

KNOWING CHRIST DEEPLY THROUGH SUFFERING

2 Corinthians 4:7-18; 12:7-10 & Philippians 3:1-14

Opening Thought: “A sermon from the pulpit or a lesson in the classroom...that tries to make Christianity sound painless, effortless, easy, entertaining, or just a Sunday morning jaunt to the happy place of souls is counterfeit Christianity.” (In Daniel Deuschlander’s *Theology of the Cross*)

I. THE INEVITABILITY OF SUFFERING

“*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away ...*” (2 Corinthians 4:16)

- Paul is saying everything in this world is steadily and irreversibly falling apart; i.e., everything, including your body, is _____.
- Paul says this in a kind of an off-handed way. But, why? Every society, up to the last 50 years, absolutely understood that this life is _____.
- The reason I’m focusing on this is because the promise of the Bible is that _____.
 - Paul said, “*Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom.*” (Acts 14:22)
 - Jesus said, “*If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.*” (John 15:20)
 - Peter said, “*Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.*” (1 Peter 4:12)
 - Paul said, “*Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*” (2 Timothy 3:12)
- The Big Question in Suffering
 - The Big Question we ask others: “How could God be with a person when all that stuff happens to them? Surely when God is with you, He protects you and you prosper.”
 - The Big Question we ask of ourselves: “This can’t be right. Maybe there is no God, or else God are You mad at me or something?”
 - Paul’s response: Our sufferings are not only *not* a denial of the gospel; they are a _____ of the gospel in our lives.
- The Unexpected Outcome of Suffering
 - The fullness of who we are is not released except through _____, _____, _____, and _____.
 - The glorious result: “*... we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*” (Romans 5:3)
 - “... if you survive this ordeal in working condition, you’re almost certain to be a far more valuable medical doctor and person than you’d otherwise have been.” As Aeschylus, once wrote, “It is God’s law that he who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep, pain that cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart, and...against our will, comes wisdom...by the awful grace of God.” (Edward Reynolds Price in *Letter to a Man in the Fire*)

(Continued on reverse)

II. KNOWING CHRIST DEEPLY THROUGH SUFFERING

- The people who write most deeply and sweetly about the preciousness of Christ are people who have

 - Examples of those who have gone deep:
 - ♦ **Jerry Bridges:** *Trusting God, Even When Life Hurts*
 - ♦ **Horatius Bonar**, the Scottish pastor and hymn-writer, wrote a little book called *Night of Weeping*, or “*When God’s Children Suffer.*”
 - ♦ **Job**, after months of suffering finally says to God, “*I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee*” (Job 42:5)
 - ♦ **Peter put it this way**, “*If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you*” (1 Peter 4:14)

- **Philippians 3:1-14**

1. **Paul’s Preparation to Suffer**

- **V 5-6:** This was what gave him meaning and significance. This was his gain, his fortune, his joy.
- **V 7:** Paul prepares to suffer by taking his whole world and turning it upside down.

GAINS	LOSSES
Pharisee of Pharisee Hebrew of Hebrew Persecutor of Church	JESUS

2. **Paul sees his experience of suffering and loss as the cost of his obedience to Christ**

- **V 8:** He started by counting his most precious accomplishments as loss, and he ended by counting everything as loss, except Christ.
- **V 17:** This is _____ Christianity.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.” (Matthew 13:44)

“No one of you can be my disciple who does not take leave of all his own possessions.” (Luke 14:33)

What this Means Practically

1. It means that whenever I am called upon to choose between anything in this world and Christ, I choose Christ.
2. It means that I will deal with the things of this world in ways that draw me nearer to Christ so that I gain more of Christ and enjoy more of Him by the way I use the world.
3. It means that I will always deal with the things of this world in ways that show that they are not my treasure, but rather show that Christ is my treasure.
4. It means that if I lose any or all the things this world can offer, I will not lose my joy or my treasure or my life, because Christ is all.

3. **Paul’s Goal (and God’s Purpose) in Suffering**

Paul is not passive in this suffering loss, he is purposeful, and his purpose is to gain Christ.

- **VV 7 – 10a**
- **VV 10b – 11** There are 4 understandings here of what it means to know Christ:
 1. ” ... [to know] the power of his resurrection”; and
 2. “the fellowship of his sufferings”;
 3. “being conformed to his death”;
 4. “in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Conclusion:

How well do you want to know Christ? Do we want to be more personal and deep and real and intimate with Him? Then it’s never too late to reassess the suffering that has occurred, nor to prepare for the suffering that lays ahead. May the Lord open our eyes to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.