

March 1, 2020

Risk and Rejoice!

We'll never be the church God wants us to be without taking risks that can only be explained by the resurrection.

LTS: 1 Peter 4:12-19

I should tell you from the start that my goal this morning is to provoke within some of you a Holy Dissatisfaction with how you live as a Christian and how we function as a church. Don't get me wrong, I love Calvary Bible Church and I love what God does in our midst. I love how he has blessed us. I love how His Spirit regenerates, redeems, and rescues sinners when we gather (as he did just last week). Being a member of Calvary Bible Church is a tremendous gift from the Lord. But... I think Calvary Bible Church can also be a dangerously comfortable place to be a Christian.

When I say our church may be dangerously comfortable, I mean that if you're not careful, you might let God's apparent favor on us become the cause of an inflated opinion about our maturity as a church.

As I recall the past 25 years of ministry here, I can say with confidence that God has sharpened our understanding of His word; He has deepened our commitment to the truth. He has – to a significant degree – taught us how to minister his word to one another better than ever before. We have become a more loving church. We have become a church-planting church, we have grown in our concern for the nations, and I think we love Jesus more. But oh, when I study passages like the one before us this morning, I can't help but come away convinced that I am but a child compared to what God wants me to be.

One thing we lack as individuals and as a church body (I think) is a biblical understanding of how God uses personal suffering to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. When I say He uses personal suffering I'm not primarily thinking of suffering brought on by sickness, disability, disease or financial pressure (although God is often magnificently glorified when we suffer well under those conditions). Rather, however, I'm talking about a kind of suffering that comes as a direct result of taking personal risks for the advancement of the gospel.

The point of the passage that lies before us this morning is that Paul rejoiced in the suffering that came upon him for proclaiming Jesus as the mystery of the O.T. Paul

knew that God had laid on him a calling to proclaim that Jesus is the only Savior. And we know that God has laid on us a calling to proclaim Jesus as man's only Savior.

As Paul went about doing things to fulfill his calling, people often responded in a negative and hostile manner. And as we strive to fulfill our calling, we too will encounter people who will not love us for it any more than they loved Paul.

The difference between Paul and many of us is that Paul viewed risk-taking that leads to suffering for Christ sake as normative to the Christian life – that is, he believed it be normal – perhaps even a mark of God's favor. We on the other hand, tend to think of suffering primarily as a sign of God displeasure (witness Job's friends). In these modern times we think of relational risk-taking on behalf of Christ as insensitive, impolite, pushy, and perhaps even fanatical! I mean, Good Christians in our day don't "proselytize." We don't bring up religion in polite conversation. And if we do, the suffering we receive is considered deserved and shameful. Brothers, this ought not to be so.

Now, with those happy thoughts in mind, let's stand (in honor of God's word) and read the text before us.

Read Col. 1:24-29

Now let me offer a summary of this passage to set things up. The key word here is "sufferings." Paul is talking about his personal ministry on behalf of Christ and his church (24b). The specific ministry he has in mind is that of preaching the gospel which he refers to as "The mystery; namely that the O.T. promises of the coming Messiah have been fulfilled in Jesus.

Paul's bold, unrelenting proclamation of this Gospel resulted NOT only in many receiving the gift of eternal life but also Paul himself receiving more rejection, pain and deadly bodily injury than any of us can imagine. And when he mentions his suffering to the Colossians, he describes his response in two words: "I rejoice."

Now, I only have two points to cover this morning and though the text we read goes all the way through v. 29, we are really only going to focus on the first verse. My two points are as follows:

- I. Paul was Called to Take risks and Suffer Joyfully with Christ.
- II. We are Called to Take Risks and Suffer Joyfully with Christ.

Let's begin by looking at verse 24.

I. Paul was Called to Take risks and Suffer Joyfully with Christ,

1. He writes to the church at Colossae, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings. That one statement should startle us because we know Paul's strategy for spreading the gospel throughout Asia-Minor. In fact, we see the first glimpse of his strategy immediately after Paul's conversion on the Damascus Rd. Having had his sight restored by Ananias, Paul was baptized by the believers in Damascus and then the text says (Act. 9:20) "And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogue, saying, He is the Son of God."

2. And do you know what happened after that? Ver. 23 says, "the Jews plotted to kill him." Now we might be tempted to chalk that up to a rookie mistake. If it were me, I would have written in my journal "First Ministry strategy was a failure. God has closed that door." But that's not how Paul responded

3. Repeatedly, as he traveled, he would teach in the Synagogue on the Sabbath, find himself ostracized by leading Jews, occasionally flogged, at which point he would turn to the Gentiles and then, move on to the next city where the strategy would be repeated.

