

# When You Suffer for His Sake

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**Bible Verse:** Philippians 1:29-30  
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We might wonder in light of the majestic themes of which we've sung this morning, why would anyone be opposed to Christ and why would anyone ever reject him, why would anyone ever need to suffer for his sake. Well, embedded in the message of which we've been singing is the answer to that question, it's that Christ asserts himself as King over all, that he asserts his authority over all and that all men are to come and to bow before him in humble submission, in humble repentance from sin, and to come and give their lives to him and he claims the authority to command that from all, and the pride of man and the rebellion of man will not have this man be King over them and that's why there is opposition to the Gospel, that's why there is persecution of the saints.

Now we are conditioned to avoid suffering as a result of life. As we go through, we like to be comfortable, we prefer to be comfortable, but the nature of the Gospel and the nature of conversion and the nature of living for Christ leads us in a different direction. If you'll turn to the book of Philippians, we're gonna finish chapter 1 of Philippians today and then take a break for a couple of weeks to address some other matters, but at the end of Philippians 1, we see a unique perspective on suffering in the Christian life, it's unique in the sense that it's the biblical perspective on suffering, not the means of avoiding it that we prefer in our carnal flesh. In Philippians 1:29, the Apostle Paul writing to this church at Philippi said,

29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

When we introduced the book of Philippians some months ago, we saw that Acts 16 records the history of the birth of the Philippian church, and if you'll turn back to Acts 16, I want to remind you of a couple of things that we saw there because it bears on the message that Paul is bringing to the Philippians in this passage, and by extension to us as well. You'll recall that he had met with a group of women by the riverside for prayer. A woman named Lydia was converted when the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things being spoken by Paul, and the Gospel began to spread and immediately there was opposition. Paul delivered a slave girl from a demon that her masters had been using to make profit because she could predict the future and do things that people would pay money to have her do for them, and in Acts 16:19, "her masters saw that their hope of

profit was gone," and so the Gospel had hit them in the wallet, so to speak, and what did they do? "They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, 'These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.'" So they trump up charges against Paul and Silas. They stir the crowd up against them. In verse 22 it says, "The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods." Speaking of Paul and Silas, of course, being beaten. "When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks." Paul and Silas were suffering again for the sake of the Gospel. They were suffering for the sake of Christ and this happened in the city of Philippi where this letter that we are studying was written and where this church had now been established for a number of years and the people were starting to grow and flourish in Christ. Well, understand, beloved, that they knew this history, they knew that their church had been born in the midst of great suffering that Paul and Silas suffered in order to bring them the Gospel. That's how they came to find eternal life. It's how they were brought to Christ. It was at the cost of the ribbons of flesh that Paul and Silas offered up to those who were beating them.

Now as Paul is writing this letter to them some years later, he's in prison again. He is suffering again for the sake of the Gospel. Let me remind you of Philippians 1:12, if you'll turn there. He had spoken in verse 7, making mention of his imprisonment and now in verse 12 while he is in prison he says, "I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else." So now Paul has suffered a loss of liberty. He had suffered physical beatings in the past, now he has suffered a loss of his liberty all on behalf of Christ, all because of his faithfulness to the Gospel, and what I want you to see here this morning, what we need to remember as we enter into our text here today, is that the Apostle Paul was a man who was acquainted with suffering for the sake of Christ, and that's what's so critical to this. He was suffering for the sake of Christ. Serving Christ did not lead him into a pain-free existence where there was no suffering and pain. No, quite to the contrary, serving Christ had been the means that brought him into affliction, brought him to adversity. Faithfulness to the Gospel was causing him life suffering in response and that was the man who was writing to the Philippians here at this time.

