

Mystery Revealed

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[0 : 00] We all know what it's like to be disappointed. If you don't know what that's like, and you haven't known me long enough, but sometimes, I mean, usually when you're disappointed, it's you just kind of bump on the road, and you go on with your life, continue with whatever you were doing.

But sometimes disappointments can be a little bit more dampening. Disappointments can turn to discouragement, discouragement, doubt, despair. You think of maybe a woman who has always dreamed of getting married and having a family, having children, and then she's disappointed repeatedly, and that eventually leads to discouragement and doubt.

Maybe I'll never get married. Maybe no one wants to marry someone like me. Or I think of a man who dreamed of this grand, fulfilling, lucrative career, but is repeatedly set back, is disappointed, and is discouraged, and that leads to self-doubt and despair.

Maybe it was never meant to be. Maybe I just don't have it. And for the Christian, too, in the Christian life, this kind of cycle of discouragement, this disappointment, discouragement, and doubt can happen.

It could creep in. A zealous Christian who enthusiastically evangelizes his friends and shares the gospel with his neighbors is repeatedly disappointed and then discouraged and then begins to doubt.

[1 : 39] Maybe my friends will never come to faith. Maybe they're right. My faith is ridiculous. Or a Christian places her hope in Jesus Christ for all her sufferings in her life, but then eventually, as sufferings mount up, she loses loved ones, she loses her job.

Disappointments lead to discouragement and doubt. Maybe God doesn't love me. Maybe God isn't in control. Maybe Christianity isn't true at all.

The Ephesians, at the time of Paul's writing, were facing a similar cycle of disappointment and discouragement and possibly even doubt. And Paul, because the reason for that is Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, who was to them the father of faith, is now imprisoned.

In fact, if you kind of compare this account, his letters to the timeline in the book of Acts, it seems that Paul's been in prison for maybe three years up to this point, possibly even four.

And so they're beginning to lose heart. Did Christ really triumph? Is Christ really victorious? Then why so much suffering for God's people? Why is this great apostle to the Gentiles imprisoned now going on three, possibly four years?

[3 : 03] Is Paul really an apostle of Jesus? We haven't heard much from him. He's been in prison all these years. So recognizing this, as Paul writes this letter, and he begins to talk about how he is a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of the Gentiles, he feels the need to address the situation and to offer some consolation to the people in Ephesus.

And that's his goal. Verse 13 is really where he completes the thought that he begins in verse 1, where he says, for this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and then he later goes, he digresses from that, and then he begins, well, he really completes that prayer starting in verse 14, where he resumes that line of thought starting in verse 1.

But that whole verse 2 to 13 is a digression intended to explain and to console the Ephesian believers. And so he says in verse 13, so I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

And that's really Paul's main point. His point is that we can, as believers, take heart in the midst of suffering because the glorious mystery of Christ has been made known to us and is being made known through us.

And that's the point that he wants to teach us. through this passage. And the three main points that I'm going to go through in this is the revelation of the mystery in verses 1 to 6, and the proclamation

of the mystery in verses 7 to 12, and finally the consolation of the mystery in verse 13.

[4 : 30] So Paul first talks about the revelation of the mystery in verses 1 to 6. He begins, for this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles.

So for this reason, really, is connecting it back to the previous passage in chapter 2 where he talked about how God gloriously brought together Gentiles and Jews, his saving work, uniting them, reconciling to one another and uniting them to God.

And so that's the reason why Paul's beginning this sentence, but he doesn't complete that, like I said, until the next passage in verse 14 where he prays for them, for this reason, I bow my knees before the Father.

That's how he begins, verse 14. And so in verses 2 to 13, he's digressing in order to console people who are doubting, maybe discouraged by his ongoing imprisonment. But as he talks about his imprisonment, it's really interesting because Paul doesn't seem despondent at all.

In fact, he sounds perhaps a little bit defiant because see how he describes his imprisonment. He says, I appalled the prisoner of Christ Jesus.

[5 : 34] You would expect Paul to say, Paul, a prisoner of Caesar. Paul, a prisoner of Nero. But Paul says, no, I am a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

Even in his imprisonment, as he's suffering on behalf of the Gentiles, as he's suffering for Christ's sake, he recognizes whom he belongs to, who owns him, who is his Lord, who is his master.

It's not Caesar. It's the Lord Jesus. He says, I'm a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Unless the new Gentile believers question his apostleship and his ministry on their behalf, he now elaborates on that in the following verses, in verses two to three.

Assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.

So Paul sees himself as a steward of God's grace, someone who has been entrusted with God's grace. And the word stewardship really is derived from the same Greek word that was used earlier in chapter one, verse nine, to speak of God's salvation plan, the plan, word for plan.

[6 : 48] It refers to kind of a house plan or a blueprint, so to speak. And it's said that God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

And there's several other words in this passage that occur which are all the same variations of that Greek root, that Greek word. So for example, in 18 to 20, he describes the household of God, right? It's related to the steward, steward, and a building that is being built up upon the cornerstone of Christ and the foundation of apostles and prophets. So all of those words are really kind of related words.

They come from the same Greek words, the building, household, plan, steward. And so what Paul is trying to paint a picture of is here is that we're all, God is our father.

He is the heavenly head of households, so to speak. And we are all the family of God. We are the household of God. And he has a plan. He has a house plan for his family.

[7 : 50] He has a family plan. And so then Paul, and Paul is a steward of that household, meaning he's a house servant. So all of these languages he's using to emphasize the fact that we are the family of God and Paul's part of this family business.

He's a steward of that house. He's a servant of that house. And this stewardship, this entrustment of God's grace in Christ Jesus, Paul refers to as the mystery which was made known to him by revelation.

That's how it was made known to him. That means Paul wasn't sitting under a boated tree somewhere and then conjured it up himself, reaching enlightenment. That means Paul didn't get it out of his own mind.

That means someone else revealed it to him. God himself revealed it to him. It was made known to him by revelation, this mystery. He's not the originator of the mystery. He's a steward.

He's a keeper. He's a guarder. He's been entrusted with this mystery. And he spells out exactly what this mystery is in verses 4 to 6 because his intention is not to become this shaman-like figure who withholds all the mysteries to himself and guards it and dispenses it as he wills.

[8 : 57] No, he wants everyone to understand this mystery. So he tells us exactly what it is in verses 4 to 6. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy

apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. So the content of the mystery is this.

In Christ Jesus and through his gospel which is the good news that Jesus lived and died and rose again to reconcile undeserving sinners like us, rebellious sinners like us to God and that in that gospel in that good news of Jesus the Gentiles not just Jews but also the Greeks also the Gentiles people from all nations are brought together in God are now fellow heirs of the kingdom and therefore heirs to the inheritance the heavenly inheritance of our God the Father and for that reason we are also members of the same body.

It speaks of membership again as he did in the last passage from last week. Paul's very emphatic about this truth in verse 6 the words heirs members and partakers in Greek all have the same prefix that means with or together and so if you were to kind of translate that more literally to convey the rhetorical effect of what Paul's trying to say is he's saying this mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs fellow members of the same body fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel and that's a beautiful truth an amazing truth it's that across ethnicities across race across all class boundaries all those who entrust themselves to Jesus for salvation have been united in one body reconciled to each other and together reconciled to God we who are once far off have been brought near and that's the mystery and how God accomplished this through his son

Jesus Christ has had been a mystery in the former generations as Paul makes clear in this passage it was not made known to the sons of men in other generations but it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit and the apostles and prophets is when he mentions that Paul is not referring to anyone with an apostolic or prophetic gift so there are people with so-called apostolic gift who become missionaries basically in frontier situations preaching the gospel where the gospel has not been preached and there are people who have prophetic gifts and people who and if the gift is strong enough we recognize them as prophets but Paul's not speaking of those prophets and apostles just any member of the church who has apostolic prophetic gifts he's talking about those people like he mentioned in chapter 2 verse 20 who had a foundational and authoritative and normative role in establishing the church and proclaiming the gospel once and for all for all future generations he's talking about those prophets and apostles so that's why he said in verse 20 of chapter 2 that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets he's referring to the same group of people that he mentioned there and it's surprising to me as I'm thinking about what Paul is saying here because I think as Paul's as this letter is being read in the public worship service setting of Ephesus it would raise not a few eyebrows to read this section of the letter and the reason for that is this because he mentions mystery and that word that concept was prevalent throughout that culture and throughout that time there were many religions in the ancient

