

Col 1:24-2:5  
Job 1  
Psalm 44

Christ: the Mystery of God

July 31, 2022

Why does Job suffer?

It all goes back to God's question:

“Have you considered my servant Job,  
that there is none like him on the earth,  
a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?”

Initially that question is directed to Satan – the Accuser –  
which Satan takes as a challenge!

But that question is *really* directed to us!

Have *you* considered Job – the innocent suffering servant of the LORD?!  
To use Paul's phrase,  
Job fills up in his flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.

Why?

“for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”

We sing about this in Psalm 44:

Psalm 44 is the song of the innocent sufferer.

The Psalmist notes that God has handed them over to their enemies –  
even though “we have not forgotten you –  
and we have not been false to your covenant.”

There are times when the innocent suffer!

Why?

If it were impossible for the innocent to suffer,  
then it would be impossible for the guilty to be redeemed.

Sing Psalm 44

Read Colossians 1:24-2:5

Paul has set forth in 1:1-23 the centrality of Christ.

Christ is the firstborn of creation –  
he is also the firstborn from the dead,  
that in everything he might be pre-eminent.

This is what Paul's ministry is all about.

1:24-2:5 explains how Paul thinks of his own ministry as pre-eminently Christ-centered.

The goal of Paul's ministry is laid out clearly for us--  
that he might present everyone mature – perfect – in Christ Jesus.

And toward this end there are three things which Paul does:

- 1) he suffers
- 2) he ministers
- 3) and he preaches

And as he makes clear in verse 29,  
it is the working of Christ within him that enables him to labor and to strive.

And what is true for Paul is true for every Christian pastor –  
and indeed, for every *Christian!*  
“His energy that he powerfully works within me”

After all, Christ has joined himself to our humanity,  
in order that he might join us to God!

But that means that as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ,  
this is my calling:  
to suffer,  
to minister,  
and to preach,  
so that I might present you perfect/mature in Christ Jesus.

So let us look at how Paul views his own ministry,  
and what that teaches us about who Christ is,  
what he has done for us,  
who we are in Christ,  
and what that means for our lives.

## **1. The Pattern of Paul's Ministry (1:24-29)**

### **a. Suffering for the Body (v24)**

*<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, 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,*

Christ is firstborn.

Therefore we as those who are born into the kingdom  
also participate in whatever Christ has received.

Christ suffered,  
therefore we suffer.

Think of what Jesus says in John 15:18-21, no servant is greater than his master.  
Or what Peter says in 1 Peter 2:21—

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us,  
leaving an example that you should follow in his steps.")  
Those who follow Christ will suffer.

But Paul is saying something more.

Yes, all of us will suffer for Christ;  
because we have chosen to follow him,  
we will face the same persecution that he did

But Paul does not say that he suffers for Christ,  
but for the church!

He is Christ's representative to the church (v25)  
and those who present the word of God in its fulness  
must expect to "fill up" in their flesh  
what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions.

Why are pastors subject to special attacks from the world, the flesh and the devil?  
Because they are commissioned by God to preach and minister.

Christ's sufferings as an atonement for sin are absolutely unique;  
no one can share in that.

Yet Christ's sufferings as the faithful prophet who boldly spoke the word of God  
were shared by the prophets of old,  
and by the apostles and pastors of the new testament era.

Remember Jesus' words in Matthew 21:33ff and Matt 23:37

Just as the prophets of old were beaten and killed,  
so also Jesus Christ was beaten and killed  
and so will all who minister in his name.

These sufferings are still not complete  
and are filled up through the faithful suffering of Christ's ministers  
through the martyrs.

Hugh Latimer and Nicolas Ridley were burned at the stake for their faith in the 16th c.

As they came to light the fires, Latimer said to Ridley:  
"Be of good comfort Master Ridley and play the man.  
We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England  
as I trust shall never be put out."

A third minister, Thomas Cranmer, listened from the window of his cell,  
and when they came for him, he recanted:

the fear of death was too strong

But at the last moment, he recanted his recantation,  
plunging the hand that had signed the recantation into the fire,  
holding it in the flames, crying out "Lord Jesus,  
receive my spirit."

Note why Paul suffers:

not for Christ, but "for you" –

"for the sake of his body, which is the church."

Job was a picture of the innocent suffering servant *before* Jesus.

Paul was a picture of the innocent suffering servant *after* Jesus.

