

Colossians 1 (24-29) – This is How to Tell a Story

Intro: May 1999, Star Wars prequels: we knew the outcome, yet longed to see the drama. It is not just the story; it is how you tell it. Many books, movies, songs are remade because of this.

Vs.24 – Paul had a call and all Christians have a call, a duty, we have a destiny to travel on our way to our eternal destination. We all have roles to play, and for Paul continuing in the gospel means teaching it, proclaiming it, and attending to its service for others. It also means suffering, but he rejoices because his suffering is accomplishing good for others in the Body.

Paul isn't saying the sacrifice of Jesus was incomplete. He is saying that by our suffering, Jesus still "suffers" as He ministers through His people. His enemies continue to punish His believers, for the same things for which they punished Jesus. ***By His stripes we are healed and by our stripes He is revealed.*** Paul is filling up his own measure (2 Corinthians 1:5). Paul is showing us how the Head and the Body are united by suffering. Most won't suffer as much as Paul but we all have a measure of affliction God has appointed us to (1 Peter 4:12-16).

Some aren't suffering for the cause of Christ but for the cause of carelessness, cowardice, crassness, childishness, or compromise (being in sin and calling it trials). Trials are one of God's ways to grow us (James 1:2-4), but some people don't actually want to grow because growth means growing pains. They don't want to give up their personal comfort to serve Christ because they don't think it is necessary. People fail to realize we will have the same hard lessons in a different circumstance until we get it right. Even when we do get it right sometimes we still have more so that others can see an overcomer. The longer you wait the harder it is for your loved ones who are not saved. It might take a long time for your witness to mean anything to them, and all you can do about that now is to move toward Christ today! People are waiting on you!

When God is at work in your life He will redefine your notions about joy. Think about Paul; not only did he have his own sufferings but he suffered for them. We have all the trouble in the world just suffering for our own sanctification, but here Paul says we need to be joyous in service to Christ if that means suffering on the behalf of others!

We must die to our own self interests (John 12:24). Just as Jesus had a cup, we also have a cup, or a cross, our burden we must bear if we are to follow Him and be His disciple. Knowing that everyone has their own cup, would you still want to sing, "*here's my cup Lord, please fill it up Lord*"? What if the contents of "*here's my cup, fill it up, and make me whole*" were suffering, what if that is the cup that would make us whole? Paul says it is (Philippians 3:10)!

Vs.25 – we are all servants of Christ, and God begins to reveal His grace to you in subjective experience thorough the Word and through prayer. We can remember that where God places us He graces us. He decrees from eternity, we discover in time. This ministry isn't for us; it is for others, by God to you for them. If you want to know what your ministry is, you need to find out who your "them" is (2 Corinthians 1:4-7). What story has God been writing and have you been living, that can help you see who you need to tell it to. Be a good steward of God's grace to you (cf. 1 Peter 4:10). For Paul it was to make the Word of God fully known. The more we fulfill our ministry, the greater the benefit to other people, and our treasure in heaven.

Vs.26-27 – we have hope because we have the personal experience and presence of Christ right now, and we will have our future glorified bodies. The resurrection of the dead is more than life after death in a spiritual sense. The great final hope of the Christian is not to die and be freed from our bodies, but to be raised with new, glorious bodies.

Vs.28 – Jesus is to be proclaimed, as preeminent, as supreme and as sufficient. Paul warns and teaches everyone in a wise fashion, and in so doing teaches them to be wise themselves. He

has to declare and defend, he does this for all, he does this with the whole counsel of God, and he doesn't hold back. Paul wants everyone to understand how marvelous Christ is and to live it.

Vs.29 – Paul knew God was in control, but he also knew that he was responsible (Philippians 2:12-13). Just because God is sovereign doesn't mean we are static, we don't have a fatalistic religion. Actors practice a fatalistic enterprise; they know their character, lines, and rehearse the script. They know what is coming next but have to pretend as if they don't. This can help you with your mindset about the difference between fatalism and predestination. We know we will spend eternity with God, yet we still have roles to play. We know there is a script, and we know some of the outcome, but unlike actors, *we* only learn the plot by living. Understanding God's sovereignty, as Paul shows us here, is cause for action, not apathy.

"For this I toil" means "Toward this goal I move". Paul is moving because God is moving and he continues to move because he wants others to move. If you want others to come to Christ one of the biggest things to do is to keep growing to maturity. God is moving and He will cause others to move closer to Him as you move closer. But even if no one else seems to be moving we are still supposed to be moving. This is our part in the great story; this is the role of your life. God is directing your movie, the camera is rolling 24/7, and the devil tries to steal the scene.

Mature doesn't mean happy and it doesn't mean miserable, it means we keep moving on whether we are happy or miserable, and no matter how long we have been on the move. If we truly want to mature in Christ, we can't just listen to watered down messages that turn the gospel into a tool to boost our self esteem, rather than convict us of sin. The gospel is supposed to cause us to worship Christ, to trust and to treasure God, in increasing measures.

We must be on guard against much of what passes for good preaching and teaching today, because the most popular brand, if you will, is pure humanism, man-centered and full of self-love from start to finish. These things are popular because they appeal to popular notions, but that is just the world infiltrating the mind of the church. The Bible calls this the Way of Balaam, mixing the world with the things of God. It is appealing to man's lower instincts, and so we easily resonate with these things and therefore think that it must somehow be truth because we feel it in our gut, but that is exactly the sort of thing we are supposed to be training ourselves out of. Jesus isn't your way to a better life. Jesus is the biggest threat to your way of life.

The Bible doesn't teach us to just be ourselves; it commands us to be renewed in our minds, filled with the Spirit, anchored to the Bible, walking in wisdom, wearing the full armor of God, growing in discernment, tenacious about our testimony, mature in Christ, living for the Great Commission, public not private faith, not satisfied with worldly position, not looking for material gain. It is not simply happy and no trouble, we could have that without a crucified savior.

Paul's goal is our goal, to be mature in Christ, and to see others maturing as well. If you are not moving forward you are sliding back and many who think they are on the road are sliding back and falling away. From God's standpoint He knows who are His, for sure, but many are only fooling themselves. Those that God saves are to become God's slaves (Romans 6:22 / 2 Timothy 2:19 / 1 Peter 2:16). God's grace produces works of righteousness in a believer's life.

It matters how you live. It's not just the story; it's how you tell it. Paul was telling the story of Christ through his own life as God's glorious power lived through him (Galatians 2:20 / 1 Corinthians 15:9-10). Paul's individual story is not your story. His ministry differs from ours, but it is still the ministry of Christ. The Bible says you have the same mighty power; God will work mightily in you if you work mightily for Him. Your life is telling the story of Jesus at work in you. We are to make Him fully known within our own lives and out to the lives of others. God has written your story; how are you going to tell it, as tragedy or triumph?