



Series: Colossians: Before All Things

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Speaker: Pastor Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

Text: Colossians 1:24-2:5

Title: Jesus Is Worth It

Hey good morning, Mercy Family! If you have your Bibles...Colossians chapter 1. If you have your discipleship plan...week 2. last week we looked at WHO Jesus is. Our writer, the apostle Paul, painted a really majestic picture of Jesus to try and help open our eyes and lift our hearts. We saw Jesus as God, as King, as Savior, as Redeemer, and as the purpose for our lives. and the application for us was to ABIDE in Jesus. So, our discipleship plan was all about personal worship. And the intent was to map out a plan for abiding in Jesus in 2024. I hope you are using this thing; we'll bring it up again here this week.

THIS WEEK we are going to pick up right where we left off. Chapter 1 of Colossians. And here's the connection to last week. Last week was all about Jesus, right? There's this old hymn I used to sing at church - oh how marvelous, how wonderful is my savior's love for me. He is Marvelous...Wonderful and so is his love for me. That's what we talked about last week and then here's what we are going to look at today. Our writer Paul is going to say that JESUS. THAT Jesus...is worthy of my sacrifice. Paul said he is BEFORE ALL THINGS. And he has come to have first place in everything. And so, I will sacrifice everything FOR HIM. But here is what is really great - This sacrificial life - for Paul and for all Christians - it is not sad obligation. It is joyful.

Paul is writing this letter from a first-century prison cell. He is anything but comfortable. He has been persecuted and now imprisoned for preaching the gospel. And yet, read this letter. It is BRIMMING with joy. He is sacrificing everything in his life so that people can know Jesus and somehow the act of doing so INCREASES his JOY. That's what we are after today.

And I want this for us church. I want you to have the joy of the Christian life. So often the Christian life is preached & viewed as one of two ways: EITHER we are taught a 'don't worry, be happy' version of Christianity where God wants you to live your best life now and sin & sacrifice aren't really brought up & if life isn't working out you must not be believing right. So,





turn that frown upside down and church is just a pep rally for Jesus! OR we are presented with a sackcloth and ashes Christianity where sorrow, scowling, & sacrifice are the only signs of maturity in Christ. A No pain No Gain Christianity. The problem with both of these is they don't give you the full picture of the Christian life. the don't worry be happy line - it doesn't square with reality. Life just isn't always sunshine & rainbows & it seems rather disingenuous to say that when you are suffering, God is unhappy with you, or you aren't being a good Christian. After all, the crucifixion of Jesus doesn't exactly seem like "best life now" kind of material. And yet on the other hand the frowning faithful seem to practice obedience to Jesus apart from joy in Jesus. And wind up being self-righteous and skeptical of anything that seems a little joyful. They are missing the joy of Christ.

So, we are going to learn from a guy who was in prison, often, for preaching the gospel. And yet this guy had joy in his sacrifice. Like there is a biblical record of this guy singing songs celebrating Jesus in prison. Just read Acts 16. Here's why this matters: **Because the Christian life is most satisfying when it is marked by JOYFUL SACRIFICE.** Joy without sacrifice leads to an empty emotional experience. And it will NOT LAST. The pep rally vibe will collide with real life, and you'll be left wondering if God is real at all.

Sacrifice without Joy leads to self-righteous entitlement. You continue down that road you'll think God owes you for your

service and others are less than you because they don't serve like you.

But today what we'll see is **God offers you deep soul satisfying joy in following in the sacrificial footsteps of Jesus.** I want this for us so much. A church that grabs this will change the world because it will look DIFFERENT from the world - sacrificing for Jesus. But will be attractive to the world - Because it has the unshakeable joy the world is looking for.

Discipleship Plan Connection

And Here's how it connects to your discipleship plan -This passage has 2 parts. First, Why JESUS > Comfort and second... how his body, the church, helps one another live that life. Pretty simple. Joyful Sacrifice and then Community. Paul is going to say the place where you will find encouragement as you live this life - is the church. The Christian life is meant to be experienced in community where we give and receive the love of Jesus in tangible ways. Our sermon will major on joyful sacrifice. And then your discipleship plan is gonna major on community. I'll hit on it, but you'll really dig into it there. Why I keep saying you need community here. I'm just teeing it up.

Ok, let's walk through this and see what God has for us.

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you,

First, let's just get real. What would lead someone to **rejoice in suffering?** Suffering after all is painful. He's in prison. I don't



think Paul loved prison. Like...ooh I love being deprived of all the things. I'm so glad to finally be here. No, what makes his suffering joyful is what he is suffering FOR.

