

“Worth It” // Colossians 1:24–29 // First #2

Allisons' Video

Well, that's awesome. Amen?

Colossians 1—if you have your Bible AND your FIRST booklet (p. 16, *there's a place for notes*). We're in week 2 of a **5-week series on Paul's letter to the Colossians**.

Last week we looked at a chart that profiled the differences in 1st generation and 2nd generation faith and I asked you which you were.

- **Illus.:** I once heard a story about an old grandfather, out in the country, sitting on the front porch with his grandson. There were about 10 dogs asleep under the porch...
 - I want all of you to **see the rabbit**.
 - **Let me be clear**—some of you have, and **you are running hard** and I want you feel affirmed. Don't feel like I'm yelling at you.
 - If you **have 3 guys who are supposed to be digging a ditch** and only 1 is doing it and the other 2 are leaning on their shovels, and the foreman yells out, “Get to work!” The guy in the ditch working is not offended. He's glad.
- I want all of you to **see the rabbit**; I want all of us to be **1st generation leaders**.

Today you'll get a **peek inside the heart of a 1st generation leader** to see what **moves and motivates him**.

I told you last week that **one of the questions Paul addresses in this concise, little, fast-paced letter** is the Colossians' concern about why he is suffering: “**Why, Paul, if you really are God's messenger...**” they wondered, “**...Why are you in prison? And doesn't that discourage you?**”

Verses 24–29 of chapter 1 is Paul's answer to that question.

- This is **such a rich text** that I just want to **walk you through it**. It's **hard to put into a tight little outline** because Paul just starts throwing out things in a stream of consciousness that move and motivate him.
- So, **rather than presenting this passage to you in the form of an outline**, I want to act like we're **just reading our Bibles together** and **I'm your tour guide**—like we're on one of those **Big Bus** city tours... where the bus just stops and the guide points a few things out and then you move on... there's not **really any rhyme or reason**, just a lot of **cool stuff to see** that you don't want to miss. (Unfortunately, we **don't have the little rope** you can pull to stop the bus yourself... but you can stick around after service and ask your campus pastor about **anything** I leave out and they will answer all your questions. **That's why we hired them**. They are the smartest people at TSC.)

So, we'll just **meander our way through this passage**, and then, when we get to the end, I'm going to give you some **reflection questions based on it that I think are really pertinent** for us right now in this season.

OK? Ready? Here we go...

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, (OK, stop. I know we just left the station but this was **really confusing to the Colossians** and should be to you as well.) **You rejoice in your sufferings, Paul?**

- Was Paul **some kind of sadist**? Or was he just **so spiritual** that he didn't care about trivial things like freedom and hot food and creature comforts? Just **so consumed by Scripture** that he was oblivious to what was going on around him?
- No, **Paul loved all these things** just like the rest of us... but **here's the thing:** ***Joyful sacrifice is giving up something you love for something you love even more.** And Paul loved seeing people come to Christ even more than he loved his personal freedoms or creature comforts. And if he had to give up the latter to get the former, he'd happily do it.

You just saw the same thing in the Allison's video. They were pretty candid about the difficulty of giving up their home and leaving a lot of their comforts and relationships—and dog (did you get that? Dog. Because that's what dog people do—they listen to the HS. You with cats have long since hardened your heart to the voice of God). to move to Malawi. (BTW, that's Malawi—in Africa—not Maui—in Hawaii. We wouldn't be making a video about them if they were going to Maui.)

- They **aren't doing this because they're so super-spiritual** that they've ceased caring about these things.
- They're doing it because, in their words, "Jesus is worth it. The kingdom of God is worth it. Lost people are worth it."

You rejoice in suffering when you love what you gain through suffering more than what you are giving up in suffering.

Without the love, the joy, you'll never **endure**.

- **I've heard this compared sometimes to childbirth.** Before the birth of our 1st child, people always told me, '**Oh, childbirth—it's so beautiful.**' Having been present during 4 childbirths now, I can tell you that there **ain't really anything "beautiful"** about the birth process itself. Honestly, it's **kind of scary**... There were things I saw that would make the movie "SAW" seem like a Disney kids film. I remember **looking around at the doctors** being like, "Is this normal? Y'all seeing this?" I stood there wondering, "When does the **beautiful** part start?"
- **Who would go through all of this voluntarily, and even call the whole process beautiful?** And almost every mom in here would enthusiastically say, "I would." They would **wave away the thought** of their suffering and say to their child, "If that's **what it took** to bring you into the world, *I rejoice in my suffering for your sake*. **Totally worth it.**"

Paul said to the Colossians, "This is **how I feel** about you *spiritually*. I **rejoice in my suffering because of what I know it is producing in you**."

