

Colossians: Alive in Christ | Suffering Christ, Suffering Church

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[0 : 00] Good afternoon, everybody. Glad to be here. And I'm going to try not to take this personally. If you come up here, there's just a semicircle of empty pews.

This isn't a Gallagher show. I don't know what. Y'all don't know who Gallagher is. He used to smash fruit. We're not going to do that. But anybody who would like to is welcome to come sit in these, the center pews up here, up front.

My name's Tommy. I'm a pastor here. Happy to be together. This is a great, great Sunday. We get to celebrate a baptism in just a little while. Of all the things we do as a church, that's one of the greatest things we get to do.

So we're so excited about that. And before we celebrate that baptism, we're going to spend a few minutes opening God's Word together. We do this every week. You can think of everything that's happening here as like this dinner party.

We've been invited in by Jesus. We're here at His invitation. And now's the part of the evening when we gather around Him and listen to Him speak. And that's what we're hoping to do right now.

[1 : 07] We've been in a series looking at Paul's letter to the Colossians. And appropriately, since this is the Easter season, we've been asking this question. If the resurrection happened, how does that affect our lives here in Washington, D.C. in 2017?

To put it simply, if the resurrection did not actually happen, I would strongly suggest you find another religion. Another worldview. Another philosophy.

There are many out there that are far easier, far more practical. Do not waste your time with this religion. On the other hand, if it did actually happen, which I believe it did, then it changes everything.

And so the question we're asking now is, what does it change? How does that actually affect our lives? And so this week, in this study, we're coming to the end of chapter 1, verses 24 through 29. But what I want to do is draw your attention simply to that first verse. Colossians 1, verse 24. Let me read it. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, that is the church.

[2 : 17] And in my flesh, I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the church. If you were following along, you probably realized this is a very difficult verse to understand.

I think it's actually one of the most difficult verses to understand in the New Testament. And it's also one of the most important for understanding our larger question. What difference does the resurrection make for how we live in the world?

So what I want to do is to spend this time really looking at this verse in particular. We'll mention the other verses, but this is the time, this is the verse that we're going to spend time on.

And we're going to ask two questions. First of all, what is this saying? What is Paul saying here? What does that mean? And then the next question we'll ask is, what difference does it make for us? So what is he saying? And then what does it mean for us here in 2017 and how we live? Let's pray. Our Father, as we just said, we're here at your invitation to hear from you.

[3 : 21] Were these simply reflections of human wisdom and human philosophies, they would, as your word says, be empty ultimately, powerless.

But we actually believe that you have promised to speak. And that when you speak, worlds come into being. Suns and moons and stars and time itself springs to life.

So we pray that as you speak now, that same voice, that same word would recreate us. That our souls would spring to life.

That the chaos would be ordered. That you would give us a vision for what it means to follow you in this world. We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen. So first of all, what does this verse say? Let me give you a little context so you understand where we are in the passage. Paul is writing to a church not unlike ours. These are people that he's never personally met. The church in Colossal was planted by other people.

[4 : 20] Paul's heard about them. He's likely in prison right now, but he's writing a letter to these Christians. And he says, I've heard on the one hand that the gospel is bearing fruit. It's bearing fruit.

People are genuinely coming to faith in Jesus. This community is being built. People are loving each other. People are generous. They're kind. They're faithful. They're serving.

And he says, there's genuine fruit here. But he says, on the other hand, there are, I hear, multiple versions of Christianity floating around the community.

There are other teachers who have come in who are propagating alternative versions of Christianity. Now, that may seem like a small issue, but in Paul's mind, it's a pretty big deal because there's a problem.

There's no such thing as multiple versions of Christianity. So these are actually false gospels. They're counterfeit versions of Christianity.

[5 : 20] They look a lot like the real thing, but they're not. And so Paul's very concerned. And so he's writing this letter in just in the previous verses. Josh preached a great sermon on these last week.

But in verses 22 and 23, Paul is saying, and you who were once alienated from God, Jesus has now reconciled to himself.

If, indeed, you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard. So this is his warning, right?

And as I read that verse, it brings to mind teaching my boys how to ride bikes. And, you know, the training wheels are off and you get on the road and you start running down the road. And they're kind of wobbling and running and running and running.

And then I let them go, right? And they start going down the road all by themselves. And I see on the right there's a ditch and on the left there's trees, right? But the road is straight. And so, you know, he's kind of wobbling to the left and to the right.

