

The Fellowship of His Sufferings

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Date: 08 April 2012

[0 : 00] In Philippians 3 verse 10, Paul says that his desire is, verse 10, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death.

He says that I may know him, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. We talked about the power of his resurrection this morning. That amazing power that rent the tomb, that left it empty as our Lord was risen, alive and seen by many and then risen, ascended and praying for us.

Our risen saviour, dramatically different from any other kind of religious figure of the past or present. One and only that was risen. And we know the power of his resurrection.

And it says that we can know that Paul is desiring to know the fellowship of his sufferings. The fellowship of his sufferings. Now, Paul was one that we see in the life that he lived.

There was something evident in his life about sufferings and about testings and trials. And we see that, for example, in 2 Corinthians 12, from verse 9.

[1 : 28] Now, the context there is of the thorn in the flesh. And the Lord says, my strength is made perfect in weakness. And Paul says, most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distress, for Christ's sake.

For when I am weak, then am I strong. Now, that's pretty strong words, isn't it? I take pleasure, he says, in infirmities, reproaches, distress, persecution.

Paul had his share of that. You can see through his life where he was beaten and stoned. He was thrown out of cities. He had to escape in a basket.

He was a basket case. He was under all kinds of trials and testings. Through fastings, through shipwrecks, through all kinds of trial and prisons.

[2 : 38] The question for us tonight is, have you joined the fellowship of his sufferings? That's a fellowship that we should have a desire to join, as Paul had.

The fellowship of his sufferings. We see that in Acts 5, from verse 40, where the context is of them, the apostles, being strongly objected to by the authorities, and commanded not to preach.

It was too much trouble for the authorities of the day. And Acts 5, verse 40, when they had called the apostles and beaten them, they commanded them that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.

And they, the apostles, departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

That was the fellowship of his sufferings. They were beaten not to speak in Jesus' name, and they went straight out and did it again, because they could not forbear.

[3 : 58] Sufferings. Sufferings. Sufferings. I'm sure we've all had some share. Some, maybe you feel more than your fair share. Some of you have had sufferings, difficulties through your life.

You can relate to this message tonight. Sufferings are things that we can be encouraged about, because the Word of God tells us that we can expect to have suffering in some measure.

And we see that suffering can be part of God's will. It can be part of God's will for us to suffer. Now, ultimately and absolutely, we're all essentially at the mercy of God's will.

When it all boils down to it, God's will is going to prevail, no matter what we can ever do. And sometimes it can be God's will that we suffer. It says in 1 Peter 3, verse 17, It is better if the will of God be so that you suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing.

Sometimes it can be God's will, and we need to resign to that fact. It says in Psalm 34, verse 19, In part it says, Many are the afflictions of the righteous.

[5 : 17] So, friends, if you think you've got a degree of suffering, a degree of testing, it says many are the afflictions of the righteous. The Word of God says we can expect it in some measure, because it's part of God's will sometimes.

Now, some people say, Oh, it's never God's will for you to be sick. It's never God's will. It's always God's will to heal you. Well, I don't see that in the Word of God.

I think sometimes God allows such things to test our faith, to strengthen our faith, for us to grow. As we'll talk later, the benefits of suffering. It's quite a morbid subject here tonight, but I trust you'll get something out of it, because it's common to man.

It's common to us, brother, sister today. Suffering is part of our lot in life from time to time. We can learn the benefits of suffering and grow through the suffering.

And it's better to suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing, that's for sure. Back in the early church, in the Nicene Council, I'm told, that in the 4th century AD, there were some 318 delegates attending the Nicene Council.

[6 : 29] And of these 318 men of God, or certainly preachers of the day, there were 12, only 12 who had not lost an eye or lost a hand or did not live on a leg lamed by torture for their Christian faith.

That's a pretty high percentage, isn't it? Only 12 out of 318 didn't have some kind of suffering or some kind of physical damage for the gospel that they were declaring.

So it's part of God's will sometimes. We know for our brothers and sisters, as dear brother Ian has got a burden for the persecuted church, and we've got materials on the back table there that tell us of the sufferings of our brethren in other lands.

We should remember them who are in bonds. It's part of God's will sometimes. Secondly, it's part of our calling. It can be part of our calling to suffer for God and for the gospel.

