

Title: Motivated to Sacrifice

Text: Colossians 1:24-29 ESV

Today we will continue in the book of Colossians in chapter 1, starting in verse 24. We will conclude chapter 1 today. Also I should mention that this message will be about 10 minutes shorter than usual to ensure that we don't feel rushed in The Lord's Supper, which will be at the end of the service.

Paul, the author of Colossians, has discussed his thankfulness for the church at Colossae, and then (last week) gave us a great passage on the person and work of Christ - especially in how He reconciles us to God.

In today's text, we will see Paul make a turn in the text to talk about his own ministry and the struggles he has endured to ensure that the gospel has gone out to the world. I think there is something for us today in that theme.

Have you ever had a moment in your life when you were starting something, maybe a project of some kind, where you realized somewhere in the middle that it was going to require more sacrifice and struggle than you imagined to complete the task? So you sat down and really had an introspective moment that went something like this - "Is it really worth it to finish this thing out? I could just get out now and save myself the trouble..."

Last winter when we lived in Colorado - my wife Abbie was going on a ski trip with her sister to Aspen for the first time. The drive on Interstate 70 through the mountains can get really dangerous in the winter, and often they enact something called "chain law," which means that the state can force you to apply chains around your tires for traction in the snow, otherwise you have to have 4wd and snow tires - or else you can be pulled over.

Neither of us had used tire chains before, and I wasn't going on this trip with her, so I decided that a couple days before - she should practice putting on the tire chains in our apartment parking lot so that the first time she tried it wouldn't be in the snow, on the side of the interstate, at 20 degrees and 10000 feet.

Well, the first pair we bought was supposed to be the easiest to apply (with just sliding it on) but it got *horribly* tangled and was a nightmare of frustration. You'd be better off putting a slinky in the dishwasher. So we went and bought a different kind that you lay down on the road and drive the car on top of the chains. This was even harder than the first pair. It wasn't looking promising.

The trip was one day away. Tensions were high. Fear was palpable. I was not comfortable. Discussions about bailing on the trip were happening.

But the desired outcome drove the sacrifice. Her sister was flying in. The hotel in Aspen was purchased. The trip had been hyped for a long time. We had watched hours of youtube videos and hugged those Honda Accord tires more than we hug each other. So we went out and bought a third set of tire chains and came home and practiced for one more day. And then, it just clicked.

Abbie swung the chain around the tire and it clicked into place, and I shouted "Eureka," and "By George, I think she's got it!" every other exclamation I could muster. And she did it perfectly over and over. She could drive in the mountains with chain law, with no fear of putting the chains on the tires on the side of the road. And they had an awesome trip, and she never even had to put the chains on. But she could have!

And there's a lesson in there. If you desire the outcome badly enough - you'll be willing to sacrifice for it in the meantime. Even if the process is painful or invokes fear in the present, you will push through if you think the result is worth it.

I guarantee that if this trip was to go skiing 1 hour away in Wyoming, Abbie would've probably let the frustration cancel or change the trip plans because it wouldn't have been worth it. But for the 4 hour trip with her sister to pristine ski-country in Aspen... she was willing to sacrifice for it.

And you, Christians, are going to come to a point in your spiritual life when you realize that there is going to be a level of struggle involved. There will be work - whether in serving the church - or personally in your life. At some point you realize that there is a certain sacrifice and cost to following Jesus and serving His church. And at that moment you have to consider "what this is all about." Why do we do this? What would sufficiently motivate you to persevere, not give up, and continue in the sacrifice of following Jesus and serving His church even when it hurts?

If you desire the outcome more than you fear the process, you will be willing to sacrifice for the sake of Christ. And so I'd ask you to consider this question today - "Am I willing to sacrifice to see God work in my life and in this church? **The sacrifice is worth the results of seeing transformed lives.**

It certainly was worth it to the Apostle Paul. Let's look at what he says in Colossians 1:24...

24 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, 25 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, 26 the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. 27 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. 28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Amen.

The first thing I would like to show you today is not really the points that I would like to make to you. First I want to give you the grid by which you should interpret the two points to come. And that grid is the *struggling of Paul to carry out his task as a believer*.

If you're a Bible-circler or a note taker, you may want to note three different parts of this passage. First, in verse 24 where Paul says "my sufferings." He rejoices in his sufferings, which we know from the context to be prison. In the past he has been beaten and subject to riots and all sorts of things. Now he is rejoicing for his suffering - (the end of v24 says) for the sake of the church.

