

Suffering with Christ

a sermon in the series
Saved by His Life: Union with Christ

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Romans 8:17

And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

I want to conclude our series today, and I want to do so by discussing with you one last area, which we are united together with our blessed Lord. It is in the area of suffering.

Suffering is not particular to Christians. All people suffer. Everyone born suffers. The act of child-birth itself is traumatic and could be considered an act of suffering by both mother and child. It is said in the book of Job that life is nothing but a few days of trouble and that is very true. So we would not want to suggest in the least that only Christians suffer. We all suffer, saved and unsaved alike. But Paul designates a particular kind of suffering. Suffering with Jesus. A suffering that somehow entails Christ and involves Him. That's the kind of suffering we're going to talk about today.

We are united with Jesus Christ, we are one with Him, therefore whatever is true about Him in His mediatorial and redemptive role is true about us, including suffering. He suffered and so do we.

I. An Evidence of Salvation

Our suffering with Christ is a proof of being true Christians.

And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:17)

The words *if indeed* are together a first class condition in Greek grammar, which means it's not a condition where *if you do something this will happen*, it's more to be understood along the lines of *since this is true this will happen*. In fact, Paul uses it also at the beginning of the verse, "and if children," which means the verse ought to read like this, "Since children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, since we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

The Apostle Paul is writing this out of a heart of compassion. Suffering doesn't sound like a very hopeful subject, in fact, this message from its introduction perhaps sounds very gloomy and not

hopeful as you intended. But this message is full of hope because Paul the apostle understood the temptation of the human heart to doubt when under great adversity. He understood there is something about us that wants to question the validity of our state with God, *Are we really Christians when we undergo suffering?* He also knew that attack of Satan, who, in the hour of difficulty when you're suffering the most, will whisper in your conscience, "If you're really a child of God, would this be happening to you? You certainly don't evidence anything of victory, how can you be sure you are a Christian?" Therefore Paul writes to counter the accusation of the accuser.

This whole chapter is about assurance. He's writing to assure true believers of their hope in eternal life. So he comes to the point where he says, "I know you suffer and I know you are suffering for Christ. Do not let anyone, whether it be others, your own heart of doubt, or the accusations of Satan, cause you to question whether or not you're a believer just because you're enduring hardship. I tell you, it's the very proof that you are indeed a child of God, a joint-heir with Christ."

He follows the line that Jesus said to His apostles.

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. (John 15:18)

And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. (Luke 21:17)

There is no doubt about this. If you are truly a child of God, men will not like you. Why? Because they did not like the Christ that indwells you. Rather than look at your suffering and hardship and rejection you experience from time to time negatively, Paul suggests looking at your difficulties positively. This would include even your struggles with sin. Instead of looking to them and asking whether you're really a Christian because you're suffering, Paul says, "Yes indeed you are. It's the very proof."

II. What Suffering With Jesus Does Not Include

A lot of us think we are suffering for or with Jesus and we are not at all. So let me quickly tell you what suffering for Jesus does not include.

You cannot consider just any suffering to be suffering for Jesus.

A. Suffering From Sin.

Suffering from sin is not suffering with Jesus. Suffering we bring to ourselves by sin, wrong decisions, and simple mistakes is the kind of suffering Paul is including here. For example, Peter says,

For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. (1 Peter 2:20)

In essence, the Apostle Peter is saying that if you sinned, then you created the hardship you now endure. To be beaten for faults is nothing more than the consequences of your wrong behavior. Therefore, if you take your punishment well, what credit is that to you? Do you think that is going to be a star in heaven for you? No. That's simply the result of your sin. But, if you have not sinned and are punished and you take it well, this is commendable to God because it shows that you have some other motive in operation within you—the power of the Spirit of God. In fact, he went on to say in the fourth chapter of the same epistle,

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. (1 Peter 4:14-16)

Here the apostle makes the clear distinction between suffering for Jesus and suffering that's not for Jesus. He says first of all, when you're reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the Spirit of God is upon you. That's why you're being persecuted. That's why you're suffering, because there is something about you that exposes the darkness of other men's hearts.

Then there is another kind of suffering. It's suffering because you've done things that are wrong and you've hurt others and now you're receiving the repercussions of your sins. He makes a distinction do you see it? If you suffer as a Christian don't be ashamed, don't hang your head, God is being glorified in you. If I sin and receive the consequences of my actions, I cannot say this is the kind of suffering that will add to my glory. But if I suffer innocently, for the sake of Christ, for the purpose of Christ, then I am glorifying God.