2 Timothy 1, verse 8. It says in 2 Timothy 1, verse 8, Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner, but be thou partaker, be thou partaker of his afflictions, of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God.

[7 : 51] Paul says to Timothy, Be a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God. When you stand for Christ, it's often the time that you will suffer knockbacks.

You'll suffer ridicule and mocking. Mocking. You know, I've been in workplaces where I've had to endure that. It happens when you're a Christian who stands out, who stands up, that you will face some of that kind of scorn and mockery.

Paul says to Timothy, Be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God. It's part of our calling. When Paul himself was saved, when he was stopped in his tracks on that Damascus road, in Acts 9, when we saw that he was blinded, and then he sought help, as the Lord directed him to Ananias.

The Lord says, I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. It's part of Paul's calling to suffer great things for the name of Jesus.

It's part of our calling as a Christian. It can be part of that will of God, as I say, for our lives.

[9 : 11] And sometimes we can murmur, you know, who's ever grumbled? I'm sure I'm not a few saintly people here today. But, you know, when troubles come, and difficulties come, and suffering comes, it's in those times that the Lord wants us to hang in there, and not to murmur, or complain.

That was what the people of Israel did when they suffered. They murmured against Moses in Exodus 15, verse 24. But murmuring in such a way is actually murmuring against God, and his plan to conform us to the image of Christ.

He wants to conform us to his image. And when you complain about suffering, you're complaining against this process. But all things work together for the good, for them, who are the call, according to his purpose.

Don't allow a bitter attitude to develop. Friends, when trouble comes, don't allow bitterness to develop. It's like someone has said, suffering can make you better or bitter.

Better or bitter. Let it make you better. Not bitter. Bitterness is the wrong response to suffering.

There's many scriptures, I've got some references people might like, I can give you later.

[10 : 33] But what does bitterness do? You can see these notes if you're writing notes. Bitterness can trouble and defile you. Hebrews 12, 16. Bitterness can prevent you from hearing God.

Exodus 6, verse 9. Bitterness can create a vengeful spirit. 1 Samuel 30, verse 6. Bitterness can cause depression and discouragement.

Lamentations 3, verses 18 to 20. And bitterness can poison you spiritually. Acts 8, verse 23. We don't want to settle for bitter.

We want to go for better. It's part of our calling. So it's part of God's will. At times, it's part of our calling. It's part of our warfare. Suffering can be part of the warfare that we call to wage.

In 2 Timothy 2, verses 3 to 4. Paul says, he says, Thou therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that wreath and tangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

[11:40] Now, there's some soldiers here tonight. There's some people who've been in the armed forces. People who've been in the military. They know what soldiers have to go through. I was looking at a bit of a video clip of an assault course, an obstacle course that some military people had designed.

I was crawling through mud and crawling under barbed wire and through tunnels and climbing big wooden obstacles and going across monkey bar type things to cross things.

And the military has to train hard. And sometimes suffering can be part of God's preparing us for the warfare that we're called to be part of as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Endure hardness. We see 1 Peter 1, verse 7. Peter writes of the trial of your faith, the strengthening of faith that is tested.

He says that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perished. Though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

[12:54] That's what will happen to gold quality faith. It's going to be glory. It's going to be praise. It's going to be honour at the appearing of Christ.

Suffering is part of our warfare. It's also a preparation that God can use you to help others. The tough things you're going through will help you minister to other people.

It's a fact in 2 Corinthians 1. The message of God, the Father of mercies, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the God of all comfort.

2 Corinthians 1. This God of all comfort, it says, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted by God.

The suffering that you will go through in your life will equip you. It will equip you. It will prepare you so God can use you to minister. So it's part of God's will, part of your calling, part of our warfare.

[14:08] There's some opportunities that suffering gives to us. There's many verses I'm reading, but they're all along this theme. The opportunity.

The opportunity to grow. 1 Peter 4, verse 12. 1 Peter 5, verse 13.

On their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf. It's an opportunity for you to grow.

Believe it tonight. It's an opportunity for your faith to be strengthened, to be a partaker of Christ's suffering, to be a part of that fellowship of his sufferings.

