

Paul's Ministry – Colossians 1:24-29
James Muldoon - Carey Baptist Church – 10 August 2008

In this morning's passage, Paul tells us three marks of his ministry. If this were a job description for a ministry opportunity, it would say something like this: "The successful candidate will: i suffer; ii serve; iii struggle." Perhaps that's not what we might be looking for ourselves!

i Suffer

v24 shows that the first mark of Paul's ministry is that he has had to suffer. And, writing as he is from prison, he is still suffering.

When Paul writes, "**I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions**" he does not mean that Christ's sufferings were not quite good enough. **v21-22** are enough to prove that. What he means is that the afflictions of Jesus' followers are the afflictions of Jesus himself. The Lord Jesus Christ shares in the afflictions and the sufferings of His people. **Acts 9:4-6** is a good example of that. It's comforting to know that when you are persecuted or rejected or sidelined or abused for Christ's sake, it is actually the afflictions of Christ that you are enduring. You are experiencing the closest fellowship with Christ when you suffer for him.

What Paul is suggesting is that there's almost a quota of suffering which must be endured by the church as a whole, by Christians throughout the whole of time. Every time a Christian suffers, that quota is getting more and more complete, until, finally, there will be nothing lacking. In the meantime suffering is inevitable. And yet, as Paul suffers, he can rejoice because that is one less piece of suffering to be endured by the church as a whole.

If we are faithful to the Lord, we will suffer. **II Timothy 3:12, Acts 14:22** and **Romans 8:17** all teach that. But when you suffer, remember that you are suffering the afflictions of Christ. You are entering into the closest fellowship with Christ there is. And with your suffering, there is one less piece of suffering to be endured by the church in general.

ii Serve

v25 shows that Paul regards himself as a servant of the church. All Christian workers should think of themselves in the same way. Are you a preacher, a crèche helper, an A&P Group leader, a mentor? Primarily you are a servant. Church is not about how you can be served. It is about how you can serve.

For Paul, there are two particular areas of service in which he is involved.

α' He serves by preaching the word of God fully (v25-28a)

Paul describes the word of God as a mystery here. It is something which could only be known if God reveals it, which is exactly what he has done. It's a mystery which is gloriously rich. And the mystery is... **"Christ in you, the hope of glory."** Every Christian is, as it were, a palace! We have the king living within us: Christ himself! That ought to give us goose-pimples! It's a present reality. But it gives a future promise too. Christ in you is the hope of glory. He guarantees that the day will come when each Christian will reach heaven.

That is the message which Paul preaches. No wonder **v28** starts off bluntly with the words, **"Him we proclaim"**. If the mystery is: **"Christ in you, the hope of glory"**, then we're going to preach him, aren't we? And we're going to go on preaching him to the end. Your task, Christian, is to proclaim him. You are doing well if you do that.

Only Christians can say that Christ is in them, though. If you're not a Christian, you're missing out. Thankfully, Jesus Christ still comes to take up residence in people's lives today. Repent of the things you've done wrong in your life. Trust in Jesus Christ, who died and rose to save people. If you do, he will come to live in you. And he will give you the hope of glory, the certainty of arriving one day in heaven.

β' He serves by caring for all God's people

In the Greek of **v28**, Paul uses the words **"every person"** three times. He cares for every one of God's people. He admonishes every person, straightening out wrong thinking. He teaches every person, explaining the word of God to them. And his ultimate aim is to present every person perfect in Christ: which will happen, so long as they persevere to the end (**v23**).

And we should be like him. Do you care for everyone at Carey, or just those who are like you? If you're like Paul, you will offer service to the church by caring for every person.

iii Struggle

In **v29**, Paul says that ministry is hard work. He labours. He struggles. It's demanding, draining, taxing, exacting stuff. And you know that from when you've prepared, say, a YPS lesson. Thankfully that's not the whole story. We can keep going because of God's energy which works powerfully within us. God energises us.

You must remember that. If you throw yourself into your ministry relying on your own skills and gifts and plans and ambitions, you will quickly be disappointed. Instead, you must rely on the Lord. It's His energy you need. It's His powerful working you require. Whatever you do, you must be prayerful. Whatever you do, you must plug yourself in, so to speak, so that the Lord's power is invigorating you.

And yet, the encouragement which this verse gives to us is that as we labour and struggle prayerfully for the Lord, He does give us His energising power. When we labour and struggle prayerfully at our God-given tasks we receive God-given power. What more do we need?