[6 : 19] And I'm standing there and I'm saying, just stay the course. Just go straight. And I say, don't, no, no, don't go that way. Don't go that way. Just keep going straight. And I can imagine Paul saying that to this church.

You got off to this great start. Now just keep going. Keep going. Don't veer to the left. Don't veer to the right. There's danger there. There's danger there. Stay the course. You know, Paul, first and foremost, is a pastor.

He's a father. And like a father watching his children, he's saying, I don't want you to get hurt. Just stay the course. So then Paul comes to this passage that we encounter today.

And he begins to commend himself as a genuine apostle, teaching a genuine gospel. See, these other teachers were very impressive.

They were good looking. They were very effective speakers. They were very compelling. Paul, from what we know, was not a particularly effective speaker. He was not particularly good looking. And so we can surmise that people heard these very impressive teachings and they said, well, wow, this guy's really good.

[7 : 27] He makes a great case. Maybe we should start listening to him. And Paul says, don't swerve from the gospel that was first preached to you. Right? So how do we then distinguish the true Christian way from these counterfeit ones?

And that's what brings us to verse 24. Let me read it again in that context. Paul says, now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. He's saying, I suffer for your sake.

And in my flesh, I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body. That is the church. It's getting mysterious. What's happening here? Well, on the one hand, Paul says, I'm suffering on your behalf.

Well, that's not a new idea. We've seen that in other places in Scripture. Paul says something like that in 2 Corinthians 1, Ephesians 3, 2 Timothy 2. I suffer for your sake. Okay. Okay.

But that's not all. Right? Then it goes on. He seems to be drawing a connection between his sufferings and the sufferings of Christ. Well, that starts getting a little weird.

[8 : 27] And then he says something truly bizarre. And here's really the rub of this passage. He goes on to say that in his sufferings, he's able to fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. Now, that should strike you as bizarre. It surely struck me that way. So what does that mean? What in the world is he talking about? Because at face value, what does it sound like he's saying? I mean, if you just read this first pass, it sounds like he's saying that Jesus suffered, but not quite enough.

You know? Jesus got 90% of the way there. But he didn't quite top it off. And so it sounds like Paul is coming along and saying, I'm going to finish what Jesus started. Jesus had a good thing going, but he didn't quite get there. So I'm just going to take it the rest of the way. That's what it sounds like it's saying. And some people take it this way. So how do we know that that's not what Paul's saying?

[9 : 35] Well, there's a couple of really important clues that show us that can't possibly be what he means. The first clue is simply to look at the context around this verse. Paul makes it abundantly clear just before and just after this verse that the cross is a finished work.

That Jesus suffered once and for all. We see this in verse 22 where he says, he has reconciled us in his flesh. Once and for all, done, in the past, finished.

You've been reconciled. It's done. It's over. And then in the next chapter, chapter 2, verse 14, he says, he has canceled our debt. Once and for all, past tense, finished.

So here's a place just before and just after that say, he has done it. It is done. There is nothing more that needs to be done. He's finished it, right? By the way, very important, helpful tip. If you ever come across something in scripture and you don't understand it, the first thing you can do is simply look at the broader context.

Context will often help you make sense of hard to understand passages, right? So that's the first thing. Paul has made it clear and he makes it clear all through his writings that Jesus' work, his suffering was complete.

[10 : 42] It was enough. Jesus himself says from the cross, it is finished. Nothing more needs to be done. And then there's another clue and that's the word that he uses. He talks about the afflictions of Christ.

What's interesting is that word afflictions is never used to describe the sufferings on the cross. This is a different word and it refers to a different kind of suffering.

So this really brings us to the point. On the one hand, Paul makes it clear throughout his writings, including in Colossians, that Jesus suffered once and for all on the cross, ultimately, to achieve our salvation.

And that is done and that is finished and nothing more needs to be added to that. But here's the thing that this verse is getting at. Anyone who believes that, anyone who believes in the sacrifice of Jesus, and anyone who begins to try to align their lives with the kingdom of Jesus, to live out their salvation in the world, that there is a kind of suffering that those people will encounter.

The cross founded the final note in history, once and for all. But there are echoes.

[12 : 01] And so what Paul's talking about, our suffering, the suffering of the church, echoes of the cross, reverberations throughout history.

Right? So if we identify ourselves with Christ, which is what it means to be a Christian. I want his identity. He takes on my identity. We become the same person.