[15:31] The psalmist cried in Psalm 4, verse 1. Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness. Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress.

Have mercy upon me and hear my prayer. Thou hast enlarged me in my distress. God can enlarge you. He can extend you.

He can grow you through such things. And suffering can help you find spiritual blessings. As we read in Matthew 5, that Sermon on the Mount, verse 10.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.

Rejoice and be exceeding glad. For great is your reward in heaven. For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

[16:35] When men revile you and they curse you and call you names. When they persecute you. When they shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.

It's an opportunity for us to grow. It's an opportunity to please God. In 1 Peter 2, verse 19 it says, Well this is thankworthy if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

It's thankworthy. It's something that pleases God. Suffering helps us develop spiritual qualities that are positive. Romans 5, 3-4.

We glory in tribulations knowing that tribulation worketh patience and patience experience and experience hope. See the love of God shed abroad in hearts.

Peter prays for some people that God, after that you've suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you.

[17 : 36] That's 1 Peter 5, verse 10. He prays that God will establish, perfect, strengthen, settle you. These are the qualities that should come forth out of the test.

After you've suffered a while, God will make you grow. And it's an opportunity to please God. It's an opportunity to trust God. To trust God.

In 2 Corinthians 1, 8-10, Paul writes, he says, We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble, which came to us in Asia. Now, if the Apostle Paul got some trouble, us humbler and weaker ones, why should we not expect to have some too?

If God allowed the Apostle Paul, if God allowed the most just man on all the earth, the just Job, if God allowed him, such ones, to have trouble then, don't be surprised if you have some too.

He says, We were pressed out of measure above strength. In so much we despaired even of life, but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.

[18 : 54] It's an opportunity. He says we had trouble in Asia. He said we have the sentence of death. We despaired even of life. Why? Because we should not trust in ourselves, but trust in God.

Suffering is an opportunity for us to trust in God, to grow our faith, to stop trusting in ourselves and our own resources, and to learn to trust in him.

In 2 Corinthians 4, verse 7, we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. Trust in God.

Trust in his promises. As the psalmist said, Psalm 46, God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. We learn to trust him when we're in trouble.

We learn to trust him as our refuge and strength. Now, sometimes we pray prayers a bit like this. Comfort me, Lord, and pay my bills.

[19 : 54] Comfort me, Lord, and cure my ills. Comfort me, Lord, and remove my fears. Comfort me, Lord, and dry my tears. Comfort me, Lord, and increase my wealth.

Comfort me, Lord, and preserve my health. Comfort me, Lord, and plead my case. Comfort me, Lord, and enlarge my place. Comfort me, Lord, and tell me why. Comfort me, Lord, and set me on high.

Comfort me, Lord, and do what I say. Comfort me, Lord, and do it today. The Spirit listened as I uttered my mind. He said not a word as I pleaded and pined.

And then he spoke in the language of conviction, saying comfort isn't comfort in the absence of affliction. If you want comfort, you've got to have some trouble, because then he can come.

Then he does come. He does come. And his feathers are over us. Under his wings we can find that shelter. We can find that sure comfort. And that sure soothing of our sorrows.

[20 : 55] Here's the one that we can come. It's an opportunity for you to trust him. What did Job do? In all of the things that went through his life, in Job 1 verse 20 it says, He arose.

He tore his mantle, he shaved his head, and he fell down upon the ground and worshipped. Worshipped. Job worshipped. You know, sometimes when trouble comes, we don't want to worship.

We don't feel like worshipping. But when we're in trouble, we should worship. We should worship. As James 5 verse 13, Is any man afflicted? Let him pray.

It's an opportunity to please God, to trust God, to glorify God. 1 Peter 4 verse 19, Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him, in well-doing as unto a faithful creator.

What did Paul and Silas do? Their backs bruised, bleeding, their feet in stocks, hands in chains, behind prison bars.

[22 : 00] They sang praises. They worshipped. They worshipped. Corinne's Betsy Tenboom, in the concentration camp, of Ravensbrück, they were asked, Where has your alleged God of love put you here?

Why has your God put you here? And Betsy replied quietly, To obey him. What about Elizabeth Elliot, and Rachel Saint? They returned with love and forgiveness, to take the gospel to the Orca Indians, who had savagely murdered their husbands.

