

“Joy In Ministry”  
Colossians 1:24 – 2:5  
Series: Book of Colossians [#4]  
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## Introduction

Today we are going to think about “*Joy In Ministry*.” We don’t need to take a survey to know that we are not always filled and overflowing with joy in serving Christ. One man, writing from his own experience as a volunteer in church ministries, pointed out three barriers to joy, long term involvement and effectiveness: (1) Fatigue; (2) Conflict; and, (3) Disillusionment.

While there are not many surveys and studies done on this among members of congregations many have been done among pastors. A recent one found that:

- 90% of the pastors frequently felt fatigued and worn out, with 71% saying they were burned out.
- 75% felt highly stressed and had experienced significant crises due to the stress, with 40% reporting serious conflicts with people in the church every month.
- 70% said they constantly fight depression.
- 57% said they would leave if they had a better place to go.

It looks like many people in the pulpits and the pews are not experiencing much “*Joy In Ministry*” in spite of Jesus’ telling us “These things I have spoken to you so that *My joy may be in you*, and that *your joy may be made full*.” (John 15:11)

In the verses before us today, Paul frames some personal comments about his ministry with statements of joy. He begins this section in 1:24, “Now I *rejoice*,” and concludes it in 2:5 with telling the church he was “*rejoicing*.” And so we are going to look at both the *Reality* and the *Reasons* for “*Joy In Ministry*.”

## The Reality of Joyful Ministry.

Paul experienced the reality of joyful ministry. He was joyful in the process of ministry. He begins this personal section in 1:24 by telling the Colossian Christians, “I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake.” He had not preached and taught in the city. In fact, at this point, he had not been there. But his sufferings and rejoicing were not only ongoing, but they also were for their benefit. He was working, training, sending others and suffering as a result of his unwavering commitment and service to Christ and them.

In 2 Corinthians 11 Paul gives us some examples of his sufferings. He experienced ...

- continual, difficult work, with many sleepless nights;
- imprisonments and beatings;

- being in danger of death through all of that as well as when shipwrecked, when facing threats of robbers, plots by enemies, and actually being stoned;
- he experienced going without food and water and being exposed to the elements;
- having the constant internal concern and pressure of his responsibilities to all the churches.

I don't want to minimize the suffering, fatigued, worn out and burned out pastors in the study I cited, but today you have to go to places hostile or closed to the faith to find the degree of suffering Paul faced.

The lead article in the current issue of *The Voice of the Martyrs Newsletter* begins,

“It was just before dawn on September 30. An angry mob of Hindu militants had been gathering steam for weeks. Carrying sticks and machetes and chanting death threats to Christians, this hatred induced tsunami swept into Rudangia, a tiny village in Orissa state, India. The mob attacked—burning homes, beating villagers and ripping Christian materials apart. Our contacts say the mob settled upon Lalji Nayak. Hindu militants grabbed Lalji and dragged him out of his home. One man stuck a knife to his throat.

“They yelled at him to renounce Christ. They demanded he “reconvert” and become Hindu.

“Lalji refused. They drove the knife deeper into his neck. Blood began to gush. Witnesses say Lalji continued to “cling to Christ.” The militants pulled out an axe and began beating him. They tortured him and when he refused to convert to Hinduism they left him for dead. Lalji died the next day at a nearby hospital.”

He joined the long line of faithful, *joyful* martyrs.

In the process of serving Christ Paul experienced great suffering. Yet he had joy. He was rejoicing. It was not just theoretical and possible, but actual and continual.

In addition to having joy in the process of serving Christ, Paul also had joy in the outcome. Let's begin the outcome in his own life. We can date some of the major markers in his life with a fair degree of accuracy. He came to faith when Christ stopped him on the road to Damascus in the year 31. This letter to the church at Colossae was written in 61, 30 years later. He was martyred in or about the year 67.

So, as he wrote this letter most of his life and ministry were behind him. He knew he would not have many years ahead of him. Yet, and perhaps in part because of this, he kept pressing on to serve Christ with faithfulness and joy. Paul looked at the people and churches from 30 years of ministry, and he was *joyful* for what God had done not only in his own life, but through him in ministry.

That leads us to the outcome in the Colossian believers' lives, which is Paul's main emphasis here. Paul states succinctly in chapter 2 verse 5, "For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ."

