

INTRODUCTION.

TODAY, ~ WE RESUME OUR SERIES ON COLOSSIANS

▶▶ Won't be rushing through this ⇨⇨ Breaks ⇨⇨ Keep reading

▶▶ This a.m., ~ we begin to look at the next section of Colossians, ~ 1:24-2:5.

▶▶ The topic in this section ~ is Paul's ministry to the church.

▷▷ And it can be split into three parts.

▶▶ In his account of his ministry to the church, ~ Paul sets forth ~ ¶¶

▷▷ his ministry of suffering on believers' behalf, ~ 1:24, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ the character of his ministry to the church, ~ 1:25-29, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ and his ministry of encouragement, ~ 2:1-5.

▶▶ We will look at the first part today, ~ Paul's ministry of suffering on believers' behalf.

▷▷ Easily split into two parts.

↪↪ Verse 24a, ~ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake.

↪↪ And then ~ Verse 24b, ~ 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. ¶¶ 1/14

VERSE 24a. ~~ NOW I REJOICE IN MY SUFFERINGS FOR YOUR SAKE.

WE MUST BE CAREFUL HERE.

▶▶ Paul's rejoicing ~ is not simply because he is suffering.

▷▷ Not some nut case.

▷▷ And Paul's attitude ~ had nothing in common with those ascetics of a later time ~ ¶¶

↳↳ i.e., ~ those characterized by the practice of severe self-discipline, ~~ ¶¶

→→ Paul's attitude ~ had nothing in common with those ascetics of a later time ~ ¶¶

↳↳ who inflicted torture on themselves in the belief ~ that they would thereby gain merit with God.

▷▷ Knew better.

▶▶ The phrase, ~ "in my sufferings" ~ could be translated as, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ "amidst my sufferings ~ or ~ "in the midst of my sufferings."

▶▶ Now I would like to call your attention to two phrases Paul uses in the full verse.

▷▷ "for your sake." ~~ Specifically to the Colossians.

▷▷ 2nd phrase, ~ for the sake of his body, ~ that is, ~ the church. ~~ Church in general.

▷▷ And the phrases, ~ "for your sake" ~ and ~ "for the sake of" ~ both indicate ~ ¶¶

↳↳ that Paul's sufferings ~ had a beneficial purpose for believers. ¶¶ 2/14

▶▶ So what is Paul saying then?

▷▷ He was rejoicing amidst his suffering ~ 77

↳↳ for the specific reason that believers ~ were benefitting spiritually from his suffering.

▷▷ Not because he was suffering.

▷▷ He was rejoicing ~ because believers were benefitting.

▶▶ Paul said the same thing to the Ephesian believers.

▷▷ In [chapter 3](#), ~ he exhorts them to not lose heart.

↳↳ Because his suffering for them, ~ he says, ~ ~ is for their benefit.

▶▶ Expressed joy in midst of suffering ~ because it spiritually profited believers.

▶▶ Now, ~ in both Eph. and Col., ~ Paul does not say how his sufferings benefited them.

▷▷ But that's not the point.

▷▷ They were somehow benefitting spiritually ~ from Paul's sufferings.

▷▷ That's the point.

▶▶ And this is what brought Paul joy, ~ not his suffering.

SO PAUL'S SUFFERING WAS NOT IN VAIN. ~~ FOR THE WELL-BEING OF THESE

▶▶ IOW, ~ there was a beneficial purpose for his sufferings. 77 3/14

AND THAT ~ LEADS US TO A MUCH BROADER PRINCIPLE.

▶▶ God's people ~ are never needlessly afflicted.

▶▶ Our suffering ~ always has a divine purpose.

▶▶ In 1 Pet. ~ 1: ~ 6, ~ Peter writes, ⇨⇨ In this you rejoice . . ., ~ though now for a little while, ~ if necessary, ~ you have been grieved by various trials.

▶▶ Grk grammar indicates that phrase, ~ "if necessary" ~ refers ~ not ~ to something conditional ~ but to what is actually the case.

▷▷ It could be translated ⇨⇨ even though now for a little while, ~ since it is necessary, ~ you have been distressed by various trials."

▶▶ Peter says that the trials we go through are necessary.