Next I would note in v25 the word "minister." He says "of which I became a minister." Now, this seems to be a common word, but it's unique that Paul uses it of himself. Typically Paul calls himself an "Apostle," especially when defending his authority. But here he's calling himself a minister. Here's why that's important - the greek word used is "diakonos," which is where we get our word "deacon."

This word, at its core, literally means "servant." Now, the Bible has two usages of "diakonos." One is the ordained office that Paul tell Timothy and Titus to install in their churches in addition to elders. The other meaning is a more generalized description of a person that labors or "kicks up dust" from their service of the Lord.

It is a “nose to the grindstone,” “ox to the plow” type of connotation - and Paul the great Apostle uses this of himself to describe his service.

Third and finally, I would note in v29 his words - “for this I toil, struggling.” Perhaps your translation says “I labor, striving.” Here he makes use of the Greek word “*agonizomai*.” You can hear the root of our word “agonize” or agony. This is how Paul describes his labors, that he toils and agonizes with all of the energy that God provides him.

And so if we combine these three words I have shown you - Paul’s ministry is defined as this - Suffering for the sake of others as a servant in the dust, agonizing and struggling to complete the task, yet rejoicing while doing so. There’s the reality of ministry as told by Paul. To me, that is the adverb of Paul’s ministry. It is the filter that describes how he does what he does.

So we know that ministry and following Jesus will be marked by difficulty and struggles - but what is it all for? What are we toiling toward? Because if you don’t know the outcome, you’re just a hamster on a wheel and that loses purpose very quickly when you get tired and ask, “Why am I running anyway?”

Now my two points.... What would motivate a Christian to continue in the struggle and sacrifice?

1. WE MUST CLARIFY CHRIST.

Let’s go back to our text and see what was so worth it to Paul to struggle and strive and sacrifice. Verse 25 says...

I became a minister (a diakonos) according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ 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

Here’s what Paul is saying - there are people out there that do not fully know the word - and it bothers me so much that I’m willing to suffer so that they can know.

Now, the immediate context is Gentiles. Paul is coming from a Jewish context wherein they knew all of the promises of God, they knew the Law, they knew the prophets, they had the stories of King David, and Moses, and Abraham, and Noah.

They had the preparation for the Messiah to come and complete their knowledge, and fulfill all things, and be the crown jewel of their revelation....but the entire non-Jewish world was completely missing out.

Unless you were Jewish - it would be very difficult to stumble across the true revelation of Yahweh God throughout human history. Unless you lived within travel distance of Jerusalem and Galilee - you would have very little chance to hear about Jesus and what He had done. Paul is saying, I came to serve those people because all of this life-changing, world-transforming truth is a mystery to them unless I go and tell them.

Look at how he describes it in v27 - *the riches of the glory of this mystery, Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Paul was willing to become a servant and to suffer because he was not OK with hoarding God's revelation of truth. and sitting on the pile and protecting his treasure chest. It was bothersome to him that there were entire cities and regions of the world that did not have truth available to them. It's one thing if someone hears the fullness of the truth and says "NO," that's going to happen - but it's another thing if someone says, "I've never even heard of Jesus" while we are drowning in resources.

Paul was obsessed with presenting a clarified Christ. He says his goal is to make the Word "fully known."

It should bother us when we hear people present a distorted picture of God's Word or of Christ. I don't mean bothered as in "I'm mad and I'm going to fight you if you don't stop saying that." I mean bothered as in "It would hurt me to let you continue living your life with this falsehood unchecked, because you're missing out on the joy of truth."

There are people living all around us that are convinced that they know the Bible because they either grew up in church, or they heard something from a friend, or watched something on Youtube - but they are living on bad information and it should motivate us to do all we can to reach them and tell them the truth.

There are probably hundreds of thousands of people in San Antonio that believe Jesus was a nice guy, a good moral man worth listening to - but nothing more. And Paul would say - "No... that's not God... fully known." And you're going to miss out on the riches of joy and the hope of glory if you keep believing that.

There are people that believe the God of the Old Testament is a different God than of the New Testament. That the Holy Spirit is a tingling feeling. That the Bible is unreliable and full of errors. That salvation can be lost. That man is inherently good. That creation came from a big bang of unguided eternal matter. That if they have more good deeds than bad deeds, then the scale of salvation will tip in their favor and they will be saved. That sin is a man-made construct. You can keep going and going.... and church ... it should hurt you inside to know that there are people within walking distance of us that base their view of God and their decision of the gospel upon false information because they don't know the truth.

