

Colossian 1:24 - 2:5

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[0 : 00] Can I encourage you to turn back now to the passage that we read from Colossians.

I spent probably the main part of the week this week past in Edinburgh.

And every maybe two or three months I have to go to Edinburgh to meet things. And it seems to me over the years as I've gone back and forth to Edinburgh and increasingly over the last few months. That as I walk down Princess Street there seems to be more and more people sitting on the pavements. They're sleeping rough with all their worldly possessions which are very little around them.

Begging and asking for help. And I found myself wondering this week and on the times past as you see people.

[1 : 42] Real people. Very few of whom will actually look up and make eye contact with you. Many who seem to be just disconnected with everybody who's passing by them. But I find myself asking many times about these people who are suffering.

How did they get to being in that place? What is their story? What is it that happened? What was the series of events that triggered their position at present?

And I suppose the summary is what's the reason behind their suffering? And it struck me as I was preparing hurriedly yesterday. That almost 2,000 years ago.

People may have asked the same questions. About the Apostle Paul. As on occasions he lay on the street.

Bloodied. Battered. Apparently dead. They thought. And people walking past him. They must have wondered.

[2 : 50] How is it that he came to being in such a position? As people walked past his prison cell. I saw the Apostle Paul with his bits of paper.

The few possessions that he had. A man who was once in such a position of great status. People must have wondered.

What is the reason for his suffering? Because it's very easy to see. That Paul was a man who suffered. And that's the first point.

I want to begin today. By simply noting Paul's suffering. The points won't be on the screen. Because I didn't have the sermon prepared early enough to be able to do that.

I'll give you the points for the sermon hopefully. We'll begin by looking at Paul's suffering. We'll secondly look at Paul's struggle. We'll then look at the fact that Paul is a servant.

[3 : 52] Paul's servants. And we'll finish hopefully with our eyes fixed on Paul's saviour. So that's the general map for the service today.

The sermon today. So first of all we begin by noting. And just beginning to think a wee bit through Paul's sufferings. In verse 24 of the verses that we read.

Chapter 1. Paul he speaks about his sufferings. He says now I rejoice in what was suffered for you. And these sufferings that Paul was experiencing.

They came as no surprise to Paul. He knew from day one of his Christian life. That he was going to have to suffer. If he was going to be a Christian.

If he was going to follow Jesus. It wasn't going to be a walk in the park. He was going to be on the front line. And he was going to suffer.

[4 : 53] Last night as we met as a YF. Just in the wee room at the front there. We heard a little bit of Kyle. And Iona.

And Catherine. And William's testimony. They shared a little bit about how they came to know Jesus. And how they then went on to walk.

And are still walking with Jesus. And we don't have time to go there. But we could go to Acts chapter 9. And in Acts chapter 9. Paul. His testimony is laid out for us. He speaks about how he came to know Jesus. How Jesus met him on that Damascus road. And knocked him flat. Arrested him. And then commissioned him. And then commissioned him. To preach. And in that testimony. Verses 15 and 16 of Acts chapter 9. We read of how the Lord. Says to Ananias.

[5 : 51] About Paul. That Paul had been a persecuted. A terrorist of Christians. And Ananias then gets this word. That he has to go and meet with Paul. Ananias is a Christian.

He's terrified. So the Lord says to Ananias. To reassure him. And instruct him. He says this man. He's speaking about Paul. He says this man.

Is my chosen instrument. To proclaim my name. To the Gentiles. And kings. And to the people of Israel. I will show him. How much.

He must suffer. For my name. And so when Paul. Is having this conversion experience. It's not all peace. And constant joy.

But he's given an insight. By Jesus. Into the extent. To which he was going to suffer. For Jesus name. And suffered he did. So. Take a moment actually.

[6 : 46] And go. To Acts chapter 13. If you. Have a Bible. If not. Just listen along. I want to just take.

A snapshot. Of a few days. In Paul's life. He's called by Jesus.

To serve him. To preach the gospel. And then Paul. He steps out. Here. In his first missionary journey. This is the. The first time. Really. He goes out. On a trip.

To. To share the gospel message. You know. He's cutting his teeth here. He's a. A young Christian. And. And. And. How's he going to go. Well. Acts chapter 13.

