

# Raised with Christ

|| A series through Colossians

## A Labor of Love

---

**Sermon Synopsis:** In a world that attempts to avoid discomfort at all costs, we are called to participate in Christ's death, by joyfully enduring struggles for the sake of others. We are able to do this because Christ is in us, and transforms the way we see suffering. He turns our labor into love.

### Colossians 1:24-2:1 (ESV)

**24** Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, **25** of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, **26** the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. **27** To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. **28** Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. **29** For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face

### **In our culture, struggling is a sign of failure.**

Lawnmower Parents "mow down all of children's challenges, discomforts and struggles."<sup>1</sup>  
"In raising children who have experienced minimal struggle, we are not creating a happier generation of kids. We are creating a generation that has no what idea what to do when they actually encounter struggle."<sup>2</sup> (USA Today)

### **The Bible gives us different perspective on our struggles.**

Now I **rejoice** in my sufferings for your sake, (Colossians 1:24a)

Why is Paul rejoicing?<sup>3</sup>

Paul is not morbidly enjoying his hardships. **Paul sees something beyond them.**<sup>4</sup>

and in my flesh **I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body**, that is, the church, (Colossians 1:24b)

This is a very difficult passage to interpret.<sup>5</sup>

Let's explain what we *can* know about this passage with two points (and we'll come back to original question about what Paul sees in his struggles)...

#### **1. Christ's finished work is complete<sup>6</sup>                      API!**

John 19:30 (ESV)

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Colossians 1:13-14 (ESV)

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:20 (ESV)

and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Colossians 1:22 (ESV)

he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death

Colossians 2:13-14 (ESV)

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

## 2. Our participation with Him is ongoing<sup>7</sup>

1 Peter 4:12-14 (NIV)

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

John 13:13-17 (ESV)<sup>8</sup>

You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Matthew 16:24 (ESV)

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Back to original Q: What does Paul see beyond his struggles that causes him to rejoice? Paul sees his participation in hardship with Christ as being *for the benefit of others*.

## 1. The "Struggle" allows us to mature in our faith

**AP!**

Hebrews 12:1-4 (NLT)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, **let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up.** And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. **After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.**

Examp: strength training, saving for retirement, diet plans, etc. You give up short-term desires for a future goal. You're suffering now for something better later!

Examples:

**AP!**

- I. When you resist temptation because you long for Christlikeness
- II. When you practice spiritual disciplines to be present to God
- III. When you give, pray, gather (when you don't feel like it), etc...

## 2. The "Struggle" can be to the benefit of OTHERS<sup>9</sup>

Love IS a struggle...it involves *suffering*. Love is being committed to someone else's highest good, without any desire for reciprocity, and even *at your own expense*.

Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV)

**Do nothing from selfish ambition** or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Examples:

**AP!**

- II. When you endure the anger of another person, and return mercy
- III. When you give up "me time" to be present to someone who needs you
- IV. When you listen to your spouse instead of blaming them
- V. When you spend time with your kids instead of working that extra hour
- VI. When you ask genuine questions to someone at your HG, instead of talking only about yourself

## Where does the power to struggle well come from?

the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of **this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**. (Colossians 1:25-27)

## The goal of the struggle is transformation into love

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, **that we may present everyone mature in Christ.** (Colossians 1:28)

(Telios) τέλειον: complete, perfect

God's purpose for you is to bring you to completion.

Complete: loving union with God, where you are able to fully give and receive love to both God and others, which happens as we are conformed to Christ. (Eph 3:17-19)

It is through *suffering* that Christ forms us into his image...

### Romans 5:3-5 (ESV)

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that **suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts** through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

The end result for Paul is not a morbid fascination with suffering, but a love for the church, and a desire to see her loving union with Christ realized. His view of suffering is completely transformed from complaining to rejoicing. And the last thing he says has nothing to do with himself, but the benefit of others...

For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face (Colossians 1:29-2:1)

## Christ changes the way we see challenges by turning our labor into love.

Example: Joseph.

### Genesis 50:20 (ESV)

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

What is the greater miracle? That God turned Joseph's struggle around. Or that God turned Joseph around to see his struggle through the presence and active love of God?

**True freedom ≠ an absence of suffering, but an empowerment in the midst of suffering.**

Application (slowly unveiled during second set)

1. Identify your pain [to be given at the end of the sermon]  
Where are you struggling right now?
2. Finding God in your pain [to be reflected on after first song]

### Romans 5:3-5 (NLT)

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and

character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

3. Loving others from your pain [to be read together at end of service]

[Preacher]  
Go into the world:  
Dance, laugh, sing, and create.

[ALL]  
**We go with the assurance of God's blessing.**

[Preacher]  
Go into the world:  
risk, explore, discover, and love.

[ALL]  
**We go with the assurance of God's grace.**

[Preacher]  
Go into the world:  
believe, hope, struggle, and remember.

[ALL]  
**We go with the assurance of God's love.  
Thanks be to God!<sup>10</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup> Sonia Haller. Meet the 'lawnmower parent,' the new helicopter parents of 2018. September 20, 2018. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/allthemoms/2018/09/19/meet-lawnmower-parent-new-helicopter-parents-types-parents-tiger-attachment/1347358002/> Accessed May 23, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The “and” in the middle of verse 24 is expegetical, meaning it is there in the syntax of the sentence to provide clarity on what's come before. In other words, Paul is explaining why he is rejoicing in his suffering, namely, because he is filling up what is lacking in Christ afflictions. David W. Pao. *Colossians and Philemon*. (ECNT; Zondervan, 2012). Footnote, 10. p.123

<sup>4</sup> The word “rejoice” is modified by the phrase “for your sake.” This means Paul is not necessarily finding joy in suffering itself, but in what suffering produces “for the sake of others.” G.K. Beale. *Colossians and Philemon*. (BECNT; Baker Academic, 2019). 136

<sup>5</sup> Says David W. Pao: “That which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ’ is perhaps one of the most difficult phrases to interpret in this letter.” *Colossians and Philemon*. 124. Scot McKnight notes that the “interpretive history here is intense.” *The Letter to the Colossians*. (NICNT; Eerdmans, 2018). 187

<sup>6</sup> Beale, 137; Wright, 93; Pao, 124; Moo, 151; McKnight, 189

<sup>7</sup> Beale. 138

<sup>8</sup> See also John 15:19-21

<sup>9</sup> Scot McKnight: “One has to think here that Paul knows his sufferings are not atoning or saving but that they benefit the church in its hearing of the gospel, the instruction in the faith, and in the way of life for the church” *The Letter to the Colossians*. (NICNT; Eerdmans, 2018). 192

<sup>10</sup> The Worship Sourcebook. 2nd Edition. Section 9: Closing Worship. Number 13. 360