But not just a picture – because Paul's sufferings are themselves *Christ's afflictions*.

Do you actually believe that it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me?

Well, then, that means that our sufferings *are* the sufferings of Christ.

Paul would have reason to appreciate this, perhaps, more than most.

Jesus had said to him on the Road to Damascus:

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

When you persecute a Christian, you are persecuting Jesus.

After all, Jesus has united his people to himself.

Therefore, his life is now at work in us.

"When Christ, who is your life, appears, you also will appear with him in glory!"

And this is why Paul rejoices in his sufferings

because he knows that the church is growing and the gospel is spreading.

### **b. Ministering the Mysteries of God (v25-27)**

*<sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

So Paul says that he suffers for the sake of the body of Christ:

Paul is the servant of the church

(Mt. 20:24-28 whoever would be great must be the servant of all)

by the commission of God

This word "minister" (diakonos) can be translated "servant"

but it is never used of a house servant.

It is official service –

think of how the British have a "foreign minister" or a "prime minister."

A minister of the gospel is a servant of the gospel.

He is called to serve the body of Christ by proclaiming the mystery of God.

Paul uses the word "stewardship" or "administration" to describe his task.

God has called him to be a steward –

not for himself –

not for his own glory,

but (v25) this stewardship was given to Paul by God, FOR YOU,  
so that you might fulfill the Word of God,  
which is the mystery kept hidden for ages (v26)  
which is Christ in you the hope of glory (v27)

What is this 'mystery'?

First, a mystery is not something which is difficult to understand.

A mystery, as Paul says in v26, is something which has been hidden,  
(for ages and generations)  
but is now revealed to his saints.

So the mystery that Paul is talking about is not something difficult to understand.

Rather, it is going to be something that was hidden before,  
but now has been clearly revealed.

And Paul says in verse 27 that it is especially among the Gentiles  
that this glorious truth is being made known.

The language of mystery in the NT often deals with the inclusion of the Gentiles,  
because this was something which God had not revealed clearly in the OT.

Certainly every Jew knew that it was through Abraham that all the nations would be blessed,  
but they had no idea that the Gentiles would become equal with Jews in Christ.  
(Rom. 16:25-27; Eph 3:3-6, 9).

Because ultimately the mystery of God is "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Paul makes it clear that our hope IS Christ.

He himself IS the hope of glory.

and that is why our hope does not disappoint!

Because Christ's presence with us and IN us is the guarantee  
of our participation in his inheritance.

Where is your hope?

What are you trusting in?

Probably somewhere at home you have pegs where you hang your coat and hat.

If the peg is solidly attached to a stud in the wall,  
then you can hang a lot on that peg.

But if it's just attached to the drywall,  
then it may just come crashing down when you hang your winter coat on it.

Hope is like a peg that you hang your life on.

If your hope is hanging on anything except Christ,  
then when difficulties come,  
it'll come crashing down,  
and there'll be a big mess on the floor.

But if your hope is rooted in Christ.

If he is the stud you nail your hope to,  
then in all the storms of life,  
you will have a safe anchor.

Because the mystery of God is Christ in you--the hope of glory

**c. Preaching the Gospel of Christ (v28-29)**

*<sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

And so it is Christ whom we preach.

And this proclamation consists of two parts:

–warning (something which we tend not to see much of today:  
rebuking, encouraging, confronting, challenging, etc.)

This is the function of discipling and disciplining, i.e., training in godliness.

--teaching (the more common form of proclaiming Christ)

How does Paul proclaim Christ?

with all wisdom

(what is wisdom?

knowing how to live in God's world—

where do you get this wisdom?

Look at 2:2-3, Christ, in whom are hidden...)

And Paul does this for the purpose that "we may present everyone mature in Christ"

--Paul desires to stand before Christ

and present each member of his flock before his master,

and to hear Jesus' voice say, "well done".

Paul has a fire burning in his heart to see the Colossians

live up to who they are in Christ.

And even so,

I have a fire burning in my heart to see you

live up to who Christ has made you to be through his death and resurrection.

In one sense, Paul's job (and my job) is easy:

the work of Christ has made you perfect!

You ARE a new creation in Christ.

You ARE complete in Him.

But you are so mule-headed that you (and I--we're in this together!)

refuse to live up to who we already are in Christ!

God *has given us* all spiritual blessings that are in Christ.

He has poured out his Holy Spirit upon us.