▷▷ The idea ~ is that the sufferings believers experience ~ are not the result of ~ accident, ~ fate, ~ or impersonal forces of nature.

▷▷ They are the will of God for believers. ~~ 1 Pet 4:19.

↳↳ Therefore ~ let those who suffer according to God's will ~ entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

▶▶ Scripture shows us ~ that there is always a purpose, ~ more specifically a divine purpose, ~ for our suffering.

▶▶ God always has a reason ~ for allowing trials & suffering to come into our lives.

▶▶ It should be reassuring and encouraging to us ~ to know ~ that God's people ~ are never needlessly afflicted. 📖 4/14

▶▶ And whether we know the purpose or not, ~ we can rejoice.

▷▷ Because the Lord ~ is at work in our lives ~ and ~ is working out his purposes.

▶▶ And we have this wonderful promise from him. ~~ Is. 43:2-3a.

▷▷ When you pass through the waters, ~ I will be with you; ~~ and through the rivers, ~ they shall not overwhelm you; ~~ ¶¶

↳↳ when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, ~ and the flame shall not consume you. ~~ For I am the Lord your God, ~ the Holy One of Israel, ~ your Savior.

▶▶ Always a divine purpose.

AND IN COLOSSIANS, ~ PAUL OPENS THE DOOR ~ AND LET'S US SEE ONE OF THOSE purposes.

▶▶ Suffering ~ has a beneficial purpose ~ for the spiritual lives of others.

▶▶ Recall Phil. 1:12 (CSB).

▷▷ Now I want you to know, ~ brothers and sisters, ~ that what has happened to me ~ has actually advanced the gospel.

▷▷ And then Phil. 4:22.

↳↳ All the saints greet you, ~ especially those of Caesar's household.

↳↳ Persecution ¶¶ 5/14

↪↪ Think of all the people in Rome ~ that benefitted spiritually from Paul's suffering.

↪↪ Think of all the people in Rome ~ who would not have benefitted ~ had he not been suffering.

▶▶ Paul told the believers in Corinth, ~ 77

▷▷ If we are afflicted, ~ it is for your comfort and salvation. ~~ 2 Cor. 1:6a.

▷▷ Think of how many unbelievers we can influence ~ when we bear up under suffering.

▷▷ Think of how many believers we can genuinely comfort ~ when they go through what we have gone through.

▶▶ 2 Cor. ~~ Paul caught up to the third heaven**

**▷▷ Well, ~ the church has benefitted more from Paul's sufferings ~ than his visit to God's throne room.

▶▶ Even we, ~ believers here at NHCC, ~ are benefitting from Paul's sufferings.

▷▷ Had Paul not suffered imprisonment in Rome, ~ the letters of ~ Eph., ~ Phil., ~ Col., ~ and Philemon ~ might never have been written.

▷▷ And we would have been deprived of the messages of these letters.

▶▶ Loved ones, ~ there is a beneficial purpose for our sufferings.

▷▷ In any number of ways, ~ others can benefit from what we go through.

↪↪ And that ~ is something to rejoice in ~ in the midst of trials and sufferings. 11 6/14

FURTHERMORE, ~ IN SUFFERING, ~ AND IN LIFE IN GENERAL, ~ WE MUST ALWAYS keep Rom. 8:28 in mind.

▶▶ And we know that for those who love God ~ all things work together for good, ~ for those who are called according to his purpose.

▶▶ Suffering will still bring pain, ~ loss, ~ and sorrow.

▶▶ But under God's loving control, ~ the eventual outcome will be for our good ~ as well as for others.

BACK TO COL. 1:24a.

▶▶ He was rejoicing ~ amidst his suffering for the specific reason that believers ~ 77

▷▷ were benefitting spiritually ~ from his suffering.

PAUL'S PRIMARY FOCUS ~ WAS ON THE SPIRITUAL WELFARE OF OTHERS.

▶▶ And not on his personal ~ needs ~ or comforts ~ or what-have-you.

▷▷ He was willing to endure anything ~ for the spiritual benefit of others.

↪↪ Believers and non-believers alike.

▶▶ 2 Cor. 12:15 (LEB), ~ But I will spend and be expended most gladly for your lives.

▷▷ This ~ is what Paul was willing to do ~ for the spiritual well-being of believers.

