

## Sermon or Lesson: Colossians 1:24 (NIV based)

[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: Joy In The Midst Of Suffering For The Sake Of The Church And The Gospel

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READ: Colossians 1:24, with vv.21-23 for context

[Note: The New American Standard (NAS) translation of this verse 24 may facilitate your understanding of its meaning. Colossians 1:24 NAS - "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions."]

### BACKGROUND:

- - Jesus is Jehovah God Himself, in fullness and in physical bodily form, which qualifies Him to "redeem" or buy "the forgiveness of sins" for humans through His suffering and death on the cross. (vv.19,14)
  - - Through that torturous self-sacrificing physical death of Christ, God has provided a way for humans to be reconciled to Him, even though we humans are born automatically alienated from Him and officially are an enemy of His. (vv.21-22)
  - - This way that God has provided for humans to be reconciled to Himself is called the "gospel" or 'good news'. (vv.22-23)
  - - God desires that every person hears the "gospel" message and responds in faith, followed by being firmly grounded in the doctrines that comprise the "gospel" and the faith. (v.23)
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### v.24 - READ

[Lesson Question: Study, discuss, contemplate, and then identify and describe what is the source of the joy that Paul is experiencing. Be sure to take into consideration the surrounding context.]

SECTION POINT: There is tremendous joy within sharing the gospel with unbelievers, even if suffering is incurred.

**"Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you,... for the sake of his body, which is the church."**

- - Paul has become a servant of proclaiming the gospel to every person on the earth. (v.23)
- - Through this activity and service of proclaiming the gospel, in effect Paul has also become a "servant" "for the sake of... the church", helping people who are alienated from God to now become "saints" or 'sanctified ones', become members of Christ's body, the church. (vv.25,24,21,26)
- - Paul also "labors", "struggles", and "suffers... afflictions" to start churches, establish them, and grow their members in the faith. (vv.29,24,27-28)
- - Even though Paul has never met the Colossians, nevertheless he has been enduring "suffering" and "struggle" in order "to present" to them the gospel and "supply" them "the word of God in its fullness". (vv.1:24; 2:1; 1:25, Strong's #4137)

- - Paul is taking active tangible steps to benefit churches, and their people - for their sake.

- - The Colossians heard the gospel and then became believers, for which Paul "now" "rejoices" in what he and perhaps other servants suffered "on their behalf" to bring them the gospel. (vv.23,24; Strong's #5228)

- - By implication, there is tremendous joy for servants of the gospel when contemplating the reality that through the servants sharing the gospel with humans who were previously proceeding toward eternal punishment, those humans became true believers and are now locked in to spending eternity with God in heaven.

- - What a tremendous joy it is to directly participate in this process that God uses, the proclaiming of the gospel, through which He brings "rescue [for believing people] from the dominion of darkness and brings [them] into the kingdom of the Son". (v.13)

- - This rescue is a priceless activity of God, with super-extreme beneficial results that continue through all of eternity - which almost makes these results beyond our adequate description and beyond our limited comprehension and beyond our capacity to be adequately appreciative.

- - So for servants of the gospel, this tremendous joy far exceeds and outweighs the "sufferings, the hardships, and the pain" that the servants endure to bring these people the gospel, "for their sake". (Strong's #3804, #5228)

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[Lesson Question: Study, discuss, contemplate, and then identify and describe what Paul is referring to here with the phrase "and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions". Be sure to take into consideration the surrounding context, especially verses 1:23,25-2:1.]

SECTION POINT: By God's design, servants of the gospel are expected to endure the afflictions that accompany their activities of spreading the gospel and the word of God.

**"and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions,"**

- - As a servant of the gospel, Paul allows himself to endure afflictions like Christ endured, even to the extent of physical afflictions of his flesh.

- - Christ's physical suffering ended the moment He died, but after Christ's departure, there is more suffering of afflictions needed in order to continue the spreading of the gospel and the building of God's kingdom by means of the church.

- - So, suffering and afflictions "are still lacking", and thereupon Paul willingly endures these afflictions "for the sake of Christ's body, the church".

- - Paul takes a self-sacrificing approach to his ministry job of being a servant of the gospel, suffering for the needs and benefit of others, rather than avoiding that suffering and pursuing needs and benefits for himself.

