

### TO THIS END I LABOR

Colossians 1:24-2:5 (Key Verse: 1:29)

*“To this end I also labor, striving with all His energy working powerfully within me.”*

In today's passage we are going to learn from Apostle Paul how to serve in God's ministry and experience joy. In the key verse he describes this service as labor, we are therefore going to learn in what sense is the service to the Lord labor, and how we can experience joy while we labor in the work of the Lord. We are also going to learn in detail the purpose of this labor, what benefits it brings to the body of Christ Jesus, the church. Furthermore, Apostle Paul will take us through the right way to labor for the Lord, so that we do not deceive others and are not deceived by others through laboring according to our own ways. May God have mercy on us all today to receive one word, make a decision of faith to labor for the Lord.

The passage today begins with Apostle Paul filled with joy, in **verse 24a** he said: *“Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you”* When he wrote this, he was in house arrest in Rome, so when he mentioned rejoice one could have thought that perhaps in a few days he will be released and set free. Finally, he would be able to go back to his hometown, reconnect with his old friends and family. This is what typically gives people joy today, passing an exam, getting an increase or promotion at work, reconnecting with our family, friends. Basically being free to do at least one additional thing in one's life. However, this is not what brought joy to Apostle Paul, rather he was joyful for the suffering that he bore for the sake of the gentiles, he was joyful for the suffering that he bore for the sake of the Colossian believers. He said: *“Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you.”*

As we understand it, suffering is not something that brings one joy, for it is associated with pain and difficulty. And indeed, during Apostle Paul's ministry he has experienced many sufferings, he was persecuted, almost stoned to death. He is in prison now, because of his decision of faith to be used to spread the gospel to gentile believers. In **Acts 9:15-16** it says: *“But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. /I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”* After Apostle Paul's encounter of Jesus Christ, his life changed, he suffered greatly for the name of Jesus. Now from today's passage we learn that suffering for the Lord is nothing to be compared to other sufferings, though one might go through pain and difficulty, there is joy in suffering for the Lord. There is joy in suffering for the Lord, for it brings good to others, good to the Lord's people. Apostle Paul was joyful, for his suffering could bring good to the Colossian believers, it brought salvation to the gentile believers.

When I think about this, I am reminded of the UBF missionaries from South Korea, though we hear of painful testimonies of how they suffer in their labor of self-supporting ministry in African countries such as South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, it was quite amazing how they would be filled with so much joy when we meet them, their smile, just says so a lot about their sense of joy. Indeed, there is joy in suffering for the Lord.

Furthermore, in **verse 24b** Apostle Paul continued and said: *“and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.”* Here Apostle Paul explained further the purpose of his suffering or work for the Lord. First, afflictions refer to the sufferings that Jesus Christ endured in his ministry, this does not include the suffering and death on the cross, which is complete, but rather it refers to his ministering to the people from region to region. This affliction is lacking, left to be fulfilled by the church which is the body of Christ himself. So, Apostle Paul here said: *“I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking”* meaning he offered his body as instrument to be used in fulfilling what is lacking, to be used to bring salvation to gentile believers. Furthermore, Apostle Paul, did all this not for himself, but for the sake of Christ's body, for the sake of the church. Very easily we can do things in the church for ourselves, to be seen as a good, hardworking, faithful and kind person. But here Apostle Paul said, he did it for the body of Christ, for the church. I believe this is what gave him this great endurance and joy, for he did it for the Lord and not for his own selfish reasons. This is what it means to labor for the Lord.

After Apostle Paul had shared with the Colossian believers the purpose of labor for the Lord, he went further and gave them details on how to labor for the Lord, how to serve God's ministry as believers in Christ Jesus. He gave them points he considered as he served the ministry of God among gentile believers. What were those points?

First, let us look at **verse 25-26**: *“I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people.”* In serving in God’s ministry, Apostle Paul continuously reminded himself that he was servant of God, not by his will but by the will of God, to present the word of God in its fulness to the gentile believers. So, in everything, he sought guidance from the Lord, through prayer and meditation, he did not teach the word of God according to his own intelligence or wisdom. Apostle Paul understood that the word is a mystery, that can only be known by revelation from God and not intuition. So, as servants of God we should continuously pray, read God’s word daily and meditate so that God in his own wisdom can reveal it to us, and enable us to grow, know him more and share with others. One important I want to change this year, is to dedicate time daily to observe the word of God together with my family. Please pray for us to be faithful with this.

Second, let us look at **verse 27**: *“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* Here Apostle Paul reminded the Colossian believers about the mystery of God, which is Christ Jesus. Jesus is the main point of the Christian faith; all hope of glory is in Christ Jesus. Our hard work and knowledge are meaningless without Christ Jesus, for Christ is the power of God. Through Christ we are saved from the power of sin and death. Apostle Paul emphasized this especially to the Colossian believers due to the rise of false teachers among them who through fine sounding arguments suggested that we need more than Jesus Christ to be saved.