▶▶ And look at what he says about his Jewish countrymen who were without Christ.

▷▷ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ~ Rom. 9:3 7/14

▷▷Not that ~ that could have actually happened.

↳↳All believers are eternally secure in Christ.

→→No way a believer could be accursed and cut off from Christ.

▷▷But this shows the extent ~ of Paul's concern for his fellow Jews.

▷▷He was willing to be forever cursed, ~ cut off from Christ, ~ if that would save his Jewish countrymen.

▶▶Paul was willing ~ to endure anything ~ for the spiritual benefit of others.

▶▶And isn't that what our Savior did?

▷▷He endured the cross for our spiritual well-being.

▷▷Phil. 2:3-8 (CSB). ~~ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, ~ but in humility ~ consider others as more important than yourselves. ~~ Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, ~ but also for the interests of others. ~~ Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, ~ who, ~ existing in the form of God, ~ did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. ~~ Instead ~ he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, ~ taking on the likeness of humanity. ~~ And when he had come as a man, ~ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— even to death on a cross.

▶▶Paul stands as a model for us.

▶▶And even more importantly ~ our Savior stands ~ as the ultimate example to follow.

▷▷Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, ~ Paul exhorts us.

▷▷What is our mindset? ↴↴ 8/14

OK, ~ WE ARE LOOKING AT VERSE 24 ~ AND PAUL'S MINISTRY OF SUFFERING ON believers' behalf.

AS NOTED, ~ CAN BE SPLIT INTO TWO PARTS. ⇔⇔ NOW THE 2nd PART.

VERSE 24b

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.

▶▶ This ~ is one of the more difficult statements in the NT to understand.

▶▶ And, ~ taken at face value, ~ it could easily ~ be misinterpreted.

▷▷ One could mistakenly assume ~ that Christ's suffering on the cross ~ was insufficient.

▶▶ It could also be twisted to lead believers astray.

▷▷ A false teacher could point to this ~ and say, ~ "see, ~ you need to add something to gain full salvation."

▶▶ That is why we need to spend some time on this.

▷▷ So you won't be led astray.

▶▶ Even though this verse might be hard to understand, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ we know for sure ~ that it cannot mean ~ Jesus' salvation work was incomplete.

THE NT ~ PRESENTS ~ OVERWHELMING EVIDENCE ~ THAT JESUS' WORK ON THE cross ~ was 100% sufficient.

▶▶ Sampling. ¶¶ 9/14

▶▶ We've already talked about this in Colossians.

▷▷ Verse 22a. ~~ but now you have been reconciled.

↳↳ Past tense.

▷▷ This was ~ a finished ~ and full ~ act.

▷▷ Again, ~ Paul does not say, ~ "But now you have been ~ partially ~ reconciled."

▷▷ It would be rather strange and illogical for Paul to introduce contradictory teaching.

▶▶ When Jesus cried out, ~ "It is finished," ~ he meant exactly that.

▶▶ And Heb. 10:12.

▷▷ But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, ~ he sat down at the right hand of God.

NO, ~ COL. 1:24b ~ IS DEFINITELY NOT TEACHING ~ THAT SOMETHING HAS TO BE added to Jesus' work.

▶▶ Overwhelming biblical evidence ~ that Jesus' work on the cross ~ was 100% sufficient.

AND APART FROM THAT, ~ THERE IS EVIDENCE RIGHT IN THE VERSE ITSELF.

▶▶ The Greek word for ~ "afflictions" ~ is never ~ used in the NT of Jesus' death.

▶▶ It means ~ "distress," ~ "pressure," ~ or "trouble."

▷▷ Ordinarily ~ it refers to trials in life, ~ not the pains of death. ↯↯ 10/14

AND KEEP IN MIND THE OVERARCHING THEME OF COLOSSIANS.

▶▶ Paul wrote this letter to refute false teaching.

▶▶ One of those tenets of the false teaching: ~ ~ ¶¶

▷▷ The denial of the sufficiency of Christ for salvation.

▶▶ Paul goes to great lengths to prove otherwise.

▶▶ Why would he introduce something to the contrary?

SO AGAIN, ~ COL. 1:24b ~ NOT TEACHING SOMETHING HAS TO BE ADDED

FOUR QUICK POINTS HERE ~ REGARDING INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE.