Man, this lesson has been a big lesson in my life. It's the lesson that has propelled most of my big steps of faith. I'll never forget my buddy Andrew Hopper standing in a cabin with me at Camp Willow Run. he and I were on staff together at the Summit Church up in Raleigh Durham and he said Man, I think I'm gonna go plant a church. And it's really hard because Anna and I love it here. Then he said what someone told him. **"But joyful sacrifice is giving up something you love for something you love even more."** And man, that was just a word to me. I'm pretty sure he got that from our pastor who got it from somebody else who was paraphrasing Jesus. In my morning bible reading this week I read Jesus say **"25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will find it. -- Matthew 16:24-25"**

Losing your life is sacrifice. It's giving up. **But with Christ you FIND a greater life than the one you give up.** THAT TRUTH...is absolutely critical to embracing the Christian life. Joyful sacrifice is giving up something you love for something you love even more. Maybe a better way to say it - **You rejoice in sacrifice when you love what you gain more than what you give up.**

take childbirth. You suffer through it JOYFULLY because of what it produces. It's not pleasant. It's a very disturbing miracle. BUT any mom will tell you she'd go through it again joyfully because she loves her child MORE than all of the comfort she sacrificed in pregnancy and childbirth.

This is what compels church planters and missionaries. Families like the Waruhiu's and the Andersons and many others who've been sent by our church don't go because they are escaping. They are suffering. But they rejoice in suffering because they LOVE the kingdom of God more than the comforts of home. So, the suffering is worth it because of their hope of what it produces.

Paul is saying this is why he rejoices in suffering. Because he loves the gain of the Colossian church knowing Jesus MORE than a comfortable non-imprisoned life. In other words, you rejoice in sufferings for Christ when the gains of Jesus are worth more to you than the comforts of life.

So, before we go any further mercy church - is THIS how you feel about what you are seeing happen here in and through Mercy Church? Like are you rejoicing in the sacrifices you have made because you are seeing how God has used those sacrifices to reach people in our community and across the world?



Because some of you have sacrificed Greatly! Is your heart rejoicing? Or are you doing this only out of religious duty? If you don't feel joy at record attendance, baptisms, discipleship involvement, and people being sent to the mission field - time to sit before the Lord and go back to your first love. Others of you - you may enjoy it here, but have you sacrificed anything or are you just here for a pep rally experience?

Example: **9:30 service specific MPR & MNE:** To make room for our friends and neighbors to come hear the gospel with you, we need folks to move from the 9:30 to another service time. To move would inconvenience you. Will you rejoice in that? Because it creates chances for people to hear the gospel? One step.

What about sacrificing your social comfort to share the gospel with someone in our community? Or even befriend someone outside your friend circle? That means time, that means awkward meeting people, awkward spiritual conversations. Are you ready to sacrifice the comforts of life you love because you love & value people meeting Jesus MORE than you love and value comfort?

That's the mentality of the church that thrives. **Churches that thrive expect personal sacrifice, not personal comfort.** And the result, is people coming to know Jesus.

- I think of our middle and high school students out at the dream center one Saturday a month. That's

sacrifice. Could be doing other things with that time. Instead, sacrifice. Why? Because JESUS > Comfort. As a result, people are coming to know Jesus there.

- I think of Mike Flynn - sacrificing week after week leading our proven men's ministry to help men break free from porn addictions. This is a sacrifice. It's exhausting. Mike is old enough that he could be watching wheel of fortune each night with his awesome wife sandy and taking cooking classes or something. I don't know. But instead, he's sacrificing that to tackle a difficult dark subject and as a result...people are being set free from addictions!
- WHY? BECAUSE JESUS IS WORTH IT!

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

This is a pretty wild statement, right? Is Paul saying that Christ's afflictions lack something? That somehow the death of Christ on the cross was insufficient for the needs of his body, the church. That would be problematic on multiple levels, right? Not the least of which would be Jesus saying on the cross before he died "IT IS FINISHED."

Let's get clear on what he's saying. He's not saying Christ's afflictions are incomplete for salvation. The apostle Paul is



completely convinced that what Jesus did on the cross was sufficient payment for the sins of all those who believe. And that his resurrection is sufficient to give new life to all who believe. NOTHING needs to be added to Jesus' work of salvation.

What he seems to be saying is that what is lacking is the suffering that WILL HAPPEN when the gospel is proclaimed across the world. Jesus proclaimed the gospel and suffered. And told his disciples, anyone who followed him, that they would suffer. And it is through our sacrifices, our sufferings, that we fill up the world with the good news of Jesus. for the gospel to go forward the church, like Jesus, must sacrifice. Christ suffered to accomplish salvation; the church suffers to spread salvation.¹

Think about it...you didn't sacrifice to receive salvation. No, Christ sacrificed to accomplish salvation for you. But someone suffered, someone sacrificed, to spread the gospel of salvation to you.

And listen, I hope your experience here at Mercy is that you hear the gospel of GRACE preached over and over. And if you are not a Christian, or brand new to mercy, I'm not talking to you with what I'm about to say.

