

SERVANT
Colossians 1:24-29
By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Nobody has made a bigger difference for Christ than the apostle Paul.
 - i. Author of 13 books in the New Testament (out of 27).
 - ii. Founder of many churches.
 - iii. Went on three missionary journeys and spread the gospel all around the Roman Empire.
2. Wouldn't it be cool to make a difference for Christ like Paul?
3. God wants to use you.
4. And by God's grace, Paul left us some insights into how he made such a huge difference for Jesus Christ.

II. TEXT

1. **Colossians 1:24-29** "24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for his body, that is, the church. 25 I have become its servant, according to God's commission 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 God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 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.

III. EIGHT WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR GOD

1. Rejoice in the Lord always.

- i. **Colossians 1:24** "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you"
 1. In this context, Paul is rejoicing in his sufferings for Christ.
 2. What sufferings? Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter. He was in prison for spreading the gospel to the Gentiles, of which the Colossians were a part. So, Paul was suffering for the sake of the Colossians.
 3. Why was Paul rejoicing in his sufferings for Christ?
 - a. Suffering leads to happiness. Matthew 5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness." The more you suffer for Christ, the more supernatural joy He gives you.
 - b. Suffering affirms your salvation. Only a very serious Christian is willing to suffer for Christ. When you suffer, you prove to be real; genuine; authentic. Matthew 5:10 "Blessed are those

who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”

- c. Suffering results in greater rewards. Everything you do in this life is recorded in heaven, and when you get there you will be rewarded. And God gives greater rewards to those who suffer for Christ. Matthew 5:11-12 “11 “You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. 12 Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
- ii. Paul was joyful in all circumstances.
- iii. To make a difference for God, learn to rejoice in all circumstances.
 - 1. To lighten the load of your difficulties. It is bad enough to suffer; depression makes it even worse!
 - 2. To attract others to Jesus. Your joy in suffering will have a winsome effect on those around you.

2. Suffer for Christ.

- i. **Colossians 1:24** “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you”
- ii. Paul suffered for the cause of Christ.
 - 1. From the moment of his conversion. After getting baptized in Damascus, he immediately began preaching, and the Jews conspired to kill him. So the disciples “took him by night and lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the wall (Acts 9:20-25).”
 - 2. All during his ministry. 2 Corinthians 11:24-27 “24 Five times I received the forty lashes minus one from the Jews. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the open sea. 26 On frequent journeys, I faced dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, and dangers among false brothers; 27 toil and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food, cold, and without clothing.”
 - 3. Until his last day. According to tradition Paul was beheaded and died in Rome a martyr at the hands of Nero between AD 65-67.
- iii. It was Paul’s willingness to suffer that made him so useful to God. God could send him anywhere, and ask him to do anything.
- iv. To make a difference for Christ, suffer for Christ. Stop playing it safe. Serve until it hurts. Give until it hurts. Evangelize until it hurts. Take risks for God. Get in trouble for God. Stop being timid and be bold. Lose your life for the gospel. Lose your reputation for the gospel. Lose your job for the gospel.

Lose your savings for the gospel. Lose your marriage for the gospel. Lose your friends for the gospel.

3. Devote yourself to evangelism.

- i. **Colossians 1:24** “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for his body, that is, the church.”
- ii. What did Paul mean, “I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions”?
 1. Christ died on the cross to save the world.
 2. But in order to save the world, believers like Paul, and you, and me, need to proclaim the gospel to the world so they can believe.
 3. Paul was saying that Christ suffered for the world, but for the world to be saved, Christians must suffer for the propagation of the gospel.
 4. The point is that Paul was devoted to evangelism.
- iii. To make a difference for Christ, you must devote yourself to evangelism. Devote yourself to reaching lost people for Christ. To being a soulwinner.
 1. Politics is important. Education is important. Fighting poverty is important. Fighting disease is important. But nothing is more important than evangelism.
 - a. Evangelism is the most urgent task of the church. Without Christ, people go to hell for eternity, and many people die every day.
 - b. Evangelism makes the greatest impact in the world. Of all the ways that you can help people, changing a person’s heart is by far the most impactful. You can give a man a meal, but he will soon need another. You can give him warm clothes, and they will eventually wear out. You can give him shelter, but his home may simply become a place of sin. You can give him a job, but he may lose his job. You can teach him to read, but he may just read trash. You can help him overcome an addiction, but he may just swap it for another addiction. But if you give a man Christ, then you change his heart and his life and his eternity forever. Nothing can take Christ away from him. Not only have you impacted that man’s life, but that man will go on to impact many others for Christ.
 - c. Evangelism is the most compassionate thing we can do. It is compassionate to provide food, shelter, and education, but those are all temporary. When you lead a man to Christ, you save his soul from eternal hell.

