

I. Introduction

- a. Everyone suffers, Christians and non-Christians. The reasons may be different but afflictions are common for all people. I recall a day when I was at our poultry farm and there were all these various trials on me. I remember thinking if I'm going to suffer like this even in farming then I'd prefer this suffering to be for the Kingdom of God.
- b. If you think trials of various kinds don't show up while you're on vacation or retirement or somewhere else in this world you are mistaken. I've been on plenty of vacations for which I could not leave the problems of ministry at the office. They went with me in my mind. Or the hotel isn't what you thought.
- c. You must decide for what and who are you going to suffer in this world because it's coming regardless.
- d. (Phil. 3:8-11) <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

II. Main Point

- a. The joys and sufferings of gladly obeying Jesus

III. Outline

- a. Suffering and the Christian life
- b. When should a Christian avoid suffering and when should one take the hard path?
- c. The willingness of Paul to die for the Name

IV. Exposition

- a. Appropriately, we come to the Lord's Table today. Let's be reminded what we are doing when we come to the Table. We are remembering the Lord's death. And in particular, you are remembering his death for you in your place, if you are a believer. This meal is meant for us to visually see and feel and taste the death of Christ. The fruit of the vine reminds of the scourging whips across his back, the crown of thorns on his head, the iron nails driven through his hands and feet and the spear that pierced his side. The unleavened bread points us to Christ's sinless life and the broken pieces remind us of his torn body. Indeed, he was pierced for our transgression and by his stripes we are healed. This is our King and the Head of the church. This is our Savior and Lord. He is the Suffering Servant. And to follow him, will bring some unique suffering. My first point comes from Jesus' first conversation with the converted Paul: Sufferings and the Christian life following Jesus
  - i. It seems clear that telling new converts about not only the possibility of suffering but the certainty of suffering for Jesus has been little to nonexistent for several years. But that's not how Jesus spoke with his disciples.
    1. Let's recall how Jesus instructed Paul from the beginning: (Acts 9:15-16) <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."
      - a. From the beginning, Paul may have been given a vision of this trip to Jerusalem and how it played out and how he would bear witness to many through the process.
  - ii. What does Jesus demand of his disciples?
    1. Jesus demands: (Matt. 4:19) "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."
      - a. Response: (Matt. 4:20) Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

- b. Other responses: (Matt. 8:19-23) And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him.
- 2. Jesus demands: (Lk. 5:27) <sup>27</sup> After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me."
  - a. His response: (Lk. 5:28) <sup>28</sup> And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.
- 3. Hear Jesus' identity, his sufferings, and his demand for any who desire to follow: (Lk. 9:20-26) <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God." <sup>21</sup> And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, <sup>22</sup> saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." <sup>23</sup> And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.
- 4. There are many more but I think we get the picture. But my guess is that you want to know if this is for every disciple?
  - a. This last quote from Luke clearly answers that.
    - i. He said to all. If anyone. Whoever. What does it profit a man...any man or any woman.
  - b. You might say, well okay. What does that look like for me?
    - i. I certainly think it might look different for each of us in some ways.
      1. Not everyone is called to pick up and move to Afghanistan but we are all called to be a witness where we are.
        - a. We are called to love each other which will take a great deal of sacrifice.
        - b. We are called fight sin in our lives.
        - c. We are called to help others fight sin by possibly having that hard conversation with them.
        - d. Raising kids in the fear of the Lord rather than just letting them do whatever they want.
        - e. Refusing to cheat on your taxes. Refusing to do things asked of you at work that are unrighteous.
        - f. The list goes on and on.
      2. What is common among missionaries or church members is that Jesus is first in your life. He is your greatest love and treasure.
      3. You deny yourself. You have died with Christ. It no longer you who lives but Christ lives in you. The life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.
      4. You walk by the Spirit of God.
      5. Jesus is Lord.

- c. If we have settled the fact that Jesus demands that you follow him then those who follow him will most likely suffer in some ways.
      - i. (Jn. 15:20)<sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.
  - iii. The reason this may seem to be a difficult thing to believe is because it is a supernatural work of Christ in us. We do not naturally want to suffer. We make decisions on a daily basis to save ourselves. Self-preservation is what comes natural and what makes you happy. But as a miraculously converted man, Paul can say without hesitation: (Acts 20:24)<sup>24</sup> But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.
- b. Since those who follow the Suffering Savior will also suffer, the thing we need to see in our text this morning is when should a disciple avoid suffering and when should a disciple choose the hard way.
  - i. Paul and his company of disciples are still headed to Jerusalem. So, here's a reminder of Paul's plans.
    - 1. We heard Paul's say back in (Acts 19:21) Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."
    - 2. And in (Acts 20:22-23) And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.
      - a. So that decision seems to follow the obvious path to suffering.
      - b. As Christians, we must have this category as a very real possibility in our decision making. The hard way may be the best way though not every time.
  - ii. When we pick up in the story there in verse 1, the journey begins.
    - 1. The deep affections the Ephesian elders have for Paul is demonstrated one more time.
      - a. It literally says, (<sup>NIV</sup> **Acts 21:1**) After we had torn ourselves away from them...
      - b. They know where this is heading in Jerusalem.
    - 2. As they sail away and make several stops which is most likely due to the fact that they are on the ship's schedules not their own.
      - a. These are ships carrying freight.
      - b. Each stop required them to find a new ship that would get them a little closer to their destination.
        - i. I'm sure we read this with thanksgiving that we can schedule our travel with far more accuracy.
        - ii. But they keep going despite what seems to be a very unpleasant way to travel.
    - 3. During their travels, at some of their stops they stay with disciples in the area.
      - a. It's amazing they know these connections.
      - b. There in verse 4, they sought out the disciples while in Tyre. It seems they had a seven-day layover awaiting the next ship or waiting for the ship they were on to unload and reload for the next leg of the journey.
      - c. During those seven days, those disciples through the Spirit were telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem.
        - i. How are we to understand this? Paul is constrained by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem and these disciples are saying through the Spirit not to go.

