

# You Were Raised Right

Studies in the Book of Colossians

Text

Colossians 1:24 - 2:5

Topic

The apostle Paul rejoiced that he was privileged to continue the sufferings of Jesus for His church

Title

*“Desperately Seeking Suffering”*

At the end of every wedding I officiate I get to say, “It is my privilege to present to you for the first time Mr. & Mrs.” so-and-so.

With most couples I’ve had little to do with getting them to the altar. My part in ‘presenting’ them is really very limited. Family and friends in each of their lives have gotten them to that point in their lives.

That started to change as I got older.

More couples started getting married with whom I'd had a lot of personal contact in my thirty-three years here in Hanford. Kids I'd held as babies, dedicating them to the Lord, were getting married.

They grew-up in this church, sat under the teaching, served under the leadership. When I presented them there was a great deal more personal involvement and investment.

When Geno married Kelly - well that was huge from the standpoint of presentation. As his parents, Pam and I had a great deal to do with getting him to that point in his life. When I for the first time presented "Mr. & Mrs. Gene Pensiero," it was a most heartfelt presentation indeed.

**Presenting, or being presented, is the context of the verses before us today:**

Colossians 1:28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, **that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.**

Paul believed that in Heaven he would have a hand in 'presenting' the believers he had evangelized and/or edified. He thought of himself as having a personal involvement in getting believers to their face-to-face meeting with the Lord.

**We** should think more about both being presented to the Lord *and* presenting others to the Lord in that glorious future day in Heaven:

- If you are in Christ, a lot of people were involved in bringing you to Jesus and a lot more are involved helping you to grow.
- As you grow in the Lord, you become a person who will present others with some level of personal involvement.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Are Going To Be Presented By Those Who Serve You, and #2 You Are Going To Be Presenting Those You Serve.

## #1 You Are Going To Be Presented By Those Who Serve You

(v24-28)

Are you expecting a baby, or have you recently given birth? Congratulations.

Better start saving lots of money. The estimated cost of raising a child from birth through age 17 is \$233,610.00.

Our verses describe what it “costs” to present a believer to God. It’s not measure by dollars, but by **discipleship**.

Colossians 1:24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,

Paul was in prison in Rome on account of his preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. Still he could say “now,” *right now*, “I rejoice” in the midst of “my sufferings” because they were “for you.” His preaching had the effect of bringing to them the knowledge of eternal life and that greatly outweighed any amount of personal suffering he must endure for it.

Nothing was “lacking” as far as Jesus’ work on the Cross. As He dismissed His Spirit, He proclaimed, “It is finished.”

After His resurrection, His followers were charged with bringing the Gospel to the world. Believers are likened to His “body” on the earth. He is in Heaven, but we remain on earth and, as His body, it’s as if He never left. Men still afflict Him through us, and in that way we “fill up,” or *complete*, His afflictions.

Colossians 1:25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,

The word “minister” is the Greek word *diakonos* from where we get the word “deacon.” It can refer to an office in the church or simply describe a Christian in his or her service to others.

Every believer is a minister - a deacon - because every believer is called to be a servant.

Paul was a minister whose formal calling was “the stewardship from God... given to [him].”

A steward is the chief servant in a household and is responsible for the overall management and administration of its affairs.

Paul's stewardship was to "fulfill the Word of God." The phrasing reminds us that we must remain grounded solidly upon God's Word. We must find the basis for our ministering in the Bible and nowhere else.

More than that, the word "stewardship" can be translated, *dispensation*. I'll let commentator Robert Gromacki explain what a "dispensation" is:

God has administered His redemptive program in different ways within the various ages of biblical history. He dealt with Adam differently when sin occurred than before his fall. After the Mosaic Law was given, the people of Israel had more responsibilities before God than prior to that event. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ likewise have changed the means of divine government in this age. These various periods can be called "dispensations."

What exactly is the current dispensation?

Colossians 1:26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

In the New Testament a “mystery” is something previously concealed and unknown which is now clearly revealed.

This particular “mystery” was hidden “from ages and from generations.”

- “Ages” refers to the periods of history prior to the first century.
- “Generations” refers to all the people who lived in those periods.

Something amazing, which was hidden, has “now has been revealed to His saints,” and it is this:

Colossians 1:27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

“Gentiles” is a word that identifies anyone not a Hebrew.

The mystery isn't simply that non-Jews could be saved. That was predicted in many places in the Old Testament.

What was a mystery, however, was that God would save Gentiles *apart* from Israel, *apart* from her program.

