



Sermon – September 15, 2019
Dr. Deron Biles

Verses Covered

Colossians 2:1 – 5
2 Timothy 4:3

Well good morning, Central. Such a delight for me to be back with you. I look forward to every opportunity to be here and grateful for the privilege. My wife, Jaye, is with me this morning and delighted that she could be along with me. I'm also very pleased to see ICR on your campus this week. I had the privilege of visiting their new center in Dallas just a few weeks ago. It is remarkable. If you get a chance, you've got to go. What an amazing ministry ICR has. And I'm so glad that they're here on your campus today. Now after the invitation, the introduction, from Brother Bill I've decided to change my message. I'm going to preach on bitterness. You've got your Bibles. No, I'm not. Just a privilege for me to be with you.

I want to begin by asking you a question this morning. What do you do because it's worth it? Are there things in your life that you do because they are worth the cost? Are there habits that you have? Are there plans that you make? Are there activities that you do? Even the effort that's involved in them, you do them because they are worth it. I learned this week, I didn't know that, did you know Houston has sort of a unknown motto? Sort of a motto that they have, it's unofficial, it's the letters, HIWI. But it's pronounced High Wie. Their motto is Houston It's Worth It. Now Jaye and I are from Fort Worth and so this is sort of a conflicting emotion that I have as I think about Houston. I think it goes back to our sporting allegiances and we root for the Cowboys and we root for the Rangers. So it's very difficult for us to root for anything Houston, especially anything that's sports related. And so I really was thinking about this, probably more time than I should have put into thinking about this. And I've decided, I suppose I can cheer for Houston if they're playing the Eagles, or the Taliban, or Alabama. Other than that, it's really a struggle for me. But I want to ask you the question; what's worth it to you? What do you do in your life simply because the effort is worth the struggle? Maybe it's your work, your job. The hours that you put in are worth everything that you do to complete it. Is it the plans that you make? Is it your insurance? Is it saving for retirement that you sacrifice because it's worth it? Maybe you've been on a vacation. You've been travelling somewhere and you take a detour just to see something because it's worth it. Are there things that you do only because they are worth it? Maybe you read the Bible in the morning because you know it's worth the effort. Maybe it's eating habits that you have taken on. It's practice that you do to complete or excel in something. Maybe you relate

to the effort of an athlete, the hours that you put in training, the hard work because the goal is worth it. Maybe you're a student. The time that you put in studying, learning, getting ready for not just tests, but getting ready for life because you know it is worth it.

This morning we're going to look at a letter from Paul to the church in Colossae. Paul's going to write about something that's worth it for him. But Paul is talking about something different. Paul's talking about a struggle. And the struggle that Paul is going to describe in Colossians chapter 2, Paul says is worth every amount of effort that Paul puts in to this struggle. When Paul wrote the letter to Colossae, Paul was writing from a prison cell. He was chained to a soldier, perhaps the better part of every day. But what he wrote about struggle, he wasn't writing about that physical kind of struggle that he was going through, he wasn't even writing about the emotional kind of struggle that Paul was facing. When Paul uses the word struggle, he's talking about an effort towards a desirable goal. If you have your Bible, let me invite you to open with me to the book of Colossians chapter 2. What I want you to notice as we read through the first five verses of Colossians chapter 2, I want you to note two remarkable things about Paul's struggle. Number one; Paul's struggle isn't really for himself. Number two; he's struggling for people he's never met before. Now with your Bible open to Colossians chapter 2, look with me beginning in verse 1.

¹I want you to know how greatly I struggle for you, for those in Thessalonica and for all who have not seen me in person, ²I want their hearts to be encouraged and joined together in love so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and have knowledge of God's mystery which is Christ, ³in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I'm saying this so that no one will deceive you with arguments that sound reasonable. ⁵For I may be absent in body, but I'm with you in spirit, rejoicing to see how well ordered you are and the strength of your faith in Christ.

How much would you struggle for someone you've never met? What would it be worth to you, the effort that, the difficulty that you might go through for someone that you don't even know? As we work through this part of the text and a couple of other places in the book of Colossians, it seems as though Paul doesn't really even know these believers in Colossae. It's perhaps true that he may have met some of the leaders, but he doesn't really know the people to whom he is writing here. And yet he describes a struggle on their behalf. In fact, the word that Paul uses is the word where we get our English word, agony. Paul says, I am agonizing for you. It's the word that we see throughout several places in the New Testament. It's the word that the Bible uses in Luke chapter 13, verse 24 where the Bible says, make every effort, or agonize to enter by the narrow gate. In 2 Timothy 4, verse 7, Paul calls it a fight. I have fought the good fight. I have agonized the good fight. In Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1, Paul called it a race. Let us run with endurance the race, the agony, that is before us. Interestingly, in our English translation, the word agony has a negative connotation; pain. In the original language, it actually referred to something positive. It's something that I go through because there's something on the other side that I see that's even worth the difficulty, the struggle, the agony, that I face. Paul was agonizing for them, for a positive result that they might see, Theologians refer to this as vicarious suffering. I'm suffering on behalf of someone else. Paul says, "I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you." It's a great struggle, Paul says. I have this intense, enormous, agony on your behalf. Paul refers, uses that same word back in chapter 1, verse 29 about himself. Paul says, "I have an agony for myself."