B. Suffering From Self-Righteousness.

If I suffer for the distinct reason that I may be seen as persecuted, a soldier of the cross and receiving persecution, then, as Jesus would say, I've already received my reward.

The wellspring of our suffering must come out of love for Christ and for others. If you remember, the Apostle Paul said we could give our bodies to be burned but if we did not do it with love, we've wasted our death, wasted our life. It was only an act of self-righteousness.

True suffering is a result of the real life of Christ demonstrated in you.

I think there are many of us who would say, "Oh, I've endured persecution this week at work for Jesus," when we really didn't. All you suffered was the repercussions of being self-righteous.

In research for this message, I scanned the Internet because I wanted to learn more about persecution in the United States. There was a particular website, I will leave unnamed, that had several videos in which they captured their so-called persecution. It was a group of young people who in public places campaigned—that's the word they used—against homosexuality. They handed

out literature and videotaped themselves being accosted, attacked by people who did not like their message. One video showed a people in a car driving by and spraying pesticides on them. Another showed where they were actually physically assaulted, as one guy takes a Bible and begins to rip the pages out, cursing them and cursing God. After each one of these episodes one of the young persons would come on the video. One guy showed where he was hit with a bottle and there was a lump on his head. One told of how his face had burned after being sprayed with mace by someone who was upset with their campaign.

I don't want to misjudge these people, but they talked about the abuse hurled upon them so smugly. Maybe I misread their demeanor and the way they said it, but it almost sounded like they were boasting in their persecution. I don't believe this is what Jesus meant by the word *persecution*.

Jesus didn't stand on street corners with signs that said, "You're all going to hell." He could have done that and it would have been true. But that's not the approach Jesus took, is it? Remember when our Lord passed through one particular Samaritan village that didn't receive Him. James and John asked Him, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" Their attitude was, "We'll show them. We'll show them You are the Messiah and we, your apostles, stand with You for truth." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them."

The mission of the church is not just to expose sin. Our mission is to expose men's sins by loving them in their sins. Some of you are going to misunderstand and quibble with me, but hear me out. If I'm to suffer with Him, I need to suffer because I'm like Him. How did Jesus deal with the lost world He came to rescue? Did He condemn them? How did He deal with the adulteress woman who was brought to Him? She was caught in the very act of adultery. Jesus could have had her stoned. The law prescribed it, in other words, the Bible dictated her execution, and yet Jesus did not want her stoned. He did not come to execute the law in its wrath but to execute the law in its love, mercy, and grace. So wisely He said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." This is how Jesus exposed sin. He exposed sin not by holding signs, not by looking down His nose, and pointing His finger saying, "You're terrible sinner." No, He exposed their sin by showing exceptional mercy. And in doing so He didn't just save her life that day, He saved her spiritually. She walked away a different person.

Our Lord was accused of being a friend of sinners. Someone objects and says, "What about when He went into the temple and overturned the table of the moneychangers and ran them out with a handmade whip and showed great wrath?" Yes. You're right. There He showed great wrath and judgment, He sure did. And another adds their objection, "What about in Matthew 23 when He scathingly rebukes those Pharisees and calls them dogs and brood of vipers, that doesn't sound very loving." You're right. He did bring judgment and condemnation on those men that day; you are correct. That is the only kind of people Jesus did condemn, those who thought they were better than others. What I fear is that we could be those *others* Jesus condemns.

When you and I begin to expose men's sins we must be very careful. It's easy to fall into a trap and not even know you're in it, the trap of self-righteousness. We are living in very difficult times for the church and it will only get more difficult. I know there are militant people who want to do away with you and I and with the Christ that's in us. I know they will oppose us and come against us but I suggest to you that if our mission is single and that is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ we need to be very careful toward those who come against us.

It's one thing to be mocked at work because you truly love Jesus. It's another thing to be mocked at work because you make others feel that you're superior because you're a Christian. The first is certainly persecution the latter is not.

Our message is not a message of condemnation. Yes, we need to tell the world that judgment day is coming and because of the terror of the Lord we persuade men, but our message is Christ saves from that judgment! If we live by serving the sinner, not condoning their sins and approving of their actions, but serving them, even in their sin, we will have advanced the kingdom. What do I mean by *even in their sin*? I do not mean help them sin. I mean to show them that we are sinners who have been saved. How then could we possibly judge them? Rather we love them.

