

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SUFFERING

- Jesus' followers should not be surprised or caught off guard by suffering. **1 Peter 4:12**
- Jesus' followers must endure suffering without compromising their integrity. **2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Peter 2:19**
- Jesus' followers must love their persecutors and pray for their welfare. **Matthew 5:43–47**
- Jesus' followers are to renounce any intention to take revenge. **Romans 12:14–21**
- Jesus' followers are to trust God in the middle of their suffering and respond by proactively doing good. **1 Peter 4:19**
- Jesus' followers are to use their experiences of suffering as a basis for comforting others who suffer. **2 Corinthians 1:3–7**
- Jesus' followers are to fix their eyes on Jesus. **Hebrews 12:1–3**
- Jesus' followers are commanded to rejoice "insofar as you share Christ's sufferings." **1 Peter 4:13**

I. Introduction

A. Jesus' worst promise

1. John 15:20-21 (Galatians 3:4; Philippians 1:29; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:21, 4:12; Hebrews 10:32; 2 Timothy 3:12)

"Remember the word I spoke to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they don't know the one who sent me."

2. No one enjoys suffering. No one. Now, most people across the globe recognize, that suffering is normal.

3. Western culture, on the other hand, has so glorified the values of safety, comfort, and convenience that anything less is something akin to a human rights violation.

4. This has bled over into the people of God and redefined our expectations. Even with the most conservative literal churches, there is an unspoken idea that God somehow promises to protect them from suffering - look at how the church, including our church responded to the pandemic. If we pray and fight back hard enough, we will turn the tide and get what we want.

*For followers of Jesus, the Bible promises suffering for our faith and the kingdom of God. The comfortable and privileged experience of the West is an anomaly and has had **a regressive impact on our maturity and transformation.**

B. Attachment for suffering

II. Free, not safe

A. Defiant, respectful activity (v12-16)

1. Perception of the early church was distanced but respectful
2. Miracles drew people toward Jesus
3. Word spreading beyond Jerusalem

B. Arrest and re-arrest (v17-26)

1. "Filled with jealousy"

- a. Arrest and imprisonment: fear of losing their power and prestige (trouble with Rome brought on by unrest)
- b. Leaders of Israel believed less in the power of God and more in the power of violence and prison to accomplish goals...

2. Angelic prison break

- a. This was a cosmic overthrow of the Jewish leadership.
 - 1) Opened prison doors
 - 2) Go stand in the temple and continue obeying what Jesus told you: be my witnesses
- b. And they obeyed

3. Aftermath

- a. Locked cells and guards in place: no idea they were gone
- b. Found in the temple where they were apprehended picking up where they left off

4. Brought back before the council... hesitantly

*The apostles (the people of God) are free but they are not safe. God's people are never safe. Safety is not an inheritance of Jesus' disciples, only witness is.

C. Confirmation (v27-32)

- 1. Violation of a court order: authority to arrest and even punish
- 2. Complaint: you bring this man's blood on us...
 - a. Matthew 27:24-25

"When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that a riot was starting instead, he took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd, and said, "I am innocent of this man's blood. See to it yourselves!" All the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!""

- b. No longer convenient for the leaders: blaming the apostles

3. Statement, not rhetorical question

- a. We must obey God, not you.
- b. Proclaim Jesus, reigning King

D. Response (v33-40)

- 1. Violence escalates: want to kill them (man's tools vs God's tools: again, does this challenge our defaults?)
- 2. Gamaliel's wisdom and political savvy
 - a. Pharisee; grandson of Hillel; moderate school, Saul (Paul) was his student; so well respected and loved that at his death, the Jews said the glory of the Law departed with him
 - b. Of man... of God...
 - 1) Of men: ultimately not lasting but can for a while
 - 2) Of God: absolutely right, can't stop what God is doing

*Gamaliel listened but didn't hear, he saw but didn't perceive. Come follow me was the call to obey. He responded with wait and see, a compromise that hedged his bet.

*Politicians always will wait and see, priests obey.

3. Threat and punishment and release

- a. Beat them (flogged)
 - 1) Whipped on back and chest with a 3 strand strap of calf-hide
 - 2) 40 lashes save 1: OT law of 40 max, 39 just in case they miscounted
 - 3) Often left victims close to death if not dead from blood loss
- b. Stop talking about Jesus, or this will happen again... day.

E. Spirit filled (v41-42)

- 1. Condition...

- a. Outside: ruthlessly beaten; bloody; probably needed assistance, and shamed in public all for telling the story of Jesus
 - b. Inside: filled with the Spirit and overflowing with gratitude and joy
2. "Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for Jesus
- a. Sit in this for a moment...
 - b. Before you assume understanding or participation... they did not complain about what had happened or condemn those who wronged them or confer on how to change their situation. They were fully focused and rejoiced seeing this as God approving of them as worthy of Jesus. If suffering is what it takes, are you interested in being worthy of Jesus name.
 - c. I don't have a category for this. I have not been mistreated in a significant way that I could even have the opportunity to rejoice. But I have complained about things that display my immaturity in light of this passage.

*What does this awaken in you? Repentance? Gratitude? Fear? Embarrassment? Confidence?

*Have you ever suffered for the kingdom of God and responded with a deep gratitude and visible joy that you would be worthy to participate in the work of Jesus? Do you even see suffering as being counted worthy or have you redefined what God considers making us worthy? Or are we just too busy meddling in other things far from God's kingdom to even see what he is doing?

*Again, be careful not to cheapen the sacrifice of those who have gone before us by labeling suffering for being foolish or immature or using worldly methods for spiritual gain as if we are suffering for Jesus and His kingdom.

d. Without joy, there is no true experience of the Gospel even though suffering is present!

3. And every day, with their slow healing and painful wounds, they did not cease teaching and preaching the story and station of Jesus.

*And there are days when I choose not to participate in God's work because I'm busy, or just not feeling up to it, or I just don't think of it (I live a very comfortable life without thoughts of cost for my faith in Jesus).

III. Challenge for us

- A. We are called into joyful suffering in the name of Jesus for his mission
- 1. We so quickly seek relief from suffering. Is it possible that we are rejecting a grace God is finding us worthy of?
 - 2. Only the Spirit can make this possible.

*Will I use my power and influence to avoid suffering, or will I trust that God is doing a work in me that could never be achieved otherwise?

- B. Neither humanity nor supernatural powers will stop God's work in the world. Therefore, we can faithfully obey God to make disciples through the worst of circumstances

“They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; for they did not love their lives to the point of death.”

Revelation 12:11

The way God has given to us, no matter what empire we live in or what rights are afforded us, to carry out His mission and conquer the world is the sacrifice of Jesus and our denial of self and carrying our cross. Maybe you are better than me, but I have not lived my life this way. Right now, the Spirit is calling us to a moment of repentance that leads to a lifetime of rejoicing. But are you humble enough to lose face to obey whatever the Spirit is calling you to do right now, today? What are you filled with? Yourself or the Holy Spirit?