

# What Suffering In Christ Does

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[ 0 : 00 ] We'll read God's word today, trusting that it is his inspired, infallible, inerrant, clear, and sufficient word. It's God's very own word for you, his people. In verse 12, we begin reading.

I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happen to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel. So that it has become evident to the whole palace guard and to all the rest that my chains are in Christ.

And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill.

The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add to my affliction and my chains. But the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached. And in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

[ 1 : 23 ] The word of the Lord for the people of God. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. The grass withers, the flower fades, the word of the Lord stands forever.

Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord, I ask that by the illumination of your Holy Spirit, the Spirit that dwells in every true believer, the Spirit of God that breathed out these words of Scripture, by the power of that Spirit, Lord, will you please minister Christ to his people today.

May Christ be so near to us in these moments that we'll share next, Lord, under your word. May we know what it means to be in Christ, especially through suffering.

We ask this for your glory. Amen. Amen. Well, everyone who is a human being suffers.

[ 2 : 51 ] Everyone suffers. In verse 13, Paul describes his suffering once again as his chains. His chains.

And his suffering is a physical suffering in the body, away from the church, in solitude, loneliness. Seeing all the problems of the early church all around him.

What a picture of the Christian life. It's such a mix, isn't it? There's profound joy and there's deep sweetness in the Christian life. But there's true suffering, true pain.

It's a mix. I know many of you are suffering today. We're grieving.

We're healing. We're worried about the future. For Paul, he called it my chains.

[ 4 : 01 ] Some of you might feel trapped to a job or a desk. Another is maybe it's the exhausting task of parenting and raising little ones. Feels like you're always around the sink doing dishes.

Others of you have been laid up in bed. You've been sick. You've been not able to get around. Depending on others. So humbling.

And my encouragement is that in Hebrews 5, 7, in the days of his flesh, though Jesus Christ was the Son of God, yet he learned obedience by the things he suffered.

Psalms 119, verse 71, the psalmist adds his testimony to God's faithfulness, and he says, My suffering was good for me because it taught me to pay attention to God's decrees.

And he prays this to the Lord. Thank you for the suffering and what you taught me through it. So everyone suffers, but the only ones who are happy through the suffering are you whom God teaches to suffer in Christ.

[ 5 : 17 ] So beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, my encouragement for you today is what suffering in Christ does. Suffering in Christ does something in you and through you.

And I hope you'll be encouraged by these verses. Number one, what does it mean to suffer in Christ? Look at verse 12.

Paul says, These things that happened to me. He's referring briefly in a few words to what we read in Acts chapter 21 through 24.

If you want to get a deep dive picture of these things that happened to Paul, read those chapters. Acts 21 through 24. Or I'll summarize it in three lines for you. After going on the missionary journeys, Paul came back to Jerusalem and he preached the gospel.

And he said, I was one dragging Christians out of their fellowship, putting them in chains, having them unjustly arrested. I'm the chief of sinners. But Christ died for sinners like you and me.

[ 6 : 24 ] That's what he stood up and preached in Jerusalem. Well, because he brought with him some Greeks on this trip, even though they didn't go into the temple, Paul was arrested on the false accusation that he had defiled the temple, even though Christ had already torn the veil in half.

So he was unjustly arrested. And as he was carried away, he had the opportunity to preach once more as he's being accused and all these false witnesses whose stories don't even match.

And Paul preached to them and he said, you continue to reject Jesus Christ. And Paul says, Jesus Christ, who you tied up and unjustly threw into the trial and then whipped and put on the cross and you killed.

This is the Christ, the Son of God that I'm preaching to you. He's alive. He is risen. And Paul is now following in those exact footsteps of Jesus Christ, identifying with Christ, almost play by play in the suffering of his Lord.

See, so Paul is not the Messiah here. Paul is merely a disciple following the footsteps of Jesus. Well, then Paul is tied up and they say, let's torture him by whipping him until he tells us what he really did.

[ 7 : 48 ] He's going to be flogged without a trial. And in that moment, Paul appeals to Caesar because he's a Roman citizen by birth. He's elite among the empire of Rome.

From that moment on, they put a chain from Paul to a Roman soldier. And those soldiers would take shifts who would be on the other end of that chain attached to Paul.

From Paul's perspective, when he was arrested, carried all the way to Rome, and then left there in house arrest, he's had a chain attaching him to a Roman guard 24-7, 365 days a year for two years.

And he says in verse 13 of our sermon text, my chains are in Christ. Not my chains are for Christ. He says in verse 13, it has become evident that my chains are in Christ. What does that mean?