¹ This phrasing is attributed, I believe, to John piper. Though I don't have the source. But not new with me.

Mercy Fam - some of you have been coming to this church for a long time. And if you are honest, you've been a consumer. You have never really taken a step yet to sacrifice your time God gives you, your talents God gives you, or your money God gives you to see the gospel go forward through this church. And I am not trying to shame you that's never my goal. BUT - DO YOU FEEL like your faith is a sacrifice?? Is your life marked by sacrifice?

Look you'll never get judgment here. Instead, I want to say - it's time to take a step. Listen - ya'll we follow a man who was beaten & nails were driven through his hands & he was murdered on the cross. And he says...FOLLOW ME. What did we think we were signing up for? So, here's my question - What's your next step?

- You may not move to another country. BUT there is a step for you. Sharing the gospel with your friend?
- LEAVE WHAT YOU LOVE - your current group - For something greater - More people knowing Jesus.
- Give your Money - Does God need it? No. But he's decided the sacrifice of the church will be the way the gospel is spread. So, when things are healthy, the more we give the more the gospel is spread. Giving is just fuel for the mission.



- In fact - King David in 1 Chronicles 21 wanted to perform a ceremonial sacrifice to God as a way of repenting from his sin and asking God to stop a plague he had sent on Israel. David goes to the sacrifice spot & tells a guy who owns some animals that he will ONLY buy these animals at full price. The guy (Ornan) says no way you are the king this is an emergency just take them. David says no.
- “I will not take for the Lord what belongs to you or offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” For David, the idea of approaching God without offering something that cost him - was irreverent. It was unworthy. Is that how you approach your worship? You’ve received Jesus - and it cost you nothing. In response - what are you offering to the Lord? Not as quid pro quo, but as worship.

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,

He’s saying God gave him a specific commission. To make the word of God fully known to them. That’s Paul’s commission and it was given to him by God...look at the text... “for you.” God gave Paul an assignment to preach in order to bless & build up the church.

That’s what God’s assignments are always for. Listen God has given you an assignment as well. Every single believer has a commission from God. Not everything from heaven has your name on it. But something does. And the best way to figure out is to get into community, and start sacrificing your life so others can know about Jesus. And ask for help figuring out your commission.

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.

God had been unfolding his plan of redemption since Genesis 3. And now, it is fully revealed in Christ. But here is what is so cool. The glorious wealth of this mystery - is Christ...in you. HE...in YOU...is the hope of glory. The mystery is Christ...IN YOU.

This means that there should be something mysterious about Christians. Not mysterious like we are cultish, or we are mystics. But that our lives defy rational explanation. We are the people who have JOY in our suffering.

Like there is something that doesn’t compute about these Christians because they don’t live for the American dream. They give away their money and time for others. They give away status and power in order to serve others. Their agenda



is not their own. It's crazy. I don't know what's going on. It's a mystery!

Got a young family right now who is plenty successful by the world's standards. And they are wanting to give it all up to go to unreached people groups and share the gospel. WHAT EXPLANATION CAN YOU GIVE FOR SUCH A LIFE? Simple: **Jesus is worth it**. They are rejoicing in suffering. Suffering the loss of wealth & status. Because the gain of unreached peoples knowing Jesus is GREATER! That's the true riches.

28 We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Look at the goal and the means by which he gets there. Paul's goal, the church's goal - is to present everyone mature in Christ. That's the goal. That's my goal as your pastor. That you will GROW UP into the image of Jesus. That you take steps...each day and week and year so that years from now you are maturing in your faith, and YOU are helping others do the same.

And look at how he proclaims. By warning and teaching everyone. Sometimes as your pastor I feel I don't warn you enough. Specifically, against the god of comfort. But it is a powerful god in our western society. The American dream is the American pursuit of a secure, comfortable life. I've noticed particularly how powerful that pull, that dream, is here in the

charlotte area. We love money because we love what it can buy. It can buy us a FALSE sense of security.

And here's the thing...part of my job in proclaiming the gospel is to WARN YOU. Warn you against the comforts of this world becoming the thing you ACTUALLY worship and build your life around. And listen...part of you growing in Christ is RECEIVING the warning.

Joy in Jesus comes through sacrifice, not comfort.

Like I said, **there is a brand of Christianity that will never warn you about you**. Will never say the word sin and so you always leave feeling really good about you. That's empty and just not in touch with reality. Receive the warning - today a warning against comfort becoming what your life is built around. And CHOOSE the path of Jesus.

29 I labor for this, striving with his strength that works powerfully in me.

Here's what I'll tell you - and it's just one of those ways God works. As you labor for OTHERS to grow in Christ. See verse 28? As you pour yourself out for others...as you sacrifice for others...God actually strengthens your own faith. This is something I think many are missing.