Now when we use the word "suffer," just to kind of give a sense, a common definition for us to have in mind this morning as we're talking about this passage, to suffer is to experience pain, harm, injury or loss, and Paul here in this passage tells the Philippians that it has been granted to them to suffer for the sake of Christ. Now this is just completely contrary to the thinking of the world. This is contrary to the mindset of the culture in which we live and it was a difficult message even for the Philippians to accept, and so Paul has to explain this to them. He gives them reasons and gives them understanding that they might be able to have a proper view on their unique Christian

adversity, and their Christian adversity in the midst of that adversity, they were not to grumble or complain about it, they were not to shrink back from it, and they were not to be afraid. Far to the contrary, Paul had just told them, as we saw last week, what the Gospel required from them in terms of their personal response to their circumstances.

Look at verse 27 with me. He said, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel," calling them to unity in the midst of their affliction, and then in verse 28 he calls them to courage, as we saw last time, courage, verse 28, "in no way alarmed by your opponents--which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God." So Paul has given them this remarkable clarion call to Christian nobility, to live with one another within the realm of the body in unity, and to face their opposition and their suffering with courage that is worthy of Christ, that is worthy of the Gospel, that is worthy of the message of the death, burial and resurrection of the second person of the Triune Godhead dying to save his elect. This is a great, glorious message and their response to suffering for that message needed to be a reflection of how great and lofty that message was. Paul says unity and courage are the order of the day for this time in your lives.

Now as we come to verses 29 and 30, he is explaining to them, he is giving them reasons to bear up under adversity that the Spirit of God would take what he's about to say and apply it to their hearts and renew them so that they would indeed manifest this kind of courage that he has just called them to. It's one thing to tell somebody to be strong and courageous, it's another reason to give them reasons, it's another thing, I should say, to give them reasons that will fortify that courage and allow them to stand firm in the heat of the battle. That's what Paul is doing here in verse 29.

So the question is, then, how should we view it, how should we understand, how should we respond when we undergo uniquely Christian adversity, and he gives them two points here in these two verses. First of all, we are to understand as Christians when suffering comes to us for the sake of the Gospel, I'm going to emphasize that and highlight that in a few moments, it's for the sake of the Gospel that he's talking about here, we're to understand that this kind of suffering comes to us from God. This is sent by God to us for our blessing and that, therefore, should give us courage and give us strength to bear up well under the midst of the affliction.

Paul recognizes that opposition has come to them. As I pointed out last time in chapter 3, verse 2, he said, "Beware of the dogs. Beware of the evil workers. Beware of the false circumcision." There were teachers that were coming upon them and bringing their influence to bear upon them, trying to draw them away from the Gospel of Christ. To confront them would be no easy matter and it would involve conflict, and these were men that were marked by selfishness, see verse 18 of chapter 3, he says, "Many walk of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping that they are enemies of the cross of Christ whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame who set their minds on earthly things." My only point being is that there was

conflict that had come to the door and it was up to the Philippians now to engage that and to resist these evil workers of false teaching.

So Paul is writing to fortify their courage. He had just said, "Don't be alarmed by your opponents." Now in verse 29, he explains why they can adopt that attitude. Notice the opening word there when he says, "For to you." For. The word "for" is telling them why their fear is not necessary and what he goes on to say, let's look at verse 29, he says, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." He says, "This has been given to you." It's a divine passive meaning that God is the one who has given this to them just as he had granted salvation to them, so the same God was granting suffering to them as well. So why is it that fear is unnecessary? It's for them to understand that suffering comes from God. Suffering comes from your heavenly Father, he says to them, and he draws this amazing, bold parallel between the gift of salvation and the gift of suffering in this verse.

Look at verse 29 with me again, he says, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake," in the interests of Christ, and he says, "not only to believe in Him," he reminds them that God has granted salvation to them, God as a gift of grace gave salvation to them. And we know from the biblical teaching that we would never have been able to find salvation on our own. We did not desire it. We did not have the power to affect it. It took an act of God and a gift of God for us to enter into his family. The Bible says that it was before the foundation of the world that God chose us in Christ. God chose us for salvation before the foundation of time. It was a gift from him that he planned before the beginning of the world, given to you.