- d. Evangelism is the one thing that heaven celebrates. Luke 15:10 “There is joy in the presence of God’s angels over one sinner who repents.”
- iv. If you are a parent, then evangelism begins with your children and grandchildren. Use every opportunity you have to win your children and grandchildren to Christ.
- v. This means that you need to learn the skill of evangelism. Do you know how to share the gospel and lead someone to faith in Christ?

4. Commit to the church.

- i. **Colossians 1:24-25** “24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for his body, that is, the church. 25 I have become its servant,”
- ii. Notice the phrase, “24 his body, that is, the church. 25 I have become its servant.”
 - 1. Paul refers to the church as the body of Christ. The “body” metaphor teaches us some important truths about the church.
 - a. Christ accomplishes His work through us. We are His hands and feet.
 - b. We need each other. The body is more effective if all the parts are doing their own special work.
 - c. We affect each other. When one part is weak, it affects the others.
 - d. We must get along. If the parts are fighting against each other, they will not get much done.
 - e. We must belong to a church. Christianity is not a solo, but a choir. It is not independence, but interdependence.
- iii. Paul says in verse 25 that he is the church’s servant. He was committed to the church.
 - 1. How so?
 - a. He planted churches.
 - b. He revisited the churches, encouraging and strengthening them.
 - c. He wrote letters to churches.
 - d. He prayed for the churches.
- iv. To make a difference for Christ, you must be a committed, participating member of the church. Why?
 - 1. Christ does His work through the church.
 - 2. You cannot accomplish Christ’s mission on your own.
- v. Many Christians believe that it is acceptable to be isolated from the church. It is not acceptable, and you will not be a difference-maker. Commit yourself

to the church – to building the church, serving the church, and working in the church.

- vi. **Colossians 1:25-27** “25 I have become its servant, according to God’s commission 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 God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”
- vii. Paul was given a commission (a special assignment from God) to proclaim a mystery.
 - 1. In the New Testament, the word “mystery” means a truth unknown in times past but now revealed by God.
 - 2. What is the mystery that Paul was given to proclaim? “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”
 - a. Hope is a confident, joyful expectation.
 - b. Glory refers to the eternal life that Christians will inherit.
 - c. “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” refers to the reality that when you become a Christian, the Spirit of Christ indwells you. This subjective experience gives us the confident, joyful expectation that we will inherit eternal life when we die.
 - 3. What makes this a mystery is that “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” was extended to the Gentiles, such as the Colossians. That the gospel and the gift of the Spirit would be extended to the Gentiles was unknown and unexpected until God revealed it to the apostles.
- viii. Doctrine: The Spirit of Christ lives in every believer. This experience gives us the hope of glory.

5. Warn and teach the word.

- i. **Colossians 1:28** “We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone”
- ii. Paul did not just encourage people; he warned and taught them.
 - 1. Warning: Sometimes translated admonish. To warn unbelievers of hell; to warn believers of God’s discipline for sin.
 - 2. Teaching: Helping people understand doctrinal truths.
- iii. Many Christians today avoid talking about anything controversial, offensive, or politically incorrect. They just want to be nice; to say things that are encouraging (like Joel Osteen). That’s fine if you don’t want to make a difference. But if you want to make a difference for Christ, you must also warn and teach.
 - 1. Unbelievers need to know there is a hell, it is horrible, it is eternal, and it is the final state of all those who reject Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Christians need to be taught what the Bible says about God, and Christ, and salvation, and marriage, and sexuality, and politics, and money, and ethics.

- iv. Some people will be offended. Some people will dislike you. Some will unfriend you. But to make a difference, you must risk being offensive, because you must warn and teach the word.
- v. The truth is what God uses to set people free, so we must speak the truth, no matter how dangerous or uncomfortable (Jn 8:32).
- vi. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** “16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”
 - 1. God wants people to be complete, equipped for every good work.
 - 2. But the Scripture must be used for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Not just encouragement.
- vii. **2 Timothy 4:2** “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching.”
 - 1. Paul instructed Timothy to preach the word. And this preaching did not just involved encouragement, but also rebuking, correcting, and teaching.

