

Contagious Joy

Part 6 – Suffering with Jesus

Philippians 1:29-30

April 5, 2009

The pastor stood to preach his sermon and had a bandage on his chin. He explained that while he was shaving that morning, he had concentrated on his sermon and cut his chin. After the service, a deacon met him at the door and said, "What a pity you didn't concentrate on your chin and cut your sermon."

Transition: Last week we cut the sermon as we spent some great time lingering over communion... show video again?

Last week we discovered that suffering is a normal part of the Christian life. In fact, we are invited to participate with Jesus in this suffering and it should be considered a privilege. This runs counter to what our culture tells us and certainly begs the question, "Why"?

Proposition: Why do we need to experience suffering?

I. Suffering puts life into **perspective**

Psalm 23:4 Yea I walk through the Valley of the shadow of death

A. What do you think about...?

1. When you are terminally ill, you value each moment you have.
2. When you have no job, you are grateful for God's provision.
3. When you are ridiculed for what you believe, you decide that God is worth living for.
4. When you lose your home to a fire, you are reminded of what counts most...life!
5. When tragedy strikes, you call those you love the most...your family.
6. When your spouse or kids die suddenly, you wish you hadn't taken them for granted.

B. During these “valleys” we discover what is truly important.
It is easy to get caught up with the wrong priorities in life!

II. Suffering “polishes” our character.

A. **The Scriptures:** It refines our character!

1. *James 1:2-4* ²Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.
2. *Rom. 5:3* And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;
3. *1 Peter 1:6-7* ⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
4. *Is. 48:10* Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.
5. *Zech. 13:9* And I will bring the third part through the fire. Refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them;

B. **The Summary:**

1. It develops spiritual maturity in our lives.
2. It refines our character. It is like polishing a stone!
 - **“When our God is about to make use of a person, He allows them to go through a crucible of fire.”**
 - It produces endurance and patience. It makes us more patient people.
 - Illustration: Praying for patience
3. It separates real Christians from the “wanna-bes”
4. Transition: There is a fire that burns us, not refines us!

5. **What fires are kids facing today?** As Dorothy said to her little dog in the Wizard of Oz, “Toto, we aren’t in Kansas anymore.” Here are the stark facts:
- The cell phone will be the greatest distributor of **pornography** for kids before the year 2011.
 - “**Sexting**” is the new craze, reported CBS news last week. 1 out of 5 kids have received an unwanted text photo of someone naked on their cell phone.
 - 160,000 kids stayed home from school today (and everyday) because of **bullying** and they literally are afraid to go to class.
 - 12 million people in America participate in **self-injury** (mainly cutting) each year with most of them being young people.
 - Today there are at least 25 different **sexually transmitted diseases** people can catch. Time magazine reported: of the young people who are sexually active, they will have 7 different partners by age 25. One out of five has a sexually transmitted disease. Do the math – it isn’t pretty! (Jim Burns, HomeWord Newsletter, April, 2009)

III. Suffering **prioritizes** the cost of being an authentic Christ-follower

Luke 9:23 (Mark 8:34) If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me

Background:

- Jesus has just done a tremendous miracle of feeding over 5,000 people
- In the process the discussion centers around who people think He is. Peter confesses to the fact that Jesus must be God, the Messiah which...

- Prompts Jesus to crack the window...to let the disciples see what is going to happen to Him. This is His first open prediction of his death, burial, and resurrection.
- This in light of what is going to happen; He outlines a 3-point plan on the “cost of being a disciple of His.”
- **Transition:** “A true “follower” of Christ realizes his secondary position to Jesus. Is He really Lord of your life?”

A. Lordship involves **submission** ...*deny yourself*

1. **Definition:** Disregarding your own interests. To lose sight of one’s self interests. Recognizing that you are no longer in charge, Jesus is. Our agenda is secondary to His.
2. **Application:** God is the owner. We go from ownership to management in our lives. What things in our life are replacing God as “most important”? In what areas do you need to deny yourself and let Him manage? Are you a control freak?
3. George Gallup contends that fewer than 10% of evangelical Christians could be called “deeply committed”. Almost half (46%) of evangelicals read their Bible once a week or not at all.
4. **Application:** Does the cause of Christ captivate us? Ironically, when we deny ourselves, we get what we want. Applying the principle of “delayed gratification” to our spiritual lives answers 3 of life’s greatest questions:
 - **Who am I?** Peace with God:
 - **Why am I here?** Purpose in Life:
 - **Where am I going?** Plan for the future:

B. Lordship involves **sacrifice** ...*take up your cross*.

1. **Explanation:** Being a Christian, a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ isn’t always easy. It is a constant battle of

the wills. The idea of “daily” is found only in this passage.