If you identify with someone, and that someone is called to suffer, then you're going to suffer. So Paul knows that as he, as he goes on to say, as he makes the word of God fully known, as he proclaims Christ, as he pours his life into seeing Christians grow and mature, in all this, he's going to suffer.

That all Christians are going to suffer, if we do those things. But do you notice what he says about that? He says, I rejoice.

I rejoice. Because this kind of suffering, these echoes of the cross in my life, they draw me ever deeper, into the heart of Jesus.

[13 : 05] Which is my greatest source of joy. And because of that, I rejoice. So that's what this verse is saying. I rejoice, because I am sharing and having fellowship with, the sufferings of Jesus.

I'm suffering like he did, and it helps me to understand him, and draws me closer to his heart. So that's what it's saying. What does it mean? We're going to spend the rest of our time asking, what does this actually mean for us?

And I don't know how this strikes you. I'll tell you what it means for me. Do you want to hear a confession? You want to know my greatest faith struggle?

People sometimes ask me this. What's your greatest, what's the hardest question for you? What's the thing that is most threatening to your faith? And you know, I struggle with doubt. I struggle with uncertainty at times.

I have periods of drought in my life. I have certain theological questions that constantly kind of nag at me, and things that I'm wrestling with.

[14:04] just like most of you. But those aren't the real threats. I mean, I'm never really at a place where I'm ready to just abandon my convictions.

That's not the greatest threat. The greatest threat to my faith is that every single day, I want a version of Christianity that is utterly devoid of suffering.

I want a version of Christianity that is easy, that is convenient. And man, have I got excuses to justify that.

You know, the more you know about the Bible and theology and biblical languages, the more justification you can come up with for never actually doing anything with your faith. Right? Because you can come up with all kinds, you can see both sides of every argument.

And what I want to do is to, I don't want to abandon my convictions, I want to massage them. I want to nuance them. I want to manicure them. I want to understand all the perspectives and have all voices represented equally.

[15:05] I want to pit the commentators against one another. I want to say, this is most likely what this means, but there are all these other perspectives. And who really knows what this means? And you can see this from so many different perspectives.

And I want to hold it in an intellectual arm's length and contemplate it and talk about it and read on it and write about it and get published and reflect on it and pontificate on it and preach on it. But not actually have to do it.

That's my greatest temptation. I can fill libraries with books about this stuff as long as I don't ever actually have to do it. That's my greatest temptation. And I don't think I'm alone.

I'm wondering if people here can identify with this at all. How many people like baby carrots? A lot of people. I love baby carrots.

Greatest snack food, right? Greatest snack food. Where do baby carrots come from? They're baby carrots.

[16:09] They're not grown-up carrots. They're not baby carrots. There's no such thing as a baby carrot. At least the way we think of it. Do you know what a baby carrot is?

Baby carrots were invented. They were engineered. In the late 1980s, there was a California farmer named Mike Ursek. And Mike grew tons of carrots. And then he began to realize that there was an enormous amount of waste in the carrot industry.

He looked at his numbers and he realized he's throwing away 400 tons of carrots every single day. 400 tons of carrots. Why? Well, most carrots, when they come out of the ground, are ugly.

They're unsightly. They've got this thick, gnarly skin. They're kind of twisted. And they're roots, right? And they look like it. And so you pull them off onto the ground and they look kind of gross.

And every now and then you get a nice, sleek, straight, pretty carrot, right? Most of the time not.

What do you think people buy? Well, they buy the pretty carrots. They don't buy the gnarly, twisted, ugly carrots.

[17:10] And so he was throwing away all these gnarly, twisted, ugly carrots. And then he got an idea. And he got an industrial green bean cutter. And an industrial potato peeler. He started running these ugly carrots through his machines.

And guess what came out? These perfectly peeled, two-inch long, perfected carrot segments. That he branded baby carrots.

And he put it in a bag and sent it to his store. And the store calls a week later and says, We only ever want baby carrots from now on. Send us as many as you possibly can. And boom, it transforms the carrot industry.

So here's my question. Imagine. We're the kind of culture that would give birth to something like the baby carrot. This is the kind of culture we live in. Right?

How do we feel about that? Right? So if we're the kind of culture that would do that to a carrot, imagine what we would do to something like Christianity.

[18 : 09] And that's exactly what we've done. Friends, we live in a culture of baby carrot Christianity. Baby carrot Christianity.

Where we take all of the ugly, unsightly, inconvenient, unpleasant parts and we just cut it away. Right? People don't want to go to the trouble to trim and to cut and to shape their.