What of Joni Erickson's harder, the quadriplegic, sitting in her wheelchair, with a paintbrush clenched between her teeth, bringing beauty out of her pain, and signing it, PTL.

Praise the Lord. God can bring beauty out of ashes. When the disciples saw a man, who was blind from birth, they asked, Who was responsible?

Was it his sin, or his parents? And the Lord said, in John 9, verse 3, Neither this man, sin, nor his parents, but that the works of God, should be made manifest, in him.

[23 : 10] Suffering, can be an opportunity, to glorify God. When you're doing it tough, the witness, of your life, in the midst of that. My grace is sufficient for thee, for my grace is made perfect, in weakness.

Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory, in my infirmities, that the power, of Christ, may rest upon me. 2 Corinthians 12, verse 9.

Another story, just to close, a man, John Selwyn, was known as the Bishop, of the South Pacific. John Selwyn, At one time, he was a, a well-known boxer.

He was recognised, for his boxing skill. Touched by the Holy Spirit's, convicting power, he became, an outstanding missionary. He left all that, behind him.

And a magazine, reports, that one day, this saintly leader, reluctantly gave a stern, but loving rebuke, to a man, who regularly attended, the local church.

[24 : 15] And this disorderly one, resented the advice, and angrily struck, Brother Selwyn, a violent blow, in the face, with his clenched fist. In return, the missionary, merely, folded his arms, and humbly, looked into the man's, blazing eyes, with his boxing skill, and powerful, rippling muscles, just like these here.

And with his boxing skill, and those powerful, rippling muscles, he could easily, have knocked, out his antagonist. Instead, he turned, the other cheek, and waited calmly, to be hit, a second time.

This was too much, for the assailant. They became, greatly ashamed, and fled, into the jungle.

Years afterwards, the man, accepted the Lord, as his saviour, and gave his testimony, before the church.

It was customary, at that time, for believers, in the Pacific, nations, to choose, a new name, a Christian name, for himself, after he was saved.

When asked, if he wished, to follow this practice, he replied, without hesitation, yes, call me, John Selwyn. He's the one, who taught me, what Jesus Christ, is really like.

[25 : 27] And this brought, real joy, to the missionary's heart, for he saw, that heeding, the saviour's, instruction, to suffer wrongfully, for his cause, had resulted, in making, his witness effective.

What about you, brother, sister? Will you, accept, that degree of suffering? Will you bear it, patiently? Will you learn? Will it make you better, rather than bitter?

Will it help you to grow? Paul says, we should, be rejoicing, in hope, patient, in tribulation, continuing instant, in prayer. Romans 12, verse 12.

And he writes, in 2 Timothy 2, verse 12, if we suffer, we shall also, reign, with him. Friends, we've heard about, suffering tonight.

It's part, of God's will. Don't think God's, abandoned you, when tough things happen. It's part, of his training program, for you. It's part, of God's will, for your life.

[26 : 26] At times, to endure, a portion, of trouble. It's part, of our calling, as God's people. We're meant to, be a people, whose faith, is going to bear, that trial, period.

It's going to bear through, and it's going to shine through. It's part, of our calling. It's part, of our warfare. After all, we're meant to be an army. We're meant to be soldiers.

We're meant to endure hardness, as such good soldiers, pleasing the one, who's enlisted us. It's opportunity, opportunity, for us to grow. Opportunity, to please God.

Opportunity, to trust God. Opportunity, to glorify God. Friends, let's have, that same desire, that Paul had. That I may know, him, and the power, of his resurrection, and, the fellowship, of, his sufferings, being made, conformable, unto, his death.

Have you joined, the fellowship, of his sufferings? Let's be encouraged, to be, a people. Not shying away, but, taking, that pathway, to the cross.

[27 : 42] That pathway, as he says to us, deny yourself, take up the cross, and follow me. When you take up the cross, it's a one way journey. And, and, the end of that road, is, is a place, where they can put the cross, into the ground.

And, friends, we need to have, that willingness, to go, hard at it. To go hard at it. And, to endure hardness. Let nothing, deter you.

Let nothing, detour you. Let us pray.