What does it mean to suffer in Christ?

[ 8 : 55 ] This is an odd Greek phrase, and I'm no scholar, just enough to understand the basics. But listening to other commentators on the Greek language, the word-for-word translation is this, the bonds of me, that's my chains, apparent, that's, it has become evident, in anointed, that's in Christ, to be becoming.

That's how the Greek reads word-for-word. It's not easy to interpret that. Maybe the best summary in English would be this, my chains manifest in Christ became.

This strange language construction forces us, as this Greek scholar put it, it forces us to rest and pause and reflect on every word in its turn.

So let's walk through those three phrases. My chains, number one. Number two, manifest. Number three, in Christ. Number one, my chains. These are the instruments used by the Lord to spread the gospel among and beyond those Roman guards.

My chains. He says, my chains manifest something. They reveal to these guards something of how precious Christ is to Paul.

[ 10 : 28 ] See, these guards, they were getting a good read on Paul. And they knew when they look at Paul, there's something very precious to Paul, and it's Christ.

It's Christ being manifested through the chains, through this picture of his suffering. And in Christ, he says, his chains are part of what is entailed for Paul to be united to his Lord.

The chains come with being a disciple. So for Paul to live in Christ means chains for two years.

Could you turn with me to Philippians chapter 3, verse 10?

I think here we have a great insight into what Paul means to suffer in Christ. In Philippians 3, 10, Paul writes that he wants to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of Christ's suffering, being conformed to his death.

You see, for Paul, the greatest blessing is to be able to identify with his Savior in the suffering that his Savior bore for him. That's what it means to suffer in Christ.

[ 12 : 05 ] It means that you get to share in the sufferings of Jesus and to know him even better. whenever a child gets sick, you'll often hear the mother or the grandmother say, I just wish I could be sick in your place.

I wish I could share in your sufferings. If a loved one of yours is going through something like that, you want to know them and relate to them so deeply that you're feeling what they're feeling. Do you see how Christ suffered for his people? And there's no greater blessing than to know Christ at that level to identify with your Savior in his suffering for you. So your union and communion to Christ become visible in suffering when you suffer in Christ. That's what it means to suffer in Christ.

Now what does suffering in Christ do? When you suffer in Christ, here's one thing. You tell of God's providence to his family.

[ 13 : 12 ] When you suffer in Christ, it does something in you that makes you want to look back and tell the story of how he had you all along. It was his good hand over you. And you want to share that with his family.

Another testimony added to the providence of God. Look at how Paul does this in verse 12. He says, I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.

Yes, he's suffering, but he wants the church in Philippi who he calls brethren, my family, and the Lord. You need to know all those things that happened, here's how they turned out. God's gospel advanced.

We can infer that when Paul was with the church in Philippi, he had shared with them his heart. That's what Paul does. He had a vision of going through Rome and not to stop in Rome. If you read the letter to the Romans, it's to let them take joy and also sending him on to Spain. And you get to be part of this church. Look what God is doing. His kingdom is advancing. Oh, but Paul wanted to go to Rome. He wanted to preach to Caesar Augustus himself.

[ 14 : 23 ] This is the time of the Roman peace, the Pax Romana. And this was the great Augustus Caesar who had unified the empire. He had annexed Egypt, parts of Spain, and Central Europe under one great empire.

And Paul couldn't be more excited to get to Rome, the capital of the entire empire, and preach the gospel. He had done this at Little Rome, Philippi, and now how will he get to do this in the big capital itself?

He says, I want you to know, brethren, the things which happened to me didn't set any of those dreams back. In fact, that's what God used to actually turn out in fulfilling all of that. when he says they actually turned out this way. He's telling of God's providence to the family of God. What is God's providence?

This is a big word. God's providence means His sovereign hand governing, ruling over all things. Our confession describes it this way. God, the good creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom, He does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things from the greatest to the least by His most wise and holy providence to the end for which they were created according to His infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of His own will to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.

[ 15 : 59 ] That's God's providence. And Paul says, all that happened to me actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.

See that phrase in verse 12, the furtherance, the advance for the greater progress of the gospel. That word is a military term, the advance or the furtherance.

And remember, in Philippi, Little Rome, there would have been many veterans of the Roman Empire. These were veteran soldiers. They would have been very patriotic. And when he uses a military term like that, you can imagine that congregation receiving this as encouragement. Here's what that term means. To advance. The Roman Empire would send out scouts ahead of the invading army to take a new territory.

Those scouts would clear the path through a dense forest. They would make a way for the rest of the troops to follow. They would also scout out the land. See, here's a strategic inland.