Their spiritual lives displayed the orderliness of good discipline of thought, word and action. The term "good discipline" is found in 1 Corinthians 14:40, "But all things must be done properly and in an *orderly manner*." There it refers to order or good discipline when the church was together in worship. Here in Colossians it refers to all of spiritual life—every aspect, every place and time.

Paul knew they were not careless. Spiritually they were, as Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus,

“...no longer ... children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.” (Ephesians 4:14)

They had stability. They were standing firm against the voices that said they needed a new understanding of the gospel's truth or new experiences and special insights. What joy that brought to Paul's heart! I'm sure his thoughts and feelings were the same as the apostle John who wrote near the end of his life, about 30 years after Paul wrote Colossians, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my [spiritual] children walking in the truth." (3 John 4)

You see, there is not only a place for, but there also is great value in looking back over what God has done through you and your ministry, whether it be the last few months or many years. God is the One who produces the fruit. God is also the One who brings joy to our hearts as we look back, note, and remember the privileges He has given us (although some of them may not have seemed to be *privileges* at the time), and what He has accomplished in others through them.

What a privilege it is to see it in our families. Then too, when we have been in a church for a time or have kept in touch with people, we get to see some of what God has done and continues to do. It gives me great joy to see how people mature and branch out in their spiritual lives and relationships over the years.

God gives us His joy. But how does it work out? What are some of the key factors in experiencing God's full *joy in ministry*?

### **The Reason For Joyful Ministry.**

The first factor we see here is the reality and motivation of having a stewardship from God. Paul tells us in verse 25,

“Of this church I was made a *minister* according to the *stewardship* from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God.”

He worked for their benefit as a “minister” by God’s choice and work, not his own.

*Minister* is the term from which we get our English word deacon. It referred to one who carried out the orders of another, especially one who was over him. So a *minister* was one who served another. God made Paul His servant to carry out His orders.

Then Paul tells us he had a “stewardship” from God. This word literally referred to a house manager. The one given charge of running a household including directing and supervising other servants, making sure the house and grounds were taken care of, that food and other supplies were purchased, records kept and the budget managed well. It was an important and responsible position.

Paul gives a few examples of what this involved. Go to verse 25 again,

“Of this church I was made a *minister* according to the *stewardship* from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

His stewardship included faithfully “preaching the word of God,” which he refers to as a “mystery.” The word *mystery* does not refer to some complicated puzzle, but to something that was not revealed and, in this case, now God has revealed. Specifically, the great, gracious truth of salvation available to all in Christ. Paul had the stewardship of sharing the riches of the glory of the gospel—that Christ lives within each believer giving us a steadfast hope or certainty of glory with God in heaven.

It also included “admonishing” and “teaching” every believer with God’s wisdom so that they would grow to become mature or complete in Christ. Every Christian is a steward of God. Every believer is given a stewardship that affects all aspects of his or her life. “*Joy In Ministry*” requires accepting this reality and living in light of it. It includes ...

- managing our lives, resources, and opportunities for God and His interests;
- managing our lives and service under God’s control;
- managing all of this willingly;
- managing for the benefit of others;
- managing faithfully.

This stewardship is a great responsibility, but it is also very liberating because it is *God’s* work, *God’s* purposes. And this brings clarity and certainty.

A second key factor in experiencing God's full joy in ministry is suffering for Christ and His church. Go back up to verse 24.

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

"What?!?" "Joy in ministry in and through *suffering*?" "How could Paul, how can you and I have joy in and through suffering for Christ and His church?" Turn ahead to another passage that strikes the same theme and gives some additional perspective, 1 Peter 4:12-16.

"Beloved, *do not be surprised* at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on *rejoicing*, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may *rejoice with exultation*. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name."

Knowing that we are engaged in a constant spiritual conflict, we should not be surprised when people ridicule or reject our witness and us. Knowing this prepares us, defends us against our joy being stolen and being replaced by dismay and discouragement. Remember that Peter and the other apostles in the first days of the church were "*rejoicing* that they had been considered worthy to suffer for [Christ's] name" (Acts 5:41). They rejoiced because they remembered what Jesus told them, recorded for us in Matthew chapter 5.

