Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Paul's Ministry: Fulfilling the Word of God
Scripture: Colossians 1:24-25
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Paul's Ministry: To Fulfill the Word of God

I'd like to have you turn in your Bible to the first chapter of Colossians. For those of you who are visiting, I would just say that we at Grace Church are committed to studying the Scripture, and that means that we just go from book to book. We've been studying now for the seven years that I've been here through the New Testament on the Lord's Day and through the Old Testament in our midweek Bible studies. And we find ourselves in a very, very important book called the book of Colossians.

This little book, it isn't very long, it's only four chapters, was a letter written by the Apostle Paul, who wrote thirteen of the New Testament books. It was written to a group of believers in a city called Colossae; not a city of tremendous importance, but nevertheless a city of some significance, and in that particular city there was founded a little church. The man responsible was a man named Epaphras,and apparently he was the initial pastor of that small congregation in that city, a city that was in a triad of cities, including Laodicea, Heropolis, as well as Colossae in the Lykus Valley. The apostle Paul is writing to them because they are undergoing some problems. The Church is being confronted with some people who are teaching false doctrine about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it's very important that the apostle Paul write this letter to straighten them out.

Now as you know, if you've been with us for our study of the first chapter, Paul has just finished, as we come to verse 23, he has just finished a powerful statement on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is really a refutation of the false teachers who were denying Christ's deity that is, denying that He was God, denying His power to save. They had said that Christ was not God, that He was just one of many spirits equal to many other spirits, and that He alone could not reconcile man to God; He alone could not bring men into fellowship with God. And Paul denies that. Paul says Christ is greater and far beyond any other created being. He is not just like other spirits or other angels, or other beings. Verse 15 of Chapter 1 through verse 19 of Chapter 1 is a statement regarding who Jesus Christ is. He says He is the image 'of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation or the prototicas, the primary one of all. For by Him were all things created in heaven and earth, visible or invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or power and of course those are all designations of angels, and different ranks of angels, all things were created by Him and for Him; He is before all things. By Him all things hold together. He is the head of the Body, the Church. He is the beginning, the prototicasfrom the Dead, the primary one resurrected, that in all things He might have

the preeminence, for it pleased the Father that in Him shall all fullness dwell. Now there is a great statement concerning the fact that Jesus Christ is God, that He is unique, that He is singly the one that God has ordained to rule the world and rule the Church and rule the universe.

Secondly, the heretics had denied the power of Jesus Christ to save men. And in Chapter 1:2023 Paul says that Christ is able to reconcile to bring men to God. In verse 21, "you who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now has He reconciled". And so in this statement from verse 1523 Paul is finalizing in simple terms the truth about Christ. He is God, and He is able to save. That's great truth.

Now you'll notice that verse 23 ends with the word "minister". Paul has said that regarding this truth about Christ that he has just spoken he was made a minister. The term "minister", then, triggers Paul's thoughts for the next section, because in verses 2429 he describes his ministry. He says, I am made a minister, and then he launches into a description of what that ministry involves, and it is a ministry to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ, Frequently in Paul's letters, and I'm sure you've come across it time and time again as we have in our studies, frequently in his letters he stops to discuss his ministry.

Paul frequently says I am an apostle, I do this, I do this, this way, this is how I operate, this is how I function, and he makes a very, very strong point again and again and again and again of the style and type and approach of his ministry. He does it for many reasons. He does it for one reason to defend his right to speak for God. He says, from time to time I am a sent one from God. At the end of 23 he says, "I am made a minister." I didn't choose this I was made a minister. And this should give him some credibility. This should give him some punch in speaking to them. He says it then to defend his right to speak for God, or to establish his authority. He says it also to express the wonder that he has in his mind that God called him. He would agree with what Isaiah said when he was up here and said that the Lord has called him into the ministry, and that he didn't understand that, but it was something about which he was extremely excited. Now that's the way Paul is. He continually reiterates the truth of his ministry because it is such a thrill to him, it's more than just a defense, it's also something that is exciting to him. And he wants the people to hear him not as a self-styled, selfappointed noncredentialed teacher like so many that existed in the world, but he wants them to hear him as the spokesman for God. And so he repeatedly accredits his ministry.

Now remember that in the city of Colossae to which the letter was written there were false teachers undermining the Gospel. They were undermining the truth of Christ. And Paul comes right back at those people and defends it, and so he feels that he must accredit his ministry. He must state his right to be believed. He must say, this is who I am and this is what God has called me to do. Hear what I say. He wants them to listen with confidence, and so it's important for him to do that. In Chapter 1:1 he says "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God." And that is a statement that he is a sent one from God, and here he adds more sock to that by detailing carefully his ministries so they will

understand why he writes the way he does, and they will be more prone to believe what he says.

Now, as I began to look at this passage I kind of keyed in on the statement at the end of verse 27: "Christ in you, the hope of Glory...", and I thought well, I'm going to build around that theme. And so I got that in my mind, I began to study. And several hours of study went by in my mind and I realized that that is not really the theme of what he is saying. That is a theme in what he says, but it is not the theme. The theme that he has in mind through all of these verses is simply to present a detailed look at his ministry. And what I learned out of this passage was so exciting to me because really you have here eight different aspects of the ministry of the servant of God. Eight different aspects that should character-ize the life of anybody who serves the Lord Jesus Christ, any-body who's called to teach or preach or minister within the framework of Christianity.

There are eight of these. Now tonight we're going to look at four of them, and next week we're going to look at the rest, the other four. And when it all comes together, you're going to get a beautiful pattern of the ministry as Paul views it. It's a tremendous portion of Scripture, because this is what he carefully does in these verses.