Also, not only was it just a matter of election but also a matter of regeneration, that the Spirit of God imparted new life to you at your conversion. God did a work in your heart bringing this gift of salvation, bringing Christ through the work of his Spirit and the opening up of the word into your mind. Just like he opened Lydia's heart, he opened yours and graciously gave you the capacity to believe, graciously worked in your heart so that you would most assuredly come to Christ to be saved. Jesus said, "No one can come to My Father, no one can come to Me unless My Father draws him." It takes a work of God. It takes a gift of God. God has to do this for anyone to be saved and it's a gracious gift that he does to undeserving and unworthy sinners, to bring them into the knowledge of Christ.

Well, what Paul is saying here, it's almost an incidental point to his argument here but it undergirds it. He's telling them, "God has granted to you to believe in Christ." Now this is, everybody in one sense, every true Christian could say, "Amen! Hallelujah! This is great! Praise be to God for His marvelous gift!" as Paul says elsewhere. This word "granted" comes from a word that means grace. God has freely bestowed all of this as a gracious gift to you, and in days to come I intend to come back to expand on this even more but that's several weeks down the line. But God has freely bestowed salvation as a gracious gift.

Now beloved, here's the bridge, here's the transition, here's the pivot point that Paul was making. You can see the gracious work of God in granting salvation to believers, Paul is saying it is the same God who's granted you the opportunity to suffer for the sake of Christ here and that takes a different kind of understanding. When you see the mercy of God displayed in salvation, you can kind of grasp that and say, "This is a good gracious gift. This is wonderful." But in the midst of the pain and harm that suffering brings and the pain and harm of adversity, it's not as readily apparent. What Paul is doing here is he's helping the Philippians, and by extension us, to see that salvation and suffering have a common source, both coming from the hand of the same gracious God. The gracious God who saved you has granted to you also the privilege of this kind of suffering.

Now it is important for us to understand precisely the kind of suffering that Paul is speaking about here. Look at verse 29 with me again because he's really not talking about every kind of suffering that can come to us in this fallen world, he has a more specific kind of suffering in mind that we will explain from other Scriptures as well. Look at it here and notice that twice, the twofold repetition that he makes of the kind of suffering that it is. He says in verse 29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." This is suffering that is specifically related to the interest of Christ. It is suffering at the hands of those opposed to the Gospel. It is suffering that comes to us in the overflow of a life that is simply seeking to be a faithful testimony, a faithful witness to Christ, and people resent that, resist that, and attack us because they can't get their hands on the Christ that we proclaim.

Now God orders all of our suffering. God has blessing for us in all of the suffering that we go through and so it's not to exclude other kinds of suffering, it's just that here Paul is talking about a specific Gospel-related, Christ-centered suffering that comes to us because people are opposed to Christ and in our faithfulness to him they resent us as a result and we suffer for it as well.

Jesus spoke exactly of this kind of suffering in the Sermon on the Mount. Turn back to Matthew 5 with me, if you will. Matthew 5, speaking before Paul was even converted. Paul later walked in light of these words that Jesus spoke. Matthew 5:10 says, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you," here it is again, "because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." This word "blessed" that Jesus uses is a word that means that someone is the privileged recipient of divine favor. You are privileged to receive this kind of favor from God when you suffer for the sake of Christ. And Jesus lays out in some manner of detail exactly what that suffering can include, "People insult you, people persecute you, people physically harm you, people physically slander you all because of Me."

This is common. This is what comes in the nature of the Christian life and we're all tempted to resent the person who brings it, to protest our innocence in the matter and as a factual matter, you know, we often are innocent when this is coming. The whole

assumption of Jesus' teaching is that this is false when it comes to you and it's evil when it comes to you. It was false accusations that brought Paul under the whip of the Philippian magistrates. It was false accusations that sent Christ to the cross and so the truth or falsity of it isn't really the point. We can protest that but we've got to get beyond that and realize that this is something that God has given to us in his favor when we suffer for him like this. When intimate family members or intimate friends reject you and separate from you because of your Christian testimony, you're suffering for the sake of Christ. When people mock you and say that your conscience is too sensitive because you don't want to participate in false worship with them, you're suffering for the sake of Christ. When people fire you because you won't go along with the sexual chaos of the day and you lose your job over faithfulness to a biblical witness of what a sexual ethic should be, Scripture would say that's wrong, that's unjust, but at the hands of men on the horizontal level, but for us to realize that to suffer for the sake of Christ is a privileged blessing for us to experience.

