

What is Lacking...

1. We are called to SUFFER for Christ.

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, (Col. 1:24)

This is one of the strangest and most confusing verses in the entirety of the New Testament.

What does Paul mean by saying that ‘in his sufferings he is filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions?’”

A quick ‘devotional’ reading of this verse in the English text is shocking.

- Is Paul saying that Christ’s suffering and affliction on Calvary was not sufficient?
- How could Christ’s work be incomplete, didn’t Jesus say on the cross, “it is finished?”

What is the Apostle Paul trying to say?

As I mentioned in my study of the Greek text on Thursday night there are three elements involved in understanding the text of scripture.

- First, what does the original text actually say.
- Two, how does the context of scripture help us understand.
- Three, what is the theological meaning.

A literal translation of the text in the English ... Paul says,

“I am filling up what is lacking in the affliction of Christ in my flesh on behalf of His body which is the church”

What does Paul mean by saying he is “filling up” what is lacking?

In the book of Revelation, we find this interesting phrase:

Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. (Rev. 16:19)

There is a recurring principle throughout the Bible, a principle which God follows when in judgment and punishment.

... the metaphor we see in the bible is a filled cup ... that is what see here in the Revelation passage.

You see, in the Bible there are some occasions when the judgment of God seems to be immediate and swift.

... and there are other occasions where it seems that God withholds judgment for this unbelievably long period of time.

... You need to remember that when God's judgment seems to be instantaneous, it really only "seems" instantaneous because we (the reader) are coming into the story late.

For example, if you started reading the bible in the book of Joshua you would immediately see God commanding Israel to destroy all of Jericho

... but if that is all you knew about the Bible you wouldn't really understand what was happening because you've come into the story late.

Now if you started reading the Bible in Genesis (before you get to Joshua) you would have already read this ...

¹³ God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. ... ¹⁶ "Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." (Gen. 15:13, 16)

... So, when God is commanding the Jewish nation to destroy Jericho he is doing so, after having waited 400+ years ...

... waiting until (as God told Abram) the "iniquity of the Amorites was complete."

Jesus later gives a similar warning to the Jews.

Listen to what Jesus said,

29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,³⁰ and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'³¹ So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.³² Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. (Matt. 23:29-32)

God says to the Pharisees, “Keep on doing what you are doing, and you will keep filling up the measure of guilt (or iniquity).

Even Paul, in Romans 2, when writing about certain sinners who were taking advantage of God’s leniency, by hardening their hearts and refusing to repent ...

... Paul says, “you are storing up wrath” and one day God’s judgment is coming.

5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, (Rom. 2:5)

In 1 Thessalonians Paul says something very similar to some wicked Jews who were keeping him from leading the Gentiles to Christ.

They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men,¹⁶ hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. (1 Thess. 2:15-16)

The first thing I want you to understand is that when Paul talks about “filling up” he is referring to this “cup of wrath.”

Paul is saying that “his sufferings” ... the beatings and punishments that he is getting for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ ...

... every time the wicked persecute him, then are just adding to the cup of God’s wrath (that when it is full) judgment will come.

God the Father is so merciful, that even the crucifixion of Jesus Christ did not “fill the cup” ...

... God was still extending mercy to the Jews ... and the Gentiles ... and all the nations.

And notice why Paul is rejoicing in his sufferings.

... because Paul's sufferings are ...

for the sake of his body, that is, the church,

The "cup of God's wrath" isn't being filled just because people are being wicked ... but also because that wickedness is being directed against the Church, the body of Christ, God's people.

Saul of Tarsus was killing, imprisoning, and punishing Christians and what did Jesus ask him when he appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus ...

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Listen to what Jesus said in the parable of the unjust judge:

Now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? (Lk. 18:7)

But there is one more thing.

Paul says this

in my sufferings ... in my flesh (sarx) ... for the sake of his body (soma)

Paul has said that when God's people suffer at the hands of the wicked, that suffering "fills up" the cup that will ultimately bring God's wrath ...

... because God is going to avenge His church.

... but in these 3 phrases we can see not only WHAT is happening but WHY it is happening.

The wicked were stoning, beating, imprisoning, persecuting Paul ... they really wanted to do these things to Jesus ...

... but Jesus is no longer on earth!

... Jesus is at the right hand of the Father!

They can't get to Jesus ... but they can get to Paul ...