[12 : 44] Greco-Roman context of mystery religions that talked about and boasted about the mysteries to which they initiate their followers their converts for example the cult of ISIS claimed to hold these mysteries and the most prominent cult of this time in Ephesus the cult of Artemis was also boasted of mysteries and these cults held their mysteries over their adherents using their secret rights and various stages of initiation both to tantalize people and lure them deeper and deeper on the one hand and then to leverage on the other hand to manipulate people for their purposes I mean just the fact that they have secrets at all is suspicious why are you holding secrets because biblically speaking really only good reason to keep a secret is for the love of neighbor keeping confidentiality for the sake of love for a neighbor or brother or sister that's really the only biblical reason for keeping a secret why in the context of worship would someone withhold those truths it's not biblical

I mean even in the context of Exodus Moses goes out and by the hand of the almighty God performs miracles out in the open but it's the Egyptian magicians who replicate them in a limited inferior way by their so-called secret arts even today there are many cults and fraternities that utilize elements of mystery and secrets to attract and retain adherence and if you think about it it's really ingenious because if someone is even remotely curious about it interested in it you can tell them well you can't find out unless you join right and if anyone is at all dissatisfied with what they're getting you could tell them well it's because you haven't really been fully initiated yet there's more you just don't know you have to enter the mysteries so this way they create an illusion of profundity and they keep their cards close to their chest until people are too deeply entrenched and invested

to leave and by requiring their initiates to keep secrets they also create this full community right because what they're saying basically is we are in the know we know this secret they don't they're the outsiders they don't know we know and that's how people

I mean infiltrate communities they're driving a wedge between them their adherence and their current communities and relationships no keep this from them this is just for us between us if you've ever been attracted to things like this were drawn by curiosity I urge you to be vigilant and to know that in all likelihood communities that emphasize these kind of secrets mysteries so to speak will probably in all likelihood compete with the church and vie for your allegiance to the Lord and so Paul's use of the language of mystery would have been curious it would have made the Ephesians perk up but Paul's not using that just to be relevant or to divulge a mystery that only a select few will know as other religions did but in order to issue a decisive challenge to those mystery religions so what is Paul saying here you have mysteries well guess what Christ is the ultimate mystery you have mysteries in your religion because Christ is the definitive revelation of God and we have no need for inferior additional pseudo mystery because

Christ is sufficient and his gospel has been revealed once and for all that's what Paul is doing he's issuing this challenge to those people and there is an institution that's going to far outlast any of those and has far lasted and will outlast all those false religions and that's the family right and the church bonded by the blood of Christ is an even stronger permanent enduring family and that's why Paul uses that language of family here head of household is God he has a family plan to build a household and Paul is one of those house servants as I mentioned earlier and no stages of initiation once you give your life to him believe in Jesus repent and believe and are baptized in his name you are immediately you're a full initiate with all the benefits and rights and privileges of sonship in Jesus and his family that's what we have and

Christ is all that we have and he's more than enough that's the revelation of the mystery and then having told us about this decisive revelation of the mystery Paul tells us about his proclamation of the mystery how he was called to the ministry of the gospel the proclamation of the gospel he says in verse seven of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gifts of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power so Paul describes himself as a minister and the word minister especially there's a city counselor that lives in our neighborhood and I don't know him that well and he doesn't know me that well but he knows that I'm a pastor and so whenever he sees me he goes minister reverend and so for him that's being deferential it's an honorific but if you think about it the word actually the minister means servant that's what the word means and when

[18:32] Paul says he describes himself a minister he's not pointing to his great status but he's pointing to the reality that he serves a lord that he has a master so he's pointing to Jesus and not to himself when he says he's a minister of this gospel and he as the servant charged with a very specific task and that's of this gospel I was made a minister he says in verse 7 he's a servant in the cause of the gospel and this gospel has a specific content he doesn't talk about a gospel he doesn't talk about any gospel he's talking about the gospel that he mentioned in verse 6 of this gospel I was made a minister and that means by extension all of us all the saints who are charged with the minister of the gospel we have to recognize that we don't get to preach another gospel as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:16 woe to me if I do not preach the gospel we don't get to change the gospel we don't get to follow the fact of our culture and preach what we prefer we must preach the gospel the same gospel that

Paul preached and that's the calling of the church that's the calling of every single minister and that's what we labor as a preaching team to preach the gospel every week and Paul explains that this charge he received was according to the gift of God's grace earlier he said in chapter 2:8 that our salvation was by grace through faith and that it is the gift of God now Paul is saying that not only our salvation is God grace and throughout his letters Paul frequently connects his ministry with God's grace and that's why Paul writes here in verse 7 that he was made a minister he didn't become a minister he didn't attain to the rank of ministry he was made a minister and the implied agent of that passive verb is God not any human being not a human institution God made him a minister and how did