You see, Jesus said in John 15, a verse that I've quoted many times, Jesus said in John 15:20, he said, "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." If you're following Christ and you're in union with Christ, then you are joined together with him not only for the sake of eternal glory but you're also joined with him in the sake that there is going to be suffering and persecution that comes from the hands of the world because of your love and your faithfulness to him, because of the overflow of the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart that is a convicting aroma of death to them, as Paul says elsewhere in his epistles, an aroma of death to them, convicting them of their sin by the fact that you don't join in with it and by the fact that you prefer Christ above all else, to everything else. And the testimony of Scripture is, the promise of God is, the blessing of God is that there will be times where we suffer as a result of that. Suffer in our individual lives, perhaps suffer corporately as a church as a result of that, and Paul here in Philippians, if you'll go back there to Philippians 1, is saying that you have to adopt the right perspective on it, see through all of the human instruments of it and recognize the reality of what's happening here.

Philippians 1:29. Let's look at it again there, just keeping it very clearly in front of our minds. Philippians 1, Paul says, "For to you," there's an emphatic placement there, "For to you." You, yourselves, have been granted this blessing not only to believe in God, God hasn't only given you that, he's also given you the privilege of suffering for the sake of Christ. Now especially as we join it together with what we saw in Matthew 5, why would God do this? Why would this be a blessing? Why is this a grace from God to suffer like this? Well, first of all, it proves something about the reality of your salvation. Your union with Christ brings you suffering and that suffering testifies back to the fact that you are joined together with Christ and that's why you're suffering. That's why you suffer for Christ's sake, it's because you're in union with him. You belong to him. You're in his family. That's more important than anything that happens on earth. And if you are indeed joined together with Christ, suffering with him, then you're union with Christ, as testified by the suffering that you undergo on his behalf, your union with Christ is a down payment on the final outcome of your salvation, your final glorification. You will certainly be delivered into heaven when you're suffering with Christ. You surely have

union with him and then you, by all means, you will be delivered into heaven with him in the end. Your suffering is actually a statement of the security that you have in Christ because you're experiencing the same things that Christ did when he walked on this earth.

So maybe, maybe we should adopt a little bit of a different perspective on it and not always return hostility toward those who persecute us, not always, you know, fight fire with fire as some are wont to do. Step back, take a look up, take a look down at the book of God and realize that God brings this to us and that your suffering for his sake is an indication that you belong to Christ and you remember that God brings everything into your life to accomplish good for you in the end. And beloved, again following Paul's logic here, if he was good enough to grant you salvation that you now believe in him, if he was good enough to save you from your sin when you yourself were hostile to him, when you yourself were living in rebellion against him and he saved you and graciously overlooked all of your sin to bring you into his kingdom, hasn't he been good to you? Hasn't he been gracious to you to do that? Well, if he was good to do that, then surely somehow he's working good in bringing you into a suffering that is like that which Christ experienced during his earthly life. You look beyond the outward human circumstance and see the hand that is bringing it. "This is the same hand that loved me in Christ. This hand has delivered suffering to me. That gives me courage. I know what this means and Jesus Christ himself said that when I suffer for His sake I'm blessed, and there's going to be a great reward in heaven for me in the end." That far outweighs any temporary momentary affliction that we experience in the meantime.