Not going to read through the text. I'm just going to scan. Down through the text. And see what he does. But. In Acts chapter 13. Looking. Just say. From verse 13 onwards. He's in.

[7 : 43] Pisidian Antioch. And when he's in. Pisidian Antioch. He's. Preaching. And there's many people. Who believe. And that's an encouragement. But. Verse 45.

Tells us. Others began to. Heap. Abuse on Paul. So he's no longer in favor. People. Are starting to. Point the finger. They're starting to heap abuse on him.

They're starting to rubbish his character. Verse 50. They go on. They stirred up persecution.

Against Paul. Paul. Who was the persecutor. Has now taken the hits.

And then. Verse 50. They have enough. And so his very own people. They expel him. It says. From their region. So what does Paul say?

Does Paul say? Well. This is not what I thought. Ministry was going to be like. I thought we were going to meet. In a comfortable building like this. And have tea and coffee afterwards. This is not what I expected.

[8 : 46] I've had enough of this. Did Paul say. Enough of this. Did the disciples say. Paul. This is too dangerous. You need to pack your bags. And head somewhere safe. No. It says. Verse 52. That they were filled with joy.

Because of their suffering. Because it was for Jesus' sake. So what do they do. After they're expelled. From. From Pisidian Antioch.

They crack on. Diaconium. Let's go to the next place. There's a door open. Says Paul. Let's head there. And we're into Acts chapter 14 now. And in Acts chapter 14.

In Iconium. Paul's enemies. That he'd made. In the last place. They hate him so much. They've already. Gathered up. And they're waiting for him. It says in verse 2.

They had already. Stirred up the Gentiles. And poisoned their minds. Against the brothers. So. A delegation had been sent. To the people that Paul was going to preach on. To say. Don't listen to him.

[9 : 43] He's a heretic. He's a bad man. He's a troublemaker. Don't listen to a word he says. But take every opportunity. To go for him. He poisoned.

They poisoned their minds. Against the brothers. So what did Paul do? Did Paul say. Well. There's no point preaching here. I'm going to catch the first bus out of here. And look for a more friendly place.

Well. No. It says in verse 3. That Paul spent considerable time there. Speaking boldly. For the Lord. Until eventually. They're chucked out of town.

Again. So what does Paul do? Does he say enough is enough? No he doesn't. He says. Let's go to Lystra. Lystra. And in Lystra. As God uses Paul.

To perform a miracle. A lame man is healed. When the Jews. See that. Paul's own people. The people that he so loved. When they see how God.

[10:40] Used them. And this. Lame man is healed. This time. They pursue him. But not just with words. With actual rocks. With stones. And they batter him.

It says in verse 19. They stoned Paul. And they dragged him outside the city. Thinking he was dead. We can picture that.

You know. We see these people on the streets. In such a desperate state. Here's Paul. He's on the pavement. He's bleeding. He's battered.

He's in a desperate state. Surely that's the end for Paul. Surely that's the point. That he says. Enough's enough. This is madness to persevere.

Surely Paul says. I need to have a sabbatical. Need to go and recover for a while. Well. The amazing thing is. What he does do.

[11:42] Verse 19. They stone Paul. And dragged him outside the city. Thinking he was dead. Verse 20. But after the disciples. Had gathered around him. He got back up.

And he went. Into the city. Back into the city. The place where he's just been. Almost killed. Same people there.

Same hostility. And yet. Back in he goes. Our girls used to have. Um. These little ducks.

In the bath. Now the bath would be filled up. Fill the bubbles. And these two or three ducks. Would be there. The other toys. Could sit on the surface. and they were fairly safe.

The three ducks, for whatever reason, all three girls, they didn't like the ducks. The ducks would get battered down under the bubbles. They'd go down for a second and they'd fall back up.

[12:38] Down, back up, down, back up. And that's like Paul. You know, that's just two days, really. Just a few days, not two days, just a few days. He's battered down and he keeps getting back up.

He's like the Rocky Balboa of the apostles. He keeps getting back on his feet. It's just a few days. It's just a snapshot of the extent to which Paul suffered.

Paul, he speaks of his personal suffering when he speaks to the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul speaks personally about what he suffered.

And this maybe is a wake-up call to some of us. Some of us think it's only it's only the wimps that become Christians.