Third, let us look at **verse 28**: *“He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.* Here Apostle Paul, further emphasized preaching Jesus Christ, not our own ideas or opinions, not even entertaining stories to make things sound nice, but we must preach Jesus Christ. For Jesus is the power of God, only Jesus can change a man, we can tell stories and entertain, but we cannot turn a sinner. Only Jesus has power to turn a sinner to repentance and salvation, fully mature in Christ Jesus. Furthermore, Apostle Paul emphasized that we must share the gospel with everyone, the gospel is for everyone, and we should present it with all wisdom, admonishing and teaching each and everyone. Very often we fall into the trap of approaching certain individuals, which by our own wisdom think they will easily accept our message. However, Apostle Paul says we must go to everyone. Very soon we will be having orientation, and during this time there is a big drive in our ministry to go to campus and invite first years to our ministry. May God have mercy on us to go to everyone, follow God’s leading and not our own ideas.

Fourth, let us look at **key verse 29**: *“To this end I also labor, striving with all His energy working powerfully within me.”* As we established and seen from Apostle Paul’s testimony, serving God’s ministry constitute suffering. In our ministry God has given us the mission to serve campus students through 1 to 1 Bible studies and testimony writing. As a Bible teacher it can be taxing to have to prepare Bible studies and meet with the leaders on Tuesday evenings, meet with the brothers during the week, prepare message, write testimonies. It becomes even more challenging to make time to spend with family, especially nowadays, Ona wants attention, she wants to play. So, in a way, just doing the basics is a struggle. With my own strength it can be very tiring, that is why Apostle Paul is urging me and you today that we must strive with Christ’s energy working powerfully within us. To labor in God’s ministry, we need the energy from Christ Jesus, with our own we cannot do it, rather we will get tired, burn out and become bitter. We must come to God, depend on God; for God’s energy is unlimited. As we labor in the Lord, let us strive with his energy and serve him joyfully.

Fifth, let us look at **verse 2:1-3**: *“I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. / My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ”* Here Apostle Paul outlines how he is always praying for the Colossian believers and those at Laodicea, even though he has not met them personally. He is always praying that they may have a good relationship among each other, a relationship of love, and unity. Because we are human, we will all have differences, weaknesses and strengths, but as Christian believers we must differentiate ourselves from the world by accepting one another and love one another, just as Christ loves the church. When we do this, we will grow and experience Christ Jesus personally. Yes, some people are very difficult, but just as Apostle Paul labored in serving the gentile ministry and experienced great

joy, we too will experience great joy when we accept one another with love, bear with one another, just as Christ accepted us as sinners.

Finally, in **verse 2:3** it says: “...in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” in Christ Jesus are hidden treasures, the most valuable treasures in the entire universe, and these treasures are with him in the form of wisdom and knowledge. At first glance, wisdom, and knowledge sound abstract and of no practical value. But actually, it is through Christ’s wisdom and knowledge that the Lord created the universe and everything in it. So, by securing this wisdom and knowledge, we can be used mightily for the Lord’s gospel ministry in this world. We can be used mightily to save many wondering souls, on campus, at work, our hometowns. Today many young people are suffering from all sorts of things, depression, anxiety, many are trapped in lives of sin. It seems difficult to free them, nothing in this world seems to work. What they need is men and women of God, filled with the wisdom and knowledge of God, to come to them and reveal the mystery of God, Jesus Christ who has power to free them and grant them salvation. May God have mercy on us, help us to mediate on him daily so that his hidden treasures may be revealed to us.

### Conclusion

From today’s passage, we have learnt that as Christian believers our purpose is to continue in the afflictions of Christ Jesus that are lacking, by giving our bodies unto Christ to be used as his instruments. We have also learnt that there is indeed great joy when we sincerely labor for the Lord for the sake of Christ’s body. We have also learnt how to effectively labor for the Lord, as Christian believers. First, we must remember that we are servants of God, called by him, for his will and purpose. So, we must always seek his leading and guidance and not labor according to our own knowledge and intelligence. Second, we have learnt that Jesus Christ is the main point of our Christian faith, everything points to him, our hard work and knowledge is meaningless without Christ Jesus.

Third, we have learnt that we must proclaim Jesus Christ, admonish, and teach everyone and present them as mature in Christ Jesus. The gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone, we must not be selective, by sharing his word only with those we like. Fourth, our labor should fully depend on the energy that Christ Jesus powerfully provides in us, and not depend on our energy for we will burn out. Fifth, we learnt that we must encourage our sheep and one another to have a good relationship, love one another like Christ loves the church, accept each other’s differences so that we can experience the mystery of God, Christ Jesus personally. Finally, we have learnt that all wisdom and knowledge is in Christ, whom through him God created the heavens and earth. So, we must come to him in prayer for wisdom and knowledge, so that we can be used mightily in this world.

As the year begins, let us surrender our lives to Jesus, offer our bodies to be used as instruments for God’s will and purpose, labor for the Lord and like Apostle experience the joy of the Lord.