- Preach Christ, be rejected, get beaten, move along.
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- Winston Churchill once quipped: "Why is it that wherever the apostle Paul spoke I riot broke out, and but wherever I I speak they serve tea?"

4. In Philippi he was beaten and then imprisoned. He was repeatedly scourged or flogged at the synagogues.

- A. One account written by a victim of flogging many years later wrote, "The first dozen strokes were like jagged wire tearing furrows in the flesh, and the second dozen seemed like the filling of the furrows with molten lead."¹
- B. The tradition was to lay down NOT just two dozen but 39 stripes with the lash. And Paul says he experienced this NOT once, but FIVE times!

¹ John Pollock, *The Apostle: A Life of Paul*, (Colorado Springs, David C. Cook, 2012), 56

5. What I want you to see, beloved, is that this was not simply bad luck for Paul. This was his strategy for reaching the world with the gospel. And he points to that fact in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Turn with me to 1 Cor. 15.

6. As you are turning there, consider this:

“What if you come to the end of your life only to discover there is no God and no life after death? What then?” If there is no resurrection does your life make sense just the same?

7. In his book *Desiring God*, John Piper tells the story of a Cistercian abbot who was interviewed on Italian television. “The interviewer was especially interested in the Cistercian tradition of living in silence and solitude. So, he asked the abbot, “And what if you were to realize at the end of your life that atheism is true, that there is no God? Tell me, what if it were true?” The abbot replied, ‘Holiness, silence, and sacrifice are beautiful in themselves, even without promise of reward. I still will have used my life well.’”

8. Now that may strike us a beautiful sentiment. But if we asked the Apostle Paul that same question, his answer would be the exact opposite. We know his answer would be exactly opposite because we have his exact answer recorded for us in 1 Cor. 15:19 where he says, “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

9. Paul didn’t imagine for a moment that a life sitting around in a monastery contemplating his navel should be considered a life well lived! He believed with all his heart that the risen Christ whom He met on the Road to Damascus was the same who would raise him to eternal life and eternal reward. As far as he was concerned, his life didn’t make any sense apart from the resurrection.

10. If you’re still in 1 Cor. 15 look down at v. 30. Paul asks, “Why are we in danger every hour? I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!”

11. At one point as he was defending his apostleship he offered a short catalogue of his suffering.

Labors... imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.
Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.
Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent

journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

12. To what does one appeal to make sense of such a life? One thing: The promise of resurrection. And if the Sadducees are right and there is NO resurrection, then (33) “let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.”

- A. Paul is not encouraging us to be drunkards and gluttons. He’s just saying, if there is No resurrection then just live for the normal comforts and pleasures of life.
- B. And that’s a scary thought because most of us are in fact just living for the normal comforts and pleasures of everyday life. We have little time for Christ. We rush through our bible reading and enjoy very little prayer. We hardly ever share our faith or experience the censure of unbelieving friends. Taking risks for the gospel? It’s not even on our radar.
- C. Most of us live in such a way that is easily explained with no reference to the promise of resurrection. To be sure, there’s nothing wrong with enjoying lawful comforts and pleasures. God has given us all things to enjoy. But the enjoyment of those things should not be the main thing.

13. For Paul, the main thing was the exaltation of Christ regardless of personal cost. And yet, its more than that. Notice what else Paul says in v. 24.

14. Paul writes, “I rejoice in my suffering for your sake and in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His body, the church.”

15. Now what does, “Filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” mean? We know what it doesn’t mean! It doesn’t mean that Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross was in any sense insufficient or that sinners must somehow make up the deficiency by their own meritorious work. As the author of Hebrews explains, “We have been sanctified through of the body of Jesus Once For ALL!”

16. Rather, I think Paul understands that there is a sense in which the resurrected Christ suffers when his people are mistreated for his sake. Remember the words Jesus said to Saul on the Damascus Rd., “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting ME? When the church is persecuted, Christ is persecuted. When the church suffers, Christ suffers. But God has established a limit to the sufferings of Christ in his church. One day he will return and put an end to the suffering of the church. Until then, however, Faithful

believers around the world who suffer for the sake of Christ and his church are “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.”

17. The enemies of Christ were not satisfied with Christ’s death! They hated Jesus with an insatiable hatred and wanted to add to his afflictions. Paul was receiving the persecution that was intended for Christ.² And the amazing thing is, he welcomed it!

18. It’s NOT that Paul liked suffering or sought to intentionally provoke it, but when it came, he rejoiced. In fact, even as Paul is writing these words to the Colossians he is sitting in a Roman Jail.