2. There are no crown wearers in Heaven that were not cross bearers here below.—Spurgeon
3. Farley wrote this in his book *Outrageous Mercy*, “The Cross is our teacher”. The cross is a window through which we learn everything we need to know about God, humanity, wisdom, and worship, the purpose of suffering, the purpose of life, and a host of other issues. If you knew nothing else but the cross, but you knew it thoroughly, you would know everything essential for this life and the next.
4. **Crucifixion** was the worst form of death in that day...so bad that Roman citizens weren’t even allowed to be crucified. “The cross was not an implement of irritation or inconvenience. The cross was an implement of slow, torturous death. Crucifixion was borrowed from the Phoenicians by the Romans. “For indeed a death by crucifixion seems to include: horrible dizziness, cramps, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, tetanus, public shame, long continuing torment, the horror of anticipation, mortification of untended wounds – all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured, but stopping just short of the point at which the sufferer was relieved of consciousness.”
5. The emphasis here is on the bearing of the cross, not the dying upon it. Jesus’ disciples knew exactly what He meant. The man condemned to crucifixion was herded publicly through the streets, taunted and jeered as he went, all the while forced to carry the cross beam, which would be the very instrument of his execution.
 - I will explain in detail on Friday
 - It reminds us that we are going to need to die to ourselves if Christ is to live through us.

6. Isaac Watts wrote this in the early 18th century...

“When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.”

7. In what areas could you sacrifice more?

C. Lordship involves **surrender** ...*Follow Me*

1. It represents our willingness to live in such a way that we realize that our life is not our own. You can't follow if you aren't willing to be led.

2. There is an act of obedience implied. In your life what does it mean? It is anything that God providentially brings into your life that causes you to cling to him when everything in your life is being stripped away. What will cause you to follow Him?

3. Whom are you really following?

IV. Suffering “righteously” **pleases** God (I Peter 2:20-24)

But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. I Peter 2:20

A. **We do it for Him** *It has been granted for Christ's sake (Phil. 1:29)*

B. **It's part of His purpose** *²¹For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you,*

1. Probably wouldn't be our first choice.

2. We have to see a bigger perspective.

C. **We follow His example**

leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²²WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; ²³and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the

cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1 Peter 2:22-24)

1. You will be persecuted for what you believe.
2. Our attitude is as important as our actions.
3. When we are suffering for our faith, we have a chance to behave in such a way that it causes others to wonder how do they do that!

V. Suffering **propels** us towards eternity.

A. **A reminder:** It reminds us our stay here on earth is temporary.

1. *II Cor. 5:2... earthly tent*
2. *James 4:14... life like a vapor*
3. Larry Norman had an album entitled ... “Only Visiting This Planet” with a picture of Stonehenge in London

B. **A realization:**

1. Malcolm Muggeridge, a former atheist, journalist and well-known TV personality in Great Britain. Late in life he turned to Christ and wrote *Jesus Rediscovered* and several other books that chronicled his spiritual journey. He often referenced “feeling like a stranger” in the world. A few years before his death in 1990 he was asked if he could explain that “feeling”.

In the war, when I was in North Africa, I heard some lieutenant colonel use the phrase “displaced person”.

Besides referring to description of what happened to people in the war, it is also a very good definition of a person who’s come to see that life is not about carnal things or success, but it is about eternity rather than time...I don’t really belong here, I am simply staying here! (Swindoll, Laugh with Me, p. 74)

VI. Suffering **promotes** God's glory and His greatness

A. Our suffering is linked with God's glory. Especially as other people look at our lives and ask how someone can handle such adversity. When we suffer properly it is an unbelievable testimony of God's goodness and greatness.

1. *II Cor. 12:7-10* ⁷to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me – to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

- Paul's thorn in the flesh could have been his eyesight. We don't know for sure.
- Our weakness ultimately brings Him glory. We trust in His deliverance, not our own clever maneuvering. It also keeps us humble!

2. *John 9:1-3* ¹As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. ²And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he would be born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

3. *I Peter 4:16* but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

B. The telescope brings distant things closer, and the microscope makes tiny things look big. To the unbeliever, Jesus is not very big. Other people and other things are far more important. But as the unbeliever watches the Christian go through a crisis experience, he ought to be able to see how big Jesus Christ really is. The believer's body is a "lens" that makes a "little Christ" look very big, and a "distant Christ" come very close. Wiersbe, (1996.). *The Bible exposition commentary.* ",Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

Table Talk

1. Why is suffering needed in our lives?
2. What did Jesus have to suffer and die for our sins?
3. In what ways do you need to deny yourself?
4. Look at the 3 principles of Lordship. How are you doing?
5. How does your life promote God's glory and greatness?