I know of a church in the northwest that does this every Friday night. They worked it out with some local bar owners that at closing time they will be there in their cars and anyone who is intoxicated and cannot drive they will drive them home in the name of Jesus. That's what I'm talking about. That's the way Jesus did it. He ate and drank with sinners, and the self-righteous questioned Him. "How can this Man be holy?" When the prostitute takes the implements of her trade—her hands and her lips—and kisses and bathes Jesus' feet with her tears, caressing them with her lips, the self-righteous wonder how He can be a prophet. This is what she does with other men. This is her livelihood and He lets her do that to His feet. How can it be?! Their view of God was judgment and wrath, holding sinners away from Him. If God wanted to hold sinners away from Him, He would have never sent Christ to them.

God has reconciled Himself to the world through Christ! He's laid down His weapon against the sinner and said, "I'm willing to make peace through My Son, will you come and be reconciled to Me?" That's our message as His ambassadors, not condemnation. Therefore, if you suffer because you're good at exposing others' sins and poor in showing the love of Christ in service to them, I say you get what you deserve.

When you begin to rebuke the sinner for His sin, could it be that motive of your heart is not to save that man but to show how much better you are than he or she. How can we do this when we remember that the mercy of God has come into our lives? Friends, these are my brethren. I'm not talking about you in the church; I'm talking about them out there. These are my people. I'm one of them. I've been rescued, but I'm still one of them. I'm still fallen, I'm still full of sin, I still need mercy. So how can I, in His name, do anything other than grant them mercy? Jesus had this amazing ability to be in the presence of the sinner and the sinner knew that Christ loved him but at the same time his sin was disapproved. In other words, a sinner liked to be in the presence of

Christ. There was a part of him that said, "I can't be in His presence, this Man is just too good, but there's something about Him that draws me to Him." Can that be said about you? Can it be said about me?

I honestly answer that I don't think that I'm altogether like Jesus in this regard. Here's where I need your prayers; here's where I need God's grace more and more so sinners can enjoy my presence and at the same time know that I do not condone what they do. When you are able to live like that, then when you speak into their lives about their sin they'll pay attention and listen.

I know there are a lot of questions about that and you'll ask about specific situations and what you should do. I'm not the Holy Spirit. I've only given you general principles.

III. What Suffering With Jesus Includes

It is sad to magnify our sufferings when there are brothers and sisters in the world who are in true pain, languishing in prison cells, families torn apart, ostracized from their communities, severely beaten, deprived of basic necessities, and even cruelly martyred. What sorry wimps we are to cry about our small inconveniences, if we have any, such as someone laughing at us because we said we are Christians.

But I believe we have crossed the line where the Christian's conscience is no longer protected. If, in this nation, you will live by your convictions, you will suffer persecution. Don't be in self-denial we've crossed that line. We're there. If you will really let Christ live through you, you will suffer. What kind of suffering will you experience? I've broken it down to two different categories of suffering.

A. Involuntary Suffering

You don't choose this. You don't want or seek this, but it comes nonetheless.

1. Emotional Suffering

This is where you do suffer ridicule. It's not easy to walk into a room and the whole room's demeanor changes to an unpleasant atmosphere only because you walk in. It's not easy to hear the snickers or to become the butt end of jokes at work or school.

It's not easy to be rejected. As humans we want to be part of the group, we don't want to be ostracized or slandered. But this is a form of persecution. This is part of suffering with Jesus. He said, "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My namesake." Even Jesus recognized that when men say things about you that are not true in order to ostracize and criticize, it's persecution. It's suffering with Jesus.

There are relational sufferings included under emotional suffering. This is when a significant other rejects you because of Christ. A wife no longer respects her husband because he now follows Christ and not her. A husband says, "This isn't the same woman I married. You've changed and I don't like this change." And he closes his heart to her. That's tough. Let's not make any bones about it, this is tough. To have that most significant person in your life reject you because of Christ is not easy but people do suffer it.

2. Financial Suffering

There are Christians who refuse to take a job that requires working every Sunday. Therefore they have to take a lesser paying job because they want their Sundays to worship with God's people. Let me be quick to add, because we have some of our folks out today working, that there is the occasional ox in the ditch that has to be pulled out. There are times when work can't be avoided on a Sunday. I'm talking about the choice between whether or not to take a job where you have to work every time the people of God are gathered. I believe we need men and women who love God enough that they're willing to suffer financially, even if it means taking a lesser paying job so they do not forsake the assembling with the children of God. I've known people that have lost their job because of their Christian testimony.