19. You see, Paul wasn’t ashamed of Jesus or His gospel. To the contrary, he longed for the kind of intimate fellowship reserved for those who humble themselves and follow Christ even unto death. To the Philippians Paul famously cried out, “That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share in his suffering, becoming like Him in His death.”

20. I suspect there is a kind of intimate and personal fellowship reserved for those who find joy in NOT only in knowing and believing in Christ, but also in suffering with Christ.

21. Paul knew this kind of fellowship and it filled him with joy. Here’s the way he describes it in 2 Cor. 6:10 “sorrowful yet always rejoicing.” And this was something the disciples had known before Paul’s conversion. After being beaten by the Sanhedrin for proclaiming Jesus as the Christ we read (Acts 5:41) “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.”

22. This is how Paul lived beloved. But it’s not a lifestyle reserved exclusively for Paul. It’s for us as well! We’ve talked about how Paul was Called to Take risks and Suffer Joyfully with Christ. Now let’s think about the fact that...

II. We are Called to Take Risks and Suffer Joyfully with Christ.

1. Consider the following Scriptures:

A. (Matt. 16:24) “If anyone would come after Me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.”

B. (Matt. 10:25), “If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household.”

² John MacArthur, *MacArthur Commentary Colossians & Philemon*, (Chicago, Moody Press, 1992), 76

C. (2 Tim 3:2) “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

2. What I am after this morning is NOT that you would go out from here and manufacture a way to get persecuted. Rather, what I hope you will consider the possibility that God’s highest goal for you is NOT comfort, happiness and ease. His highest goal for you is NOT that you would retire, buy an RV and collect Sea Shells. Rather, he is calling us to understand that the normal Christian Life involves risk-taking that may very well result in personal suffering.

3. I want to see in our church the spirit of Adoniram Judson who lived in an age when, so far as he knew, no one had even thought of going out of North America to reach the Lost, and no organization existed in the country to support American foreign missionaries! But who cares if it’s never been done? Someone has to be first! He began thinking, “Why should not I be a foreign missionary to one of these remote parts of the world as yet unreached by the gospel?”

4. Or consider John Paton Scottish Pastor turned missionary to the New Hebrides. When he told his church in Scotland that he was leaving to take the gospel to those dangerous islands in the Pacific,

One old Christian tried to discourage him from going by warning him, ‘The cannibals! You will be eaten by cannibals!’

John replied, Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my Resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.

5. I think of Martin Luther who upon writing the famous Hymn A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, included the following lyrics,

And though this world, with devils filled,

Should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear, for God hath willed

His truth to triumph through us:

The Prince of Darkness grim, We tremble NOT for him; His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure, One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers, No thanks to them abideth

The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with is sideth.

Let good and kindred go; this mortal life also.

The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still.

His kingdom is forever!

6. I think of Eric Mock who gave up his career working on the international space station and became a missionary with Slavic Gospel Association to strengthen local churches in the former Soviet Union..

7. I think of Shannon Hurley who was a successful young businessman who gave up his career to move his family to Uganda to start S.O.S. Ministries

8. Or Wayne Mack who at age 70 gave up the comforts of ministry in America to move his wife to South Africa where he still serves in his 80's.

9. I think of a young single woman in our church who saw a couple of girls and thought "its now or never." Then she walked over to where they were sitting, introduced herself and sat with them to share the gospel. One of those young ladies showed up in church the next week.

9. All of these men and their wives (and children) chose the hard path of risk-taking that occasionally leads to suffering for which they now confidently rejoice.

10. What about you?

A. Is God calling you to leave the U.S. for a ministry in another land?

B. Is He calling you to join the men and women who go downtown on Friday Nights to share the gospel with strangers?

C. Is He calling you to reach out to your neighbors and risk sharing Jesus with them and perhaps inviting them to church?

D. Is he calling you to set up a conversation with an adult sibling simply to tell them about Christ?

E. Some of you are called to leave the comforts of Calvary Bible Church to help Living Hope Bile church become all it can be. And in a few months, many of you will follow Keith and Matt out to plant Christ Fellowship Bible Church. And believe me, there will be risks and difficulties enough in that endeavor to keep you dependent upon the Lord for years to come. And Jesus is worth it. He's worthy of the risk. He is worthy of your suffering. And he is worthy of your Praise and thanksgiving when you see what He does with you though it!

11. There are 10,000 ways to take personal risks for Christ. O Calvary Bible Church, Don't be ashamed of the gospel when you have opportunity to speak.

12. *We'll never be the church God wants us to be without taking risks that can only be explained by our settled faith in God's promise of resurrection.*

13. Jesus said, Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."