It bothered Paul enough to go to prison so that people could hear. What are you willing to sacrifice so that people in this community can know the truth. Would you go to prison, be fired, risk safety so that someone could hear the truth and be saved?

We don't even have to go to that extreme... Would you come on Sunday nights? Would you join a Sunday school class or an off campus Bible study? Would you give of your financial resources so that we can increase our giving to missions and outreach events? Would you attend prayer meetings even when your schedule is tight?

Paul said it was worth it to him to see those who didn't have a full knowledge of God come to know Him fully. If you are motivated to see people that don't know Christ at all, or who have a distorted view of Christ - come to know Him in truth - you will sacrifice to make that happen.

Next, what else would motivate a Christian to struggle and sacrifice?

2. WE MUST CHAMPION MATURITY.

Let's look to verse 28 to see this played out.

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

So not only does Paul struggle and sacrifice to get the gospel out into the world - but he also desires to present people "mature in Christ."

There should be an equal passion in the heart of every Christian and church - to BOTH reach into the unbelieving world to engage with the gospel, AND to challenge existing Christians to grow into maturity.

Few things are more sad than someone that has attended church for years and decades - with no fruit in their life to show for it. An immature Christian that has been professing Christ for a long time is confusing to an unbeliever and harmful to the church. That's why RC Sproul once said, "It's not the profession of Christ that matters, but rather the possession of Christ."

Your Christian journey should not end when you step out of the baptistry. Your goal should be to become more and more like Jesus until the day that you breathe your last, and that's not going to occur by accident or by osmosis.

Growing in Christ is not like growing in age. You will get older and look older no matter what you do. Whether you eat well or exercise or have good genes - there is a set pattern of what happens to the human body in your teens, twenties, thirties, forties and so on. You don't have to do anything to make your hair turn gray or your muscles to weaken or your face to develop little wrinkles - it just happens. This is not how growing in Christ is.

If you don't put in the discipline, and you don't regularly connect and commune with God, and enjoy moments of worship, and submit to the leading of the Spirit - you will never grow and never become spiritually mature. And I don't just mean mature in knowledge, I mean mature even in the way you behave.

I believe that your salvation is an act of God alone - and your sanctification is a cooperative effort between you and God. Listen to what Paul says are the means by which he pushes disciples onto maturity.... He proclaims Christ, he warns (admonishes), and teaches. That's preaching, correction, and teaching - in order that we can attain to maturity.

This is extremely important. The mission of the church is to reach the unreached AND to progress people down the assembly line of discipleship. We need to be asking of each other, "What's your next step?" How are you going to move forward from where you are today and grow into where God wants you tomorrow?

Is there a specific sin that you need to put to death? Are you neglecting Bible Study or prayer? Are you living with joy and thanksgiving? Are you telling people about Jesus and challenging their worldview? Are you being generous with your time, money, and resources? Are you personally making disciples?

We have to be passionate about growth - not just in ourselves - but in others. If we look to each other and see that we aren't growing, or if we see that someone is reverting, we have a responsibility to step in and help. We need to be an encouragement to one another as we grow in maturity. Challenge each other to press on and to stay the course and to push ahead in The Lord.

The Christian life is difficult at times. It's a life of giving away. You're going to feel like you pour and pour out. You're going to feel like Elijah sometimes - "Oh Lord, I'm the only prophet left, everyone has bowed the knee to Baal. Only I am left serving you." You're going to feel like it would just be easier to live for yourself, to keep your time, keep your money, and just come on Sunday mornings for the pep talk to get you through the week. But this is not the life that Paul modeled.

He struggled, and labored in the dust - so that Christ would be made known - and so that others would be presented mature in Christ. This is what we need from every Christian.

And if you're looking at the struggle of really following Jesus, you have to desire the outcome more than you fear the process. You have to be motivated by people whom you don't know, having a total life transformation, believing the gospel, and having Jesus change their entire life as they grow in Him. If you do not care about that - you will not sacrifice for it.

But if you do - you can agree with what Paul says in Romans 8:18

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us

Christian, I want you to know today that Christ is worth the struggle and the sacrifice. Seeing people understand the truth and watching the lightbulb come on is a beautiful thing that never gets old. I pray that we as a body would be motivated to sacrifice to this end, together.

(Pray)