He has given us new hearts, new life, and has renewed us in the image of Christ.

He has declared us righteous in Christ, and has sanctified us with the blood of Christ.

Yet we do not live as righteous, holy people.

We are like dogs after a bath.

The first thing a dog wants to do after he bathes,  
is go run around outside and get dirty again!  
Even so, though we have been washed with the blood of Christ,  
we can't seem to wait to jump back into the mud puddle of our sin!

This is why Christ has appointed ministers in his church –  
to admonish and to teach,  
warning of the consequences of sin,  
and proclaiming the wonders of what Christ has done.

And so (v29) Paul labors,  
"Struggling (ah! hear this!) with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

Paul agonizes (word for struggle) in his labors to present everyone mature in Christ.  
This is to be true in all ministers of the gospel.

But not for a moment does Paul think that his own strength is sufficient (II Cor. 12:9).  
It is simply by the grace and strength of Christ that he labors.  
Over the years I have seen time and again  
how I only burn out when I rely on my own energy!  
When I rely on *his energy* I can keep going!

Yet, 2:1, Paul is still struggling! The Christian life is never passive.  
We struggle, but with Christ's energy and strength.  
It is not our own strength, but it is our struggle.

## **2. The GOAL of Paul's Ministry: That Their Hearts May Be Encouraged (2:1-5)**

*2 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, <sup>2</sup> that their hearts may be encouraged,*

What is the point of Paul's struggle for the Colossians and the Laodiceans –  
and for all "who have not seen my face in the flesh"—  
which includes YOU and me, by the way!

*that their hearts may be encouraged*

Every thing else in this passage refers back to this.

The goal of Paul's ministry was to present everyone mature/perfect in Christ Jesus.  
The fruit which he sought was that their hearts might be encouraged.  
That they might understand the mystery of God and have full assurance,  
not merely in an intellectual manner,  
but in the deepest part of them--the heart.

That their hearts might be encouraged.

It is here--at the heart--that Paul desires to encourage you.

How?

How does this get fleshed out for Paul?

Our hearts are encouraged by three things:

- 1) the love and fellowship of the body (2:2a)
- 2) the true knowledge of Christ (2:2b-3)
- 3) the good order and steadfast faith of the church (2:4-5)

**a) Our Hearts Are Encouraged through Being Knit Together in Love (v2)**

Listen to how Paul says this in verse 2:

*being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,*

The word he uses which is translated "knit together",  
could also be translated "instructed" or "proven".

That our hearts are instructed in love, or proven by love.

This is a love which is rooted and grounded in the reality of the gospel.

Although Paul is using all sorts of intellectual words in verses two and three,  
"understanding", "knowledge", "wisdom"--  
this is no abstract intellectual knowledge,  
this is a knowledge and a wisdom which are hidden in the person of Christ.

So what does it mean to have our hearts knit together in love? or by love?

Recall what Paul said back in 1:4

he gave thanks to God ever since he heard of their faith in Christ Jesus  
and their love for all the saints.

We saw that their hope in Christ had produced faith toward God  
and love toward one another.

Paul is now saying that his suffering and agonizing for the Colossians  
is to produce a greater love for one another,  
as they see Word of God growing and spreading throughout the world.

Paul is merely following the teaching of Christ,  
who said that it was by the love of Christians for one another  
that the world would know that Christ was sent by the Father.



And this love is the bond which knits us together (cf. Col. 3:14)

This love is found in Christ.

Imagine what our homes would look like if our hearts were more knit together in love.  
Imagine what our church would look like if we sought to put the interests of others  
ahead of our own.

But Paul tells us how this is to happen.

You see, the passage could be well translated,  
"in order that their hearts may be encouraged being knit together by love  
and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding"

It is only when you have grasped the height and depth of the great love  
with which God the Father has loved us in Christ Jesus,  
that we can love one another.

It is only when we have the full assurance of the knowledge of Christ –  
when we have known and understood the mystery of Christ in you,  
the hope of glory –  
that our hearts will receive the encouragement  
which knits us together in love.

AND this is our second point: that our hearts are encouraged  
**b) through the knowledge of the mystery of God, namely Christ,**

<sup>3</sup> *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

Our hearts are knit together BY love and FOR all the riches  
of the full assurance of understanding.

This doesn't go over too well in our individualistic culture,  
but Paul is telling us that we will only have assurance of understanding--  
in other words, that we will only come to a true knowledge  
of the mystery of God--together.