▶▶ 1st, ~ never let ~ an obscure verse ~ overthrow overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

▷▷ Overwhelming evidence

▷▷ 24b = unclear verse

▶▶ 2nd, ~ unclear verses are to be interpreted ~ in light of clear verses.

▷▷ Not the other way around.

▷▷ IOW, ~ ¶¶

↪↪ if an unclear verse ~ seems to teach something contrary to clear verses, ~ the contradictory interpretation must be rejected. ¶¶ 11/14

▶▶ 3rd, ~ Scripture does not contradict itself.

▷▷ Therefore, ~ a contradictory interpretation is always wrong.

▶▶ And 4th, ~ Scripture interprets Scripture.

▷▷ Circles of context.

TO HELP US BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND VERSE 24b CORRECTLY, ~ WE CAN GO TO LUKE'S account of Paul's conversion in Acts 9.

▶▶ Scripture interprets Scripture.

▶▶ Background: ~~ Paul persecuting the church

▶▶ We'll pick it up in [verse 3](#) ~ and read through to [verse 5](#).

▷▷ Now as he went on his way, ~ he approached Damascus, ~ and suddenly ~ a light from heaven shone around him. ~~ ¶¶

↳↳ And falling to the ground, ~ he heard a voice saying to him, ~~ "Saul, ~ Saul, ~ why are you persecuting ~ [who?] ~ me?" ~~ And he said, ~ "Who are you, ~ Lord?" ~~ And he said, ~~ "I am Jesus, ~ whom you are persecuting.

▶▶ Very interesting: ~~ ¶¶

▷▷ Jesus suffers ~ when believers suffer for him.

▶▶ Just a quick side note.

▷▷ This is very comforting to know. ~~ We don't suffer alone. ~~ Jesus suffers along with us.

▶▶ Jesus suffers when believers suffer for him. ¶¶ 12/14

(VERSE 24b) ~~ And SINCE THE CHURCH AGE IS NOT YET FINISHED, ~ JESUS, ~ ¶¶

▶▶ in a very real sense, ~ and in whatever manner it manifests itself, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ will continue to suffer until the church age ends at his return.

▶▶ This is most likely what Paul means when he says, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

▶▶ "what is lacking" ~ most likely refers to future believers who are yet to suffer ~ ¶¶

▷▷ until the last generation of believers before Jesus returns.

▷▷ Then the suffering will be complete ~ and will cease forever.

▶▶ And each believer has a share in these sufferings.

▷▷ Paul is referring to completing his share here.

MAYBE THIS SUMMARY STATEMENT CAN TIE IT ALL TOGETHER ~ and give us a good picture of what Paul is saying.

▶▶ Though exalted, ~ Jesus continues to endure afflictions ~ through his persecuted followers.

▶▶ So, ~ in one sense Christ's afflictions are not over.

▶▶ They are lacking, ~ since the church age is not yet complete.

▶▶ And each believer has a share in these afflictions. ¶¶ 13/14

▶▶ Thus, ~ Paul is saying here ~ that he is experiencing his share of the sufferings, ~ 77

▷▷ that will continue until the end of the church age, ~ and which somehow ~ affect Jesus.

HOPEFULLY, ~ THAT HELPED YOU.

▶▶ But if not, ~ that's ok. ~~ Clear as mud? ~~ That's ok.

▶▶ It's a very difficult verse to understand. ~~ Expository preaching.

▶▶ But here's the main take-away this morning from this.

▷▷ This ~ is what I want you to take with you today.

▶▶ It's hard to understand what this verse means. ~~ But ~ what it doesn't mean ~ is crystal clear.

▶▶ Therefore, ~ I suggest that ~~ what it doesn't mean ~ is ~ just as ~ if not more important for us to know ~ than what it does mean.

▶▶ Because ~ what it doesn't mean ~ will help us not misinterpret it ~ and will help us not be led astray by false teaching.

▶▶ And ~ what it does not mean, ~ is that Jesus' work on the cross was insufficient for salvation.

▶▶ After making purification for sins, ~ he sat down ~ at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

▶▶ If nothing else about this verse, ~ please take that with you today. ~~ It is finished.

LET'S PRAY 14/14