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. *Rejoice and be glad*, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Then, there is that other part of Paul's statement in verse 24, "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." "What is his point? After all, didn't Jesus' death pay for our sins completely and forever?" The answer from the Bible, of course, is "Yes." We could turn to a number of Scriptures, but consider just two statements here in Colossians. Look back to 1:19.

"For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven."

Now look ahead to 2:15. "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made

a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”

Whatever is “lacking,” it is not anything that has to do with our redemption. Even the word “afflictions” is never used in the New Testament to refer to Christ’s suffering for us and our sin. Even so, that phrase “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” can be troubling.

One of the challenges of communication is to get your listeners or readers to accurately and clearly receive your message. A Vicar, concerned about the deteriorating condition of their church building, decided to make a direct appeal for funds, just before the offering. He said, “The proceeds from the offering this morning will go toward the alleviation of the dry rot in the pulpit and the extermination of the worms in the pews.” Some parishioners there, as some of you here, received a message which was quite different from the one he intended.

Christ’s suffering, His death on the cross was complete. Nothing needs to be, nothing can be added. What Paul is saying here is that Jesus did not exhaust all the suffering for righteousness, nor did He suffer so we don’t have to face rejection and persecution for God and His truth. *Indeed*, He told us just as He was hated and persecuted, so will we be hated and persecuted. And so Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1,

“For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer.” (verses 5-6)

Jesus has left us our part—service, glory, rewards *and* suffering. God uses all of this to bring about His full joy in us as we have our hearts and minds set on Him and the ministry He gives to us.

The third key factor we see here in experiencing God’s full joy in ministry is *strength from God*. Let’s go the last verse in chapter 1, verse 29. “For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” We see the expression of laboring and striving in 1 Timothy 4:10.

“For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.”

The terms laboring and striving were used of the disciplined, even exhausting efforts of athletes. They speak of great dedication and effort.

Even though Paul speaks of His laboring and striving, his dedicated agonizing in the work of Christ, He realized it did not depend on his abilities. He was striving according to God’s power, which was mightily working within him. We turn back to Ephesians 3:20 where he tells us that God “... is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power [God’s power] that works within us.”

And so in Philippians he wrote that "... it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (2:13), and again, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." (4:13).

Here Paul deflates the mystery religions with their secret knowledge, mysteries, power for the select few, and the legalists emphasizing their own abilities. One former legalist who learned and relied on this wonderful truth was Martin Luther. In his grand hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* he penned in verse 2 "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing." "*Joy In Ministry*" for us comes as we realize and rely on God's power to energize us!

The final key factor we see here in experiencing God's full joy in ministry is struggling for other believers. Look at the first verse of chapter 2.

"For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face."

Paul invested thought and prayer for, he agonized over other believers he had not even met face to face. He did, he tells us in verse two,

- so that they would be encouraged;
- that they would be "knit together in love" (2) as they, following his direction in 3:14, to "put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity;"
- that they would attain to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance and knowledge of Christ (2);
- that they would not be deluded by persuasive arguments.

False teaching, to have a chance, comes with very convincing words and approaches. And so Paul struggled for others, as we need to struggle for others. Joy in life, in God's service is never complete unless we are involved in the *struggle for other believers*.

## **Conclusion.**

There is a hymn we don't sing much anymore, in fact it isn't in our hymnals. *Joy In Serving Jesus*. The first verse says, "There is joy in serving Jesus as I journey on my way, joy that fills the heart with praises every hour and every day." Then the chorus adds, "There is joy, joy, joy in serving Jesus, joy that throbs within my heart; every moment, every hour, as I draw upon His power, there is joy, joy, joy that never shall depart." The following verses speak of joy that triumphs over pain, joy that fills my soul with heaven's music, joy amid the darkest night.

That is a great message! Question: is it true for you today? We are called to life and fellowship with God. Flowing from that relationship we are called to ministry, to be His servants, His stewards. And all of this is part of Christ making His joy grow in us and our joy be full.

As you go to God now,

- Thank Him for providing you with the *reason*, the *means* to joyful ministry.
- Thank Him that this is real for you—not just for others, not just a dream. It is real for you.
- Ask God to work powerfully within you to help you move forward with the truths that transform fear or drudgery in ministry into joy.

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