From the time of Abraham until the first century if you wanted to know God and have a relationship with Him you had to either be a Jew or convert to Judaism. Paul was going around preaching Jesus Christ to Gentiles with **no** requirement that they first convert to becoming Jews.

What a rich and glorious truth this is. You come to God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ apart from any works of righteousness and certainly apart from any and all religion, rites, and rules.

When you come to Christ, you have "Christ in you." You have the presence of Jesus via the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit.

Under the previous dispensation, that of the Mosaic Law, God dwelt where?



In the Holy of Holies, above the Mercy Seat that was on the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle.

Today He dwells in the bodies of believers; we are His Temple on the earth - both individually and corporately.

Still more: You have “the hope of glory.” The blessed hope of the church is the return of Jesus to resurrect the dead and rapture the living to take us home to Heaven to the place He’s been away preparing for us.

All of this, what we call the church and the church age where Jew and Gentile alike are born-again by grace through faith in Jesus, is the “mystery” revealed to each and every “saint.”

Colossians 1:28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

One commentator said the word “preach” refers to both our *lips* and our *lives*. All of us have lives and lips that should be dedicated to serving the Lord at all times.

Notice Paul said “**Him** we preach.” We preach a Person. To put it negatively, we do not preach a program or a system. Even if we are systematic in our understanding of doctrine and how things in the Bible ‘fit’ together, it is to be subordinate to the Person and work of Jesus.

It’s an important distinction because we are so given to want to reduce things to something we can easily understand.

We are also to be “warning every man.” This involves, first of all, evangelism. People need to be warned that they are sinners headed deserving of death and of judgment after death.

Believers, too, need to be warned from time to time to continue in the faith and to live set apart, holy lives on earth.

“Teaching every man in all wisdom.” The Amplified Bible translates “wisdom” as “comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God.” I like that. We need more than definitions and details. We need insight into the *ways* of the Lord - not just His works.

Paul's goal was to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." On earth you are daily, as you cooperate with God, being perfected. In Heaven, when you stand before the Lord, you will be "perfect."

We are reading Paul's letter to the church at Colossae. It's our letter, too. Paul was writing to us. He was suffering imprisonment and every other affliction for you and I every bit as much as he was for the Colossians.

**Someone suffered for you to bring you the Gospel.** In fact, a lot of people did:

- "For you" God raised-up and gifted saints throughout history - including Paul.
- "For you" God raised-up family members or friends or co-workers who were willing to suffer at some level to let you know they were believers in Jesus Christ.

Everyone is fascinated with their ancestry right now, or so it seems. It's fine; I'm not suggesting that there is anything wrong with it.

Maybe you're tracing your roots through your family tree. Well, spiritually speaking, you were "born-again" as a result of spiritual ancestors sharing the Gospel with others. What a fascinating tree that would be to trace, in terms of who was used to get the Gospel to you.

They are your presenters in the future glorious day when you appear before Jesus.

## #2 You Are Going To Be Presenting Those You Serve (1:29 - 2:5)

Ever read all the credits at the end of a feature film? It's incredible how many people are recognized. The credits for the extended version of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, are twenty-seven minutes long.

I used to chuckle at some of the services listed in the closing credits that seem so insignificant. They list caterers, bookkeepers, assistants and assistants to the assistants. One day it struck me that every one of those names was there because they contributed, however slightly, to the overall project.

**You are I are God's closing credits in the lives of others.** In some lives you're like a director or a producer. In others you're an assistant to an assistant; or a janitor. But your contribution, however slight, is significant.

Colossians 1:29 To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

The work of a presenter requires "labor" and "striving." They are athletic terms:

- "Labor" is a term that describes the training of the athlete behind the scenes and before the contest. Think *Rocky* (now *Creed*) or any extreme training sequence.
- "Striving" is the word we get *agonizing* from. It refers to the intensity of the athletic contest itself.

These words indicate a joyful, voluntary serving - but one that is nevertheless filled with physical and mental weariness, toil, and even exhaustion.

It's become fashionable, Christian chic, to talk about things like "burn-out" and our need for sabbaticals and such in our serving the Lord.

I want you for a moment to imagine yourself telling the apostle Paul you are feeling a little “burnt-out” in your ministry.

Remember you’d be looking at a man who had surrendered everything to serve his Lord, whose body had hundreds of lashes, and had been in many imprisonments and in multiple shipwrecks. A man who had deep mental exhaustions thinking about the welfare of the people of God. Someone who wished he could be cursed to Hell if it would mean the salvation of his people, the Jews.

