

I am ready for some sunshine. Can anyone else just say yes and amen to that right there? I am ready for some sunshine, but nothing can take away my hallelujah. Amen. Today we're working through the last part of the first chapter of Colossians where Paul talks about just some stuff that he's gone through that has not robbed him of his hallelujah.

In fact, he says, I have found this amazing truth that in the middle of suffering I can experience joy. We're going to lean into that this morning. I'm off the books already, guys back there. I'm not on my script, but that's all right. We're going to lean into that aspect of just following Jesus, being faithful to what he's asked us to do, even when the skies are dark and gloomy and finding in the middle of that just an amazing place of joy.

So let's pray and we'll get started. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your continual presence with us as we trust you, as we just lean into what you've asked us to do. Even when difficulties come, we can find joy. We thank you for that and we give thanks for it. In Jesus name, amen.

There once was a king who had two servants. I would say, stop me if you've heard this, but I've heard it a dozen times and I heard it again this week and I thought, this is so good. This is so good. There was a king who had two servants. The first one, for fear of not pleasing the king, got up early every day and hurried along to do the things that he thought would really please the king.

He didn't want to bother the king with questions and so he just did what he thought he should be doing. He did what he thought the king wanted him to do. He hurried from one thing to the next, morning to night. He was stressed and he never really learned to just rest in being a servant of the king. The busy servant by the end of the day, in fact, the busy servant, by the time the second servant actually got up and began his day, had accomplished a lot.

But much of his work was meaningless because it was not what the king wanted. The second servant, on the other hand, got up early too, because he wanted to please the king and he wanted to serve the king in ways that pleased the king. But before he started his task, he checked in with the king. Hey, what do you want me to do? And the king would tell him, here's what I want you to do.

It was only after time with the king that he would begin to do what the king asked him to do. And he knew because of that, that everything he did was what the king wanted him to do. It had a purpose. It was according to the king's will. As we go through this series, I think this today, that story has a little bit of bearing on us, so keep that in mind if you're with us for the first time in a while.

We're going through the book of Colossians and we've not gotten too far, you'll be pleased to know, so you can catch up pretty easily. But we're in Colossians chapter one today. So far, we have been introduced to the writer. His name is Paul. Paul introduces himself to the Colossians.

He's never met them either. And so he's explaining a little bit who he is and his affection for them. He calls them his family. And then he prays this amazing prayer for them. After this prayer, he reminds them of what the connection is between them.

He says our connection is Jesus. Jesus, who created everything and is holding everything together by just himself. He is the glue that everything is held together in. All things were created by him and for him and through him. And now he's holding it all together, including this thing now called the church that you're part of.

You are the head of the church. And just as he created things in the beginning, he is in the process now of recreating and making things new. Now, after things got broken and busted by sin, he is making all things new, including your lives. Now, living this new life, in many respects, is easy, but it's also not simple, yes, but easy, no. There are influences all around us.

There are challenges, there are difficulties. Can someone say amen to challenges and difficulties that want to sort of knock us off course? And if they don't knock us off course, they make us want to sort of step back and say, you know what? It was easier before it was comfortable. I knew my place.

I knew what I wanted to do and what I didn't want to do, and I just did what I wanted to do and didn't do what I didn't want to do. It was easy. We've been there, too. That old way was killing you. And Jesus says, this new way is going to bring you life and will bring you joy.

That's what Paul says. Paul says these troubles and difficulties that can throw other people off course for those who will stay the course, who will let nothing rob them of their hallelujah, will find themselves living in this place of joy. It's unbelievable. That's what Paul says. In fact, here's how he begins.

Colossians. And we're in verse 24 through, actually, chapter one, into chapter two. Well, we're going to focus on 20, on verse, on chapter one. So here's what he says in verse 24. He says, now I rejoice.

Okay, that's great. I rejoice in what I am suffering for you who, 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, which is sort of a lot of stuff to say. And scholars are, they talk a lot about what Paul actually means here. But I think what he's saying is, in light of what Christ has done, what I'm able to give is amazing, an honor to give myself to this work, this new thing God's doing on behalf of his body, the church. Paul says in verse 25, I become its servant by the commission.