Look at 2 Corinthians 4. Scripture tells us to view life this way repeatedly again and again. In 2 Corinthians 4:17 it says, "momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." The insults, the isolation that comes from following Christ are a light affliction compared to the great reward that God has stored up for those who gladly accept those sufferings for the sake of Christ, but we look beyond what's happening in this earthly life, verse 18 of 2 Corinthians 4, "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." You say, "This suffering isn't simply coming from the hands of men. This has been appointed for me by God. The God who brought me into saving faith has brought this to me. I can trust Him for this. This kind of suffering is temporary. It's not going to last forever." It's probably not even going to last, you know, for years. For some, maybe. The point is it's temporary, it's passing, and it gives way to an eternal unending weight of glory that God blesses you with for the sake of patiently enduring suffering for the name of Christ. This changes perspective and in the context of what Paul is saying in chapter 1 of Philippians, therefore, be courageous, do not be alarmed by your opponents because this has been granted to you from God to suffer for him. And when you realize the full perspective, that this comes from God, that there is reward for it, that it is a testimony to the reality of your salvation, then that gives you the ability to stand like a man in the fire of battle coming to you and stand and prove the mettle that you have as a soldier of Christ, not running from battle in fear or because you don't want to suffer on behalf of the one who suffered for you.

You see, when you understand these things, the Spirit of God applies it to your heart and gives you courage to say, "Look, look, you're wronging me, you're slandering me, you're doing wrong to me, you're separating from me. I get all of that. That doesn't faze me. That doesn't throw me off my game. That's not going to make me change because I have this biblically informed mind that tells me God has ordained this for me. This is what Christ went through. This is proof of my belonging to Him." And the more severe, in one way, the more severe the persecution for the sake of Christ, you look at that and say, "Surely the reward must be even greater. I can endure this momentary affliction for the sake of the reward that awaits me and for the present testimony of the Spirit to my heart witnessing to me that I truly belong to Christ and this suffering is a proof of it."

You know, I know that some of you had to walk away from churches that didn't get this. You were not welcomed by your own church as you stood for Christ and they wanted you to leave. Wow. Okay, here it is, it's been granted to you for Christ's sake to suffer like that. That's a blessing. It's a blessing when fidelity to the truth in your life has consequences.

So suffering comes from God. That gives us courage. That gives us strength. Secondly as Paul continues on, he gives us another point to consider and Scripture gives us another point to consider. It's not only that suffering comes from God but suffering came to others. Suffering came to others and this is very humbling to me personally thinking about and working through the consequences of it. This makes me want to be faithful to Christ come whatever may. Verse 30, look at it there with me. Paul says, "experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me." He says, "As you are going through this suffering that God has granted to you, understand beloved believers, that you are experiencing the same conflict that happened to me when I brought the Gospel to you back at the riverside and Lydia's heart was opened." Paul himself as he's writing this is reminding them of what they had seen in his life. Paul says, "You saw that I was beaten for the sake of the Gospel. You know now that I am writing to you in prison and I don't have the freedom to come to you like I would like. I am suffering as I write this to you. I have suffered for the sake of the Gospel and you are the beneficiary of that suffering. You are part of the fruit that God brought to bear as a result of that." So the Philippians were in the midst when Paul was beaten and now they hear by his letter and by the report that Epaphroditus would bring to them when he delivered the letter, "I'm suffering even as I write this to you." So he tells them, he says, "Remember that you're not suffering alone. You're part of a greater matrix of suffering that the people of God undergo for the sake of Christ. Others are suffering also. It's not just you." What Paul is saying is that Paul is telling them that, "My suffering should strengthen your courage. I've suffered for your sake," he tells them, "now you suffer also. You suffer with good cheer, with good courage, with unity with one another and rise to the occasion of this suffering that comes to you for the sake of Christ. You are not alone."

Many times we'll say things like this to one another, you know, we talk about what we're going through and life is difficult, but then we remember, someone else comes up in the conversation who has it a lot worse and that has a way of softening our complaints and our dissatisfaction with our present circumstances when we remember, "Oh, somebody

else has got it worse. Maybe I shouldn't complain quite so much. Maybe I should bear up with joy here." And the recognition of someone suffering especially in a godly way, has a sanctifying influence on us. Well, beloved, this is presented to us in Scripture over and over again as something that we are to contemplate and to remember. I quoted the words from Jesus, "If they persecuted Me, they'll also persecute you." In Matthew 5, Jesus took it back further and said, "Remember that the prophets were persecuted." The prophets suffered for the sake of the truth of God. You see, in our modern day here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we really have to work hard to toss out the glad and happy picture that is often presented to be the expected experience of Christian living and to realize that this is not, that is not the picture that Scripture paints of walking with Christ in a hostile world. Scripture pictures suffering coming to us as a result of following him.

