

Colossians 1:24-2:5

1. Suffering to fill up what is lacking v24
2. Stewardship of the mystery v25-27
3. Striving for their completion v28-29
4. Struggling for their encouragement v1-3
5. Stability of faith v4-5

*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 what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.*

I. Paul Suffered

2 Cor 11:24-28

A. Scourged for the Gospel v24

This was the Jewish form of punishment

1. He was stripped and tied to a stake so that he could not run or fall.
2. Then a person trained in flogging would take a whip and lash Paul's back 39 times.
3. The law allowed forty stripes; but they, to be cautious, and merciful, inflicted but 39.
4. 1/3 of the stripes would go on the chest, 1/3 on left shoulder, and 1/3 on the right.
5. The lacerations would not be clean, but torn and shredded, so that healing would be slow and complicated by infection.
6. Now, consider that this happened a second time on the same back, opening all the scars.
7. Then consider that some months later it happened a third time, then a 4th and finally a 5th.

B. Struck for the Gospel v25a

Acts 16:22-23 *Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.*

1. This was under the Roman government, as they beat criminals in this way.
2. There was generally no limit to the number of times the victim would be struck
3. The severity of the beating depended upon the mood of the soldier giving the beating
4. This happened 3 times

C. Stoned for the Gospel v25b

Acts 14:19 *Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.*

1. Generally when one was stoned, he was stoned to death.
2. They thought he was dead and then just dumped him outside of the city.

D. Shipwrecked for the Gospel v25c

He hadn't yet experienced the shipwreck of Acts 27:39-44 so we know that he suffered in this manner at least four times in his life.

E. Suffered for the Gospel v26-28

II. Paul Rejoiced in His Suffering

The most ridiculous thing is, that he rejoiced in his suffering!

1. This is what Jesus instructs His followers to do!
2. Matthew 5:10-12

The Apostle Peter gave the same instruction in his first letter.

1. Before we look at what he wrote, consider the context.
2. Persecution has erupted all throughout the Roman Empire and Christians are being arrested, tortured, mistreated, and murdered.
 - a. If you look back at 1 Peter 1:1, you will find that there is no name, address and phone number given for his recipients. READ
 - b. He also gives a very vague return address in chapter 5:13: READ
2. This letter would travel through an underground network in order to get to where it needed to go. This was the context in which Peter penned these words...
3. 1 Peter 4:12-14

III. Paul Suffered for the Church

He does his fair share for the church in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

A. Our Sufferings are Christ's

1. The church is the body of Christ: and the Head suffers with his members.
2. I have to believe that Paul has in mind the first words of Christ he heard.
3. Acts 9:4-5 *And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.*
4. The Redeemer was one with the poor flock at Damascus.

Just like the sufferings of those in Jerusalem and Damascus were Christ's sufferings, the apostle's sufferings were those of Christ, for Christ is identified with all His people.

B. Christ's Sufferings are Our's

1. So, Christ is associated with us, in our suffering. At the same time, since we are associated with Christ, we enter into His sufferings.
2. That should be no surprise to us...even though it is unheard of in America
 - a. Luke 9:23-23 *And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.*
 - b. The moment we associate with Christ, we open ourselves up to the hatred of the world.
 - c. 2 Cor 1:5 *For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.*

What persecutors do to us is not about us...in fact they may love us without Christ...it is persecution of Him!

C. These sufferings complete the mission of Christ

1. What on earth could be lacking in Christ's afflictions!?
 - a. There is nothing lacking in his atonement. It is finished!
 - b. But, it is God's plan that His kingdom be advanced by suffering.

2. In Paul's sufferings, he extended Christ's sufferings to those for whom he died
 - a. 2 Timothy 2:10 *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*
 - b. It is God's design for us to present the marks of Christ to the world by a willingness to suffer

3. Our failure to fill up the afflictions of Christ has hindered evangelism!

IV. Suffering is Part of Ministry

Why would it be God's will that Paul should...and that we should...join Christ in His afflictions?

1. There is proof in persecution.

Those believers over there are so radical because they have suffered such hardship.

1. Are they proven because they are persecuted
2. Or could they be persecuted because they are proven?
3. 2 Tim 3:12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*

2. There is power in persecution

When God's people suffer for Him, they display the power of God working in their lives

1. 2 Cor 4:7-12 *But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.*

2. When God's people avoid suffering for Him, they miss out on experiencing and displaying His power
3. When we operate in comfort and ease we operate outside of God's power.
 - a. When the possibility of suffering arises for most American believers, we say that God is shutting the door.
 - b. Brother Andrew said this...*There's not one door in the world closed where you want to witness for Jesus...Show me a closed door and I will tell you how you can get in. I won't however, promise you a way to get out. Jesus didn't say, Go if the doors are open, because they weren't open! He didn't say, Go if you have an invitation or a red carpet treatment. He said, Go because people need His Word. We need a new approach to mission—an aggressive, experimental, evangelical, no holds barred approach...a pioneering spirit.*
4. Through suffering we display the power of God

Rev 12:11 *And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.*

1. If you are willing to suffer, to sacrifice, to experience discomfort, to die there is no one and nothing that can overcome you.
2. If they can't overcome you with death, you can't be overcome! That is power.

Hebrews 2:14-15 *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*

3. There is production in persecution

Suffering has an uncanny way of impacting and reaching people for Jesus

1. Phil 1:12 *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel*
2. If we were to attempt to prove our desire to evangelize the world we would do so by
 - a. displaying big buildings, big budgets, Bible studies here
 - b. Plans, programs, and prayer meetings here
3. But Paul would display his desire by saying, *I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*
4. God wants us to present the marks of Christ to the world by a willingness to suffer
 - a. Michael Card in his book, "Wounded in the House of Friends" tells the story of a Masai warrior named Joseph. (pg 93-94 of "Let the Nations be Glad")
 - b. If we are to reach the lost, we must come to the place where we stop being so comfortable being comfortable