If you are to live for Christ in this culture today, some of you, or perhaps our church will have a lawsuit against us to curtail expressions of faith.

Recently I had a pastor call and ask me if we had a written policy manual. I told him we had a constitution and bylaws but not a policy manual. "Why are you asking?"

"I'm just concerned that a couple will come to me knowing I don't agree with their conviction about marriage, and will want to be married by me knowing that I'm going to say no just so to make an example of me."

This is the hour we're living in. People will actually seek certain people out, knowing what their answer will be so that they can then financially bankrupt them. When that happens, count it all joy. You're suffering with Jesus.

3. Physical Suffering

Bodily harm, imprisonment and, yes, even the ultimate price, death.

B. Voluntary Suffering

Here I mean a suffering you choose. Who in their right mind would choose suffering? Ah, Jesus did. Jesus, in His right mind, without any coercion, choose to leave the splendor and glory that was His in heaven and come to accept the reproach, shame, scandal, and sin of this world. So if you take on any hardship for Christ that is suffering.

Let me give you a couple of examples.

1. *The voluntary suffering of loss.*

Let me give you a real cogent explanation. We're asking you to be in prayer right now for the budget and next week we're asking you to share what you believe God wants you to give to the kingdom of God, particularly in the ministries of this church. I believe it is suffering with Jesus when you purposefully sacrifice for the kingdom. You have a certain standard of living but by choice you have caught the heavenly vision. You understand there is an eternity, you understand there are souls going into hell and you want to rescue them. You know that Jesus said, "Don't put treasures on this earth, put them in heaven," so you are willing to lower your lifestyle in order to exalt the advancement of the kingdom.

This is exactly what Christ has done for us. He was willing to suffer the loss of reputation and the loss of the glory He had with the Father before the world was made. He was willing to suffer self-denial in order to bless us the poor. "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." This is the principle. So when those of us who will say, "Lord, I want you to decide what I should give and I want it to be pleasing in your sight," the Lord will require—and I believe He will require it of all of us—sacrifice. Are you willing to follow the example of our Lord in this sacrifice? If so, you are suffering with Him.

You know I don't like to talk about these things, but they do need to be discussed. I don't know of any way you can demonstrate your love for God more than when you start releasing the control of your checkbooks. Many of us will do long hours of sacrifice to serve one another. We'll donate time, effort, or things we possess, we will study our Bibles, pray, fellowship with saints, and sacrifice time for one another, but when it comes to money we draw the line. We all give, but my question is this: does your giving reflect what you believe about Jesus' kingdom?

2. *The voluntary giving of yourself.*

Once again, we see this principle of divesting so that you can invest. We see it in Jesus. He emptied Himself and made Himself of no reputation so He could pour Himself into us. Oh, what amazing love! And oh, what great suffering on His part to do this, not just on the cross but in all of His life, even to this hour when we play the adulterer or adulteress. He still is there when we return to receive us. Therefore, we suffer loss and give ourselves for others.

3. *The voluntary struggle against sin.*

Not suffering *for* sin, but suffering *against* sin. Jesus never struggled against His own personal sin but He did fight against temptation. For 40 days He wrestled with the devil and when it came for the time to take on our sin, He resisted for a moment. He said, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will," and He took the cup and drank it all. Jesus struggled with that sin, therefore, He can identify with our struggle. Praise God! And if you're suffering like that, then indeed you are a child of God.

My brother or sister, I plead with you this morning, don't believe the devil! Believe your Father. I know you have sinned this week. I think I can say that about all of you. We all have sinned this week. Don't believe the Devil who says, "See! There's the very reason why you can't believe with any assurance that you're a child of God. You don't pray like you ought to, you don't love like you ought to." I'm not here to tell you that you're saved; I'm here to show you what the Bible says. If you struggle and fight the fight of faith against your sin, then there is the proof that you're His child.

IV. The Sufferings of the Saints are the Sufferings of Christ

A. The Saint Does Not Suffer Alone.

And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:17)

When you and I suffer for Jesus it really is suffering with Him, which means He's suffering too. That would mean then the saint never suffers alone. When they laugh at you. When your children rebuff, that is act out against you, act disrespectful to you because you are a parent who loves God more than you love anyone else, including your children, it means you really do love Jesus. And when you're suffering, you're not alone. You're suffering with Jesus, or Jesus is suffering with you.