[ 17 : 05 ] Here's a point where we can get access and it'll open up and we'll be able to conquer this region. You come back and you tell the army, this will be the most favorable terrain for you to march on.

This is how we can advance our army and what we're claiming. When you come back and you hear this report from a scout, you feel strengthened.

You want to stand up as a soldier and march onward, hasten onward. The kingdom is advancing. Let's follow where these scouts have gone next. And so that's what Paul says that everything that I suffered up to this point, it revealed God's sovereignty and if I die in chains here, which he does, you church, you come as the next army pushing on and planting the church here and establishing, furthering the gospel mission of King Jesus.

So when you suffer in Christ, you tell of his providence to his family and it encourages them. See, Paul's not attaching any of their hope to Paul himself.

Paul is pointing to the gospel. It's the gospel of the living Jesus Christ who through his Holy Spirit he will advance. Our confidence is not in man, even the apostle Paul.

[18:22] It's in the gospel carried on through the word of God. I want to prove this. You can turn to 2 Timothy 2.9. 2 Timothy 2.9.

If you don't want to turn there, you can also listen. Here's what 2 Timothy 2.9 says. And to give you a point of reference, Philippians is one of Paul's earlier letters that he wrote from prison.

And it's so joyful. You might think, well, this is just him thinking he won't be there too long. 2 Timothy is the last letter we have from Paul. The very end of his time in prison.

Notice what he says in 2 Timothy 2.9. I am suffering bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound.

The word of God is not in a chain. See, their confidence should be in the advance of the gospel through the word. It's not tied to any one man.

[19:27] It's God's word that advances his gospel. And Paul joyfully goes out as the scout. That's where he'll end his life. He'll never get to go to Spain. But the word of God will march onward through his church.

And with every step of the way, you bear witness. Look, even through my suffering, see God's providence advancing his kingdom. We get to do that when we suffer in Christ as well.

Number three. What does suffering in Christ do? When you suffer in Christ, the life of God in you becomes evident to others.

When you suffer in Christ, the life of God in you becomes evident to others. Look at verse 13.

It has become evident, Paul wrote, to the whole Petrarian guard, the whole palace guard, and to all the rest that my chains are in Christ.

[20:31] It has become evident to them. Who were these guards? Well, I've mentioned briefly, these were the elite Roman soldiers that worked for the emperor himself.

They were estimated to be 9,000 of these guards called the Petrariani. In Christ, in Paul, through Paul's suffering, is evident to these guards one by one.

See, from their perspective, they see an old minister of the word, a Jew, now in Rome, who's trapped to a chain.

From Paul's perspective, suffering in Christ, Christ is being revealed through his suffering. He says, I'm the one here who is free to preach the gospel to you.

And you're chained on to me. You have to listen. Imagine what that would be like to be one of these elite guards. You work for the biggest empire the world has ever known.

[21:39] You don't just work on the army in some outskirt colony. You work in Rome. Not just in Rome. You work for the emperor, Caesar himself. You're among the elite.

And part of your rotation is going to be to spend a watch, a quarter of a 24-hour shift with this old minister. Imagine what that handoff is like.

Many of us have jobs where you rotate a shift and you check in, you check out. And it's part of the job of a nurse or someone else with a shift to get the report from that shift so I can be ready for the next one.

And these guards would know each other and you can just see it in this man's face. One of the toughest, most hardened soldiers around. He's the alpha.

And you just see his face looks peaceful. And you see a calmness in this man. He's always trying to prove to everyone he's the tough guy. And he's just so relaxed now.

[22:37] What has happened? You don't even know what's coming up for you. That chain goes on to you as the guard and it's your shift. Paul starts telling you of God himself who created you and how you have no hope standing before the holy God in your sin.

But God himself took on flesh and he fulfilled his own law for his people. And it's not just good news for them, it's good news for you if you believe in him.

And the kingdom of God advances. When you suffer in Christ, the life of God in you becomes evident to others.

How could it not? It's God himself inside of you. We read in verse 13, it wasn't just the Petroirian guard, it was also all the rest. Word spreads that my chains are in Christ.

Who are all the rest? We can connect a dot here that was so cool for me to see. Would you turn in your Bible to Philippians 4? You're in Philippians 1. Flip the page there.

[ 23 : 55 ] Who might be part of all the rest who hear of the precious Christ through Paul's ministry? Philippians 4.22. As he's writing to the church back in Philippi, Philippians 4.22, he says, all the saints, all the believers, everyone in Rome within the church, those who have visited me, or even those here that are part of the guard, they greet you, church in Philippi, especially those who are of Caesar's household.