You want to experience the strength of God working powerfully in you? You need to put yourself in a position



where you NEED the strength of God. And that place is...helping someone else grow as a follower of Jesus. It's sacrificing yourself to help someone else.

I'm telling you, if you want to experience a surge of spiritual strength...share the gospel with somebody! Nothing will strengthen you like trusting the Lord and giving them the good news of the gospel. And I promise you the day you stand down beside the baptism tank while they profess faith in Jesus...You will be so filled with the spiritual strength you will cry.

It's like you know how people say that in a wedding...when the bride is coming down the aisle, try to get a look at the groom? Cause that dude's face is priceless. That's similar to how I feel about the friend or family member beside the baptism tank. Almost always in tears because THEY'VE SEEN GOD MOVE! And they were a part of that story.

We've got a need for marriage mentors, for community group leaders, for middle & high school mentors...And that's just our programming. Not to mention the people in your life who just need somebody striving in God's strength FOR THEM. Paul keeps talking about that as he moves into talking about the church.

For I want you to know how greatly I am struggling for you, for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me in person. 2 I want their hearts to be encouraged...

As Paul struggles for the church in Colossae and for the church down the road in Laodicea (if you remember from week 1 that's a town about 9 miles south). As he struggles for them - as he suffers so that their faith will increase...he says two things that, as your pastor I pray is true of you here in our church.

He wants their hearts to be encouraged. And can I just say that's what I want for you guys? I want your hearts encouraged by the gospel...by what God HAS DONE FOR YOU and by what he is doing. Ask our worship team what kind of tone I want our church to have and all the time I say "celebratory." that's because we have the most encouraging news in human history. I want us to celebrate it!

The psalms are filled with celebration. Again, this is the problem with the frowning faithful. You should be encouraged! Lifted up! Man, the world is a hard, sin-riddled dark place. But the people of God? Man, we have a hope that shines in that darkness. A hope so powerful that your present struggle isn't worthy to be compared to it. So, when we GET IN HERE...listen to me...I'm a little off course but I gotta say it.

You need to be at church every Sunday. I don't need you. YOU need the saints. You need to be encouraged. And you need to



treat this almost like a worship workout. Hydrate beforehand, don't dress to impress, dress to worship. Ya'll from a high church are concerned I'm being irreverent. No. King David Danced in his priestly underoos before the Lord. JOYFULLY singing & Praising. Now - Don't do that here. But I want you to come to worship expectantly. I want you to worship FREELY. That LOOKS different for everyone. I genuinely want freedom and some of you come from less expressive cultures than others. Some of you are from New England and Some of you are from Jamaica and some from California and some from Ohio and some from South Asia. We want UNITY in our worship, not uniformity. So be free. BUT Nobody celebrates like this - dead pan.

So, I want it for you but what I also know is YOUR worship encourages your neighbors worship. So, you actually CONTRIBUTE to the spirit of encouragement of the hearts of others with the way you worship.

Paul also says...and joined together in love, so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery — Christ. 3 In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Ok he wants their hearts encouraged AND joined together in love. That might feel a little syrupy sweet to some of you. BUT what he's saying is that somehow by joining together in the Love of Jesus. This is why I think membership in a church

matters because its committing yourself to loving your brother or sister in good times and bad. You and I are simply made to know the love of Jesus in the context of community. He's going to say it again in chapter 3. Put on love which binds everything together in unity. The community of the church is where you learn AND experience the love of Jesus. What we are doing right here...man I hope it serves you well. I work my tail off to encourage you with God's word each week and I hope it serves you but its only HALF of what the church is to be about.

If you base your whole Relationship with God on sitting & consuming sermons...you will STUNT your SPIRITUAL GROWTH. You are made for & called to a life of JOYFUL SACRIFICE carried out in community with other believers.

Listen, let me give you an example from my life. 2018 - My father-in-law passed away really suddenly. It was awful. Courtney and I were in a community group here at Mercy. And the Urbaneks & Greers & Newtons & Ransones & Borders & Wiggins & Hopkins and others came over to our house while we were away with Courtney's family. They cleaned it and then they put scripture on sticky notes all over our house. Our home was covered by the word of God.

I could listen to 100 sermons and I'm not sure they would strengthen my faith the way those brothers and sisters did when we were hurting. Evidence - here we are 5.5 years later



& I still recall it. They sacrificed their time to serve and in doing so, my family was encouraged when we were in the absolute pit. And we experienced just a little more of the riches & treasures of knowing Christ. How? The people of God surrounded us with the word of God in a time we needed it most. Sacrificed their time. Changed our lives.

Closing

Jesus is worth it. Is your life marked by sacrificial joy? What step of sacrifice is he calling you to take?