We need each other.

If all we do is study our Bibles by ourselves,  
we will not come to an understanding of the truth.

If all we do is live in our own little corner,  
we will not have our hearts knit together by love,  
neither will we have full assurance of our understanding of the mystery of God.

What are the full riches of complete understanding?  
What is the mystery of God?

*Christ himself*

The mystery which has been revealed to the Gentiles is Christ in you,  
the hope of glory.

In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

No knowledge is true knowledge unless it is rooted in Christ;  
no wisdom is true wisdom unless it flows from Christ.

That is why the most brilliant pagan scientist or philosopher are ultimately fools,  
because they insist on interpreting the world apart from Christ.  
They may be \*right\* about a lot of things,  
but they know nothing as it really is,  
because everything has its true meaning and purpose in Christ  
[who is the one in whom all things hold together,  
the one who created all things in the first place! (1:15-17)].

This is going to be a key argument for Paul later (2:8-10, etc.).  
Because Paul is concerned that the Colossians are being deceived and cheated  
by the philosophies that surround them.  
But Paul wants you to see that knowing Christ is only possible  
if you are encouraged in heart and united in love (note the "that" in verse 2).

In other words, you need each other.  
Here is where all the body language of chapter one comes to a head:  
it is through your love and encouragement of one another  
(stimulated and nourished by Paul [v1] and other ministers of the gospel)  
that you will come to the full knowledge of Christ.

Not simply that you will intellectually instruct one another,  
although that plays a part in it,  
but rather that your love is an indispensable key  
to open the door to true knowledge and understanding.  
After all, the church is a body,  
and the body can only grow in knowledge if the parts work together. (Eph. 4:14-16).

Which brings us to our final point:  
our hearts are encouraged

**c) through the good order and steadfast faith of the church (v4-5)**

*<sup>4</sup> I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. <sup>5</sup> For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.*

Paul contrasts the "plausible arguments" of the world (v4)  
with the faith that you have been taught.

Do not let the wisdom of this world lead you astray.

When you wonder, “how do I answer people?”  
don’t worry about whether you have clever arguments,  
rather focus on living as Christ's body,  
steadfast in the faith, unmoved from the hope of the gospel.

Paul tells you this to warn you against deceivers.

As long as you are orderly and firm in faith (v5),  
growing in love and encouragement (v2),  
and growing in the true knowledge of Christ (v3)  
then no one will deceive you with "fine-sounding arguments".

To paraphrase verse 6, Be who you are in Christ.

True order in the church is a delight.

Not a man-made order, all stiff with rigid rules and prohibitions,  
but the order that comes from the love and encouragement that is in Christ.  
Here Paul commends them for their orderly worship and life together  
(in contrast to his admonishment to the Corinthians  
that they START doing everything decently and in order!)  
here, he praises them for standing steadfast.

Paul rejoices that they have not fallen away from the faith,  
and encourages them to persevere in their calling.

Even so,  
as our life and worship in the church is ordered by the wisdom of Christ,  
we will continue to find our joy and encouragement in HIM.

Who is Christ?  
What has he done for our salvation?  
Who are we in Christ?  
And what does that mean for our lives?

These are the questions which Paul is answering for the Colossians.

He has now finished the first part:

Christ is the image of the invisible God,  
in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,  
by whom all things were made,  
and in whom all things hold together.  
And he is the firstborn of creation, and the firstborn from the dead,  
so that he might be preeminent in everything.

Only the creator could be the redeemer.  
Only God can save.

Therefore the fulness of God dwelt bodily in Christ Jesus,  
and through his death and resurrection,  
Jesus has reconciled us,  
who were once alienated and enemies of God,  
to the Father  
Therefore Jesus Christ is our only hope and salvation.

And Christ in you is the true hope of glory.

And Christ has also given you the apostolic teaching,  
so that the suffering, ministry, and preaching of Paul  
and of other ministers of the gospel  
might one day present the spotless bride of Christ to her bridegroom.  
God's plan of salvation includes the means of our salvation,  
which comes through the preaching of the Word,  
so that the mystery of God might be proclaimed among the Gentiles –  
among YOU.

This is Who Christ Is,  
and what he has done for our salvation.  
Now, from 2:6 through the rest of the book,  
Paul will tell us who we are in Christ,  
and what that means for our lives.