Remember that word? If your translation doesn't use that word, commission, then write it in the notes. I've become its servant by the commission. God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. To them, God has chosen to make known among the gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery.

Now, what mystery? Well, this mystery, Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end, I strenuously contend through all the stuff, with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. So no.

I may rob me of my hallelujah. I added that little bit, but I think it makes sense in context, don't you? So Paul alludes to part of his story that the cautions may not be fully aware of. In fact, you may not be fully aware of this part of Paul's story either. Paul began his life christened as a young baby.

Saul. That was his name originally, Saul and Saul. He was a very religious man. He wanted to honor God. He wanted to please God.

Like that first servant. He got up early just looking for things to do for God. He calls himself sort of a super jew, a pharisee. And if you take Paul's word for it, he was a pretty exceptional pharisee. As a pharisee, Saul thought his mission in life, his commission from God, was to protect the jewish faith at all cost from any threats and the biggest threat that Saul saw to the jewish faith was Christianity, this gospel of Jesus.

Jesus and his followers were the biggest. Saul. Saul sets out to eradicate that threat. He goes all over the place, searching out christians to arrest them, have them thrown in prison. Some were even killed because of Saul's word.

And Saul felt very justified. He was doing what God had commissioned him to do, and he felt this way up until this one moment. He is traveling from Jerusalem to a town called Damascus. When he gets to Damascus, he has an assignment to search out and find everyone who calls himself a Christian and arrest them. This is what his commission is.

He feels he's traveling on this road to Damascus. And some of you know what happens. All of a sudden, a blinding light comes into the sky, and it throws Saul to his knees. He's with people, and he hears this voice. The others hear it, too, but they see nothing.

And this voice from heaven says this, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And Saul's like, who is this? The voice says, it's Jesus.

Now, in that moment, something happens. Saul's perspective is completely flipped around. We call this experience, oftentimes a Damascus road experience to describe these almost instantaneous conversions that people have. It doesn't happen to everyone. If you did not have a Damascus road experience, I didn't either.

My conversion was a process. But some people have amazing immediate turnarounds, and Saul did. Saul received a commission from God in that moment. That was the complete opposite. Now, we all know what a commission is.

If you're a travel agent, when you're booking travel, you get a little commission. That's a payment for services rendered. But in this instance, a commission is more like a military commission, an assignment, a responsibility, a duty that's placed upon an individual or a group to accomplish something. And so Paul, well, Saul, so far, Saul receives this commission from God. And later, when he's in front of a king, a local king named Agrippa, Saul is describing this, and now he's now known as Paul.

He gets a new name when he gets this commission. So let's just call him Paul from here out and make it easy on me. Paul is standing before King Agrippa, and he says, here's what the voice said to me. The voice said, rise and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose to make you a minister. Say that with me.

Minister and a witness. A minister and a witness. Remember those two words, and remember the word commission. I have given you a commission to be a minister and a witness. Both of the things which.

Both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. And therefore, Paul says, king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Paul says, I was faithful to this commission. God gave me to be a minister and a witness. Now, in the vision, in the commission that Jesus gave Paul, he did not lean into a lot of specifics.

Two things. Things which you have seen and things which I'm going to tell you about later. That's what Paul got in terms of his commission. The things which I've seen is like, okay, I can handle the things which I've seen. I've seen it and survived it.

The later, the things which I will show you later, that can be the scary part for us as we follow Jesus. Can it? What will it actually mean to follow Jesus? What is this going to require of me? When we look at Paul's life, we look at the good things of his life.

Oftentimes we look at his outreach to the Gentiles. Every one of us in the room is a beneficiary of Paul's outreach to the Gentiles. We're reading Colossians. We look and we admire and we respect and we take instruction and inspiration from Paul's letters that he wrote to the church and to other pastors to teach us how to live and how to think about this new life in Christ. We think about his inspiring mission.

At least I do, his inspiring missionary journeys all over the world, places other people wouldn't go, Paul went. And because he was obedient to that man, the gospel shared, the church grew, the kingdom advanced. Those are amazing things. But it wasn't all fun. Paul alludes to that in the beginning.