Now to begin with, point number one. The source of the ministry. As Paul looks at his ministry he wants to talk about the source of it, and that you see in verse 23 closing out the last portion in verse 25 as well. Notice the end of verse 23 that statement, "of which I, Paul" and of which in reference to the Gospel back in the verse in the middle of the verse, "the Gospel, which you have heard which was preached to every creature under Heaven of which I, Paul, am made a minister." The word "minister" is not a highfallootin' word, it's not an elevated term; it's a very, very low term. It's the word deakinos, which means "servant". "I am made a servant."

Now, how was Paul made a minister? How was he made a servant? Go back to the 26th chapter of Acts, and I want to show you something. Now remember that Paul never claimed to be a selfstyled apostle. Paul never claimed to have figured out one day when he sat down at his desk, "Let's see, I could be an alchemist, or I could be a horsebreeder, or I could be a farmer, or I could be a mason building buildings, or I could be a minister. Now let me put all the pros and cons, blah, blah, blah, blah, let's see. If I become an alchemist, there's always the danger that I could blow myself up. If I'm going to be a horsebreeder, there's always the danger that my horses won't come out very good, and so forth and so forth. He didn't do it that way. He, in fact, had pretty well decided what he wanted to be in his life, and that was, he wanted to be a Christian killer. And so he set about to do that. And everywhere he went he says he was breathing in and out threatening and slaughter and he was slaughtering Christians. And he was one day on the road to Damascus, doing what he normally did... just get up in the morning, 8 to 5, kill Christians (laughter), and he was on his way to Damascus; and in the middle of the trip, as he approached the city, he was blinded by a light from Heaven, God slammed him to the ground, he ate a mouthful of dirt, he woke up in his blindness and said, "Lord, what will You have me to do?" And the Lord said, "You are going to be an apostle to the Gentiles."

Now, that is not working out your own career.

Now notice Acts 26:13. "At midday, oh King," and here he's telling Agrippa how it all happened, he's giving his personal testimony, "at midday, oh King, I saw in the way a light from Heaven..." I'm walking to Damascus; I saw a light from Heaven, "it was brighter than the sun. Shining round about me and them who journeyed with me, and when we were all fallen to earth, (the whole entourage went down) I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew tongue, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the thorns (or the goads)." When they used to have an ox working in a field, in order to keep the ox going in the right direction and not kick, they put pointed goads right against the heels of the ox, and if the ox kicked, too bad. So the ox learned, don't kick. And the Lord said, it's hard for you to fight against it, to resist me, to kick against me. And I said, "Who are you, Lord?" He recognized it was the Lord, wanted a more specific title. He said, "I am Jesus, whom you persecute. But rise, and stand on your feet, for I have appeared unto you for this purpose (now watch this next word) to make you a minister,"

Now Paul did not choose to be a minister, he was made a minister. And a witness of the things which you have seen, those things in which I will appear unto you. Delivering you from the people, from the gentiles unto whom now I send you. Paul, I have chosen you to go to the gentiles. You are now hereby made a minister. And I'll tell you, people, that's a pretty strong statement. And I can relate to that, as you know. That's exactly what the Lord did to me. Threw me out of a car going about 75 miles an hour, skidded me all over the place, woke me up when it was all done, and spoke to my heart and said, MacArthur, you are now in the ministry. And I said, "Right, whatever you say! You're going to fight like this, I quit." (Laughter) And that's precisely what happened, and I had three months in bed to let that decision sink into my heart.

The Lord makes ministers. His ministers are those who are called. He's done it throughout the Old Testament. Read the story of the prophets. You have no selfstyled, selfappointed prophets. They're called of God.

Now Paul makes this clear again and again in his ministry, and in the 15th chapter of Romans in the 15th verse: "Nevertheless, brethren, (Rom. 15:15), 1 have written the more boldly unto you to remind you because of the Grace that is given to me of God that I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the gentiles," The reason I'm so bold in writing to you gentiles is because the Lord has made me a servant to you gentiles. I'm only carrying out my ministry. I'm only doing that which God has called me to do. In II Cor. 3:4, we read again: "and such trust have we through Christ toward God, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything of ourselves, our sufficiency is of God (not that I'm selfconfident, he says). In other words, my confidence and my trust comes because my sufficiency comes from God. That's what he's saying. God has called me into this, and God has equipped me for this. II Cor. 4:4 "in whom the God of this age has blinded the minds of them who believe not lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them (the God of

this age is Satan, he's blinded men's eyes) for we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord, and ourselves your servants because of Jesus. It's Jesus that made me your servants. It's Jesus that drew me in this.

Look at the 5th chapter of II Cor. 18th verse: "and all things are of God who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ and given to us the ministry of reconciliation". If I preach that a man can be reconciled to God, it is because God has given me that ministry. I would say this ... you don't choose the ministry that God desires for you. God chooses it. You are either obedient or disobedient. In I Timothy we find in 1:12: "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me (listen) in that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry. Paul says, I'm here because he put me here. I Timothy 2:5 "There is one God, one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time." Listen, "for this I am ordained a preacher and an apostle, a teacher of the gentiles." It's been ordained of God. This isn't something that I whimsically chose. In II Timothy 1:11 it says: "Under which I am appointed a preacher and an apostle, a teacher of the gentiles", repeating the same three terms.

Now, who made Paul a minister? God. Who is the sourcethen of ministry? God. Whatever gifts you have received to operate within the Body of Christ, who gave you those gifts? According to I Cor. chapter 12 the Holy Spirit gives to all men severely as He will. It is the Spirit of God who manifests Himself in the gifts of the Spirit in order that we might minister. It is God who calls us, it is God who puts us in the ministry; it isn't something we choose. Notice again in Col. 1:25, because you have again in the same terms, Col. 1:25, it says: "...of which I am made a minister." Here it is again, "I am made a minister according to the dispensation or the stewardship of God, which is given to me for you to fulfill the Word of God." Notice this, I am made a minister according to the dispensation of God, which is given to me. Stop there.

