

Preaching Christ

March 9, 2025

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Colossians 1:24–2:3

Session Outline

1. Suffering for Christ (Colossians 1:24-27)
2. Laboring for Christ (Colossians 1:28-29)
3. Encouragement in Christ (Colossians 2:1-3)

Theological Theme

Suffering is part of the Christian life, and we shouldn't be surprised when we encounter it. Like Paul, we should walk in the purpose God has for us, laboring for the sake of the gospel with the Holy Spirit's help.

Call to Action

Don't be surprised at suffering. We share in Christ's sufferings in order to display His power through our weakness. Your pastors preach Christ, because that's the commission God has given us. If you ever move on from BBC (or its campuses) be sure to prioritize finding a church that makes the word of God fully known.



Leader Guide

Preaching Christ

Introduction

In 1950, an American Wheaton College graduate from Portland, Oregon learned about an unreached people group in Ecuador: the Huaorani (or “Auca”) Indians of the Waodani tribe. God used this conversation with a former missionary to Ecuador to plant an idea and issue a call in his life to minister to these people. In 1952, he and a friend headed to the capital of Ecuador (Quito) to learn Spanish. After six months, they moved deep into the Ecuadorian jungle. In 1955, he and a small group of missionaries contacted the Huaorani. They dropped gifts in a bucket from a plane and used a loudspeaker to communicate with them in their native language.

Eventually, the Huaorani people began to give gifts of their own. In 1956, the missionaries were ready for the next phase of their ministry: direct contact. They found a nearby beach to land their plane and set up camp. A small group of three Huaorani came to visit. The Huaorani talked, received gifts, and even took a ride in the missionaries’ plane. The missionaries were excited to entertain a group of Huaorani men the next morning, but the Huaorani had other plans. On January 8, 1956, Jim Elliot and four other missionaries were speared to death by the very people they were trying to share the gospel with.

Jim was survived by his wife Elisabeth and young daughter Valerie, who, along with the sister of one of the other martyred missionaries (Nate Saint), traveled back to Ecuador in 1958 to learn the native language and live in the jungle with the tribe that murdered their loved ones. Many among the Waodani tribe accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

The legacy of Jim and Elisabeth Elliot is one of the most profound modern examples of suffering for the sake of the gospel, inspiring generations of missionaries and believers. Jim Elliot—who famously wrote, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose”—understood suffering for the sake of Christ and did it gladly.¹ In our reading today, we’ll continue to read the account of another missionary who suffered for the sake of the gospel and did so gladly: Paul.

- What other examples of people suffering for the sake of the gospel (modern, historical, or biblical) can you think of? What did they do and what was the impact?
- What does it mean to suffer for the sake of the gospel in 2025?

Session Summary

The apostle Paul suffered greatly for the sake of the gospel, and in today's passage, he told the Colossian believers that he rejoiced in the suffering he endured for the sake of the gospel and believers everywhere.

Paul sought to encourage the Colossian believers by sharing how he labored for the sake of the gospel. Paul, a great servant for the gospel, was dedicated to proclaiming Jesus and helping everyone he encountered know Jesus more fully.

1. Suffering for Christ (Colossians 1:24-27)

- What does it mean to rejoice while we are suffering? How is this possible?

Just a verse before this, Paul wrote that he was a servant of the gospel (v. 23), and we get a taste of what he meant by this idea in verse 24: he was willing to suffer for the gospel. Paul's life and ministry was full of suffering for the sake of Jesus. Jesus Himself said Paul's ministry would be marked by suffering for His sake (Acts 9:16).

Paul was beaten, imprisoned, and opposed (2 Corinthians 11). In Acts 14:19, Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city of Lystra and presumed dead, but he got up and went back into the town (Acts 14:20). In Acts 16, Paul and his associate Silas were "severely flogged" (v. 23) and thrown into jail, where they responded by praying and praising God (Acts 16:25). A mob attempted to kill Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 21:31). He was on board a ship that was caught in a terrible storm and ran aground on the island of Malta, where he was bitten by a poisonous snake (Acts 27-28). His ministry was marked by suffering and violent opposition. It's no wonder Paul had so much to say about suffering.