And you see that in verse 29. I labor for this striving with all His strength for the power that works mightily in me. Now earlier in chapter 1, Paul was talking about his ministry to the Gentiles. And Paul talked about the mystery that is in Christ that God in Christ was even allowing the Gentiles to hear the gospel. And so Paul says, "That's my agony for me." I'm agonizing so that the Gentiles would hear the message of Jesus Christ. Paul says, "That's my agony for me." But then in the very next verse, Paul says now I want you to know the agony I have for you. The agony I have for me, Paul says, is that I might be able to effectively share the gospel with those who have not heard it. Now the agony Paul says, I have for you, is different. It's a great agony. It's a struggle that I have for you, for those in Laodicea, and for all those who have not seen my face. Paul says, it's the agony of my ministry.

I want to suggest to you from the example of Paul the kind of struggle we need more of in the church. Look with me, first of all, in Colossians chapter 2, verse 1. Paul says,

[I want you to know how greatly I struggle for you and for those in Laodicea, who have not seen my face in person, ²I want their hearts to be encouraged](#)

I want to suggest to you we need more struggle in the church for encouragement. For the encouragement of those who are discouraged. Now the word that Paul uses here in verse 2 for encouragement is an interesting word. It can mean comfort. It's the word used of the Holy Spirit in John chapter 15, and again in John chapter 16. Jesus said, "It's to your advantage that I go away because when I do, I'll send the comforter. He'll remind you of everything that I've taught you." He's the One who comes along side. He's the one who brings comfort to those who are discomfited. He's the one who brings encouragement to those who are discouraged. I know you watch the news, or you read the news, and it's easy to become discouraged sometimes, isn't it. The struggles, the difficulties, the pain, the sorrow, the crime, all the injustices that we face. And it's so easy for us to become discouraged. And Paul was praying, he was agonizing that they might be encouraged in discouraging times. It was something he wanted in their hearts. Paul says, "I want their hearts to be encouraged." Now we learned in verse 4 of this same passage, one of the reasons for their discouragement is they were under attack. These believers, perhaps young in their faith, were being challenged by those who opposed them. They were under attack. So Paul says, "I'm praying that even in these difficult circumstances, you might be encouraged." Who do you know in your life who is an encourager? You have someone? Maybe it's a friend. Maybe it's a teacher. Maybe it's a family member. Who is an encourager for you? We meet several people in the Bible who are like that. Remember Barnabas? Barnabas is not his real name. That's a nickname. The nickname means son of encouragement. His name was Joseph, but they called him Barnabas because he was such an encourager. We meet another man in 2 Timothy chapter 1. Paul calls him Onesiphorus. Paul says, "He often refreshed me." Do you have somebody like that in your life who's an encourager? Someone who just speaks words of encouragement in your life in difficult times? You know there's someone you can count on to be an encourager at a minimum. Paul is showing us the importance of going out of our way to encourage others. Some of you know someone who needs encouragement. Someone in your family. Someone on the church staff here. Is it a minister? Is it a teacher? Is it a professor? Is it a pastor? Is it a friend? Is it a missionary? Someone you know who needs to be encouraged. Paul says, "I'm agonizing that there would be more encouragement." Their encouragement is worth your struggle. We need more encouragement in the church.

I want to suggest to you secondly as we read further in Paul's letter. Not only do we need more encouragement, we need more struggle in the church for unity. Look in verse 2. Paul says, I want you to know the struggle that I have for you and for those in Laodicea and all who have not seen my face. I want their hearts to be encouraged and I want them to be joined together in love. Your translation may use the phrase knit together. That they might be together and together in love. The psalmist said in Psalm 133, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity. Paul says, "I'm praying that you might be knit together." Maybe you know someone who likes to knit. Jaye and I are now grandparents and we just had our fifth grandchild and one of the things that my wife does when we have new grandchildren is she knits them a blanket. And so we just had our fifth grandchild just a couple of weeks ago. So she was knitting a blanket. And if you know someone who knits, sometimes they can't maybe get the exact color that they need or maybe it's a pattern that they look for, and so they take two strings of yarn, they'll work them together, and after a while, you really can't tell where one string begins and where another one ends. They're intertwined. They are knit together. Paul says, "I'm praying that it would be that way in the church. I'm praying that your hearts would be knit together. I'm praying that you would be united. I'm praying that you would be one in the body of Christ." Paul says, "I'm praying that their hearts would be knit together." What would happen if that happened in the church? That we had a unity. We had a fellowship. We had a common union. We were knit together. And Paul says, "We were knit together in love." The affection that we have for one another because the unity of the church is worth your struggle. The effort that it takes to be united, Paul says, is worth the struggle.