- - This self-sacrificing approach of Paul in fulfilling his ministry job of being a servant of the gospel is like the approach that Christ took, enduring afflictions on the cross for the needs and benefit of others, rather than avoiding that suffering and pursuing needs and benefits for Himself. (see v.22)

- - And like Christ's situation of enduring afflictions on the cross that were lacking and needed to be completed in order for the accomplishing of God's purposes (in reconciling humans to Himself), so too Paul and other servants of the gospel are to endure

afflictions that are lacking and need to be completed in order for the accomplishing of God's purposes (in spreading the gospel and the word of God). (vv.21-22,24-25)

- - This repeating phenomenon apparently is by God's design, that God intends and indeed ordains for His servants to encounter and willingly endure suffering and afflictions in a self-sacrificing manner in order to "fill up... what is lacking" or "supplement" what is "deficient" in the accomplishing of God's purposes. (Strong's #0466, #5303)

- - Christ endured afflictions to fulfill His role in God's purposes (in reconciling humans to Himself), but additionally we who are servants of the gospel need to endure afflictions to fulfill our role in God's purposes (in spreading the gospel and the word of God to the whole world), which is necessary in order to implement what God has provided through Christ's afflictions.

-- When doing ministry work as a servant of the gospel for the sake of the church, the sufferings and afflictions can come from persons inside the church or outside the church, and in any of a variety of forms, such as:

- - - - survival - lack of basic necessities of life, food, shelter, clothing, water;

- - - - physical - assaults, beatings, torture, sunburn, tiredness, inconvenience, lack of sleep, lack of medical care, and etc.;

- - - - relational - the enduring of conflicts, strife, stress, arguments, hostility, animosity, antagonism, persecution, rumors and gossip, rejection, resistance, trying to make or keep peace, and etc.;

- - - - financial - lack of money, income, resources, reliable transportation;

- - - - personal - isolation, lack of human companionship, friends, and ministry supporters, and etc.

- - - - mental - depression, fear;

- - - - spiritual - despair, doubts, attacks orchestrated by the Kingdom of Darkness, lack of positive feedback;

- - - - ministerial - the enduring of mistreatment, favoritism, anger, verbal abuse, rantings, dissension, division, un-substantiated charges, accusations, character attacks and reputation assassinations, unreasonableness, selfish ambition, jealousy, glory seeking, scapegoating, misrepresenting, unjustified termination from a ministry position, dis-fellowship, greed, theft, immoral behavior, control seeking, physical threats, prejudging, and etc.

- - As is evident from this list of afflictions, being a servant of the gospel for the sake of the church usually involves making sacrifices to one's own well-being, or comfort, or enjoyment, or preferences, or finances, or income, or employment, and etc.

- - But at the same time, engaging in activities as a servant of the gospel for the sake of the church in presenting and teaching the word of God in its fullness "so that everyone may be presented perfect in Christ" can bring joy in the midst of the accompanying suffering and afflictions. (vv.25,28,24)

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**BIG IDEA:** Servants of God who engage in the activities of spreading the gospel and the word of God may incur suffering and afflictions, but joy can also be found within those activities.

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APPLICATIONS:

- - Do you have the same kind of self-sacrificing approach that Paul exhibits in this section of verses? For us local believers? For our local church? For the church in general? For the gospel? For unbelievers?
- - Do you in some way engage in or tangibly support the activity of proclaiming the gospel?
- - Do you in some way engage in or tangibly contribute to the proclaiming of the gospel in a foreign country, perhaps through a missionary or a foreign missions ministry?
- - Do you in some way intentionally reach out to unsaved people and tangibly try to draw them in to this church or your ministry group, so that they can hear the gospel?
- - Do you in some way labor or tangibly contribute to the starting or planting of new churches, as opportunities arise?
- - Do you in some way labor or tangibly contribute to this church growing in number of attenders?
- - Do you in some way labor or tangibly contribute to the growth of attenders in this church towards spiritual maturity?

-- Have you in some way ever suffered affliction for appropriately engaging in any of these activities?

- - - - If so, was the affliction wrongfully perpetrated on you by a pastor, or an elder, or a deacon, or a ministry trustee, or some other kind of ministry leader? If so, raise your hand.

- - - - Thereupon, were you able to find any joy in the midst of those unjust afflictions that you suffered from a ministry leader, for the sake of the church or the gospel, as referred to in verse 24?

- - - - Were you ever able to personally recover from those afflictions that were unjustly perpetrated on you by a ministry leader? Fully recover? If not, shake your head from side-to-side - 'No'.

- - Nevertheless, do you prioritize and maintain the well-being of this church over your own well-being or preferences, despite the afflictions unjustly perpetrated on you?

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[Additional Lesson Questions to ponder (optional, if time allows):

- - What is implied here about Paul's regard for the Colossian believers (whom he probably had not personally met yet (v.2:1)), the local church (such as at Colosse and Laodicea (v.2:1)), and the church in general, the 'body of Christ'? Do you think Paul's regard is misplaced, a mistake, foolish, or goofy fanatical? If not, then what do you think it is? Why?]

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