Let me explain the principle. All through this series I've illustrated union with Christ by my Bible and a sheet of paper. The illustration is that if you put the paper in the Bible then whatever is true about the Bible is true about the paper. If I give this Bible to my brother here, then I'm giving him the paper also. Whatever is true about the Bible is true about the paper. But isn't the opposite also true? Think about it.

The paper is in the Bible, we are in Christ, so whatever is true about Christ is true about us. But could it not be also that whatever is true about you is true about Jesus?

I want to give Geoff this piece of paper, but because it's in the Bible I have to give him the Bible too. So whatever is true about the paper is true about the Bible. If I drop my Bible on the pulpit, I've dropped the paper. If I drop the paper I've dropped the Bible. This is a principle that was first clearly revealed in Scripture in Acts 9.

Saul of Tarsus had received the appropriate paperwork to go to Damascus and arrest Christians, to drag them back to Jerusalem to stand trial for following, who Saul thought, a false Messiah, Jesus. Along the way, Jesus appears to Saul and says to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Jesus does not say, "Why are you persecuting Christians?" He says, "Why are you persecuting Me?" He established a principle with His new church that whatever is done to His beloved is done to Him also. It's as if He is saying, "There is such an integral union between Me and My people that you cannot do anything to them that you don't also do to Me. What's true about them in this case is true about Me."

That's why Paul and no other apostle goes on to say, later in his life after being converted that day on his way to Damascus, in Colossians 1:24,

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.

If we didn't know better we would say that sounds a little farfetched if not heretical. Jesus lacked nothing. He paid it all. There is nothing left. He finished it. He even said, "It is finished!" in His last breath. Paul is not saying there is something lacking in His atoning death and sacrifice. What He is saying is that Jesus didn't finish suffering on the cross. The sufferings of Jesus are not finished, they are still going on in His body. In my body, Paul says, are the sufferings of Christ. There is more for Him to suffer and He suffers even now for the sake of the body, the church. This is an amazing concept, is it not? Not only do we not suffer alone, Christ is suffering in our sufferings and somehow this is displaying the glory of Christ and His redemptive sufferings.

B. Our Suffering Glorifies Christ Now.

When you suffer for Jesus you glorify Him now. I don't have time to get into the last phrase of our text, which in itself is worthy of many sermons, "we shall be glorified together." Future tense. One day we are going to be glorified. If you could see yourself now the way you're going to be, you would tremble with joy. You would literally shake with joy over what you're going to be like. The glory of Jesus is going to be shared with you. You're not going to look like you do now. You will be of such a radiant beauty and possess such amazing power. If you could just see what you will look like then. Angels will give you honor. You will be greater than they, for like your Jesus, you will have inherited a name that is better than theirs. He is going to share His glory with you. Again, that is the substance of many sermons.

But I'm not talking about that kind of glory now. What I'm talking about now is the glory you give Him today in your suffering. How so? Do you remember what Jesus prayed in John 17, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You"? What did Jesus mean? He said, "Father, help Me, so that what I do in My suffering will glorify you and you will glorify Me." Here is the principle, Jesus was teaching His disciples that when we endure suffering for His sake we are telling the world that our sufferings are worth it because He is that good.

We find Jesus so much better that we are willing to suffer to have Him and that completes the afflictions of Christ. In your suffering you are demonstrating what He demonstrated on the cross, that God is worth every bit of this and more. You will say as the Apostle Paul said in the very next verse, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us."

As I conclude, I want to bring back the exhortation that our sister gave us earlier. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Not tomorrow or next month. Not when conditions are better or have improved so it will make it easier for you to serve Christ. No, today,

right this moment, choose whom you will serve. I'm asking you, my brothers and sisters, not to serve Him with halfhearted service with which we have served Him heretofore. I'm asking you to say to the world that He is better than this weak hearted affection. He's better than that. I'm asking you to rearrange, reconstruct, reprioritize your life so that your life glorifies Him now, though it suffers now. Glorify Him now so that He will glorify you then. You will be able to rule and reign with Him in the glory of His kingdom. I want you to be able to say these sufferings now are small compared to the glory He will give you. If I've shared His glory by making Him appear as He is—beautiful—He is going to share His beauty with me. May God help us to “suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” Amen.