- ii. We've already heard Paul say back in 20:22 "that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me."
      - iii. Down in verse 11 and 12, a prophet by the name of Agabus prophesies that same thing.
        - 1. Upon hearing this, those with Paul and people urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.
- iii. So, is the Holy Spirit giving two different answers? What's going on here?
  - 1. The Spirit consistently makes known that suffering awaits Paul in Jerusalem. Upon hearing that, the disciples draw the conclusion that he should not go.
  - 2. What should Paul do? Should he listen to the disciples or not?
    - a. Even with our first point in mind that to follow Jesus will result in suffering but it does not mean Paul always chooses to go the way of suffering even though it should be a possible option.
      - i. Back in Ephesus when they drug two of his disciples into the theater, he listened to the other disciples and his government friends and did not going in there.
      - ii. When the Jews came down to Berea, do you recall the disciples sneaking Paul out during the night? Or the time he was let down in a basket in Damascus?
    - iii. So, the hard way is not always the best way.
      - 1. For example, here is Paul's own thinking about a situation in (Phil. 1:21-26) <sup>21</sup> For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup> I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. <sup>24</sup> But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.
    - b. Let's compare this to Jesus.
      - i. Do you recall the time Jesus was at the temple in Jerusalem in John 8 having this difficult discussion with the Pharisees? When he said, "Before Abraham was, I am" what did the Pharisees do?
        - 1. (Jn. 8:59-9:1) <sup>59</sup> So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.
      - ii. There are more places but that's enough for us to know Jesus avoided suffering at times too.
    - c. As I heard one pastor say, "The theology of Kenny Rogers helps here: 'You gotta know when to fold 'em, know when to hold 'em, know when to walk away and know when to run.'"
- 3. With that said, I don't think it's right to say that the Holy Spirit is saying two different things.
  - a. What seems clear is that the Holy Spirit testifies consistently what will happen if Paul goes to Jerusalem.
  - b. However, in light of this consistent testimony, the disciples see the only option to respond is to avoid Jerusalem.

- i. Let's compare this to Jesus' own experience a similar situation.
  - 1. (Matt. 16:21-23) <sup>21</sup> From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. <sup>22</sup> And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." <sup>23</sup> But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."
  - 2. Obviously, if Jesus doesn't go to cross, then there is no salvation. It was necessary for Jesus to do this and what?
    - a. (Lk. 22:42) "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."
- ii. Paul's suffering though similar, it does not atone for anything. He's not doing it to save himself. He's not doing it to merit salvation for someone else.
  - 1. But he is being conformed to Christ's death. He seems to be suffering just like Jesus.
- iv. Sometime the hard path is the right path. I think we all struggle to put that as an option in our decisions.
- c. The last point will be quick. Paul's life makes known how worthy he believes Jesus is.
  - i. Paul's readiness not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus says something very clear about the worth of Jesus.
  - ii. If we do not see Jesus as worthy, we will be unwilling to suffer for the name.
    - 1. Recall this from (Acts 5:41) <sup>41</sup> Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.
    - 2. (Matt. 10:37-38) <sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.
    - 3. The degree to which our lives bear fruit of a readiness and willingness to take up our cross and follow Jesus wherever he leads, displays what we believe the worth of Jesus is to us and to the world around us.
  - iii. I find it common that people suffer because of the worth of money. They will suffer at their job because the things of this world mean a lot to them. They will suffer for family members and friends...even strangers sometimes.
    - 1. We will suffer for who and what we love.
    - 2. Don't waste your sufferings!

#### V. Response

- a. Our response is to remember Christ's suffering for us as we come to the Table.
- b. Let the intended images come to mind as we who are his come to our King's Table.
- c. This is only for those who have responded to the gospel in repentance and faith and have been baptized.
- d. If you have not submitted to follow Christ, this isn't for you. But you can respond to the demand of Jesus today, when he says, "Come follow me."

#### Lord's Supper:

As we come to the Table, I want to show you more powerful example what we celebrate this morning can do.

We come and...

1. Look Up — God has prepared the feast
2. Look In — self-examination
3. Look Back — at the cross
4. Look Around — at your fellow church members
5. Look Ahead — to the marriage feast

(Acts 21:8) <sup>8</sup> On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.

Why did Luke include that phrase, who was one of the seven?

Because guess who was largely responsible for one of the seven's death? Paul. Not only has the gospel reconciled Paul to God but it has reconciled Philip and Paul.

Isn't that amazing?

Let us remember this glorious Savior in his death for us!

This is his sinless body that was broken for us; eat this in remembrance of him.

This is the blood of the covenant that was shed for our sins; drink this in remembrance of him.