Well it's not just their encouragement. It's not just their unity. Look further in the text. Paul says, "We need more struggle in the church for assurance." Paul says, "I want you to know the struggle I have. I want their hearts to be encouraged, joined together in love, so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Paul says, "I want you to know that you know Him. I want you to have an assurance of your faith. I want you to be comforted in your faith. I want you to be certain of the One in whom you believe." Are there any you know who are confused today? There were some that were confused in Paul's day. And Paul says, "I'm praying that they may be certain. I'm praying that they may be assured." One thing is sure. Even in our confusion, God's never confused. Paul says, "I'm praying that they may be united, that they may have an assurance in their understanding of their knowledge in Christ." Paul talks about the riches of complete understanding the value of knowing that you know Him. Paul says, "The assurance is worth the struggle." That's what Paul was saying to the church. Look in verse 3.

³[in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.](#)

All the answers to life's questions are in Him, Paul says. All the struggles, all the difficulties make sense in Him. Everything you don't know He knows. Everything you need, He is. All the struggles and the difficulties make sense only in Him because in Him are hidden all of the mysteries of full knowledge, full assurance, full understanding, and maybe today you're looking for that treasure of understanding in Him. In Him, Paul says, are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Not in pop psychology. Not on the internet. Not on a blog sight. In Him are hidden all of the wisdom. Today on the internet there are over 1 billion websites. Every second there are 40,000 searches on Google. 2 million e-mails sent. And 6,000 Tweets are tweeted. We

live in a society that is hungry for knowledge. But Paul says, “In Him are hidden all of the riches of knowledge and understanding.” All the riches of wisdom. All the value that we have of full understanding, Paul says, the mystery only makes sense in Christ. In Him are the riches. And Paul prays that they may have assurance of this mystery. Because He, and perhaps He alone understands. Is that ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God? There’s never been a time when God didn’t know the answer. When God was shocked or when God was caught off guard. No. God has full understanding and He alone knows the mysteries. Maybe this morning you simply need to trust in the One who knows. Maybe you need to look to the One who knows. And Paul is reminding us that the struggle for our assurance, for our comfort, for our understanding is worth whatever effort it might take. Paul says, we need more struggle for assurance in the church.

But I would suggest to you fourthly. We need more struggle in the church for discernment. Verse four is a picture of what’s happening today. It was happening in this day. It was a struggle. There was an attack taking place on their faith. There were those who were under attack and Paul says, “I’m aware of this.” And he says, “I’m saying this so that no one may deceive you with arguments that sound reasonable.” Did you see that? They were being attacked by those who were challenging their faith. But they were challenging their faith with plausible arguments. With arguments that on the surface sounded reasonable. And so Paul says, “I’m praying that you have discernment so that you can understand the difference, the distinction, between what is true and what is false, but sounds real.” Paul says, “I’m praying that you might have a discernment.” The plausible arguments of untruth. Remember Job’s struggle in the book of Job? Job was going through different times in his life, catastrophic health problems and personal crises and family crises. And soon after his struggle began, Job was visited by three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Three friends who came with good intentions. And they came with bad theology that sounded plausible. They began to explain to Job, or for Job, the reason that they believed he was struggling. And all of their reasons sounded good to them; made sense in popular religion. Perhaps in their own minds they were doing Job a favor. They had plausible arguments that didn’t fit in his context. And from the very beginning of time, the enemy is going to try to dissuade you with arguments that sound plausible. Remember Satan in the Garden attacking Eve, “Has God really said...” The challenge of plausible arguments. Paul said in 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 3:

³There will come a time when people won’t stand sound doctrine, their ears will be substituting things that just sound good to them because they can’t distinguish between the truth and the lie.

Paul’s reminding us that it’s God’s desire for you and for me to develop a discernment, the ability to understand the difference between what is true and what is false, but may sound real in another context. Paul says, they’re trying to discourage you, to deceive you with plausible sounding arguments. We live in a day with many competing noises; challenging, attacking, vying for our attention, the struggle to make sense in the midst of all the noise. And Paul says, “We need more struggle in the church for discernment.” And the only way that you and I can discern untruth is to have a solid foundation on what is true. The effort that we put in to learning God’s word, studying God’s word, applying God’s word in our lives is how we differentiate between what is true and that which is false. It’s worth the struggle.