They just want something they can pull out and eat. And that's the same way we treat our faith. Right? We have this kind of version of Christianity that is utterly sanitized and convenient and uncontroversial in every way.

Right? Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this way. He didn't use the phrase baby carrots. But he says, the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance. Baptism without church discipline.

Communion without confession. Grace without discipleship. This is baby carrot Christianity. Richard Niebuhr describes it as, quote, a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of Christ without a cross.

[19 : 20] Baby carrot Christianity. All the ugly, unsightly parts trimmed away. And so what do you have as a result? That allows me to take my Christian faith and just pack a little in a little Ziploc bag.

And I just close the bag and I just drop it in my pocket. And I'm just going along in life. And then I start to feel kind of lonely or insecure or anxious or sad.

Or I hate my job. I'm wondering about the meaning of my life. My relationships stink. I don't have any friends. And then I can just pull the little bag out and get a little spiritual snack.

And feel a little better. A little prayer. A little Bible verse. And then just put it back and just keep right on going. That's it. Purely convenient. And the best part is it doesn't get in the way of me wanting to do exactly what I want, exactly when I want.

It's there when I need it. And this is my greatest faith struggle. I want all the benefits of Christianity with none of the cost. And I'm wondering, can you identify with this? And see, here's the problem with this way of thinking.

[20 : 26] And this is where the verse begins to kind of push into this. Paul's saying one of the marks of genuine discipleship is suffering for the sake of Christ and his church.

You know, there's a lot of suffering that results from the fact that we have disobeyed God. But Paul's saying there's this whole other kind of suffering that comes from following God. Following Christ.

And he's saying a mark of genuine discipleship is that you're encountering that. The road is marked with it. The only way to avoid it is to go off the road. But if you're on the road, you're going to have to face that stuff.

And even Jesus was clear that following him is going to bring suffering. He says, it's so hard. You need to count the cost before you do this. Before you make the commitment, you need to know what you're getting into.

This is why he uses parables about the kingdom. Like the pearl of great price. The kingdom is like a pearl of great price. And when a pearl merchant who knows everything about pearls and knows the value of pearls, when he sees this pearl, he's willing to sell everything else in order to have that one pearl.

[21 : 33] The kingdom is like a treasure in a field. And a guy comes along and he sees the treasure. And it's so valuable that he's willing to sell everything and buy the field just so he can have that treasure.

Why does he tell parables like that? Because he's saying, this is a hard road. But let me tell you, it is worth it. It's worth it. It's worth whatever it asks of you. But it's hard.

So you need to know that there's a pearl. That there's a treasure. And that it's worth it. So if we identify ourselves with Jesus and we seek to bring our lives in line with the ways of his kingdom, this means that we're going to have to endure some, not all, but some of the suffering that Jesus endured.

Some of it will affect us. The echoes of the cross will reverberate through our lives. So you may not have to spend 40 days in a desert totally alone being personally tempted by Satan, right, every day. Hopefully you don't have to do that. But some of you right now are lonely. And you're single. And you're single because you want to marry a Christian.

[22 : 50] And no one has come along. And so you're just alone. Right? Some of you are lonely because you're attracted to people of the same sex or other issues have meant that for the most likely outcome is that if you're committed to chastity, in other words, using your sexuality in ways

that reflect the kingdom, that you're probably going to have to go without a family, that you're probably going to live most of your life without a nuclear family, and you're facing that prospect right now, you're sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

Those are the sufferings of Christ. Not all suffering is the same. There's a kind of suffering that draws you into the heart of Jesus. You want to know why? Have you ever been through something really challenging, traumatic?

You've faced something that nobody's been attacked or through some kind of trauma. And all of a sudden, all of your friends, all the people who are closest to you, they feel like they're distant because nobody really gets it because they've never really been through it.

But then you meet somebody, maybe in a support group, or maybe chance brings you into somebody else's life, and you meet somebody, and you find out they've been through what you've been through.

And you have that bizarre experience where all of a sudden you feel closer to this stranger than to all of your friends and family because on some deep level, you get it. And there's these moments that you can have where you don't even have to say a word.

[24 : 22] You just look at that person, and you just feel known because they've suffered the way you've suffered. That's what this is talking about, that you suffer like this, and that's the kind of special relationship that you have with Jesus, where you just look at each other, and you don't have to say a word.

Jesus says, I get that. I know exactly what that feels like. And you look at Jesus, and you say, he knows. He's been there. I have some sense of what he's been through.