Do you see how that desire for Paul to go to Rome and preach to Caesar and preach to the great capital, it's being fulfilled through the suffering, through the chain. As he's back in Philippi looking out at the Roman Empire, man, wouldn't it be amazing, church, let's pray that God's gospel will reach the Roman army, the greatest army in the world that they would believe and that the emperor, Caesar, would believe.

Let's pray, church in Philippi, that God would do that and look at how God did it. It's through his chain. Christ speaks through Paul and through his word and listening to Christ's voice as we sing, new life, the dead receive, the mournful, broken hearts rejoice, the humble poor believe.

Second Timothy 2.9, Paul said, I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal, but the word of God is not bound. The life of God is in you who believe just that same way, just as powerfully.

There's a book that Jonathan mentioned in Sunday school and I enjoyed reading it this week. It's called The Life of God in the Soul of Man. And that's exactly what it is to be a Christian.

[ 26 : 01 ] The life of God himself dwells in the soul of man. This book quoted an old poet who described the gospel that way. The love of God shot all these golden arrows at man, but nothing could penetrate man's heart of stone.

So the God of love put himself in his bow and shot himself at your heart to shatter your heart of stone and overwhelm you with his love.

And when you suffer in Christ, the life of God in you, it becomes evident to others. Number four, what else does suffering in Christ do?

When you suffer in Christ, God uses your life to embolden his family. When you suffer in Christ, God uses your life to embolden his family.

Look at verse 14. Philippians 1.14. Most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident of my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

[ 27 : 14 ] God uses the suffering of his people to embolden Christians, to embolden the church.

From the world's perspective, if we can just make life hard for Christians, if we can persecute and shut them down and not let them meet, not let them gather in the name of Jesus, not let them preach the gospel or at least censure what they're going to say, we can stop the spread of Christianity.

That's what Satan's trying to do through the world. We can look at even recent history and see it's just the opposite. In 1949, the population of China was 542 million people.

Out of those 540 million Chinese, only 1 million were believers. 30 years later, that 1 million Christians went to 12 million.

What makes this remarkable is it's during the time when all the churches were shut down, when it was illegal to preach the gospel, where the Bible had to be smuggled into China. The church exploded.

[ 28 : 30 ] Today, the population of China is 1.5 billion with 100 million Christians, mostly worshipping God underground. 100 times the growth in this one country during the most intense times of persecution in modern history in just a period of 75 years.

That's what our God does. As the Christians are persecuted, the brethren, the family of the Lord, gets much more bold to speak the word without fear and His kingdom advances.

And that's why 2 Timothy, that same letter, that last one from prison, 2 Timothy 4, verses 1 and 2, Paul wrote with confidence to Timothy, the church in Ephesus and to all of us, I charge you,

therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom, preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, exhort, and teach with all long suffering.

That's what suffering in Christ does. God uses your life through suffering to embolden His family. Number five, what else does it do to suffer in Christ?

Of all of these verses, these are the ones that were the most convicting to me, the most work God still has to do in my own heart. Here's the doctrine I see. When evil motives become evident, you identify even more with Christ in His suffering.

[ 30 : 17 ] Evil motives are everywhere and we see them. Sometimes we suspect them and then other times they become very clear. But when evil motives become evident, you feel that injustice.

You feel that sense of wrong in the name of Christ. You identify even more with Christ in His suffering. Let's read verses 15, 16, and 17. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife and some also from goodwill.

The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely supposing to add to my affliction in my chains, but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.

Paul spent serious time reflecting on the early church. The early church is no better or worse really than the church today. Sometimes we want to make it like a golden era.

We should just be more like the early church, full of envy and strife and selfish ambition, not sincere. That's not the early church we should go back to. It's the same.

[ 31 : 30 ] It's the same church as today. There's much wrong going on in the name of Christ. You felt it. You've seen it. And it should bother us. It bothered Paul.

He's naming it very specifically. Three verses of this. It's clearly been something heavy on him. I'd like to walk you through these words he uses. In verse 15 he uses the word envy.

Envy means to be discontent at the sight of the reputation or happiness enjoyed by another. To grieve yourself at the superiority of another and to hate him on that account.

In Mark 15.10 we read that our Lord Jesus Christ knew that the chief priest had delivered him for envy. And Paul is identifying with Christ in his suffering.

There are many wanting to preach Christ even preach correct doctrine because they wanted the attention and the fame that Paul got as an apostle. He uses the word strife.

[ 32 : 37 ] It can be translated as rivalry in verse 15 as well. It's contention debate variance for the sake of arguing.