... and you ... and me

... And Paul says that this is for Christ.

Look what Paul wrote to the Philippian church ...

29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, (Phil. 1:29)

We are called to SUFFER and from Paul's example we learn that we should "rejoice" that we have been "granted" to SUFFER for Christ's sake.

... this is part of what it means to be a part of God's family.

Paul didn't seek suffering but neither did he simply tolerate it.

... never forget that Paul and Silas were singing and praising God in the Philippian jail.

Paul understood what we must NEVER FORGET ... suffering is only temporary.

17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (Rom. 8:16-17)

2. The MYSTERY has been revealed to us.

²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Col. 1:26-27)

This word “mystery” is used 27 in the New Testament.

In Paul’s day this word was used by the “mystery religions” about secrets that were revealed by the gods to the “inner circle” of initiated followers.

Paul is using this word because the concept is familiar to his audience.

... in fact, part of the rhetoric of these false teachers in Colossae was that they were saying they “knew” something that Paul and other believers did not know...

... because they were “special” or “more holy” or “initiated” ... part of God’s inner circle.

Paul says, “*Not true, the mystery that was hidden for ages is now revealed to ALL the saints of God.*”

And here is the mystery ...

3. The hope of glory is CHRIST IN YOU

... this is a miracle, and it is filled with glorious riches!

This is one of the greatest truths in all of the Bible, and yet most Christians miss the wonder of it.

Let me remind you of Paul’s description of Jesus in verses 15-19.

- He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
- He created all things, and He holds all things together
- He is the beginning the firstborn of creation
- All the fullness of God the Father dwell in Him

And now Paul says ... this same Jesus is IN you!

No other religion or religious leader makes such a claim.

No other movement teaches that the founder has taken up residence *in* his followers.

... Muhammad does not indwell Muslims.

... Buddha does not inhabit Buddhists.

But here we are told that Christ dwells in us and Paul says, this is the hope of Glory ...

In Exodus when Moses was on the top of Mount Sinai and God was giving him the law the bible says that to the Israelites the GLORY OF THE LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain...

When Moses came down off the mountain, HIS FACE **RADIATED with God's glory.**

God's glory was on display

In Isaiah 6 when the prophet saw the glory of God he fell on his knees and worshipped...

... In Luke 2 when the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds of Bethlehem they glorified and praised God.

God's glory prompted worship

What I'm trying to illustrate is this ...

These are not the days of Moses, Isaiah, or the Shepherds ...

We don't see the presence of God descending on a mountain top or hovering over the holy of holies.

So ... what hope is there that this unbelieving world will ever see the glory of God in their lives?

Jesus tells us:

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:14-16)

They mystery of the Ages is that Christ is in You the hope of Glory and now you are called to reveal that mystery to the surrounding world.

How do we do that?

... Well Paul tells us in the last 2 verse of this first chapter.

²⁸ We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. ²⁹ For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. (Col. 1:28-29)

Please hear my heart today.

Some of you are going to work tomorrow and work in a place where you feel all alone ... in fact you are dreading tomorrow ... there is a knot in your stomach ...

CHRIST IS IN YOU ... you are the hope of glory in that place.

... would you consider that fact that God has strategically placed you there because He wants HIS light to shine in that place.

I know it's hard ... I've been there ...

... and here is what I have learned ... Just because it's hard doesn't mean God is not in it.

There may be a person hearing me, you love your spouse, but you know that right now they are not where they should be in their relationship with God.

... anyone can abandon ship.

But you must not forget CHRIST IS IN YOU ... you are the hope of glory in your home.

Whether it is job, school, relationship, situation ... whatever ...

... no matter how awkward, uncomfortable, or uncertain you are feeling right now ...

CHRIST IS IN YOU ... and you are the hope of glory where you live, learn and work ...

Would you trust that God is wanting to display his splendor and majesty and beauty through you?

Finally, perhaps you are not saved, and you are miserable, discouraged, and downcast.

... in the depth of your soul you are ready to throw in the towel.

The cause of your heartbreak and sorrow is not your environment, it's not what is around ...

... the cause of your misery is **WHAT IS NOT IN YOU** ...

You have never acknowledged Christ to be your Lord and Savior.

But if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead ... **YOU WILL BE SAVED!**

If you will believe that, and act upon it ... **CHRIST WILL BE IN YOU ... AND YOU WILL BE FREE!**