It's only the people who need a crutch to get through life that become Christians. It's only the people who are looking for an easy life of sort of skipping through the meadows and easy listening music.

[13:44] That's the Christians. The tough people, the real people, they're the ones that get on with life. That doesn't seem to be Paul's life.

To what extent, Paul, did you suffer for the cause of Christ? Well, he says in 2 Corinthians 11, verse 24, five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I've spent a night and a day in the open sea. I've been constantly on the move.

I've been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false drudge.

I've labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep. I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food. I've been cold and naked.

[14:48] And so he goes on. It's quite a CV, isn't it? Paul suffered for Christ, for his sake.

And here, as he's writing this letter, which we have in front of us here, as he pens this letter to the Colossians, is he writing this letter from the warmth and luxury of an oak-panelled study sitting in a Parker Knoll chair?

No, he's not. Is he in some luxury accommodation in the jacuzzi dictating the words that are needing to be written?

No, he's not. Is he in a local Starbucks sipping a Frappuccino with the latest MacBook? No, he's not. He's in prison in a dungeon in Rome coming towards the end of his life and he's still suffering. Paul suffered. It's the first point. The second point to note here is that Paul struggled. Paul here, he speaks about his struggle and he's honest about that.

[16:16] Many of us, as we speak to each other, we think that none of us struggle. We're all fine. But we're not all fine. If we're Christians, part of our calling is to struggle.

And Paul's honest about that struggle. He says in verse 28, we proclaim him, Jesus, admonishing, warning, and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. Let me pause for a wee second. This is a bit of digression, but if there is somebody here who is thinking about going forward to the Lord's table next weekend and who has confessed their sin and who believes in Jesus but is still asking the question, you know, am I good enough?

Listen to Paul. We are perfect in Christ. We're condemned out of Christ. But if we are in Christ, because of what he has done for us, because of who he is, we are perfect in Christ.

So don't dare hesitate if you're the Christian on the grounds that you think that you're somehow not good enough. If you're a Christian, Jesus made you good enough.

[17:55] To this end, I labor, verse 28, says Paul, verse 29, struggling with all his energy which so powerfully works in me. And he goes on in chapter 2, I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not yet met me personally.

Why is Paul saying this? We kind of hide our struggles from each other. Why is Paul telling them, I am struggling and I'm struggling on your behalf?

What is he trying to do? What's his motivation here? Is he trying to guilt trip them into obedience? I don't think he is. Is he trying to get them to feel sorry for them? I know that he's not because there's no trace of resentment or bitterness about what Paul was enduring for them.

He says in verse 24 of chapter 1, I rejoice in what was suffered for you. 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.

He's struggling, he's suffering but he's not reluctant, he's not embittered, he's actually joyful over it. He's not trying to say to them, look how poor I am and it's partly your fault.

[19:12] No, he's joyful over the struggle. Now, I want to just take a second for those who might have a question here about that verse.

Paul says, I rejoice in what was suffered 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.

Now, some of us might read that and think, what is Paul trying to say here? Is Paul trying to say that there's some kind of shortfall in the afflictions, the sufferings of Christ and he has to suffer about himself in order to save the Colossians?

Is Paul trying to say that he is a core redeemer with Jesus of the Colossians? Is he trying to say to them that he is in some measure saving them? Well, he's not saying that at all.

He's not saving the Colossians through his suffering. Jesus has saved to the uttermost the Colossians, the Herrochs, the Leosachs, the English, the Scottish, the African, the Australian, those who have trusted in Christ.

[20:25] He has done it all. On the cross as he died he said it is finished and the work of redemption it was done, it was finished. So, Paul was suffering not to redeem the Colossians, not to save them, but he's suffering and he's struggling because he is so desperate that the Colossians would hear about Jesus and that they would believe in Jesus and that they would remain in Jesus because Jesus is the only one who is able to save and redeem.

So, how precisely then is Paul struggling just now? He'd never met the Colossians so he wasn't shoulder to shoulder with them wrestling through various circumstances.

He'd never met them. The message of the gospel came through Paul to Epaphras and then Epaphras shares the message with the Colossians. So, where is Paul's struggle happening?

Well, I'll tell you what it was happening. It was happening on his knees in a dark, cold prison cell. He's struggling for them as he gets on his knees and he prays for them.