The word dispensation, oikanammios, noikusis law, or rule. Oikas is house. It means to rule a house; it means to be a steward of somebody else's possessions. It means to rule for the houseowner, it refers to somebody given great responsibility. God owns His Church. It's His house, His temple, and God says I want to appoint you to rule in my behalf, in my Church. It suggests being a great estate to manage, the word does, "of which I am made a servant according to the stewardship", or if you want a goodword for that, according to the Godgiven responsibility. "According to the Godgiven responsibility which I have received." It's a divine office, Paul says. It's God's plan. It's God's Church. It's God's Gospel. It's God's Christ. It's God's message. It's God's truth. It's God's Word. And, he says, look, Paul. Will you manage it for me? I'm in the ministry because God has put me there. I'm a steward.

You remember our study of I Cor. chapter 4, don't you, a few weeks ago? Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, Paul says, there, of stewards of the mysteries of God. I'm a steward. A steward doesn't own anything; he manages something for somebody else. The houseowner would

have a steward in those days who would manage his whole house. And this was when you had a large estate, and so that the houseowner could go anywhere he wanted, the steward would take care of everything employment, wages, taking care of the supplies in the house, making sure everything was carried out a very great responsibility. So he says, we are stewards. Moreover, I Cor. 4:2 "...it is required of the stewards that a man be found what? Faithful." Just carry out the task. So Paul says, God has given me a task. God has given me a divine responsibility, and I'm obligated to fulfill it. God is the source of my ministry.

In I Cor. 9 a few weeks ago we studied a couple of verses that will give you a good insight on this. I Cor. 9:16: "For though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to be proud of. I have nothing to boast about, to cause selfglory. For necessity is laid on me, yet woe is unto me if I don't preach the Gospel. Remember we talked about that? Paul says, look, don't come up to me and say, "Oh, Paul, you're a minister. Oh, Paul, what a selfsacrificing wonderful human you are. He'll say to you, "Look fella, I was going down the Damascus Road minding my own business, and I got thrown into this deal. Don't pat me on the back. I didn't ask for it, and now it's a situation wherein if I don't fulfill it, I'm in a lot of trouble. So don't pat me on the back about it, I had nothing to do with it. Probably a lot more responsibility than I want anyway. He says in verse 17, if I did it willingly, then I would have a reward, but it's against my will. It's strictly a responsibility that's been committed to me, that's all. It's something given to me, and I didn't ask for it, but I'm in a lot of trouble if I don't fulfill it, so don't pat me on the back pray for me!

In Gal. 2:7 Paul says, on the contrary, when they saw that the Gospel of the uncircumcision or the Gospel that goes to the gentiles was committed to me, we'll stop right there. That's all we want is that phrase. He says, the Gospel to the gentiles was committed to me, I didn't have any choice. In Ephesians, Chapter 3, he says: "...for this cause I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you gentiles, if you have heard of the dispensation or if you have heard of the responsibility that God has given me, how that by revelation he made known to me the mystery, and then he said in verse 7 of which I was made a minister, by His grace. In other words, you must know that God has called me and God has made me a prisoner of Christ. I'm chained to Christ, I can't get away. I've got this tremendous responsibility to reveal the truth that God gives me to dispense the mysteries, those are the truths of God's word. I was made a minister. In Titus 1:7 "A bishop must be blameless as the steward of God." Anybodyin the ministry. Bishop means a pastor, not what we call an ecclesiastical bishop, (the term just has to do with a pastor, an elder) is to be a steward of God.

God has called us to a tremendous responsibility. And that's why, no matter who you are as a Christian, the Spirit of God has given you certain gifts, and if He's given you those gifts He's called you to minister those gifts and you need to do that. It's a serious responsibility. If you possess a gift of the Spirit then you possess something that belongs to God, and you are to minister that. You are to dispense it to those in need of it. I Peter 4:10: "...as every man (that's all of us) has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Every

Christian has received spiritual gifts. We're going to get into this in the 12th chapter of Corinthians in the morning, soon. Every Christian has received gifts. If you have, then minister them. As a good steward, as a steward you hold that gift, bit it isn't your own. You're going to use it and manage it for God's glory. If you have a speaking gift, then speak as the oracles of God. If you have a serving gift, then serve with the ability that God gives, that God may be glorified. The source of all ministry is God. We don't choose that.

And so what am I saying? I'm saying that you had better examine your own heart to see what God has called you to do. You had better search your own heart to see what your spiritual gifts are, There are diversity of gifts, but the same Spirit, differences of administration but the same Lord. Diversities of the operations but it is the same God working in all, There are different gifts here. Every one of you are different. But you've been given a stewardship, and it's from God, and he's the source of that calling and the source of that gift, and you'd better use that thing, because you're a steward of it. Some day when you face Jesus Christ the record of your stewardship is going to be what did you do with the gifts you were given? Are you going to be like the servant who buried it in the ground and said, I knew you were tough to handle, so I just buried it and held on to it, or are you going to be the kind who multiplied stewardship? So in any ministry, whatever it is, God calls us, God equips us, God assigns us. Maybe not as dramatically as the Damascus Road experience that Paul had, but just as truly. But you say, John, how do you know God is calling me to the ministry? You'll get the message if He's calling you, believe me. One way or another. You need to be listening and then responding like Paul did with the words: "What will you have me to (what?) to do." So the source of the ministry is God. He says, I am made a minister, verse 23. Verse 25, 1 am made a minister according to a Godgiven responsibility.