I want to suggest to you one more thing. We see from Paul's encouragement to the church in Colossae, we need more struggle in the church for discipleship, for growing in our faith. Look at verse 5. Paul says:

⁵I may be absent in the body, but I'm with you in spirit, rejoicing to see how well ordered you are and the strength of your faith in Christ.

Paul says, "I'm encouraged to see some of you growing in your faith. I'm encouraged that you're growing deeper in your understanding. I'm encouraged that you're walking in your faith." Paul says, "I'm praying for steady growth in your life and in your faith." One of the concerns that I have for this generation is that we're becoming a generation that is high on spirituality, but low on spiritual maturity. We like to talk about spiritual things. We like to think about spiritual things. But the real work that it takes to grow spiritually is sometimes sadly missing in our efforts. It's why Paul said in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 15, we need to grow up in our faith. We need to grow deeper. We need to grow more mature. And Paul says, "I'm absent in the body, but I'm with you and I'm rejoicing to see two things. I'm rejoicing to see that you are well ordered and I'm rejoicing to see that you are steadfast. You are stable. You're growing strong. You are steady in your faith." Paul says, "I'm rejoicing to see the good order and the steadfastness in your faith." Maybe you saw the video, it's YouTube that's popular now, don't look at it now. But it's a YouTube from the most recent royal wedding from Prince Harry, with Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. Did you see the YouTube video of the guy who was marching out of step? Go back and look at that video. It's a fascinating video. It's been viewed over a billion times. Here's this guy, and the camera zooms in on him because he's out of step with all the other people who are marching. There's this long line and they're all marching in step except for him. And he kind of stumbles and then you can see the expression on his face as the camera zooms in and he's got this weird, pained expression on his face. And he almost comes to a complete stop where the line keeps marking and he's trying to get his feet walking in step with everybody else. It's the picture of what it means to be out of step. That's what Paul's talking about here. I rejoice to see when you're walking in step. I rejoice to see when there's good order. I rejoice to see when you are standing strong and walking faithful in your journey. Paul says, "I rejoice to see the maturity. I rejoice to see the progress that you are well ordered and steadfast. You are standing strong. You're established. You're firm. You're not discouraged. You're not dissuaded. You're not defeated." Paul says, "To remain in step and steadfast is worth the struggle that it takes in our Christian life to grow and to grow deeper in our Christian lives." Those are the struggles Paul had for the church. They are struggles worth having.

I want to suggest to you we need more of that kind of struggle in the church. We need more struggle for unity. We need more struggle for encouragement. We need more struggle for understanding. We need more struggle for discernment. We need more struggle for discipleship. That we are, as people of God, growing stronger in our faith, faithful to the Lord." Paul says, "I'm struggling on your behalf." It reminds us of another who struggled on our behalf. We sang about it earlier this morning. Where our Savior on the cross suffered on our behalf. Paid the price for our sin so that you and I could enjoy a relationship with Him. It was the struggle that He knew was worth having so that you would have an opportunity to have a relationship with God through Him. Maybe this morning you are reminded that there's a struggle in your life worth having. Maybe there's an effort that you need to put in to growing in your faith, to growing deeper in the

work of the Lord. Maybe this morning God is calling you to struggle, not just for your life, not just for your faith, but for the encouragement of someone else. Maybe this morning God is speaking to you. Would you bow together with me in prayer?

This morning as God begins to speak to your heart, reminding you of some of the ways where God might be calling on you to struggle on someone else's behalf. Where God might be calling on you to step out on faith. To begin habits of discipleship that cause your spiritual life to grow, to mature in a way that would bring honor and glory to Christ. Maybe God's calling on you to be faithful. Maybe this morning you've been reminded of the struggle of our Savior on your behalf who's made possible for you a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And this is an opportunity for you to respond to Him. Maybe God's calling on you to unite with this church, step out on faith in some responsibility you know God's leading you towards in this church. Some other decision God wants you to make. In just a minute we're going to have a moment of invitation. I'm going to be challenging you, if God's speaking to you, this is an opportunity for you to come. It's an opportunity for you to respond, to step out on faith and however God might be leading you. God I'm grateful that there was One who suffered on our behalf. Who made possible a relationship with You. Who atoned for our sin, for my sin. God I pray that we, as Your people, might struggle for those things that are worth it. Might endure to the end that Your name is magnified in our lives. We mature in our faith. We grow closer to You in relationship. God whatever You're asking of us in this moment, this time of decision, I pray we have the obedience, the faithfulness to follow You. So whatever decision You may be leading us towards right now, I pray we are receptive, open, to the leadership of Your Spirit. Because we realize not just in eternity is it worth following Christ. But here, the work of Your church and the work of our families, to the ministry, to those who've not heard the message, we realize it's worth it. So God use us for Your glory. In Jesus name. Amen.