Remember the things. I'm suffering. I'm suffering with joy, because it wasn't all fun stuff. Paul faced a lot of challenges as he fulfilled this commission to be a minister and a witness. In two Corinthians, he talks about this.

You will remember some of these things. He tells the Corinthians, I have worked much harder. I've been in prison more frequently. I've been flogged more severely, and I've been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one.

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was pelted with stones. Three times I was shipwrecked. What can take away my hallelujah? I spent a night and a day in the open sea drifting sharks beneath your feet.

Oh, don't even let me think about that. I'll dream about that tonight. I've been constantly on the move. I've been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, endanger in the country, endanger at sea, and endanger from false believers. I've labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep.

I've known hunger and thirst and often gone without food. I've been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak and I do not feel weak, who is led into sin and I don't inwardly burn.

If Paul had known what the commission of God was going to entail, this idea of being a minister and a witness, I don't know. He may have backed out. Thankfully, God didn't share everything with him, because again, at the end of it is this glory? Is this joy? But becoming a servant to the commission of God requires a willingness to say on the face of it, whatever it takes, I'm willing to do.

Whatever it cost, I'm willing to pay. And wherever it leads, I'm willing to go. And when we accept Christ, we accept that commission. Let me say that again. When we are brought into Christ by his grace, by the work on the cross, and we say, yes, Lord, to God's invitation, we also are brought into that commission.

And when I say yes to it, and when I am faithful, as Paul said to King Agrippa, when I am faithful to this call, then whatever happens in the middle of it somehow, in a way that only God can do, it becomes joy. Paul said, I rejoice in my suffering. Somehow, miraculously, as I release myself from myself and just enter into Christ, I am finding an abundance of joy that did not exist anywhere else in my life. James, if you recall, says, count it all joy, brothers, when you face troubles and trials and tribulations, and Paul says, I don't have to pretend, I don't have to convince myself. I don't have to remind myself to count it all joy.

I'm living in this amazing place where despite all the stuff, despite floating in the open sea with sharks beneath my feet, I'm like, I don't want to be anywhere else but right here in the center of God's will for my life, in the center of his commission. In life, we will encounter many things that can discourage us and maybe even throw us off our game. But can I encourage you to stay faithful to the commission of Jesus from the outside, it can look scary. But Jesus promises to walk with us as we live out his commission for our lives. Now, I want to go back to one point

about this idea of commission, because it's very tempting for us as new believers or as old believers to assume a commission that God did not give us.

Have you ever been there where you spend your time and your wheels and your energy doing something that God did not ask you to do? Like that first servant running around trying to please God, doing all the stuff that God did not ask you to do. And you're worn out and you're weary and you're exhausted. You're like, I can't follow Jesus. If this is what it means, you're not experiencing joy, then I want you to really contend with the fact that you may be operating out of a commission that is not yours.

It may be someone else's that they've either laid on you guiltily or you've taken because you felt guilt. So Paul, if you remember, when he was still Saul, he was convinced his commission. He was convinced. His mission was to eradicate the influence of the gospel among Jewish believers. However, when he had a little talk with Jesus, his commission was exactly the opposite of what he thought he should be doing.

God's commission for him was to advance the gospel, not eradicate the gospel. We have received a commission from Jesus. Go and make disciples very light on details. Just go use what you've seen and I'll show you more later. When Jesus gave that commission to the first disciples, here's what he told him to do.

Does anyone remember, he says, before you start rushing out, trying to do this, here's what I want you to do. I want you to go back to Jerusalem, and what are you going to do? Anyone? Wait. You're going to wait.

You're going to spend time with each other and with me, and in the right time, I'm going to give you what you need to fulfill your commission, the Holy Spirit. So before you rush off in your enthusiasm and zeal to honor God and please God, can I just encourage you to do something that most preachers will not encourage you to do? Say no to a lot of stuff and say yes to spending time with Jesus. The disciples waited for the Holy Spirit, and we need to do the same thing. We need to wait and receive from God the confirmation of his commission.

Jesus says, when you do that, when you take my yoke, he calls it not Tim's yoke, not Steve's yoke, not Andy's yoke. But when you take my yoke on you. You will find this commission to be easy and light. Now, you may face difficulties. You certainly will.

