



2022.05.15 Colossians 1:24– 2:5 “Paul’s Labour for the Church” Brian D Lima

Introduction

How much do we know Jesus? We may know what he did, but I don’t mean that. I mean how much to we experience Jesus in our lives? Are we getting to know him relationally more and more? What do I mean by this?

In this week’s midweek update, I mentioned the life of Jim Elliot. He was one of the five missionaries who tried to share the gospel with the Quechua people in Ecuador. Jim knew that the Quechua were a remote and isolated people who had never heard of Jesus because they were known to be violent and would kill any outsiders who attempted to make contact with them.

Jim felt Jesus’ love to reach the Quechua and so he and his friends made a plan to meet the Quechua and find a way to share the Gospel with them. The love of Jesus compelled Jim to say, “I dare not stay home while Quechuas perish.” Jim knew he could die at their hands, but he wanted to know Jesus more. He wanted to live out more of Jesus’ love for the Quechua by actually being in their midst. Because his goal was to experience more of Jesus he wasn’t afraid of death. He said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

This is what I mean about knowing Jesus more. How far will we follow Jesus and his love for the world? There is so much love in Jesus that we don’t experience because we are afraid to follow that love to its fullest expression. In today’s passage, Paul is setting himself as an example to follow. He encourages the church not to worry about his persecution and imprisonment but to rejoice with him that Jesus’ teachings are bearing fruit and Paul is getting the chance to know more of Jesus’ love. And Paul will tell the church to continue their discipline of living out more and more the glory of Jesus’ life within them.

We remember from the last two weeks that Paul is motivated by grace and peace as he seeks to encourage the church in Colossae to continue to follow Jesus. He reminds them that Jesus is the Pearl of Great Price. Knowing and following Jesus is the goal of every Christian. Jesus alone is Lord over all of creation and the church should never entertain any other command but the ones which Jesus speaks to the church.

In today’s passage, Paul sets himself up as an example of pursuing Jesus even through persecution. He will say that there is only joy for those who follow Jesus even through affliction. These, for Paul, are opportunities to know Jesus and his love at a deeper level.

1.) Joy in Christ's Afflictions

*²⁴ Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is **the church**.²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—*

In Colossians 1:24–25, Paul states that he was rejoicing in what he was suffering for the church in Colossae. Scholarship places Paul in prison during the writing of this letter but they're not sure which prison. Is it in Ephesus or Rome? Paul is described as being in prison in both areas. But where is he doesn't seem to be vital. What is vital is that Paul rejoices in his suffering.

This isn't the only time we've heard Paul say this. In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul felt it was necessary to describe many of the persecutions he experienced. Paul hated to elaborate what he had gone through because he was nervous of sounding boastful. But he allowed himself to be "foolish" by describing his trials because the church was being tempted to follow others who were bragging about their experiences.

Paul said, "Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches."

Paul wasn't describing his afflictions to boast about himself. He boasted about his weaknesses through these afflictions. He told the church that he was just like them. He felt weak and frail. He even felt the burn of temptation. But it was Jesus' life and power that led him through the trials. Paul boasted in Jesus' power through the trials.

Jesus had led Paul to proclaim his teachings, to show his grace and love even through persecution. Jesus had told his followers that no disciple will escape the life pattern of their master. If Jesus showed the love of God, the patience of God, the mercy of God even to those who considered him their enemy, then certainly his followers would experience the same as they followed their Saviour through the guidance of God's Spirit.

Paul rejoiced in prison as he wrote his letter to the church in Colossae, because he was getting to know the love of God in Jesus even more as he shared in the afflictions of Jesus and his ministry.

2.) Hope of Christ's Glory

⁶ **the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations**, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

²⁸ He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

^{2:1} I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ² My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, **Christ,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**

In Colossians 1:26–2:3, Paul says that all followers of Jesus have hope. Their hope is Christ's glory within them. This is a hope that none of the faithful in the Old Covenant had. Even King David, who was filled with God's Spirit didn't have this hope. King David said...

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Paul is saying that those who are united with Jesus can live out his pure heart. The Holy Spirit will never leave them and will give them always a willing spirit to carry them through any circumstance where God leads them.