God do it he says by the working of his power almost an identical phrase is used in chapter 11:9 when he said that God raised Christ from the dead by the working of his great might he says that same power with which God raised Christ from the dead he uses that to form to shape to make ministers that's amazing because that means we need to pray hard for all our pastoral interns

because yeah sure we can assess them we can train them but God has to make them it's those whom God has made and called that we affirm for the ministry and while Paul has his particular ministry and while pastors vocational ministers have their particular ministry this doesn't just apply to them it applies to all believers and the reason is this because in later in chapter 4 verse 7 the same book

Paul writes that grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift and later in that same chapter chapter 4 verse 12 Paul writes that God gave the ministers of the gospel to equip the saints for the work of ministry the same word ministry that's used here to describe Paul's ministry in a real sense then every saint every single one of believers every single one of you every Christian is a minister well this doesn't mean of course that you know vocational pastors and other church members minister in the exact same way right Paul observes that distinction elsewhere but each one must serve according to the measure of Christ's gift that he or she has received we all have to be ministering because all of us have received a measure of Christ's gift and this to

Paul is a wonderful grace that's why he marvels at it and all of us can marvel at the fact that God calls us and he wants to use us and so he says to me in verse eight though I am the very least of all the saints this grace was given to preach the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ the word translated very least here is actually a made up word Paul most superlative so it's like least right so it's like you think you're humble you're the least among all the saints guess what I'm least right Paul saying he's the least the very least of all the saints I mean it's and Paul I don't think this is false humility I don't think he's feigning humility I think this is a genuine confession of his heart because he's grateful he's him a steward of this great mystery it's really the most emphatic way that [23 : 58] Paul can say that and so that's something that we should also marvel at God wants to use us God made us stewards ministers of the gospel if you think about it more it's a further grace it is more amazing because God could save us and choose not to have anything more to do with us but there's amazing grace seen in the fact that God not only forgives Peter who denied him three times but he reinstates him to serve as leader among the apostles isn't there Charles Spurgeon once expressed a similar sentiment he writes I have always felt in my own mind that it was one of the clearest proofs that I had God's forgiveness of my many sins when I was trusted to preach the gospel I should think that if a prodigal came back to his father the old gentleman would kiss him and receive him and rejoice greatly over him but the next

Saturday the market day the old gentleman would say oh I cannot send young William to market they'll be putting temptation have is thine William you stay at home with me he might not let him see all that he meant but he would say to himself dear boy he is hardly fit for that great trust I love him but still I hardly dare trust him as much as that but see what my Lord did with me when I came home to him as a poor prodigal he said here is my I bless his name that I have not preached anything else and I do not mean to begin to do so end quote I really hope you feel the same way Charles Spurgeon did and as I do we get to serve God we get to we're saints of God and ministers of the gospel it's so glorious it's so wonderful that this ministry has been entrusted to us we have not in the least been trustworthy we have not been worthy of the sacred trust we have sinned against rebelled against we failed in more ways than we can count and yet

God doesn't say here I've saved you now stay here and don't mess anything up but instead God says no here here's what's most precious to me here's my gospel preach it share it tell the whole world about it isn't that amazing that should make us so eager to serve to want to share this gospel with all that we come across and what Paul proclaimed and what we get to proclaim also is this gospel which he describes here in verse eight as the unsearchable riches of Christ now he doesn't mean riches that belong to Christ he means that Christ is the riches it's the construction and Christ himself is the content of the riches that's what he says similarly in Colossians 1:27 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 as a church we don't merely seek spiritual gifts from Christ Christ is our ultimate gift he is our ultimate treasure that we get to enjoy and church is really a there's no trace untrace you can't find the limits of it you can't contain it you can't identify it it's unknowable it's incomprehensible it's unsearchable and his riches are unsearchable that's great because some of us I mean I think some of you guys know what it's like to live in scarcity or have experienced it at some point you know what it feels like to feel in your wallet or know that your bank account is getting close to zero or you know what it feels like to overdraw on an account or to get