I'll do whatever it takes—pay whatever price I must pay—for you to know Jesus."

Joyful sacrifice is giving up something you love for something you love even more.

So, let me ask you: Is this how you feel about what is going on at 'The Summit Church'? Are you rejoicing in sacrifices you have made because of what you see God doing through those sacrifice in people in the world? Or do you enter this season with dread, wondering what God will "make" you do?

- Are you **one of those people who are like**, "Oh, yeah, Paul, I **know suffering firsthand**. *I came to church today and it was so crowded. And, I had to park so far away... I had to walk like 100 yards to the building! And, they sang not 1 but 2 songs I didn't like. And then my campus pastor had the audacity to ask me to come at a different service time to free up space for others, and then to serve in the kids' ministry??...* Oh, the **heaviness of gospel ministry**. I think I'm going to go to a new church." I may or may not be reading from a compilation of emails of recent.
- Or, maybe you are like, "**I hate these series** when we talk about sacrifice... I just want to come to church, hear an inspirational message, connect with friends, have my kids have a good time, and go home. *Is that too much to ask?*"
- **I think of what one of our church planters in a Muslim area of Central Asia...** they were meeting with a small group of new believers, but hadn't grown for a while. So, at a church meeting my friend had them write down 5 people who didn't know Jesus on a piece of paper... **That's what Paul is talking about.**

To be 1st generation means you expect personal sacrifice, not personal comfort, and you **rejoice** in it because of what you see being produced through it.

- **Y'all, when I hear stories like that of Matt Allison...** (student at Campbell saved here, now a missionary... I'll gladly give to a

campus that helps reach more students like him!) Or Anna Murphy last week... this is what I want to give to!

- **Or, a couple from the Alamance County couple...** while serving on First Impressions team there, they met a visiting Chinese student being hosted by another Summit family. **A week later, over lunch**, they were able to lead this student (and two others!) to Christ. The students were only in the US for 3 weeks. The couple was so convicted that the wife flew to China a month later to visit—not a mission trip, on her own dime—just to encourage these new believers. Now this couple has caught such a vision for the nations that they're planning to go to China, full-time, as missionaries.
- **Or, a couple I know at our North Durham campus:** caught the vision during one of our ServeRDU weeks for using their (new) wealth for **affordable housing for the marginalized**: bought 3 apartments, got so moved they bought 32 more → now they are filling them with refugee families (one with 9 kids!) and women in crisis ... And they are looking for DWELL folks to move down there, too.

Somebody gave to make the ServeRDU week possible, and it led to this.

I want to give to make those stories possible!

So, Paul says, **“Far from being discouraged** by these sufferings, I rejoice, because of what it produces in you!”

In the next verse, **Paul even takes it up a level**. In fact,

...and I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for his body, that is, the church.

Now, on the surface, this is a **staggering** statement! What could possibly be *lacking* in Christ's affliction? Didn't Jesus say from the cross, **“It is finished?!”** Hasn't he done everything necessary to save us?

So, why would Paul say something was **lacking**? **Well, in one sense, the work of salvation** is complete—Jesus has done everything necessary to save us. But **in another sense, the saving act is not complete** until we hear about it and respond.

- **Martin Luther** famously said, *“It wouldn't matter if Jesus died 1000 times if no one ever heard about it.”* **Or Carl Henry**, the gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.”

Paul says, “Christ's sufferings are not complete, in the fullest sense, **until you hear and respond**, and **if it takes my suffering** to bring that to pass, I'll gladly go through it.”

I love the way one Romanian pastor says it: **“Christ's cross was for propitiation; ours is for propagation.”* Christ suffered to accomplish salvation; we suffer to spread salvation.”¹

Listen, let me give you a hard and rather unpopular teaching (this is not how you build a church): **Suffering is the means by which God has ordained bringing salvation in the world.**

- **We want it to be through prosperity and blessing...**
- Jesus told his disciples right before he left, *“As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”* Just like the Father sent Jesus into the world to bring salvation through suffering, so Jesus sends us into the world to extend his salvation through suffering.