**Now go ahead and tell him how tired you are.**

Paul is an extreme example but still an example. We must be willing to labor and strive in order to serve others. Physical and mental weariness, toil, and even exhaustion are to be expected at times.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul told them that Epaphroditis was “sick almost unto death,” but nevertheless went on serving (2:27).

Paul is quick to add that you are not left to your own strength to accomplish any of this.

“His working,” Paul said, “works in me mightily.” You surrender and suffer, but God supplies the power. You are stronger in Him as you are weaker in yourself.

Griffith Thomas wrote, “Sacrificial disciples are needed to proclaim the sacrificial work of our Lord.”

Many saints suffered for you and for me so we would hear the Gospel and be saved. Can we do any less - especially as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit as we await the blessed hope of the appearing of Jesus at any moment?

Colossians 2:1 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,

“Conflict” is not what you think. It is the Greek word *agon*. The Greeks referred to the athletic arena as the *agon*. It was the place people assembled to watch the games. It came to refer to the contest itself.

Paul was engaged in a “great conflict” for believers in the sense that he was in the arena of the Christian life exercising all of his spiritual, mental, and physical energy to serve others. Like a great athlete in the arena, he brought his “A” game - Apostle.

“Laodicea” was about eleven miles from Colossae. It seems this letter was for them, too. At this point they were doing well, standing firm. The church in Laodicea, sadly, is famous for Jesus telling us in the Revelation they had become “lukewarm” and were about to be vomited out of His mouth. It didn’t take long for them to backslide.

The world is a dangerous place for believers. Our pilgrimage homeward to Heaven is fraught with peril. We have, however, both guidance and companionship along the way in the form of God’s Word, God’s indwelling Spirit, and God’s earthly people.

Colossians 2:2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,



“Encouraged” is from the word that means *to come alongside*. It can also be roughly translated *with heart*. The idea is to always come alongside believers with the desire to strengthen their heart for the Lord.

Paul said, “being knit together in love.” When you knit something you pull together the separate strands and unite them into something that has both beauty and purpose. Believers are to have unity as something beautiful and with great purpose. It is possible to do so because of the “love” that God has shown us and that we can therefore show towards each other.

“Attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding.” Paul exerted all his energies toward getting believers to understand the implications of the Gospel. The more they understood God’s Word, the greater their “assurance.”

Assurance of what? Assurance of their initial salvation; of their on-going sanctification; and of their ultimate glorification in Heaven. Those assurances are “riches” indeed.

In an uncertain world, you can be assured that He who began a good work in you will complete it.

“To the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ...” The “mystery” being revealed was the church of Jesus Christ, Jews and Gentiles alike, as a new and amazing work of God that occurred after Israel officially rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Thus Paul exerted all his energies toward establishing and edifying local churches.

Colossians 2:3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

There are “hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge” to be discovered - but not by adopting worldly or cultic practices. They are discovered daily as you spend time with the Lord. And they can be discovered by all believers - not just a privileged few.

Colossians 2:4 Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.

Caution is always required because there always are those wanting to “deceive” you.

One of the means by which they deceive are “persuasive words.” It’s a phrase that can be translated *fast talk*.

Don’t automatically ‘buy-into’ what you hear. You must take what you hear back to God’s Word and measure it. There is nothing wrong with a healthy skepticism. What men and women say about the Word of God is not the Word of God and it needs to be tested.

Colossians 2:5 For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

I was touched by that phrase, “with you in spirit.” We like to tell folks we are praying for them. That’s great - especially if we really are praying for them, and not just using it as a catch-phrase.

To say, “I’m with you in spirit,” seems more powerful, more intimate, more meaningful. It’s a 24/7 kind of commitment. We should try it on each other.

The church at Colossae was in “good order” with steadfast “faith in Christ.” Paul could “rejoice.”

It's an old film, not that popular, but you may be familiar with *Mr. Holland's Opus*.

Richard Dreyfus was nominated for an Academy Award for his portrayal of Mr. Holland. He's a composer who takes a teaching position at a high school thinking it will give him more time to compose his life's work.

Quite the opposite happens as he gets involved helping his students. Life seemingly passes him by. Then, at his retirement, in a moving scene, hundreds of people he has encouraged over the years stand-up.

**They are his opus** - his life's composition.

What are you wanting to produce through your efforts in life? On top of the list ought to be disciples you will have a hand in presenting to God.

Many will present you; how many will you present?