In verse 24 of today's passage, Paul wrote that he rejoiced in his suffering on behalf of the church at Colossae (and believers everywhere). Paul had a deep understanding that, just as Jesus said in Acts 9, his personal suffering was part of God's plan for his ministry and that God works in all things for our ultimate good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

Paul represented this idea many places throughout his letters and ministry. In Romans 5:3-5, he wrote about boasting in his afflictions as the way endurance is produced. He told Timothy in that all believers seeking to live a godly life could expect to be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12-13). In 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, Paul wrote that, even though he pleaded that God would take away his suffering, this was not in God's will. Instead, Paul delighted in persecution and difficulty.

Still, it might seem odd to us that suffering would produce rejoicing from Paul. But he could rejoice in his suffering because he knew the church would be blessed through it.² Jesus had something to say about this idea in the Sermon on the Mount. He pronounced those who endure persecution and insults for His name blessed (Matthew 5:10-12).

Mystery

Paul's efforts on behalf of the Gentiles were intended to help them know the meaning of God's "mystery" about Christ. By mystery Paul meant God has now revealed something formerly concealed. The mystery is the fact that Gentiles are now made fellow members with Jewish Christians.

Paul's phrase "I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for his body" (v. 24) doesn't mean Jesus's redemptive work on the cross is somehow lacking but could allude to Christ suffering alongside Paul (in whom He dwelt) as he suffered in ministry.³

Verse 25 deals with Paul's calling. Paul had become a servant of the body of Christ because that is what God called him to do. God calls us into things for His glory, and God's planned to use Paul to share the gospel, primarily with the Gentiles.

- ❓ What can we learn from Paul about our own need to pursue God's purposes in our lives?
- ❓ Application: Reflect on your life. What "commission" has God given you? What purpose has He given all followers of Christ?

2. Laboring for Christ (Colossians 1:28-29)


- ❓ What does it mean to labor for the sake of the gospel? How do we strive with Christ's strength and not our own?

These verses outline Paul's purpose: teaching others what it means to follow Jesus. God gave Paul a specific commission in his ministry, but Jesus gave all of us a command to go and make disciples, telling others about Jesus and teaching them how to follow Him. This is what the Great Commission is all about:

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

—Matthew 28:19-20

Do you notice Jesus’s focus on Gentiles? Jesus orders us to “make disciples of all nations” (v. 19, emphasis added). The Jews were God’s chosen people, the people God chose to bless the world through (Genesis 12:3). Now, the Gentiles were getting adopted into God’s family, too.

 What does it mean to “proclaim” Jesus (v. 28)? How do we do this in daily life?


Let’s break down what Paul wrote about his purpose in verse 28:

“We proclaim him”: In verse 27, Paul wrote of the glorious wealth and hope that is found in Christ, and he wasn’t shy in sharing this truth far and wide. Paul took the Great Commission seriously and told everyone he could about Jesus. After his conversion, his whole life was an arrow pointing straight to Christ.

“Warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom”: Here Paul described an important tenant of the Great Commission: teaching with all wisdom. Paul wanted to make disciples, and disciples understand who Jesus is and how to walk with Him. Notice also that Paul mentioned everyone. Just like Jesus commanded in the Great Commission, Paul sought to make disciples of all nations.

“So that we may present everyone mature in Christ”: Paul’s goal was spiritual maturity. He wanted to help people find the “glorious wealth” (v. 27) and hope in Jesus that comes with spiritual maturity and really knowing and walking with Christ.

Paul wrote that he had been laboring and striving toward this goal. Think back on the list of trials and suffering we outlined above—his labor was great indeed. When Paul wrote about “his strength that works powerfully in me” (v. 29), he was pointing back to the Lord. He could labor and strive for the good of the Colossian church and the gospel because the Lord, who dwelt within him, was working powerfully alongside him.

 Application: What are some ways we could labor for the sake of the gospel in our lives today?


3. Encouragement in Christ (Colossians 2:1-3)

 Why would Paul’s suffering encourage these believers?