It's to struggle and to vie for superiority over others. You see what all these have in common is they're looking at man. They're not looking at the glory of Christ.

Christ. In verse 16 he describes the wrong motives of selfish ambition. This was a reference to political campaigns in the Roman Empire.

Electioneering. Partisanship. Political self-promotion. It was the practice of Roman candidates for office who went about the city to solicit votes.

Do you get the picture of what was going on among these churches in Rome? In verse 16 Paul describes those troublemakers as insincere.

[ 33 : 35 ] Preaching Christ but trying to do it so that Paul will suffer even more. He says insincerely to add to affliction of my chains.

It means to be raising up even more accusations against Paul to push Paul down. It's the opposite of clean and pure. In verse 18 he describes the preaching as being done in pretense.

Pretense is to cloak or color something like put makeup on something purely for outward show.

Jesus spelt this too and he preached against it.

In Matthew 23 14 he said woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you devour the weak and for a pretense you make long public prayers.

Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. How is it that this can happen that so much evil such evil motives can be rewarded and celebrated and permitted within churches that call themselves Christian in the name of Christ who suffered and made himself low.

[ 34 : 47 ] How can this happen? Well I think Paul was wrestling with that very question and that's what he cautioned in that same last letter from prison 2 Timothy 2 3 he warned the time will come when they these congregations people like you and me we will endure sound doctrine no longer but instead according to our own desires because we have itching ears we will heap up for ourselves teachers that will do just that.

So we need to guard against this church we're just as vulnerable as the early church was to this. I want to encourage you in our constitution it calls for vows for elders just as members make vows to the congregation.

Here are two of the questions that potential elders are asked that I believe get at the heart of what Paul is addressing. Number one have you been moved as far as you know your own heart to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote his glory and the gospel of his son.

A potential elder will have to stand here and vow to you yes that's my motive. Number two do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel and the purity the peace and the unity of the church whatever opposition may arise unto you on that account you must say I do.

When the evil motives become evident to Christians we identify with Christ in his suffering and we hunker down as a congregation back to his word back to our purpose which is to glorify and enjoy God together.

[ 36 : 39 ] Amen? Well those are the things I see in this passage that God does as we suffer in Christ and I love how Paul leaves us with such a sweet taste in the mouth in verse 18.

After wrestling through that you see what he asks rhetorically he says what then what yes this is all going on what are you going to do it in Philippi what are you going to do about it what am I going to do about it here in chains in Rome what then and here's the conclusion that by the grace of God the spirit taught Paul I hope he'll teach this to me before he takes me on to glory in every way whether in pretense or in truth Christ is preached Christ not financial prosperity nor Christian nationalism but Christ and Christ alone must be preached Christ is preached not legalism nor licentiousness but Christ and Christ alone must be preached Christ is preached not your works not God's grace plus your works but Christ and Christ alone must be preached

Christ of the Nicene Creed that we say together and we have held with the church ever since he's the one and only Lord of the church the promised one he is who we preach and Paul writes in this I rejoice Christ the God of God light of light true God of true God he is preached and in this I rejoice Christ creator of all who came down who was made flesh he is preached and in Christ being preached we rejoice Christ who entered humanity for us for our salvation he is preached freely to anyone who will come come and welcome come oh sinners and rejoice Christ who suffered died and rose again and ascended to heaven he is preached he rules he is the king and lord of all and we rejoice when he is proclaimed

Christ is coming to judge the living and the dead the full gospel of Christ is preached and we rejoice Paul says in this I rejoice yes and I will rejoice every time I hear the name of Jesus being proclaimed and preached I rejoice and I resolve I continue to rejoice in Christ because though I am suffering I am bound with chains as a criminal the word of God is not bound so dear brothers and sisters you too suffer but suffering in Christ does powerful works through his people I encourage you through your suffering tell of God's providence to others trust him to reveal the life of God inside of you through your suffering to others

I pray Lord that as we suffer with one another bear one another's burdens we cry together we pray together as we do that that we will be emboldened as a church we will identify even more with him in his suffering we'll trust him that even through the suffering somehow he's advancing his gospel purpose and together every time the name of Jesus is proclaimed and named and prayed under we rejoice together Psalm 119 71 you can testify as well my suffering was good for me because it taught me to pay attention to the good Lord who gives me his loving lordship with Christ my king and his law we settle we're under him we're not a prisoner to Rome we're not under the chains of our suffering we're slaves to Christ and his word is unbound everyone suffers but happy are you whom God teaches to suffer in Christ let's spend a moment reflecting and asking

[ 41 : 24 ] God to minister this truth to our hearts