Write this down: ***Life in the world comes only through death in the church.***

Is that a price you are willing to pay?

- **Let me ask: What did it cost you to receive the free gift of salvation?** Nothing. Jesus paid it all.

¹ “...And our willingness to endure hardship for the good of others is a filling up of Christ's afflictions because it extends the benefits of Christ's death to others and makes them visible.” Quoted by John Piper

- But **are you willing now to do what it takes** for people all over the world to know that message?

Isn't that what we owe to the gospel?

- I **often ask you to consider**—where would you be without Jesus? Had Jesus chosen not to come and die for you? In the exact same place **millions of people** are in the world without you?
- **How could we receive the extravagant grace of the gospel**—and do nothing to get it to those who have never heard?
- **Don't we owe it to them?**

We **owe an incredible debt** to the world, so Paul continues: For this reason, **25 I have become its** (the church's) **servant,**

- **Not "minister"** as ESV translates it—that makes you think it is a professional position. This is a common word that could describe anyone.
- Stop here: Is **this how you primarily see yourself?** Would you mainly see yourself as the servant of the church or the beneficiary of the church?
- **Do you come to this church primarily saying,** "What can this church do for me?" or "What role am I supposed to play in the church?" (Nothing wrong with benefiting—we want to be a blessing to you and your family—but which is *primary*?)
- **Are you primarily servant of the mission of the church** or a beneficiary of the ministries of the church?

Paul says, "I am the servant... **according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,**

- That word 'commission' means '**individual assignment.**' Something given specifically to you.
- God doesn't just have this **great, big, global mission that he assigns to the church at large**—he also has an individual assignment—a commission—for you.
- He **has a purpose for your time,** talents and treasures in the church—a **commission**—for you. And it's the **kind of thing where if you don't do it,** it won't get done.

- This week I **stumbled onto a collection** of those "you had one job" pictures. I was supposed to be **working on the sermon** and a ½ hour later I was giggling through these pics.
- ***ONE JOB FAILS.** This was their commission.
 - **Somewhere in the body of Christ this is you: "name here"**

The ESV translates this word: a stewardship. Something given to me not for myself, but for the sake of someone else.

- Paul says "God gave it **to me for you.**"

In fact, in Scripture, if you don't use it for the purposes God gave it to you for, God considers it stealing.

- Paul in **Romans 1:14** called himself **a debtor to the Romans**—to bring the gospel to them. Jesus had given him a commission. He was now a man under obligation: "I **literally owe it to you,** and if I don't get it to you, I am renegeing on a debt."

It reminds me of one of my favorite **passages in the OT where the prophet Micah** discusses this same concept: **Micah 6:8, 'He has shown you, o man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you.** (I want to know this—God, what do you want? What am I going to be held accountable for? 3 things—this is the Christian life in a nutshell!) **To do justice, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.'**

- **"To do justice."** I've told you before that "justice," for us, typically only means that we are being fair and not stealing. But **in the Bible, to be "just" also means using what** you have for the reasons God gave it. It's why God gave to you.
 - **It is unjust, the OT says in almost 200 places,** for those in positions of privilege not to leverage that privilege for those without it. That's not a matter of charity but of *justice* in God's eyes.
 - Listen: **Poverty around the world** requires something of us who are rich.
 - **BTW, you say, "Well, I'm not rich." I saw this recently:** Less than 5% (**4.25**) of the world's population are Americans, yet we account for more than 25% of the

world's wealth! (Don't feel guilty about that; it just means we produce more than anyone else. The point is, just living in the U.S. means you have a lot compared to the rest of the world.)

- Get this: If you make **\$34K a year** as household income, you are in the top 1% worldwide
- And then consider the fact that there **2.5 billion people** that live in substandard housing, or without adequate nourishment and consistent access to clean water
- **Every week 100K** kids die of starvation or preventable, hunger-related diseases!
- **That requires something of us!**
- **American Christians** have a combined annual income of \$5 trillion. We are the **richest faith community** in history.
- **I saw this recently...** How much do you think all this would cost?
 - Sponsor 1M indigenous full-time missionaries in poor nations around the world
 - Completely fund the fight against global malaria
 - Quadruple the global missions budget of all missions agencies engaged in reaching unevangelized nations
 - Provide food, clothing, and shelter to all 6.5 million refugees across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East
 - Triple the global Bible translation budget
 - Fund 150,000 seminary scholarships for promising students in emerging economies
 - Double the operating budget of Compassion
 - Establish eight new Christian universities around the world
 - Hire 25,000 additional American missionaries to work on our college campuses²

What do you think the price tag on that would be? It could all be accomplished if the Christian community **gave just .4 percent of its income—1 out of every \$250—to work in the Kingdom of God!** God has put everything necessary for the evangelizing and transforming the world in the hands of the church!