Second, and this is really neat, he not only talks about the sourceof the ministry but the spirit of the ministry. As we serve the Lord Jesus Christ, recognizing God has called us, what should be our attitude? What should be the spirit in which we serve? Verse 24, watch this. I'm just going to read three words..."who now (what's the third word?) rejoice." What's the spirit of the ministry? A word with three letters, JOY. The spirit of the ministry is joy. Whatever our ministry is, we are to enjoy it. That's a sad reality, I think, that many ministering Christians don't have the right attitude. Do you know that? There just aren't enough joyous Christians. There just aren't enough happy Christians. It's like the little girl who saw the mule and said with a long face like that it must be a wonderful Christian (laughter).

You know, there are a lot of people that have been given a tremendous responsibility by God, but they grudgingly carry it out. You know I mean, what do you do? "Oh... I'm serving the Lord...," you know. It's just agonizing. Where's the joy? It's a sad reality that many pastors have lost the joy of the ministry. They don't have the right attitude. They get like Jonah, you know? Even when it goes good they're hesitant, angry, they're reluctant, bitter, resentful. You say, yeah, but I've got it taught in my ministry. It's hard to have joy. Oh? Think of this one. If you ever think you've got it tough in your

ministry and you can't find joy, listen to these words. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joythat was set before Him (what?) endured the Cross, despising the shame. Why did He do it? For the joythat was set before Him. Jesus never lost the joy of what He was doing. Never. Never. Why should you? You haven't suffered unto blood yet, he says, or you haven't died in your service. Oftentimes you'll talk to somebody, even another pastor, who'll say, "Oh, I've lost the joy of the ministry." You know what that means? That doesn't mean to me that they've got bad circumstances, that means they've got bad connections, see. Because you don't lose the joy unless you lose the Lord, and if you lose the Lord, I've got to redo my theology?

See, there's joy in the ministry, Oh, it's easy to get discouraged with circumstances. Paul was, He said, I have continual sorrow and heaviness of heart concerning my people Israel, but he

never lost the internal joy. We've talked about this. The element of personal joy was the spirit of his ministry. Every-where he went he was rejoicing. You realize when he wrote the Philippians he was rejoicing, andmost likely he was in jail? And I've told you about that Jail. It was a hole in the ground. In the prison they just dropped prisoners in that place and when they got 40 in there they'd open the sewage, the sewage would run in and drown them all, they'd let it drain out and then they'd start with another 40. And that's where he was when he wrote, "rejoice always, and again I say rejoice," Some-body was probably sitting there saying this guy is out of his mind. What's he so happy about? It had nothing to do with cir-cumstances. He had a relationship with the living God that was perpendicular and transcended beyond all circumstances.

I told you a few weeks ago, joy is the deep down confidence that God is in control of my life, and that doesn't change. That's where the joy comes. Whenever I, see somebody who's lost the joy, I don't worry, I don't want to talk about if something's happened with the Lord. Paul's joy was generated because of what Christ had done for him, and I'll tell you something else. Keep this- in mind. Humility generates joy. You know something-humility, generates joy in this sense. Paul always thought of himself as so unworthy, that even having the privilege of dying for Jesus Christ was a cause for joy, because he didn't even think he was worthy of that. When you lose the joy is when you get to thinkingyou're too good tobe sufferin' what you're sufferin', or to be havin' it like you're havin' it. And that's the wrong perspective.And he says, "Hey, I now rejoice. You say, yeah, you know he was probably in a wonderful place. You know where he was? In prison, that's where he was. In prison. Remember him in the jail in Philippi? With his feet and his hands in the stocks, in the middle of the night in the inner dudgeon, what was he doing? Singing! Paul rejoiced even though he was bound by a chain in Rome. No circumstance could affect his deep down confidence that God was in control of his life, and boy, that brought satisfaction and the spirit of the ministry, beloved, is joy.

Christians ought to just be beaming with joy. In the midst of anything and everything, and that's what the world's gonna see, and they'll say, what's wrong with those people? I was reading Eristhenes, and he says, (he's a Greek and he's commenting on Christians) and he couldn't figure them out, and he

says, it's amazing. He says, when a baby dies, they rejoice, for one who passes through the world without suffering. He said, when one of them dies, they carry his body through the streets and sing hymns of praise like someone who had simply taken a journey from one place to another. He couldn't figure it out.

Joyful Christians are absolutely dramatically effective on the world. The spirit of the ministry is joy. Colossians right here in chapter 2 verse 5, Paul's in jail in Rome here chained to a Roman soldier as he writes, he says, "for though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order in the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. Absolutely undaunted was this guy. Because his joy was always based on the perpendicular. In I Thessalonians he writes, I think it's chapter 2 there, verse 19, he says, "what is our hope? For joy, a crown ofrejoicing." Are not you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ for you are our glory and joy. Listen, he rejoiced about God and he rejoiced about everybody else, and consequently what happened to him didn't matter. And you say, I don't care what I go through, when I see that you knowthe Lord Jesus Christ and that you're going to be there at the Second Coming, I'm so happy, I could care less about me. That's what he's saying. That little letter of Philemon in the 7th verse, he says, "we have great joy". And here he is a prisoner again when he wrote this; he always talks about joy when he gets in jail. Says, we have great joy, because the hearts of the saints are refreshed by you, brother. When I hear about you, Philemon, I'm so happy about you. He's always got his joy in his relationship to the Lord and then his relationships with people, and so it didn't matter what happened to him because he was totally, absolutely, unselfish.