Previously in our text, Paul noted that he rejoiced in his suffering on their behalf and was laboring and striving for the gospel. In Colossians 2:1, Paul wanted them to know how greatly he struggled for them and other


congregations who had not met Paul personally. Paul used an athletic metaphor here, much like the idea of someone striving in a race for the sake of the gospel he presented in 1 Corinthians 9. Paul also mentioned Laodicea (v. 1), a nearby town that evidently also experienced the problem of false teaching that plagued the Colossian church.⁴

Paul wanted the Colossian believers to be encouraged. A discouraged congregation is vulnerable to lies, disunity, and the schemes of the enemy, and this is not what Paul wanted for the believers at Colossae, who may have been discouraged by their current situation. Paul wanted them to be encouraged and united in their love of Christ.⁵

 What did Paul say he hoped would be the outcome of encouraging the Colossian believers?

Paul's hope was that the Colossians would know Christ more deeply. Earlier, Paul wrote of the "glorious wealth" (v. 27) that comes with knowing Jesus, and he wrote of the riches of understanding Christ completely in verse 2. Remember that it was Paul's goal not just to convert believers, but also to help them know how to walk with Jesus. Here Paul referred to the "complete understanding" of the knowledge of Christ. Paul wrote that in Jesus are the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Knowing Jesus is worth more than any earthly treasure.

The Colossian believers' complete understanding was under attack from false teaching. Paul wanted them to grow their understanding as a united body of Christ, and he wrote his letter to help them better understand the true gospel and overcome the false teaching they faced. Paul stressed that knowledge and wisdom are found in one place: Jesus.

 Application: How can we encourage fellow believers who may be experiencing difficult times or false teaching today?

Conclusion

In our passage today, Paul presented the idea of suffering for the sake of the gospel. There are examples of followers of God suffering all over the pages of Scripture, and Jesus warned us this would come in John 16:33. As we walk the path God crafts for our lives, we shouldn't be surprised when we suffer, but the commission of God is worth it. Jesus is worth more than earthly comforts, and we're called to teach everyone about Him.

Paul often wrote of laboring and striving for the sake of the gospel, and today's text is a prime example. Going and making disciples like Jesus commanded takes work. Like Paul, believers today strive with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

Paul sharing that he hoped to encourage the believers he was writing to. He knew the false teaching they were hearing could breed discouragement, and he wanted them to be confident and encouraged in the true gospel. He wanted to root them in the knowledge of Jesus so they wouldn't be shaken by the false teaching among them.

Paul also knew the importance of community. Unity is important in the body of believers; a community in which a believer can grow to know Jesus better, like our church and group, is an important avenue for spiritual growth.

- ❓ When was a time you faced suffering for the sake of the gospel? How did you respond?
- ❓ How could we grow in proclaiming Jesus in our lives?
- ❓ Who is God calling you to proclaim Jesus to this week? How will you act toward this?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for His Word and the truth found there. Ask that God would help your group more fully know and walk with Jesus. Ask Him to show your group what He has commissioned each person to do and ask Him for help walking forward in His purposes. Ask that God would help your group accept and be strengthened through any suffering for the gospel that might be in the future.

Memory Verse

In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
—Colossians 2:3

Additional Resources

- *Be Complete* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* by Charles Swindoll
- *Colossians and Philemon* by G.K. Beale

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Colossians

Purpose

Paul wrote to counter the “Colossian heresy” that he considered an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The false teaching is identified as a “philosophy” (2:8), presumably drawn from some Hellenistic traditions as indicated by the references to “his fullness” (1:19); the “elements of the world” (Gk *stoicheia*, 2:8, 20); “wisdom” (2:3, 23); and “self-made religion” (2:23). In addition, the false teaching contained Jewish elements such as circumcision (2:11; 3:11); “human tradition” (2:8); Sabbath observance, food regulations, festival participation (2:16); the “worship of angels” together with “access to a visionary realm” (2:18); and harsh human regulations (2:21–23). Paul addressed this syncretistic philosophy by setting forth a proper understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and by noting appropriate implications for Christian conduct.