But Paul is also saying that this hope in Jesus isn't only discovered when we share in his work of feeding the poor or in mending the afflicted. The Christians in Colossae are being called to share in Jesus' life of afflictions just as Paul is going through. Knowing Jesus more means sharing in his life. His life was marked by humility and service even when others were persecuting him. For God so loved the sinful world that He gave His Son as a sacrifice. He gave His Son as an offering of grace. He gave His Son to be handed over to affliction and death. Those who wish to follow Jesus, to follow God must walk with him through all parts of his life.

Paul is telling the church that the hope of glory which is Jesus in them can be lived out. They can know Jesus even more than they do currently do if they walk in obedience to his will even through persecution and affliction.

3.) Don't Be Deceived, But Be Disciplined

*⁴I tell you this **so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.** ⁵For though I am absent from you in body, **I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.***

Finally, in Colossians 2:4–5, Paul has set for the church the way to hope. The way to hope is to live out the life of Jesus within them. There is so much more the church needs to experience in Jesus. Paul expressed this in his letter to the church in Philippi. He said...

What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

If the church has this same goal, to know Jesus more and more, they will not go off course by being deceived through clever arguments meant to intrigue and fascinate but ultimately destroy the church. Paul is delighted that the church is disciplined enough to collectively pursue a deeper knowledge of Jesus' love for them and the world. They are tenaciously following Jesus and learning obedience through trials.

What is our application for today?

1.) Let Sacrifice Embolden You

We don't have to be a family that is afraid to follow Jesus into suffering. Even when our bodies grow weak through suffering these can be opportunities to know Jesus and his love even more. We don't have to fear affliction or persecution.

Have you ever noticed how faithful immigrants can be? Immigrants can really suffer when they move to a new country. They may not know the language or culture of their new country. The people of the new country may have very little knowledge of the country and culture of the immigrants.

Immigrants may be called names or quickly discredited by those who think their country is the best in the world. Immigrants often feel as if they will never be considered normal or equal citizens because they didn't share the same history and experiences as those in their native country.

But immigrants who have faith often cling even more tenaciously to their Saviour. If their new country holds no hope for them, then Jesus will be their only hope. Throughout their new life in a new country, they may experience some level of persecution but by placing their hope in Jesus, God blesses their service. Their work, their family, anything they touch is blessed. We need to be a family that looks for examples of faith even through suffering so we might see what hope in Jesus alone looks like.

2.) Your Hope is Before You

Do you often feel like you're a good enough Christian? How about now that you've read about Paul's life? Do you think you follow Jesus as Paul did? There is so much more to Jesus than we live out. If we are truthful, we often think that just believing we will go to heaven if we have faith in Jesus' death and resurrection is all that there is to being a Christian.

If we are feeling like we need to do more, we may volunteer for church events. But is this all that there is to living out the life of Jesus within us? No. Our hope is before us. There is so much more of Jesus that we can know and experience. We just have to be willing to follow him, to live out the life he lived when he was on Earth.

Let us be a family that has a passion, as Paul did, to know and live out all of Jesus' life within us. Jesus is calling us to love our family, friends and neighbors the way he does. Let's not be content to settle with a love that differs very little from the love found in the world. Let's pursue a love that comes from heaven.

3.) Don't Be Deceived

It is easy to be deceived. We may not want to follow Jesus into persecution. We may not want to show the love of God for the world that hates him. So, we may protect ourselves. But in protecting ourselves we will feel incomplete and insecure. In this state of sin, we will be easily deceived because we will be looking for religious ways to feel better about our disobedience to follow Jesus.

Someone will say, "to be a good Christian or church member you should..." and we might eagerly follow this advice because it will require less risk than following Jesus into persecution and affliction. Religious leaders may say things that sounds persuasive and right, but in the end, it will cause us to stop following Jesus, who is the only hope for humanity.

Let us be known as a family whose only goal is to know Jesus and his glory. Let Paul's words, "What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith," let these words be our own.

Conclusion

I'd like to share a [short video of the life of John Chau](#), a young brother of ours who got to know Jesus in a fuller way than most. May he be for us what Paul was for the church in Colossae, an example of pursuing Jesus even through affliction and even death.