When you see somebody without joy in the ministry, it's because they're selfish, and they think they deserve better than they've got, and if they really looked at their hearts they don't even deserve what they've got, right? That's why Paul kept his joy, because anything that came to him, even suffering, was something more than he felt worthy to receive. And I'll tell you something, once the joy is gone, you're in trouble, you're in a lot of trouble. Because everything you try to do is gonna be works, legalism, and have little effect. The beginning of the letter to the Philippians he writes, he says, again the same idea, he says, (he's in jail), so in verse 13 he says, "My bonds in Christ are manifested in all the palace." In other words, this is great being a prisoner because all these soldiers who get chained to me keep getting saved and they take the message back to the palace. "And many of the brothers in the Lord, becoming confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the Word." In other words, there are other Christians who can see what you can do as a prisoner who aren't so worried about it any more. They see that since I've been a prisoner, all kinds of people have been getting saved around the jail here, and so they're a little more bold to preach, figuring that if they wind up in jail they'll have a good time there too. And he says, you know there are other people *who* go around condemning me and saying that I'm in jail because the Lord had to put me on the shelf because I blew my ministry, and it's kind of a judgment on me and some people are trying to even add affliction to my bonds, he says in verse 16, in this kind of criticism, but some love me. But I don't care, verse 18 he says, "if Christ is preached in that I (what?) do rejoice, and I will continue to rejoice. The spirit of

the man undaunted and the spirit of the ministry is joy.

What are the thieves that rob us of joy? What are the thieves that rob you of joy? Circumstances, people? People are thieves they steal joy, you know that? If you let 'em. Things? Worry, that's the worst thief, And what are the guards that protect your joy?, Humility, Devotion to Christ. Trust in God. Those things. You say, year, but maybe it was pretty nice where Paul was going to jail here. It wasn't too bad, maybe, that's why he had so much joy, Oh? Let's look at Colossians 1:24 again, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings'." Now wait a minute. Paul, you actually rejoice in your suffer-ing? Oh yeah Oh yeah. Why? Because they're for (what?) for you. And secondly, they fill up that which is behind or remain-ing of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church.

Now that is a very confused verse, as you first read it, Let me explain it to you, and this brings us to the third point, We've seen the source of the ministry, the spirit of the ministry; here's the suffering of the ministry. The suffering of the ministry. He says, I'm rejoicing in ny suffering, because it's for you, and also it fills up what is remaining of the afflictions of Christ, Now this has really been misconstrued, Now there are some people who say that Christ when He died on the cross did not finalize all suffering, This is, generally speaking, the 'Roman Catholic view, that more suffering is necessary to fill up that which remains of the suffering of Christ, and that's why they teach that the saints must suffer, And you'll find many people, there are some who are very devout, who wear belts with nails in them.

I knew a man who went years and years with thing like rocks in his shoe, and tacks. There are many, many people who go and light candles and so forth, and so on, in order to get people out of purgatory, because they have to go to purgatory to suffer awhile to atone for sin because they have to fill up that which remains of the suffering of Christ. That's where all that comes from, you see. That Christ's sufferings have to be supplemented by Paul and by you and by everybody else.

Now you say, what about the ones that are super good. Well, you see, if you're super good in this life, according to Catholic theology, you can get enough accomplished in this life to go right to Heaven, and then if you have any extra they'll put it into what's called the Treasure of Merit and apply it to somebody in purgatory who needs it, That's true. That's what's called the Treasury of Merit. And the idea is that you have to continue to suffer and suffer and suffer and so forth in order to expiate sin. You think that's what Paul's saying? Why, that would be a fatal blow to what he just said. Because what he just said was that Christ by the blood of His Cross, through His death, has presented us, verse 22, through death presented you what? Holy and unblameable and what? Unreprovable. Through His death. So Paul is not going to unsay everything that he has just said. And Paul is dealing with a heresy in Colossae that's insisted that Christ's death and Christ's life had to be supplemented by ascetism and human works anyway. He's certainly not going to say that. In fact, the word for affliction here is nowhere used to describe the atoning suffering of Christ. You say, well, what is he saying, All right, let's look at it.

"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you." Now this, relates directly to him being a prisoner, as he is a prisoner when he writes Colossians. Chapter 4 tells us that as we find him in Rome and he makes certain references to his situation, we know without a shadow of a doubt that he's a prisoner. Now listen. In Acts 9:16 the apostle Paul was told something at the very beginning. This is the chapter that tells of his conversionthe 16th verse, "I will show him how great things he must (what?) suffer for my namesake." From the very beginning God said, Paul, you're going to pay a high price. You're going to be a prisoner of life. And you know what was so neat about Paul? He never sawhimself as a prisoner of Rome. Every time he talks about being a prisoner he says, I'm a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He always saw it that way. In Philemon 1: "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ", Philemon 9: "Now a prisoner of Jesus Christ", Philemon 23: "my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, So he's always seeing himself not as a prisoner of the Romans, a prisoner of men, a prisoner of anybody but Christ, and all of this is a fulfillment of prophesy. So he says, hey, I rejoice in my suffering for you. It's what the Lord predicted. It just helps me to believe in Him more because it's exactly what He said would happen, I see it fulfilled. Why did he rejoice? Notice, "because my suffering is for you." Now the end of the verse 24, "it's for His body's sake, which is the Church." I'm suffering for your sake, For your sake. You say, in what sense?

Look at Philippians 1:29. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but to suffer for His sake." To suffer for His sake. Paul says, it's not only my lot to suffer for Christ's sake, but yours too. I'm going to suffer for Him; you're going to suffer for Him, for His sake. That means because of Him. The early Church, buy they suffered. They really suffered. Paul says, I rejoice in this, I'm thrilled with it. You say, how can a guy be thrilled about suffering? Well, I'm going to give you five little thoughts here. Five causes for joy in suffering.