Lostness in the world requires something of us: don't overlook this one. Some of you are really **motivated by suffering** around the world (refugees; clean water)—that's great. But don't overlook the greatest kind of suffering—**eternal suffering**.

To do justice (*i.e. to use my time, talent and treasure for the purpose God gave it to me... realizing that God will hold me responsible for it!*)

- **To love mercy:** now Micah turns the crank...not only does God want me to do justice, he wants me to love mercy—i.e., showing mercy.
 - **Why? Because I'm the recipient** of great mercy! **Again:** Where would you be had Jesus not chosen to die for you? The exact same place millions are without you. **That REQUIRES something of us!**
 - **Ishmael**—Doesn't that require something of me?
 - **You ask: Why are we always talking about this**, pushing ourselves, entering this season? Why not settle in for comfort and provide a church that just makes for a good family place? **It's our commission.**
- **To walk humbly with your God:** what gave the church in Acts the ability to transform the world was that it was a group of people without money or power **simply listening** to God and obeying him.
 - In this season, I **want you to hear from God firsthand**. Don't expect **magical voices**—but ask the question and do to the best of your ability what you think God is telling you.
 - For some of you, it's going to be **the largest and scariest** thing you've done!
 - E.g. Us with car (but we drive our car...) It was one of most amazing seasons.

² *God and Money*, Cortines and Baumer, 106.

That's it. That's what God *requires* of you. To act justly—to use your resources (time, treasure and talent) for the purposes God gave them; to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.

This is **what Paul is talking about when he says he is “commissioned.”**

LET ME ASK: Are you going those 3 things? Are you fulfilling your commission?

Let's keep moving through Colossians 1—we're almost done. Paul says my commission was to *make God's word fully known* to a certain group of people and I am doing it. In **vs. 26 he goes on** to describe that message.

26 the *mystery* hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. What is *the mystery here Paul speaks of*? Christ. That **Christ is what this whole thing called history** has been about. That every OT prophecy points to him. That all our **unanswered questions and yearnings for justice** find their fulfillment in him.

But watch this: 27 God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. **Not only that Christ himself is the mystery**, but that **Christ in you** is the mystery.

- **Others should look at our lives** and see something they can only describe as “mysterious.” Neighbors and family should look at how we give, and forgive, and sacrifice, and they should say, “What's up with that person?” And people's only response is, **“Beats me. What their up to is a complete mystery.”**
- I've told you before about the life of **William Borden**, a young man who was the heir to the Borden milk company who walked away from it all to go be a missionary in Egypt. He was only there

a few months when he contracted meningitis and died. Just a few hours before he died someone asked him if he saw this whole “coming to Egypt” thing as a mistake. He was so weak he couldn't talk, and he grabbed a piece of paper and wrote “no regret.” He is buried in a very out of the way place in Cairo, and his very plain looking tombstone simply has his name, the dates of his short life, and the phrase, ***“Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life.”**

- Our lives should scream, “Worth it—but only because of Jesus!”

28 We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. *29 I labor for this, striving with his strength that works powerfully in me. Two things to notice here. **First, vs. 29: *striving with his strength that works powerfully within me.***

- Ask anybody that has walked with God for any length of time will affirm this. **The best way to deepen your relationship to Jesus is to help people discover theirs.**
- There is nothing you can read, nothing you can listen to, nothing you can memorize, that will grow you quite as much as simply pouring yourself out—fulfilling your commission—for others!

Second, notice that Paul says, ‘**My goal is to present you mature and perfect in Christ**, which includes warning you...’

That's **part of my goal** in this series. See, I know one of the greatest competitors for 1st place in your heart is money.

- Honestly, **when we talk about money**, I feel a little apprehensive, even squeamish.
- Like you are afraid I am **trying to manipulate you—guilt you** into giving.
- But **as your pastor, my goal** is to present you mature in Christ, and I know there is nothing quite so dangerous as money.