into credit card debt and sometimes we as

Christians think of God and his grace and his mercy in the same way we worry that we've been drawing too much from his account of God's grace and we worry that soon enough I'm going to hit that credit limit and I'm going to be slammed with this insurmountable debt we think our problems are too big our past is too dark our sins are too grave for God sure maybe he will save us but there's definitely no chance that he can use someone like me Christ his mercies his grace can never be overdrawn that's what he said it's unsearchable you can't trace it to its limits there is always enough you can't count it or number it you can't ever exhaust it there's mercy enough in [30 : 01] Jesus Christ for you there's grace enough in Jesus Christ for you every single one of you that's why he describes it as unsearchable bottomless illimitable immeasurable unfathomable inexhaustible so as a church let's commit to this together we're fellow beggars in need of God's grace let's go to Christ to his unsearchable riches and receive freely there will always be enough and that's the glorious task of the church the proclamation that was entrusted to Paul and now to us as the church the unsearchable riches of Christ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created things who created all things and what is the purpose or goal of this entrustment this proclamation of the gospel why do we proclaim the gospel Paul tells us in verses 10 to 12 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of

God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places this was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him the goal of this proclamation is God is the ultimate agent of this display and we are the intermediate agents instruments that God uses to show this manifold wisdom to the heavenly places and it's amazing to think about because the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places these are angelic beings as we talked about in Ephesians 1 as well so God is using us the church to teach these angelic beings a thing or two show them hey you want to see my manifold wisdom here's the church and these are not just any angelic beings these are hostile angelic beings in the context of

Ephesians we see that in clearly in chapter 6 12 where Paul says for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the authorities against the cosmic powers over this present darkness against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places so these are hostile forces forces that opposed God I wish I had the reference for this but I'm noticing that every other page of my sermon is cut off halfway at the bottom at the top so I think it was my printer but I don't know what happened but so I have a partial quote here from 1 Corinthians I think it's from chapter 9 but it talks about the angels and these hostile angels and how

God revealed his glory to them and I'll just read the part that I have here it is although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are doomed to pass away but we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God which God decreed before the ages for our glory none of the rulers of this age understood this for if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of glory so you kind of understand this gives context to what Paul is trying to say here how did God showcase his manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places this is what happened these hostile angelic forces wanted to frustrate God's plan they wanted to oppose him so they led Jesus Christ to the cross they used the things that were the powers that were at their disposal and they led him to the cross and they had him crucified at the hands of sinners but as they did that they played right for the salvation of his people and even though these angelic beings believed that they were triumphing that they had their domain over these

Gentiles because there was no salvation apart from the Jews in the Old Testament they had to come and receive their faith and be adapted into that people but so the Gentiles were boasting about their dominion over the Gentiles and they used these Gentiles to kill the dead and it turns out lo and behold now in Jesus all the Gentiles and Jews are going to be saved together in Christ Jesus reconciled to him oh wisdom of God that's the wisdom that he's referring to God turned their gloating into moaning their triumph into defeat and he accomplished his eternal purpose through the very hands of his enemies that's wisdom and it's manifold the word is it's like a compound word that says many varied very diverse very manifold

[35 : 23] I think of like a really really ornate or elaborate origami fold every facet of it showcasing the skill and creativity of the artist God's wisdom is manifold and what is the instrument by which God displays that manifold wisdom it's us we are the daily and eternal reminder to the enemy angelic forces of their failure their short sightedness their subjection and of God's triumph and his

manifold wisdom it's not amazing and as the recipients of the riches of Christ as the receptacles of God's manifold wisdom verse 12 tells us that we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Christ the boldness and access they're really two words joined together to communicate a single concept it's like bold access or free access that we have to

God and this concept was used in this Greek Roman context referred to the right of a citizen to speak publicly at a public gathering only citizens were allowed to speak in those contexts but we have that freedom we have that access to speak to God that word is also used in some Greek literature to refer to that candidness that characterizes speech between friends sure with strangers and outsiders you have a little bit more guarded with our speech but with friends we're frank we're honest we're candid that candidness freedom the boldness access that characterizes our relationship with God now because we're citizens of his kingdom because we're members of the household of God I mean it's easy to take that for granted isn't it because we experience it every day we have this access every day but I mean think about it right if in our culture if there's a really important personage that comes to town and you want their audience you have to jump through so many hoops you have to get your security clearance you have to be patted down you have to have good enough reason so that they acknowledge that it's worth for their time for you to meet with them but when it comes to

God this is not so with us because God has made us citizens and members of his family so we have boldness and access and with confidence we can approach his throne and this only happens through faith in him it says we have confidence through our faith in him that means faith is the means by which we secure this access faith is the means by which we avail of ourselves of the riches of Christ we don't need to earn it we don't need to work for it we simply receive it by faith but you do need to receive it by faith and so if you are not a believer and you're here with us today you're not yet a Christian then I urge you and I want to plead with you to receive it by faith take nothing else with you to Christ for your salvation as the song rock of ages cleft for me says nothing in my hands I bring simply to the cross