Number one, it brings us nearer to Christ. It brings us nearer to Christ. You know, Paul wanted to get as close to Christ as he could. Philippians 3:10: "that I may know Him, the power of His resurrection, and the (what?) fellowship of His (what?) sufferings." You say in what sense**,** John? When we suffer for the cause of Christ, that is when the world casts it's slurs at us, and mocks our Christ, in a sense that suffering helps us to understand what Jesus went through, doesn't it? Because in John 15 and 16 Jesus says, if they hated Me, they're going to hate you. If I've suffered, you're going to suffer. And in II Timothy 3:12, all that live Godly in this present age are going to suffer persecution. And so it helps us to understand more about Him. It helps us, as Hebrews 13:13 says, to go outside the gate and bear His reproach with Him. So I think there's joy in suffering because it brings us nearer to the understanding of Christ.

Secondly, when we suffer it brings us the assurance of salvation. Suffering brings us the assurance of salvation, in a sense**.** I Peter 4:14: "If you are reproached for the name of Glory and Christ happy are you for the Spirit of God rests on you. In other words, when you suffer you have this tremendous

confidence of the presence of the spirit of God. And that's a very assuring thing. So, suffering can bring joy to the apostle Paul, to any Christian because it identifies him with Christ because it brings him a sense of the presence ofthe Spirit of God which assures him that he belongs to God.

Thirdly, it brings a future reward. When you're willing to step out for Christ and be bold and speak the truth and suffer the consequences sometimes as we all have from time to time it promises a reward. Listen to Romans 8:18: "The sufferings of this present age are not worthy to be compared with the Glory which shall be revealed," Verse 17: "If so be that we suffer with Him we will be glorified with Him." There is a sense in which the suffering now will be rewarded in the day that we look forward to in the future. In fact, in II Cor, 4:17: "Our light affliction for this moment works a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

So, suffering can bring joy because it identifies us with Christ, because it brings assurance of the presence of the Spirit of God, a confidence of salvation, it brings a future reward.

Fourthly, it results in the salvation of others. it results in the salvation of others, I can remember as I wrote in the book on "God's Will is not Lost" the time that I preached and I suffered I think at that point maybe one of the most difficult times of persecution in my life, and out of it people were redeemed. In Philippians 2:17 he says: "If I be offered as a sacrifice for your faith, I joy and rejoice." In other words, if I offer my life and you get saved that's joy. There's a price to pay, he says, but that's all right. The results are worth it.

So, we can rejoice in suffering because it brings us near to Christ, it brings assurance of salvation, it brings a future reward and it results in salvation for others.

And I think a fifth thing; I just have to throw this in. It leads to terrible frustration on the part of Satan because he's trying all he can to wack us around and all that comes out is good results. It puts a dent in the Kingdom of Darkness, In Acts 9:16 he says: "How many things you will suffer for His namesake." It'll come to His glory; it will bounce back to the glory of Christ.

Now, having said those five things, Colossians 1:24 adds another reason, and this brings us right to the text again, He says, I'm not only rejoicing in my suffering because it brings me nearer to Christ from other passages we gathered that, it gives me assurance of salvation, it brings a future reward, it results in the salvation of others, it frustrates Satan. But I am rejoicing because it fills up that which is remaining of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh. What he means is this, look; I am receiving in my body what is intended for Christ. This does not mean there is anything lacking in the atonement, it does not mean that there's some kind of short change in the value of the death of Christ, it means this. The enemies of Christ were never satisfied with what they did to Jesus, do you know that? They hated Jesus with an insatiable hate. They wanted to add to their, suffering. And as soon as Jesus ascended back into Heaven and He wasn't around any more, and the world hated Him so much, who

did the world attack? The Church, didn't they? They began to persecute the Church and persecute the Church and persecute the Church, and why were they whipping the Church and burning the Church at the stake and throwing the Church to the lions why? Was it be-cause they hated those individual personalities, no. It was be-cause they stood in the place of Christ and since Christ wasn't around to get they got the people who stood in His place. That's what it means.

Paul is saying this, look: the world isn't done persecuting Christ, but since He's not here, whatever is lacking in what they want to do with Him I am receiving into my body and standing in His place who stood my place is a cause for joy. To take the blows meant for Him who took the blows meant for me makes me happy. If Jesus Christ could hang on the cross and take my sin and the punishment I deserve I think I can take a few punches for His sake. That's what he's saying. And you see, in that sense all Christians are in His place. As the enemies of Christ attack Christ they attack us, and what is left lacking in their minds in the affliction that Christ deserves they give to us and we ought to joyfully say, if I can take a blow for Jesus who took all the blows for me that's cause for joy.

You see, in Acts 9 Jesus said to Paul as he was on the Damascus Road, we read it in 26:2, he said: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou the Christians." Is that what He said? What did He say? "Why persecutest thou (what?) me." You see, when Saul killed Christians who was he really laying the blows to? Christ. But since He isn't here, Paul says when they do it now to Him, I take the blows. I fill up in my own flesh the afflictions the world intends for Christ. In II Cor. 1:5 Paul says, for as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, the sufferings in Christ abound in us. What a great statement. The world persecutes us -we bear His suffering. And he talks about it so many places. He says in Galatians 6:17, beautiful statement, I bear in my body the scars of the Lord Jesus. The blows that I've received have been taken because the world can't hit Him.