Prayer is a struggle. Prayer is a struggle. It's meant to be because prayer is the front line of the spiritual battle.

[22:18] battle. This standing here is less the front line of the spiritual battle than the old Kalyoch who was on her knees at her bedside.

That's where the battle is happening. When you think about your life and I think about mine, don't you find that you can plan and then do progress.

Most things, the activities that you put in your diary, you're able to do them. The visits that you determine you're going to do, most of the time, you're able to do them. The meetings that you plan to go to, with the exception of the prayer meeting, you put them in the diary and you get there.

Not too much pops up to interfere and take us off track with these other things, but when you and I settle down to pray, everyone and everything seems to militate against us and pull us away from the closet or pull us away from the prayer meeting.

Every distraction hits when we go on our knees. Every possible disruption seems to come on us.

[23 : 40] Your mind wanders, your phone goes off, the kids turn to each other, the cats attack the dog, all manner of things are kicking off downstairs as you're in your room trying to pray, it's a struggle.

And that's why Jesus said in Matthew 6, he says, when you pray, not if you pray, he says, when you pray, when you pray, go to your room, find a private place, close the door, get your phone away, disconnect everything, and pray to your father.

Jacob wrestled in prayer, it says in Genesis 32, Paul struggled in prayer for the Colossians. And I think we should just take a moment, even in the quietness of our own parts, and be thankful for those who have struggled for us in prayer.

Many of whom are no longer in this world, but who struggle for us. Be thankful for those who continue day by day to struggle for you.

I certainly am. Reverend Rory Morrison and Chris Anne have said to me that there is not a day that passes where they don't pray for me and pray for us as a congregation.

[25 : 23] They struggle on with that. So be encouraged by those who are struggling on your behalf, on our behalf, and let's be encouraged to struggle on for others.

That's a big part of our calling. Alistair Begg, I was listening to him in the car when I was travelling south, he said something along these lines, I'm paraphrasing them, he says, prayer is the missile that the devil has no defence against.

When it's launched, it always brings damage to the devil's kingdom, king, and it always brings glory to God's king. He says, but the problem is, it's a missile that so rarely launched.

So let's be encouraged to launch these prayer missiles, to struggle on in the warfare of prayer for ourselves and for others. Paul struggled for the Colossians, he suffered for the Colossians, the question is why?

Why is he taking such a punishing? Why is he enduring all this? Why does he not walk away? Why does he keep on?

[26 : 47] And the answer is because Paul is a servant of Jesus. Third point is Paul's servants. Who's Paul's servant?

He's servant Jesus and his gospel. Verse 23 this is the gospel that you heard and has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven and of which I Paul have become a servant.

What does gospel mean? Gospel simply means good news. The good news about Jesus. That he lived for us, that he died for us, that he rose from the grave and that if we look to him in faith, if we trust in him and confess our sin, he will save us forever.

That's the good news. gospel. This is the gospel you have heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven and of which I call have become a servant.

Look at verse 25. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness. I walked down Edinburgh Prince's Street wondering about the sufferings and the struggles of those who were sitting there.

[27 : 59] to those on the streets of Rome who looked at Paul and saw how he suffered and struggled. Paul tells them, you want to know the reason for my struggles? You want to know the reason for my sufferings?

I can tell you. It's because I am a servant of Jesus and his gospel and his people at the church. None of this stuff surprises me, says Paul, through the bars of the prison cell. None of this perplexes me, says Paul. I understand the reason for my suffering.

I accept my sufferings. I even rejoice in my sufferings because they're for Jesus' sake. And he promised Paul, as he's promised everyone who will follow him, that this is part of what we will experience.

Jesus says in John 15 and verse 18, if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own.

[29 : 03] As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you. No servant is greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. Matthew 16 verse 24, Jesus said to his disciples, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

And I could go through, I deleted more texts than I read by six times. I could go through text after text after text and show how Jesus in so many different ways and different places, he says to his people, if you are going to follow me, it's going to cost you.

You will have to suffer, but the suffering you will endure, you will endure with my help, says Jesus, for my sake.

and there will be a suffering which is worthwhile and is fruitful. And Paul understood that.