Look at the book of 1 Peter just after Hebrews, and we'll come to Hebrews in a moment. Hebrews, James, and then 1 Peter. This is not surprising. It's not surprising when relatives cut off relationships with us because they don't want to hear about Christ. This is not unusual. This is not unexpected and Peter is emphasizing this same point not only of the reality of suffering but the blessing that it is in his letter as he writes to those who would read his words. 1 Peter 4:12, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you." He says, "Don't react like this is something totally unexpected. That's not the case." Instead, verse 13, "but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation." You see, there's this end times focus to it, that there is an outcome to this that Scripture predicts, that there will be a time of reward and rejoicing that come for those who have suffered for the sake of Christ.

Verse 14, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name." Could it be any clearer? Jesus spoke of this in his own teaching before he was crucified. Jesus suffered in his own earthly life. His apostles, his appointed representatives suffered. Paul was beaten. Peter suffered. We're going to see more in just a moment. The whole biblical witness is testimony to the reality of this. Church history tells us that 11 of the 12 apostles were martyred for the faith, and John, the one who lived a long time, was exiled to the island of Patmos as we see in the book of Revelation. Thick books, thinking specifically of "Fox's Book of Martyrs," testify to the reality of suffering persecution and martyrdom that the saints have suffered throughout the ages.

You see, we've been conditioned, I'm afraid, when I say "we" I'm speaking broadly of the so-called evangelical church today, we've been conditioned by that theological plague that I taught about some days ago, moralistic therapeutic deism, that God exists to make our life easy. Scripture says, "No. Following Christ may make your life difficult. It may make it hard but take heart, take courage, Christ has overcome the world, the Spirit of glory rests upon you when you suffer for His sake, when you lost relationships for His sake, and the outcome of this is great reward and great glory for you. Don't be ashamed.

Don't shrink back in fear. Certainly don't silence your testimony to Christ in those times. Persevere because others have suffered with you." Hebrews 2:10 says it was fitting for God to perfect the author of our salvation through sufferings. Then you remember that the biblical witness speaks to this as well.

Look at Hebrews 11, it you will, in that chapter known as the Hall of Faith by many. Hebrews 11. And without going through it all, just going to that beginning in verse 36 where it says, "others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground." Men of like precious faith, men loving the same Christ that you do, saved by the same grace that you are, having suffered greatly for the sake of that faith, for the sake of Christ, losing everything earthly that belonged to them as a result of their refusal to deny Christ and walk with the world.

Now beloved, that has an impact on us as we think about these things. Do you understand that the life of Christ urges you to persevere in the midst of your own suffering for his sake? Christ suffered for you. How then could we refuse or resent suffering that comes on his behalf to us for his sake? Paul, the apostle, suffered in order to bring the Gospel on his missionary journeys again and again and again, and you can read about that as he talks it in the Corinthian epistles, all the different kinds of suffering that he went through in order to deliver the Gospel to us. The saints who have gone before us suffered in order to deliver the faith to us, and here we are on the receiving end of it. Now beloved, when the battle comes to us, then, all of these things, the fact that vertically it comes from God as a gift of his grace, that he will reward us as we faithfully endure, when we remember on a horizontal level, speaking of Christ in his humanity, when we remember Christ, when we remember the apostles, we remember the saints, all of that has a cumulative impact on our heart that points us to courage when suffering comes, to not be intimidated by the changing nature of the culture around us, the gathering storms that come against those who want to uphold biblical truth and a biblical ethic. Not to be intimidated by that at all. Not to resent it but rather to accept it. "God, this is the day, this is the age in which You have appointed me to live and it is my privilege now to stand for Christ in the midst of a day like this." Just as it was the privilege of the apostles in their day to stand for Christ, the Reformers to stand in their day for the sake of Christ and endure the persecution of the wicked Catholic Church. Others along the way, Spurgeon in the midst of his Downgrade Controversy, died young, died younger than I am because the battle just sapped him of his physical strength. Don't you see, beloved, don't you see how all of this points us to courage? And it develops a sense in our hearts that says, "I will not run from this battle. I will not flinch in the face of persecution. Others have suffered before me. I can't betray them. I can't betray Christ. I can't betray my gracious God and seek earthly comfort, earthly temporary comfort and avoid this affliction that comes from being faithful to Him. In my workplace, on my college campus, Lord, I'm willing to be embarrassed, I'm willing to be humiliated for Your sake. I'm willing to have people laugh at me, mock at me. How could I do anything else?" you say to yourself in the privacy of your own heart as you contemplate these things later today. How could you do anything