Author

The Apostle Paul is identified as the author of Colossians (1:1; 4:18). The church fathers unreservedly endorsed Pauline authorship (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 3.14.1; Tertullian, *De Praescr. Haer.*, 7; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 1.1; cp. Justin, *Dialogue*, 85.2; 138.2). A close reading of Colossians reveals a considerable number of lexical, grammatical, and theological similarities with the other Pauline writings (1:9, 26; 2:11–14, 16, 20–21; 3:1, 3, 5–17). Also favoring the authenticity of Colossians as a letter of Paul is its close connection with Philemon, an epistle widely regarded as Pauline.

Setting

During his ministry in Ephesus (Ac 19:10), Paul sent Epaphras to spread the gospel in the Lycus Valley. Epaphras subsequently established the church at Colossae (1:7; 4:12–13). The city’s population consisted mostly of Phrygians and Greeks, but it also included a significant number of Jews. The church, likewise, was mostly composed of Gentiles (1:21, 27; 2:13), but it also had Jewish members (2:11, 16, 18, 21; 3:11). When Epaphras (Phm 23) informed Paul of certain heretical teachings that had spread there, Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians as a theological antidote.

Special Features

Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae is one of the prison letters (along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). Paul’s desire with this letter was to correct the false teachings that were cropping up in the church. In doing so, Paul presented a clear picture of Jesus Christ as supreme Lord of the universe, head of the church, and the only one through whom forgiveness is possible.

Extended Commentary

Colossians 1:24-3:3

1:24 Paul rejoiced in his sufferings (Rm 8:18; 2Co 1:5; Gl 5:24; Php 3:10) because they benefited the church. By suffering Paul was completing in his flesh what was lacking in Christ's afflictions. This enigmatic phrase cannot mean that something was lacking in Christ's atoning work (v. 20). Rather, Paul's sufferings benefited the church by promoting the spread of the gospel.

1:25 God's commission (Eph 1:10; 3:2, 9) pertains to God's plan for Gentiles to receive salvation and to share in the inheritance of God's people. Paul's role was to make this message fully known.

1:26 The term mystery (cp. v. 27; 2:2; 4:3; Rm 11:25; Eph 1:9; 3:3-9) refers to something that was previously hidden in God's plan but has now been revealed. Here it relates to the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God.

1:27 The words glorious and wealth jointly connote the wonder and blessings associated with this mystery. In you could mean "among you," or, more likely, refer to Christ's indwelling of believers (Rm 8:10; 2Co 13:5; Gl 2:20; Eph 3:17).

1:28 The words warning and teaching express the manner of their proclamation, which is further characterized as being in keeping with all wisdom. The purpose of this ongoing ministry was to present everyone mature in Christ in correspondence with Christ's purpose in reconciliation (v. 22).

1:29 Paul viewed his work along the same lines as Christ's work of purifying and maturing the church. This was not something that Paul accomplished in his own strength but in conjunction with the work of Christ operating in him.

2:1 On have not seen me in person, see 1:7-8.

2:2 Paul's struggle in the gospel ministry came from his purpose and desire to encourage and join their hearts together in love and in complete understanding (see 1:9,26).

2:3 Christ is the only source required for wisdom and knowledge; the Colossians did not need to look to any other philosophy. Hidden does not mean secretive (1:26) but plays on the word treasures. Jewish writers often used this imagery to encourage seekers to dig deep when looking for truth.⁶

References

1. "About Jim Elliot," Elisabeth Elliot, accessed January 8, 2025, <https://elisabethelliot.org/about/jim-elliott/>; "Timeline: The Life & Work of Elisabeth Elliot," Elisabeth Elliot, accessed January 8, 2025, <https://elisabethelliot.org/about/timeline/>; Justin Taylor, "They Were No Fools: The Martyrdom of Jim Elliot and Four Other Missionaries," January 8, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/they-were-no-fools-60-years-ago-today-the-martyrdom-of-jim-elliott-and-four-other-missionaries/>.

2. Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Colossians,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1895.
3. Köstenberger, 1895.
4. Constable, “Notes on Colossians.”
5. David Guzik, “Colossians 2: Answering the Colossian Heresy,” *Enduring Word*, accessed January 8, 2024, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/colossians-2/>.
6. Köstenberger, “Colossians,” 1895–1896.