[30 : 32] Remember what he says to the Romans in verse 18 of chapter 8. Think about the series of his suffering, the extent of his sufferings, that acute suffering that he experienced, and yet he says to the Romans, he says, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

I want to just apply this very pointedly, I suppose, as we move towards the conclusion.

and I want to say something to those who are thinking about going to take communion for the first time next Sunday, God willing, if we see it.

There will likely be some here who have come over time to see their sin, as I have, and who have come over time to see Jesus on the cross, and understand that he is there to be saviour.

So you're sitting on your chair, perhaps, and you see your sin, and you see that Jesus is saviour, and you've asked for forgiveness of your sin, and you've put your faith in Jesus, and you've asked him to come into your life and be your saviour, and now your hearing his call as your Lord, and your Master.

[32 : 19] And what he says is, do this in remembrance of me. Take the bread, take the wine, sit at the table, do this in remembrance of me.

But the problem is, if you do this, if you go forward in faith to the table, there are some people who are going to laugh at you, and there's some people who are going to mock you, and there's some people who are going to be super critical of you, and they're going to watch you like a hawk forevermore, and there's some people who might even distance themselves from you, and not really want much to do with you, or be very cold towards you for a period, and at the moment, presently, you're counting the cost, and you're realising that you're going to have to suffer, at least for a period, and Paul in a sense from this passage says, yes, that's true, you are, he doesn't play anything down, but he amplifies he says, if you're going to be obedient to Jesus, if you proclaim Christ as Paul did, as you come to the table, you proclaim Christ's death, and if you do that, when you do that, whatever you do that, it will attract suffering, because just as the world hated Jesus, the world hates seeing Jesus presently and through his people, just as the devil attacked Jesus, the devil will attack those who are trusting Jesus and becoming more and more like Jesus, you will always have to suffer, him, but the question I would ask is, is he not worth it? When we consider his sufferings for us, is he not worth it? When we consider how much he has loved us, is he not worth the suffering?

the struggles? We finish just with a word about Paul's savior. I just want to finish by making sense of the fact that Paul, he could deal with the beatings, he could deal with the prison terms, you know, he could deal with being so spectacularly out of favor with this world, because he was in Christ.

[35 : 23] He knew that he was in Christ. He knew that Jesus was his savior. He knew that if he died in that prison cell that night, he was safe forever.

He wasn't going to heaven, he was going to heaven. he may not have a good reputation with those who once applauded him for his acumen as a Pharisee, but he had Jesus as savior.

He may not have the money or the chance of making money and fame and status and the reputation of one of the Pharisees that he was very much on track to be, but he had Jesus as his savior.

He may not have had his freedom, but he had Jesus as his savior. Jesus was with him in that cell. Paul was in Christ and Christ was, verse 27, in Paul.

He had the hope of glory and that was what drove Paul. and that was enough. So no matter what he suffered, it was worth it because he had Jesus as his savior.

[36 : 54] You know, the reality is, suffering is something that none of us will escape. We can try and dodge it. We don't court it.

be madness to court it, but we can't escape it. Every one of us will face suffering, but the question is where will we face it?

will we face it here for a short while as those whom the world turns on because we are servants of Jesus who will not shut up about Jesus?

Or will we face it in the hereafter as those who turned away from Jesus and rejected him as savior and refused to own him as lord and he will have to suffer eternally for the sin that we hung on to and refused to let him heal us.

It's a sober place to finish but I think I'll finish there. Let's pray.

[38 : 26] Father, we thank you for the Apostle Paul and how he so boldly and persistently and determinedly pointed many and us included to Jesus.

We thank you for his love for us, your love for us, that you would even warn us in such sober terms about the perils of not trust in Christ.

We thank you that Jesus suffered and died to take our sin away so that we would have eternal life.

But impress upon us, we pray, the danger of neglecting the salvation that Jesus bought.

We know that Jesus spoke more than anyone about the fact that if we refuse to confess our sin, then we will have to pay personally for our sin in hell.

enable us, we pray, we pray, not to go that course, but rather to put our faith in Jesus and know with the Apostle Paul that in Christ we have the hope of glory.

[39 : 47] And if we are in Christ, we pray that each one of us would confess that. even though it's a struggle, even though it will attract suffering, help us to be obedient as your servants, as we hear our Master say, do this, to remember me.

And we ask this in Jesus' name, and for his sake, coming.