else when others have suffered before you and you walk in the benefit of their faithfulness?

And then think beyond it, think about the ones that are coming after you and you say, "Lord, I won't run from the battle. There are others coming after me. They have to be able, Lord, they have to be able to see in me however imperfectly a model of willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ. Maybe someone after me will find courage from the example, from my example," you say to yourself, "Maybe my children, maybe my grandchildren will hear something that will spark in them a desire to be faithful also." but the Christian heart looks at all of this suffering that others have undergone on behalf of Christ and says, "I can't go AWOL here. I can't run. I can't resent this. This is from God. This is the calling of Scripture."

So beloved, I want to stop here for a moment, pause for a moment and tell you that we're in the midst of a moment of really great blessing from God right now as we're talking about this. This morning it is a blessing for us to be able to talk about this when the heat of persecution is pretty low for most of us, to be able to hear these things from Scripture, to absorb them and to let them become our convictions so that they become that which prepares us for greater fires to come, for greater adversity on behalf of Christ to come. We can think through these things in the calmness and peace of the present day and then draw upon them in the future when the conflict is there. This is one of the benefits of verse by verse teaching, that it's able to bring something like this to our minds before we need it. It's a lot harder to grasp these things and embrace them when the heat is on.

So beloved, with those things in mind, we look at Scripture and we recognize that your testimony to Christ may bring harsh consequences to you, your commitment to righteousness may bring unjustified slander and broken relationships upon your head that will break your heart for the rest of your life. That might happen. When that happens, if that happens, beloved, you need to remember and understand something very critical, when that happens it is not some strange thing that is happening to you that is contrary to Scripture, that is not to be expected by what God has told us in his word. He's told us to expect this and he's told us that it's a blessing of his grace when it comes. It's important for you to understand and recognize. Not only is it not a strange thing – oh, hang onto this – it is not divine punishment for wrongdoing. You're not suffering for the sake of Christ like this because you've done something wrong and God is punishing you as a result of it. That's not the point. You're suffering because of your identification with Christ and just as the world rejected Christ, it rejects those who are his as well, and therefore God is blessing you by giving you a tangible object lesson that you belong to Christ and not to the world and that is not to be resented or feared but to accept it with courage and joy even.

So beloved, if you're suffering now like this for Christ, if you know what it's like son against father, daughter against mother, as Jesus spoke, that he came to divide like that, when that kind of suffering comes, beloved, on the authority of God's word I call you, I encourage you, I exhort you, be courageous. Be strong in the midst of the battle. Do not run. Do not fear because to you it has been granted for Christ's sake not only to believe in

him but also to suffer for his sake as Paul said to the Philippians, "Experiencing the same conflict you saw in me and now here to be in me."

Let's pray together.

*O God, we pray that You would indeed protect us and sustain us with courage that is worthy of the name of our great Savior Jesus Christ. He who suffered for us that He might reconcile us to God, Father, having been reconciled to You through His blood, if suffering comes, Father, we submit to it. We embrace it as that which comes from You for our good and for Your glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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