

Showing the Life of Christ in our Mortal Bodies

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Date: 21 March 2021

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[0 : 00] So, I have a confession to make, you know, just between you and me and the whole internet. I preached a month ago and what I said left me feeling a little uneasy. Now don't get me wrong, I believe what I said was true and I hope that God used it to speak to you, but it may have been incomplete. For those of you who didn't hear it or have just forgotten, I was speaking about the sufferings of Christ and how we as Christians are called to share in those same sufferings.

I wanted to challenge those of us who are comfortable and safe Christians to remind us of the realities of following Jesus. But here's the thing, not everyone is comfortable, not everyone is safe. And so as I uploaded that video a month ago, I was left with this nagging doubt about what it says to people who are living with poverty, neglect, abuse and injustice. And as I looked over today's reading, I was immensely challenged yet again, as I read these words of enduring under suffering. So the danger would be that if I carry on as I had last month, it would seem that if you are suffering, God just wants you to sit down, shut up and deal with it. And that can't be true, can it?

So as I tried to figure out what Paul is saying here, I did what we should always do when reading the Bible, I took it back to the cross. But in particular, I thought back to my own childhood.

And the first time I remember really understanding what it meant that Jesus had died. I guess I was around seven, maybe eight years old. I was in church on Good Friday, hearing everything that Jesus went through. And all I could think was how horribly unfair it was that someone as amazing as Jesus would die this lonely, painful and humiliating death.

[2 : 29] Jesus died for our sins. He died so that we can have forgiveness and new life. And we will be celebrating that in full on Easter Day. But Jesus didn't just die for our sins. He also died because of sin. He died because powerful men could make it so that an innocent man would die a criminal's death.

Jesus stepped into a broken, sinful world. And he became his victim. He died a sinner's death that saved sinners. A victim's death that saves victims. And that victim status is clearly on Paul's mind as he's talking about his own ministry in 2 Corinthians, where he's saying here we are hard pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted, struck down. In verse 11 he says this, for we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

Paul sees himself and his fellow Christians as revealing Jesus and who he is by suffering in the way that he suffered. If they're suffering in the same way Jesus suffered, they must be doing what Jesus did. They are suffering for coming face to face with the sinfulness and injustice of our world. I think Esau Macaulay puts it better than I ever could.

Herod did not see Jesus as a danger because he was a compassionate healer who spoke of justice, repentance and transformation. Herod saw Jesus as a threat because his ministry of healing was a sign of the in-breaking reign of God. Anyone familiar with the Jewish scriptures knew that when God did act, he would not leave the rulers of this world unthreatened. This is what frightened Herod, the possibility that the advent of God's reign through Jesus might upset his own. So, we may be called to suffer, but we're not called to suffer in silence. Rather, we point to our suffering and the suffering of others to expose the injustice of the world, to point our finger at those who use corruption, violence and fear to get what they want and to say, you are not in charge here anymore. The kingdom of God is coming.

[5 : 33] And that is why Paul, in his weakness, in his victimhood, still sees the power of God at work. But I say we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed. We show the life of Christ every time we take the side of the weak and the broken, instead of the powerful. We have treasure in jars of clay.

The glory of God is shown in broken human bodies. And out of that brokenness, God brings hope. Verse 13.

It is written, I believed, and therefore I have spoken. With that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak. Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.

The kingdom of God is coming. And that kingdom will bring justice and restoration. When Jesus was raised from the dead, it showed what God's end goal was.

Jesus, the victim of the injustice and violence of the powerful, overcame that power when God raised him from the dead.

[7 : 11] And Paul here reminds us that we too will be raised with Jesus. Death will be no more. Justice will finally be done. And we see that we're still waiting for that. And we read Revelation. This is chapter six. I saw under the altar, the souls of those who have been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, how long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood.

It's not the most comfortable reading, I know. It's not very friendly, not very Christian. And yet, if God's kingdom is truly going to come, He must do right by those who cry out for justice.

Another confession for you. I sometimes find it hard to cry out for God's kingdom to come. You see, I know in my head that the eternal life that God is going to give us will be far, far better than anything this world has to offer right now.

But I've got plans. You know, I've got career plans, I've got family plans, there's stuff I want to do, there's stuff I want to see. In fact, there's just enough stuff that I kind of want Jesus to hold off a few more decades before he comes in glory.

Which is why I need to keep watching the news. I need to keep looking out at the world and the suffering and injustice that goes on there because sure, sure, I've got plans and they're very nice.

[8 : 56] But you know what? I bet Sarah Everard had plans. Stephen Lawrence, George Floyd, they probably have plans. And those plans were snatched away.

Every person who has died an unjust death, in fact, every person who lives under oppression and fear does not have the luxury of asking God to operate on their terms.

All they have left is that cry, how long, Lord, how long are you going to leave us like this? And so if we're not going to be crying out for ourselves, we must add our voices to that cry on behalf of the oppressed. We show the life of Christ in our longing for God's kingdom to come and put an end to suffering and death once and for all. We have treasure in jars of clay. Broken human bodies will be raised to new life.

But that's new life is not just for the future. Rather, that future hope strengthens us to act now.

Verse 16, therefore, we do not lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

[10 : 31] For our light and momentary we are not. Well, the things I've been talking about are not light and momentary. In fact, the things Paul went through for Jesus are not light and momentary either. This world has seen lifetimes of injustice.

But Jesus gives us hope. God himself entered our world and suffered the same injustice that his people did.

And he has promised to bring it to an end. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul reminds us that we are already citizens of heaven, even as we wait for Jesus to come and rescue us.

And what that means is that we don't have to wait to start acting like God's kingdom has come.

Outwardly, we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

It may look like there is no hope left. But in reality, we have the power of God within us to change the world. This is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

[11 : 45] And it has driven Christians throughout history to stand against poverty, slavery and hatred because we are citizens of heaven. And where we are from, that sort of thing is just not acceptable.

We show the life of Christ in our actions that make the world look more like the kingdom of God, even as we wait for it to come. We have treasure in jars of clay.

New life is promised by a transforming world. New life is promised by a transforming world. So we fix our eyes, not on what is seen, but what is unseen.

For what is seen, the pain and injustice of this world is temporary. For what is unseen, the glorious life of the kingdom of God, is eternal.
Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.