You may face troubles, you may face discouraging things, but the yoke itself, the commission will be something that will bring you joy. It will bring you joy. Many of us enter into our faith, and I grew up this way, where there was a contract with me. God says, I will save you, but you need to do da da da da da. And so we spend a lot of our energy doing all the stuff, and it's good stuff.

It's all good stuff. That may be God's commission for you, but when it's the stuff, it's not Jesus. So we do this stuff like God's got us. If we do this, then God will do this. A contract.

But God has not called us into a contractual relationship. He's called us into a covenantal relationship, which means I want you to be something more than I want you to do something. That is an incredible difference of perspective.

Spend time with God in his word. Open it up. Read it. Listen as the Holy Spirit prompts you, and then follow. This is key.

Follow where Jesus leads. Again, his yoke is not burdensome. His yoke is light. It brings rest, even though there is labor and effort and energy and troubles and things that are hard to do as a servant of the king. But yet, at night, you will lay your head down on your pillow and rest, knowing that you have done exactly what Jesus called you to do.

When he calls you to do, it will require reserves of strength and obedience you have never been asked to demonstrate before. You will need a close relationship with Jesus to endure and persevere. That means our focus has to first be on Jesus and then secondarily on the job he's called us to do. And if that relationship is healthy, the commission to minister and be a witness will be effective. We'll find ourselves joyfully enduring for the sake of the gospel, difficult and challenging things.

There's a spiritual retreat that I'm often on, part of called Emmaus. Anyone familiar with the Emmaus community? So at the end of this service, we're not supposed to talk about a lot on this, but I'm going to tell you this, because at the end of this, it's a weekend filled with just reminders of what God has called us to and the promises that he's working in us and through us and around us, and this good thing that we're part of now as the church. But at the end of it, there's a commissioning exercise where, given all that we now know about how much God loves us and what he's doing in us, we recognize our responsibility to step into what he's called us to sort of a commission exercise. And at the end of that exercise, the leader will say, Christ is counting on you.

And your response is, and I am counting on Christ. That term, Christ is counting on you, is something that a little part of my religious spirit fights against. The idea that God somehow needs us, that God needs me makes me feel somehow that God is somehow smaller. In a sense, God doesn't need me. And I've heard preachers say that God doesn't need you or your money.

But in fact, God says, I do need you. I need you. You, me, Paul, the Colossians, Shauna, Tommy. God needs us. Remember what he says.

Colossians 1:25. I have become the servant of the gospel by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in his fullness, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations.

We're working this out. We're seeing this thing that was hidden from everyone, and now we're like, aha. I know something no one else has known for ages and generations. God is revealing

something through us to them. God has chosen to make known among the gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery.

It's being shown, which is this. Christ in you, the hope of glory. Christ in you, Christ in me, Christ in us. As a church is the plan. This is what God says, I need you.

I don't have a backup plan. Christ in you is the hope of glory.

What do we do with that?

I'm praying. We step into it. We say, okay, I will be faithful to the commission of Jesus, to be a witness, to speak about what I've seen and experienced, and to be a minister, to serve wherever I can serve. God will lead me. I will make no presumptions on my commission.

I will go where Jesus leads me. And in so doing, whatever happens, it's going to be good. It's not going to be easy. I'm sure it's going to be hard. There's going to be things that will make me go.

What can take away my hallelujah? But at the end of it, be like Christ in me, the hope of glory. What joy. Heavenly Father, this morning, as we prepare for a time of communion, our desire as people of faith, a people of God, is to be your servants. But we want to be faithful and good servants, not just busy servants.

So as we spend time right now in this moment with the cup and the bread. Father, quiet our hearts, open our ears to hear from you. And if there's anything in our lives right now that is just busyness, convict us of that. And in your grace remind us that we are first and foremost called to be, not called to do. And once we find that place of rest in that relationship, then we receive your commission.

And Father, this morning, if you want to speak it into the lives of people here, we give ourselves to you to hear from you what you've asked us to do individually and as a congregation. We want to be faithful to you because you are counting on us and we are counting on you. Amen.