Paul says allof this, for your sake, for the Church. All of this to win you to Christ, All of this to mature you in Christ. All for you. You're the objective in this thing. I pay a price to win people to Christ. I pay a price to build the Church. They stone me. They beat me up. In II Cor. 11:23 he says what he has suffered: in stripes above measure, that is whippings, prisons more frequently, death often, of the Jews five times received I forty stripes except one (that's thirtynine stripes), three times I was beaten with rods, that's a whole big group of whiplike sticks wrappedtogether that flail against the skin. Once I was stoned, three times suffered shipwreck a night and a day in the water, journeyings often, perils of waters, robbers, mine own countrymen, gentiles, perils in the cities, perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea, perils among false brethren, weariness, painfulness, watching, hunger, thirst, fasting, cold nakedness. He did all that for the sake of the Church and the whole time he ministered he worked to earn his own living in spite of all that and he not only earned his own living but the living of those people who traveled with him and he did every bit of that for the sake of the Church.

And he says, I'm willing to make a sacrifice, In Acts 20:22 and now he says, "I go bound to Jerusalem. I don't know what's going to befall me except the Holy Spirit tells me in every city that

bonds or chains and affliction await me." I know when I get to Jerusalem I'm gonna get it. "But none of these things move me, neither count I myself dear to myself so that I might finish my course with (what?) joy. I will not allow my spirit to change because the spirit of the ministry is joy, and I'm going to finish this thing with joy, which I received of the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God, and I don't care what anybody does, it isn't going to change it. I'll suffer anything for the sake of the Church, I'm willing to build the Church at any price, even the price of my own life, and one day it was true. An axe came down in the sun and severed his head from his body, He says, I endure, in II Tim. 2.10, "I endure all things for the elects' sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. I'll do anything to get people saved, I'll do anything to make 'em grow. I'll go anywhere, I'll say anything that has to be done and has to be said. In confronting the lost and in building the body, he suffered. But after all, he said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28, "you take care of this flock which the Lord has purchased with (what?) His own blood, and Paul always felt that if the Lord would shed His own blood for the Church Paul could shed a little of his for them too.

So he says, I'm not just a servant of the Lord, I'm a servant of the Church too, and I'll suffer. He cried. You know, it says in Acts 20 that he wept. That he cried over his ministry. Tears. He warned them night and day to tears. H suffered internally as well as externally not just persecution but internal anxiety over the Church. What is the sour e of the ministry? God. What is the spirit of the ministry? Joy. Suffering of the ministry it is the willingness to go out and accept the blows from the world that are meant for Christ and rejoice in it that you're even counted worthy to do it.

Fourth and the last thing we're going to talk about. Paul presents the scope of the ministry. This is beautiful. At the end of verse 25: "to fulfill the Word of God," Fantastic statement. The scope of the ministry: to fulfill the Word of God, or to give full scope to the Word of God, Paul is simply saying, I just want to do what He called me to do. What God has given me to do I want to do it. And so I will rejoice, because that's the right spirit. I will suffer because that has to be in fulfilling the scope of the ministry, Paul wanted to fulfill it. I just read you Acts 20 where he says, "none of these things move me, I don't count my life dear to myself, I just want to finish the ministry God has given me. That's all; I just want to finish it. That's the only thing he had on his mind was to finish the ministry with joy. And you know something? He did. And that man's ministry touches the world. You know it's still touching the world right now through the letters that he wrote? I just want to finish the ministry. I just want to do what He called me to do, to fulfill His Word. What does that mean? To fulfill the Word of God. I think primarily it means the Word of God directly to him that called him into the ministry.

Secondarily it means to fulfill all that the revelation of God is. To teach it all. I think what he's saying here is, I want to teach all the word of God to all of the people that God has called me to. The whole world? Not necessarily. But the whole Word to all the world that God sends me. I want to teach the whole Word to that world that God gives me. That's exactly what he has in mind.

Now, at the end of his life in II Tim. 4:2 and following he kind of talks about it. And when it's all over, he's just about to die, verse 7 he says this: "I have fought a good fight (I love it) I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." You fought all the way? Oh, yeah, I had to fight. It wasn't easy. And I never changed what I believed I kept the faith. And I (what?) finished the course. Wouldn't you like to say that? Wouldn't you like to come to the end of your life and say God, I'm done. I can leave now. Anytime you're ready. Hit the eject button. I'm ready, I'm done. How did he do it? How did the man fulfill it? How could a man ever finish the work God gave him? How is it possible? Because he said I just want to do one thing, now notice this. Fulfill the Word of God. I just want to do' what He called me to do. Give the whole Word to the people He's called me to reach.

I want to say something that's very important right here. I want you to get this. Some ministers, and I really see this, get so carried away at this point, and so can we as Christians, that they think they have to win the whole world. "I've got to fulfill it all they're going to be all over everywhere." You know what happens, their ministry is all over everywhere about that deep. It never does much of anything. You know, think about it. The apostle Paul affected the world and he's still affecting the world. You know, the guy only took three missionary trips. That's right three. You know that all three of those missionary trips went to the same places. Little tiny area in the Mediterranean little tiny area, First time second time, went over a little ways,/same ground, step a little further, third time, same ground, another little further. He just said, I'd like to get to Rome, and he got there as a prisoner at the expense of the Roman government. That's all that's all the further he ever went. Just three little trips. And yet the man affected the entire world. How did he do that?

Think about Jesus. Do you realize that Jesus never left? Jesus never went on a boat and went anywhere? He stayed right in the area of Israel Galilee Jerusalem, GalileeJerusalem, that's it. You think He had a sense of winning the world? You better believe He did, but He never left where He was. You say but how could He reach the world if He neverleft where He was? Because He knew how. David McKenna says, selfstyled Messiahs are megalomaniacs. Their sense of mission has no limitations, short of conquering the world and conquering it now. At the slightest signal that their efforts are being frustrated they usually respond with rage and madness. You see, Jesus had a tremendous economy of effort. He knew how to do what He wanted to do in limitation.