6. Devote yourself to discipleship.

- i. **Colossians 1:28** “We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”
- ii. Paul’s goal was not just to win converts, or to evangelize, but to lead people to maturity in Christ. Not just evangelism, but discipleship.
- iii. To make a difference for Christ, don’t just focus on reaching lost people, but on helping Christians grow to maturity.
- iv. The Great Commission given by Jesus is not to go and make converts, but disciples (Mt 28:19-20). Not just believers, but fully-devoted followers of Jesus.
- v. If you are a parent, then your priority needs to be on discipling your children. Teach your children the word, and help them to grow to maturity in Christ.
- vi. Ephesians 6:4 “Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”
- vii. How do you disciple someone?
 - 1. Teach them the word. 1 Peter 2:2 “Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that you may grow up into your salvation,”
 - 2. Lead them to take one step at a time: Baptism. Make Sunday church a priority. Home Group. Daily Quiet time. Volunteer in church. Tithing. Witnessing.

7. Work hard.

- i. **Colossians 1:29** “I labor for this, striving”
- ii. “Labor” refers to working to the point of exhaustion. MacArthur

- iii. The Gr. word for “striving” gives us the Eng. word “agonize” and refers to the effort required to compete in an athletic event. is a term from the athletic arena, signifying intense exertion.
- iv. Paul worked with all of his might to make a difference for Christ.
- v. Paul’s diligence is seen in his farewell address to the church in Ephesus:
 - 1. Acts 20:31 “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I never stopped warning each one of you with tears.”
 - a. Paul worked tirelessly, night and die, for three years, warning and teaching the Ephesians.
 - 2. Acts 20:33-34 “I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that I worked with my own hands to support myself and those who are with me.”
 - a. Paul had every right to receive a salary from the church, but to set an example of hard work he chose to work as a tentmaker to support himself, and then do church work voluntarily.
- vi. To make a difference for Christ, you must work hard.
- vii. This diligence in ministry involves two things:
 - 1. Do quality work. Do your best in ministry.
 - 2. Do quantity work. Do as much ministry as you possibly can. Don’t just give God a little time and energy; give Him your all.
- viii. Colossians 3:23-24 (Phillips) “Whatever you do, put your whole heart and soul into it, as into work done for God, and not merely for men—knowing that your real reward, a heavenly one, will come from God, since you are actually employed by Christ, and not just by your earthly master.”
- ix. **Charles Spurgeon** said, “Those who are diligent in business rise up early, stay up late, and deny themselves much comfort and leisure. They are not soon tired, or if they are, they persevere even with an aching head and weary eyes. This is the manner in which we should serve the Lord, for such a Master deserves diligent servants. He demands such service and will be content with nothing less.”

8. Depend upon God’s strength.

- i. **Colossians 1:29** “I labor for this, striving with his strength that works powerfully in me.”
- ii. Paul did not just work hard, but he also depended upon God’s strength.
- iii. Serving God is spiritual work, and you can only succeed with the aid of the Holy Spirit.
- iv. How do you depend on God’s strength?
 - 1. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 “And don’t get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit”
 - a. What does it mean to be Spirit-filled?

- i. To be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with His power.
 - b. How to be Spirit-filled?
 - i. Repent of all known sin and surrender fully to the Spirit's control.
 - ii. To be full of the Spirit's power, the Spirit must have full control of you.
- 2. Bathe your ministry in prayer.
 - a. God works through prayer. James 4:2 "You do not have because you do not ask."
 - b. One time a man brought his son to Jesus to be healed (Mk 9:14-29). The boy was possessed by a demon who would throw the boy down, cause him to foam at the mouth, grind his teeth, and become rigid. It would also throw the boy into fire or water to kill him. So first he brought the boy to the disciples, but the disciples could not heal him. They had cast out many demons before, but this time they ran into a roadblock. So then Jesus came and rebuked the demon and drove it out of the boy. Later, in private, the disciples asked Jesus why they couldn't drive out the demon. Jesus said, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer (Mk 9:29)."
 - c. Only through prayer can we make a difference for Christ.

IV. CONCLUSION

- 1. God wants you to be His servant. He wants to use you. 2 Timothy 2:21 (ERV) "The Lord wants to use you for special purposes."
- 2. But you must do your part. You must meet the conditions that we talked about. And you can.
 - i. Notice I didn't say that you have to be highly educated to make a difference for Jesus. The great Charles Spurgeon had very little formal education and never earned a university degree.
 - ii. Notice I didn't say that you must have a perfect past to be used by God. "God can play beautiful music through dented instruments (Thirsting For God, Gary Thomas)."
 - iii. Notice I didn't say that you must be highly talented to make a difference for God. God is not looking for ability, but availability.
- 3. You can start making a difference for God today with a simple prayer. "Lord, I am Your servant. Use me."