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## Sermon

### ***The Jewish Messiah – the Gentile Christ***

**Colossians 1:24-2:5**

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This next section of Colossians seems rather surprising after the heights Paul has just scaled as he extols the wonders of who Christ is. Now he writes about himself. Why is that? Shouldn't he focus on Christ and the Church? We'll answer that question later, but for now we find Paul writes of his suffering, his secret and his struggles.

#### **His suffering (v24)**

This letter was written about 60AD. If you had met Paul you would be shocked at his appearance. He was a battered man. He would have been a mass of scars, his face and head would have shown the effects of many injuries. He would have moved awkwardly because of the scars of his many wounds. In Galatians 6:16 he wrote, "I bear in my body the marks (scars) of the Lord Jesus." Let me read to you from 2 Corinthians 11 which was written about 4 years before the Letter to the Colossians:

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 spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have 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 brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

He wrote this letter to the Colossians chained to a Roman soldier in prison for preaching the gospel. And he was able to write: "I am so happy about my suffering." It is not that he enjoys suffering but that he was helping to complete the sufferings of Christ.

This is a difficult verse which has given rise to much debate and not a little heresy! Is Paul saying that Jesus' work on the cross was insufficient for our salvation? Absolutely not! That strikes at the heart of the gospel. If you think that read Romans or Galatians; meanwhile hear these verses:

Hebrews 9:24-26 For Christ did not enter ... heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Colossians 1:22 He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

Colossians 2:13-14 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

No, Christ made a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for our sins. So what does he mean? Paul is not talking about the suffering of Christ on the cross for our salvation. He is talking the tribulation around our being brought to know Christ and then to mature as Christians.

Christ's sufferings for sin are over – "it is finished!" But his tribulation for the church is not over. Compare it with a woman travailing in labour. At birth that travail is over, but the trials of raising a child has just begun: sleepless nights, concern, self-sacrifice – the list goes on.

When I wrote my dissertation for my MTh, I considered the leadership of John Wesley and John Wimber. I made the observation that for any new move of the Spirit to come to the Church the leader has to suffer. There is both spiritual and human opposition which seeks to stop, to quench to prevent the truth from being accepted and practised by the Church.

The Church is not going to grow up without someone suffering pain. And Christ experiences that suffering in the body of Paul and other Christians. Paul writes that he is happy because it is Christ's pain and through this pain he will build people up and bring them to maturity. This is not a masochistic pleasure, it is not a stoical putting up with tribulation but there is a rejoicing at the good that will come.

Paul is not adding anything to the cross but he is adding something to the church. He talks of his troubles and he says I have never met you but this suffering is on your behalf.

When did Paul learn about such suffering? It was at his calling. On the Damascus road, he encountered Jesus: He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" <sup>5</sup> "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus told Paul that he was suffering at that time with his church. Then when he instructed Ananias to go and pray for Saul, he said,

"Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus had told him from the start that his role would involve suffering.

### **His secret (v25)**

Paul then moves from his suffering to his commission. I have become a servant by the commission God gave me ... He uses the word which is used of a master appointing servants to household tasks. We have all roles to fulfil in the household of God. No householder is going to have servants who are not assigned tasks. What is yours?

Paul's was to preach – to present the Word of God in its fullness. And that entailed a mystery. Paul uses that word three times in this passage. It was a mystery which had been kept hidden for ages. It involved glorious riches; it contains all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

But when Paul refers to this mystery here and in other Epistles, it is a revealed mystery. (v26) "Now disclosed to the saints"; (v27) "made known among the Gentiles"; (2v2) "that they might have the full riches of understanding." It is like reaching the end of a detective novel – you can say that was a good mystery but you know now what it is.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 9:4-5

<sup>2</sup> Acts 9:15-16

Paul's commission was to share a secret. This is like unwrapping a gift. His task was to share the best kept secret there ever was. And it is ... "Christ in you the hope of glory."

What is so significant about this statement?

Clue 1: *You* is plural. If the secret was that Christ was in a person's heart, it would be singular. So in with plural is among the group.

Clue 2: It is *You* not *Us*. *You* Includes the Colossians but not Paul!!! It was that the Christ would be among the Gentiles! The Jews expected the Messiah for themselves, but not for the Gentiles. Jesus did throw out some hints. He once said, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."<sup>3</sup>

Each of the first three gospels records Jesus saying at the Ascension that the gospel must be taken to all the nations, but they did not get it. Peter got into real trouble for entering a Gentile house and baptising them. It was Paul who understood and worked to take the gospel out to the non-Jewish peoples.

The revelation is that the Jewish Messiah is the Gentile Christ. And Paul tells us that receiving Christ as Lord and saviour brings the hope of glory. The Glory of God – is the visible presence of God – the *shekinah*. In the Bible it is usually described as being brighter than the sun. If he were visibly present we would have to close our eyes.

The hope of glory has two aspects: The expectation of seeing the visible presence of God and the expectation of sharing in the glory of God. This is the promised inheritance for those who put their trust in Jesus.

### **His struggle (v29)**

Paul tells them he labours to exhaustion and strives like an athlete at his task. Think of the exertion of an All Black or the intensity of a 100m sprinter – this is the sense of his words. It is a tough job of toil, sweat and tears. And he struggles like this to present everyone to Christ. If Paul had not suffered as he did, Christianity would still be a Jewish sect and we would not have got a look in. Jesus has not ceased to be the Messiah of the Jews but he is Christ of the Gentiles.

How did Paul keep going? He writes that the effort is his but the energy is God's. Christian life is not lazing in the Lord - it is demanding but done in his strength. We give all and find he supplies more!

### **Conclusion**

Why does Paul emphasise his suffering, secret and struggle? It is not to provoke their sympathy or admiration. He wants to give them something but they have to be ready to receive it. Consider the situation: they have never met him; he is in prison awaiting trial; and there were false teachers among them. They might think twice about listening to him.

Paul tells them, I am the one who suffers for you; I am the one who shares the secret with you; my sufferings and struggles show how important this message is to me. Did they accept this commendation? Almost certainly, yes – because they kept the letter and valued it.

Now God has seen fit to pass this letter onto the wider church, and now to us today. We have never seen Paul but the same battle is on today. There are many in the wider church today who will not accept Paul, who will not listen to him. And so he has to establish himself in our hearts also. Will you open your heart to Paul?

Why should you? Paul is the one to whom you owe your presence here this morning. It was Paul who took the Messiah of the Jews to the Gentiles. It was Paul who fought with his blood for this truth that Messiah is for you. He stood alone to oppose Simon Peter on this principle. It is for this reason he went to prison and ultimately lost his head. It was this Paul who brought the gospel from Asia to Europe. He set the gospel free from Judaism and delivered it to us Gentiles! It is Paul who makes it clear that salvation is found by faith in Jesus Christ, rather than in keeping the Law.

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<sup>3</sup> John 10:16

Will you give heed to his letter to us – to you? Will you take it seriously as a message that conveys life? Will you read over Colossians yourself at home as we work our way through it at church. There is good food for our spirits here. Will you value this message to the church and incorporate it into your life? Do you have the hope of glory?