Now let me say this, because I think it's very important. And I need to hear this, I need to remember this. Jesus limited His ministry. Because it isn't how broad it is, it's how deep it is. God says, you take care of the depth of it; I'll take care of the breadth of it. Look at the limits that Jesus put on His ministry. Number one limit he says, "I will only do what the Father shows me to do." Limit number one on anyministry God's will. Right? God's will. And I'll tell you there are all kinds of people dreaming about all kinds of fantastic things and running around doing them and God doesn't have a thing to do with it. And instead of spending their time doing what God wants them to do and God gifted them to do they're running around doing what they want to do and usually it's megalomania. Usually it's an ego problem when that gets too far stretched out. John chapter 5:30 that's precisely

what Jesus said, that what He wanted to do was just what the Father gave Him to do "I seek not my own will, but the will of my Father who sent Me." So the first limitation He put on His ministry was the limitation of God's will.

Second one was the limitation of time, He had a timing limitation. How many times have you read it in the Gospel of John, "His hour was not yet come." He had a sense of timing, that there were certain things to be done in certain times, and until it was the right time and the Father's time, and the Father's will, He didn't do them. That put limitations on His ministry in terms of God's will and in terms of timing. And I'll tell you one thing when it did become the right time it was exciting, wasn't it? Boy, when He finally did say, "My hour is come," man, it was exciting.

The third limitation that He put on His ministry that I see in the Bible is the objective of His ministry when He first came into the world in Matt. 9:13, Matt. 10, He said "I have not come but for the lost sheep of the House of Israel." I'm just going to talk to Jews. You say, why would He limit Himself like that? He tightened the circle of His ministry. That Father's will, a special time, a special people. He wanted to reach Jews. I'll even go a step further. He only wanted to reach one kind of Jew. You say, what kind? "I come not to seek the righteous, but to bring (what?) sinner to repentance." He didn't want hypocritical super religious ones he wanted ones who recognized their sin. Again, the scope of His ministry is narrowed.

Another thing that limited His ministry. Not only the Father's will, time, particular people, but the subject. All through Jesus' ministry people tried to pressure Him into making political statements. What do you think about Caesar? And what did He say. Very judiciously He avoided any political involvement and said render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. You see, He refused to be forced into political involvement because that was not His purpose. And I know He had strong feelings about it but He evaded it because He had limits on His ministry. You know something else, He limited Himself in the people that He discipled. Mark, chapter 5. He healed a maniac. And after He healed the maniac the maniac fel1 down at His feet and clutched Him and he was clothed and in is right mind and he said, "I want to go with you." And Jesus said (what?) no. You stay here; you go back to your own people. Why didn't He take him? You see, megalomaniacs, madmen, they need lots of disciples. See, because they need to drag them around and prove themselves. Jesus. He knew how many He could handle, He knew many He had and that's all He wanted.

Kept narrowing, and narrowing, and the limitations on His ministry are astounding, and yet Jesus Christ affected the world. The apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 15, I've got limits too. He says this: "I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not wrought in me." My limit is that I only talk about what God has done in my life. It isn't theory. And I'll tell you something else, verse 20: "I have strived to preach the Gospel not where Christ was named." I've got another limit. I only go to places that are newplaces forthe Gospel. Listen. The men who affect the world put limits on

their ministry that allow them to do it with depth. Paul goes back to the same people three times. Jesus works with the same twelve people three years. And it ultimately affects the world. Learn it, people. There is a scope to the ministry. The scope that you're going to have in your ministry is not related to how fast you travel it's related to how deep you plow. You worry about the depth of it and God will spread it. And I can give you personal testimony to that.

I am absolutely astounded at the ministry that Grace Community Church has all over the entire world, as people from hear travel as they carry tapes and materials, as they learn from the teachers and they spread the message. We get mail from the world, and yet we have this ministry here. The deeper this goes the greater will be its breadth. Listen. What does it mean to give full scope to the ministry, what does it mean to fulfill the Word of God for your life. It means this. To obey God's will in God's time. To do what God has called you to do, to teach the whole Word to those God has given you to do and let Him worry about extending it. If I could just do that I'd be satisfied. So Paul lays out His ministry. The source is God. The spirit is joy. The suffering - -well, that's on behalf of Christ for the sake of the Church. And the scope is the whole word to the world God has called me to, and then by His Spirit, to extend it to the world beyond.

I'll tell you something, that's only four of the features of the ministry. We've got four more. But if God's people were committed to those four, what a revolutionary thing the Church would become. Let's pray.

PRAYER: Thank you, our Father, tonight, for a good time of fellowship. It's just exciting to be together, and I want to thank you for the gift you've given me and the ministry to teach these beloved precious people, Thank you for every person here tonight, every one of them especially made object of your love ... the one that you want to draw back to yourself, that they might know the fullness of life. I thank you for their faithfulness, for the fact that they come back week after week to hear and to learn and to share and to worship and to fellowship and how rich you've made me how much joy I have because of you and because of them. May I never be too concerned about me. I pray that you'll teach us all that you're the one who puts us in the ministry and you're the one who equips us and the only response we can have in whatever service we do no matter what the circumstances are is to be rejoicing because anything that we get is more than we deserve, even if it's to suffer for your sake, what a sweet joy it is. Help us to realize that you've told us that we're to just fill up the cup that you've given us and do it right and do it well, and then you'll pass it around for the world to drink. Help us to be obedient servants to speak the oracles of God, and to minister in the ability that you've given. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

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