He's actually had it worse than me. And not a word has to be spoken. Fellowship in the sufferings of Christ. You may not have to face the rejection of everyone.

You may not have to face the pain of having even your closest friends turn their backs on you and the whole world reject you like Jesus did. Hopefully you will not have to face that. But there are some people here who, because of your faith, you feel estranged from your friends and from your family.

There are people in our church who don't feel like they can go home for the holidays because they're not sure their families want them there because of their faith. Right? There are people in this room who you have to hide your faith at work because you know that you will lose the respect of your colleagues if they find out what you believe.

[25 : 37] Fellowship in the sufferings of Christ. Jesus looks at you and says, I get that. Yeah. I know exactly what that feels like. You don't have to say a word. I know that.

I've been there. Right? None of us are ever going to have to face the unimaginable suffering of the cross as Jesus did. But maybe you're taking time to listen to someone and invite them into your life even though you have no margins.

You have no energy, no time to give, and yet you're willing to open your heart to somebody. Maybe you're dealing with chronic pain. Maybe you're facing terminal illness.

Maybe you're dealing with conditions or struggles in your life that you've tried everything. You know, maybe you're hanging on by your fingernails fighting addiction.

And every moment feels like a battle. And in all of it, you're seriously tempted to doubt the goodness of God. How could a God who is good allow me to go through this? Jesus says, I know what that's like.

[26 : 45] Yeah, yeah, when I was feeling that, I was sweating blood. I was weeping. My friends were asleep. I was weeping my guts out all by myself.

I've been there. You know, maybe you're struggling to forgive someone even though they never really apologized. Even though they have no idea how badly they hurt you. They don't even care. But you're struggling. You're saying, they know not what they've done. Jesus says, I've been there. You know, maybe you're staying in your marriage even though your spouse has hurt you so deeply. And so much of you wants out of it. But you're fighting for it. Because you believe in the covenant. Jesus says, I've been there. I know what it's like to hold on to a covenant.

Even when the other person has broken it again and again and again. I've been there. In these and a thousand other ways, every single day, we die little deaths to self.

[27 : 44] Because in our guts, we believe in and long to follow Jesus. We believe the resurrection actually happened. We believe it changes everything. And what this is saying is, every single time

we suffer for the sake of our faith, for the sake of following Jesus, we are sharing koinonia, having fellowship with his sufferings.

Jesus is saying, yes, I know exactly what you feel. I feel it too. And Paul says, if that's true about you, then rejoice. Celebrate. Praise God. Rejoice in that suffering.

Why? Because we're masochists? No. Because it is drawing us closer to the heart of Jesus Christ. So this is what Paul is saying in verse 24.

The true Christian life is a road marked with suffering. And that suffering enables us, or this truth enables us, to rethink our whole perspective on suffering.

You know, Viktor Frankl wrote that great book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, because he spent a good portion of his life facing the horrors of concentration camps. And he saw in his, these brutal experiences, the difference between people who were able to survive, endure those horrors with their humanity intact, and people who simply decompensated.

[29 : 03] And he said, the difference is that these people, the people who were able to preserve their humanity, these were people who were able to make meaning out of their suffering. They saw a greater meaning in it.

And this is what Christians see in our suffering. We see suffering that is a reflection of. These are echoes of the cross.

And they're drawing us deeper and deeper into the heart of Jesus Christ. So this is what Paul is saying with this profound verse, and I think why it's worth spending a Sunday on it.

So now I just want to talk about a few implications. What does this actually mean for us? As we leave and go into our lives and go to Monday morning, what does this actually mean? First, this is an invitation to embrace the reality of suffering in your life.

If you're a Christian. If you're not a Christian, this is a kind of suffering that you're not going to have to face in the same way. But for those of us who are Christians, this is a kind of suffering that we will encounter because we are Christians.

[30 : 12] And this is an invitation to embrace that. Some of us want to feel closer to Jesus, and I know some of you do. You feel distant from Jesus, and you wonder, why do I not feel anything in my faith, and why do I feel like God is so far away?

And for not all of you, but for some of you, it may be. It may not have to do with how much you're reading the Bible. It may not have to do with how much you're praying, or how much you're coming to church, or how much you're doing any of those things.

It may be because you are spending so much time and energy insulating yourself from discomfort, which is profoundly easy to do in our culture. That you've lost sight of the fact that when you insulate yourself from all of that, you're also insulating yourself from the presence of God.