I cling that's faith and the divinely appointed expression of that faith a public profession of that faith is baptism and we encourage all of you who have not been baptized to get baptized to offer baptism next month and so up to this point Paul has spoken of the revelation of the mystery and how he has been charged and the church is charged with the proclamation of the mystery and then we might wonder at this point why Paul is going to such lengths to describe the significance of ministry to us and Paul is not doing this for selfish reasons but for pastoral reasons because heartened Ephesian church for the disappointments and setbacks that they're seeing in the imprisonment of Paul and the persecutions that they faced in the rising empire of Nero and so he says in verse 13 so I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you which is your glory so there's this it neatly kind of wraps up this entire passage because he began in verse one by saying that

I'm a prisoner on Christ on behalf of you and then now he says I am suffering for you for you on behalf of you it's actually exact identical phrases in Greek he's saying that I'm a prisoner for you I'm suffering for you he's kind of enclosing bracketing this entire section by closing with the account of his suffering but how exactly is Paul suffering on behalf of the Ephesians believers and for their glory so first obviously Paul because Paul as a steward of the mystery was imprisoned and persecuted while in the act of proclaiming the gospel for the sake of these Gentile believers in that sense we could say that yes Paul was suffering on behalf of the Ephesian believers but I think there's a second and more immediate way in which Paul is saying that he's suffering on behalf of these Ephesian believers and Paul says something very similar to the Colossians church in Colossians 1:24 he says now

[41:09] 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 what does he mean by that right because in his writings Paul frequently connects suffering and glory second Corinthians 4:17 for this light momentary affliction is preparing us for eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison Romans 8:17 if we are children then heirs heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him 2 Timothy 2:10 therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory over and over again suffering and glory because in

Paul's conception and in the understanding of the early church they believed that by virtue of our union with Christ they believed that Christians every Christian would and should suffer we were

appointed by God to suffer for Christ's sake and in our suffering for Christ's sake and in our suffering for one another's sake we become this in the flesh in the body this personal representation a picture so to speak of Christ's suffering and in that and that doesn't mean that Christ's suffering for us is inadequate that he said we too as his followers follow in his footsteps we're also appointed to suffer as he did so that we can also be glorified as he was and as he so then what that means is this this is so comforting for us so practical for us as we live because when we are ridiculed for our faith in our workplaces or in academia when we're caricatured as ignorant regressive bigots by the media when

Christians in Muslim countries Buddhist countries Hindu countries and communist countries are persecuted for their faith they're driven underground and prohibited from proclaiming the gospel when they're imprisoned for telling people about Jesus and when some of them are martyred killed for their faith and in many smaller ways we here in the western world when we make sacrifices and endure suffering for the advance of the gospel when we serve the church though it's difficult and hard when we forego earthly pleasures to give generously and sacrificially toward God and his mission when we take difficult thankless jobs so we could go out into the mission field or be part of a church plant when we overlook offenses caused by one another and forgive each other when we overcome the fears and anxieties we have sharing the gospel with unbelievers and share with them in every little sacrifices and suffering we make the hundred little sacrifices that we make on a daily basis we are suffering for the sake of

Christ and we are filling up the afflictions of Christ we're suffering on behalf of church we're suffering on behalf of each other for the sake of the family of God and that means suffering for Christ's sake is not incidental it's an integral part of what it means to be the church and what it means to mature and grow as the church it it it it is an essential necessary part of life because as we suffer we're identifying with Christ in our union with him and we're becoming representations of Christ to the watching world when we suffer for one another as Christ suffered for us that's how Paul is trying to console the Ephesians believers here in verse 13 so I ask you not to lose heart over what I'm suffering for you which is your glory so don't lose heart my suffering your grief it's for our glory don't lose heart because my suffering is not a setback it's for the advance of the gospel don't lose heart just as the incomprehensible death of the

Messiah led to the salvation of the nations though your suffering might not make sense now it will eventually ultimately display the manifold wisdom of God let's pray together God you are our worthy gracious loving master and lord and in your service even pain is pleasure even suffering is streaked with unspeakable joy help us to be such church the church that is so beholden to its master so grateful and filled with overflowing praise that we would be consoled even in the midst of all our sufferings entrusting ourselves to you and glorifying you nonetheless in

[47 : 34] Jesus name we pray amen