In 1 Timothy, Paul tells Timothy to “warn the rich of this present age about the deceptiveness of money.” **It’s a snare**, and by it many have been disqualified from the faith, and it is the root of all kinds of evil.

- Jesus said **you cannot love, or prioritize or obey, the kingdom of God and money.**

In this series, I have a warning for many of you about your money:

It’s not, “If you don’t give, we can’t do x, y, or z.” No, the warning is, “If you’re **not putting Jesus in the 1st place**, you are destroying your own faith and the faith of your children.

- **C. S. Lewis:** “Prosperity knits a man to the world. He feels that he is finding his place in it, while really it is finding its place in him.”

This is why Jesus talked about money more than anything else. Jesus knew that no matter what else you say, until your commitment to Christ affected that area, it was all a sham.

- **It is why I often say** if you can’t get past your mistrust... maybe you had a bad experience, and you thinking I am manipulating you, I’d prefer you give somewhere else... I hope one day you can trust us and give here. **We try to be very transparent.** But if you can’t, I’d love for you to give somewhere else for a while—just whatever you do, don’t disobey God here.

This is Paul’s goal.

OK, we are **pulling back into the station** after our Big Bus tour through this passage.

So, here are my questions for us:

1. Where and how are ***you** “filling up Christ’s afflictions”?

- Do you show in your **life the marks of sacrifice**?
- I told you **that in this series we are talking a lot about money.** Here is a very **practical application** question: Has your **giving affected your lifestyle**?

- How could you say you are **bearing Christ’s afflictions** if your giving hasn’t even affected your lifestyle?
- How can you say **he is first** in your life if **other things** haven’t changed—haven’t been sacrificed—to make room for the kingdom of God?
- **There should be a discussion... (as with home, sending kids to colleges)**
- **Where and how are you filling up Christ’s afflictions?** Maybe you are ready to **start getting involved** in the mission with your time and talents: **Next Steps:** ready to volunteer or go on a mission trip.

2. Are you fulfilling your ‘commission’?

- He has shown you...! Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly with God?
- Can you say you are doing that with your...
 - time?
 - talent?
 - treasures?
- **Have you ever asked** yourself, “Why did God give me this earning potential? Why did God give me these talents?”
- Are **you genuinely listening to God**?
- That’s what I want you to do with this card.
- **What I know about the book of Acts**—it was a group of people with no money, no influence, who changed the world because individual members were attuned to the HS.
- Pray through this **CARD** and just **put your yes** on the table.

3. Is your life so different from those around you that it can only be called a mystery?

- **Very practically**, I’ve heard it described like this: 3 steps behind (average credit card debt in Triangle: \$13,343)

Don’t you want to get to eternity and be able to look back, with Paul on a life of sacrifice and say “worth it!”

- Do you **realize how short life is**—and that what you’ve been given you’ve been given to invest in eternity?
- Is **Jesus and his kingdom** getting your first and best?
- Are you going to be **able to say with William Borden**, ‘no regrets’?

This is **what Paul is going to get into in more detail next week**. So I hope to see you back then.

Pray . . . *Amen*.

CALL FOR OFFERING (FTG line...)

As they come I want to talk to you really quickly about **two things**:

1) Online Giving

- In order to make it easier for you to follow God’s call to put him **first** in your finances, we have launched a new online giving platform at **summitrdu.com/give**.
- 67% of our church gives online...
- I do:
 - I never carry cash: We all live our lives online
 - This can help you **prioritize** the kingdom of God by making it a regular rhythm. It keeps you from forgetting.
- **We’ve made it easy enough that you could even do it during service when we call for offering.**

2) Advance Commitment Night

- **THIS Sunday, Oct 28**, at the Apex Campus, 7 p.m.
- I wanted to take a moment to speak to **our leaders, volunteers and committed members** that have already begun this journey of FIRST.
- Our **team has prepared an awesome night** you don’t want to miss.
- We are going to **reflect on the incredible things** we’ve seen God do and then **our leaders are going to go first** in

committing ourselves to put Jesus first **over the next two years**.

IMPORTANT: For any of you that are ready (to turn this card in) we would love to have you join us. It would be really helpful if you could RSVP for that at summitrdu.com/first.

MISSIONAL BLESSING AND SEND