Because God is defined as being the God who enters into suffering. Where is he? He's not in the camp. As Hebrews 13 says, he's the one who's outside the camp. He's bearing the reproach of the world. And the author of Hebrews says, therefore, should we not go out to him and bear the same reproach, endure the same suffering?

You cannot live comfortably within the city walls. You have to go outside the walls to that place of suffering. That's where Jesus is. So the first thing is, we need to embrace the reality of suffering.

[31 : 28] And the second one goes right out of the first. For those of you in this room who are suffering right now, you're hearing this and you're thinking, I am in this right now as I'm sitting here. I think our tendency in this culture is to immediately when we face any kind of suffering, whether it's physical or emotional or psychological, our gut instinct is to run as fast as we can away.

It is a problem. It needs to be fixed. Any suffering is bad. It's all bad. We need to get rid of it as soon as possible. So whether it's a counselor or a pill or lots of pills and multiple counselors and solutions and books and whatever we need to do, we need to end it.

And until we do that, we need to numb ourselves from it and avoid it as much as possible. Now, I'm not saying that suffering is good. I'm not saying this justifies suffering. I'm not saying that it's not right for us to want suffering to end.

But I am saying, and this is a hard truth, God often uses pain as a means of change.

It is often the struggle, the suffering, the pain. Those are often the things that God most uses to change us. I think back on my life, I had a blessed life of many great experiences.

[32 : 38] Hashtag blessed all the way. Many, many great experiences. But I remember very few of them. You know what I remember? The pain. Whatever of me is of any value, it's probably a result

of the pain.

So the invitation here is before you instinctively run from whatever pain you're facing, don't just run from it. Listen to it.

Listen to God in it. Sit in it. Ask the Lord, what are you telling me in this?

What are you doing in me through this experience? I love the words from C.S. Lewis. God whispers to us in our pleasures, but he shouts to us in our pain.

It's God shouting at you. Don't miss that opportunity. And then lastly, the third and final implication. And this is what Paul alludes to in verse 27.

[33 : 44] Ultimately, though we suffer now, in Christ, we actually share the hope of a final glory. That one day, all of our tears, all of our brokenness, it's all going to give way to a glorious renewal.

And here's the thing. I actually think our suffering is going to be a part of that glory. It's going to be wrapped up in that glory. There's a kind of Japanese art called kinsakuroi, which is not a great pronunciation.

But the translation is golden mend. And this is a kind of art where the artist takes a broken earthenware vessel, like a pot or a plate, and they take this shattered piece and they rebuild it. But they use liquid gold in all of the cracks and creases to bind the pieces together. So the finished work is the vessel restored, but has all of these veins of gold running through it.

And hands down, hands down, an order of magnitude more beautiful than the original piece. What makes it beautiful? It's the gold. And I think the same will be true of us.

[34 : 57] I think that as God mends and restores and renews this world and us, as he redeems our lives and as he ushers us into what we believe, new creation, when all has been made new, I do not think that all of our suffering and all of our struggle is simply going to be tossed into the scrap heap, forgotten by time, as though it never happened, as though it meant nothing.

Because I don't think a single tear is meaningless in God's economy. I think that we're going to be renewed a lot like these pots. And in some mysterious way, those tears, the struggle, the suffering that you're enduring right now, that that's actually going to be a part of your glory.

Those are going to be the places where the golden light of God's redeeming power and love shines most clearly through. Those are going to be the things that make us radiant.

And you say, well, how could we possibly know something like that? Well, that's exactly what happened with Jesus when he came out of the tomb.

And his glorified body, the body that at this very moment sits in the throne of heaven itself, has scars on it, wounds in the hand and feet, inside places of glory, pain that has been transformed, no longer symbols of weakness and defeat, but now symbols of victory and freedom and renewal and sacrificial love.

[36 : 24] And the same will be true of us. Our wounds will become no longer symbols of weakness and defeat, but your wounds will one day cry out, praise be, to the God of victory, the God of renewal, the God of freedom, the God who's willing to enter in and to suffer more than we ever will, to bring an end to all suffering once and for all.

Amen? Amen. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you. We thank you for your word. We thank you that it can break into our lives and reorient our perspective and give us a way of seeing things that seem impossible to look at.

We thank you that we're not talking about a God who is distant and remote and disinterested, but rather with every description of suffering we share.

We are saying this in the presence of a God who knows that suffering. You know it in your flesh. We thank you for the hope that that brings us. We thank you that as we move forward and come to your table together that we are simply receiving a foretaste of the glory that will one day be revealed.

We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen.