

My Suffering, Your Glory

Ephesians 3:13

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Scripture readings prior to the sermon:

2 Corinthians 11:23b-28; Colossians 1:24-29

Good Morning!

It's a joy to be here to serve you as we open God's word together, here in Ephesians, chapter 3. We will read verses one through thirteen, and then we will dive in. Ephesians 3:1-13.

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal

purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

[PRAY]

So, let's set up our discussion this morning with some brief words of introduction.

First, as a reminder, Paul is writing this epistle – or letter – to the church at Ephesus while he is a prisoner in Rome; we can see this in v. 1. "For this reason I, Paul, a **prisoner** for Christ Jesus..." The year in which Paul is writing is probably 62 A.D., and the church at Ephesus was a church that Paul had pastored for approximately three years (you can read about this in Acts 20). At the end of his three-year stay in Ephesus, Paul left his spiritual son, Timothy, in charge of the Ephesian church, and that was probably around 57 A.D. Undoubtedly in the intervening four or five years between 57 and 62, there were some Christians in the church at Ephesus who didn't know Paul, but who had only heard about him, this great Apostle to the Gentiles. So, here in this epistle, Paul provides a bit of an introduction to himself...we can see this in the following verses of chapter 3 (follow along):

- v. 2 – the stewardship given *to me*
- v. 3 – the mystery made known *to me*
- v. 3 – *I* have written
- v. 4 – you can perceive *my insight*
- v. 7 – *I* was made a minister
- vs. 7-8 – God's grace given *to me*
- v. 13 – *I* am suffering

If we go back to verse one, we note that it begins with, "For this reason..." Those of you reading ahead will note that verse fourteen also begins with this same phrase: "For this reason..." So it seems that Paul's train of thought heading out of chapter 2 most naturally proceeds into verse

fourteen of chapter 3, with verses two through thirteen as kind of an aside, and he's planning to proceed on to describe what he's praying for for the Ephesian church (which is where we're planning to pick up next week). But why the aside, then?

Back to verse one: "For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles..." So very quickly, let's ask ourselves: If we were members of the church in Ephesus, and we were receiving this letter from our beloved Paul, and he had just mentioned that he was a prisoner... Why? On our behalf! Paul says, "I'm in jail...and it's YOUR FAULT!" Well, frankly, we might feel a little bad about that...and so he ends his brief aside with an exhortation to NOT be discouraged, to NOT lose heart...which brings us to verse thirteen (our text for this morning).

Paul writes in verse thirteen: "So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory."

We will deal with Ephesians 3:13 this morning by asking and answering five questions (you have some space for Sermon Notes in your bulletin if you would like to keep track):

1. What were Paul's sufferings?
2. What is Paul referring to when he refers to "your glory"?
3. How were Paul's sufferings **for** the Ephesians' glory?
4. Why should the Believers in Ephesus not lose heart?
5. What does all of this mean for us?

First...

What Were Paul's Sufferings?

Paul writes:

*So I ask you not to lose heart over **what I am suffering** for you, which is your glory.*

Paul briefly summarizes his sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:23b-28. I won't read the entire passage again here (Pastor Mike read it earlier); you can go there later and re-read this summary for yourself. Then, you can

read through the book of Acts for more details; for example, you can read about how Paul was stoned and left for dead at Lystra in Acts 14, and you can read about how Paul and Silas were imprisoned at Philippi in Acts 16, etc. And I remind you again, of course, that as Paul is writing this very epistle, he is in prison in Rome.

One quick note here, by the way...none of these sufferings that he endures surprises Paul. Back in Acts chapter 9, after Jesus appears to Paul on the road to Damascus, God calls a Christian named Ananias to go to Paul (who at the time was called Saul) and to pray for him, and during this exchange with Ananias, God says to him, “Go, for he (Paul) is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him **how much he must suffer** for the sake of my name.” (Acts 9:15-16) So, Paul was told about his sufferings, and as the scales fall from his eyes there in Acts 9...he goes off to follow Christ as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

This foreshadowing of suffering...we will come back to it later.

Question #2:

What Is “Your Glory”?

Again, Paul writes:

*So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is **your glory**.*

“Glory” is not an easy word to define, but we will do our best here this morning to get the point across. In the New Testament, this word is used in a couple of different ways. For example, let’s look briefly at 2 Corinthians 3:18:

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the **glory** of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of **glory** to another.*

The first time the word “glory” appears in this verse – the **glory** of the Lord – it is being used to describe an attribute of God. John Piper defines it

in this way: the glory of God is “the radiance of God’s holiness, the radiance of His manifold, infinitely worthy and valuable perfections.” So you have all of the perfections of God in all of His attributes, and glory is that...thing...that becomes apparent to you when all of those attributes come into focus.

Glory is something you can feel, perhaps, more than you can define. You stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon or you watch footage of Secretariat winning the Belmont Stakes in 1973 by 31 lengths, and that feeling you get... maybe?

You know, yesterday afternoon, my family was blessed with an opportunity to go and to watch the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra perform at Heinz Hall. And I gotta tell you...it was inspiring! For the second half of the performance, they played Shostakovich’s 10th Symphony. And they got to those last twelve or sixteen measures, and I’m hearing this incredible music in all of its majesty and beauty and power... And at the end of it... I mean, you just gotta stand up and clap! I mean, I’m crying, you know. And what am I clapping for? Am I clapping in appreciation of all of the hard work and discipline that these 12-to20 year old kids have put into their craft? Of course I am! But...but, if I don’t eventually turn that applause and that thankfulness and emotion upward to God...then I’m not giving credit where credit is due!

It is God who gives men the ability to write such music! God knew from eternity past what Shostakovich’s 10th was going to sound like, because He invented all of the notes...and the instruments...and sound! And it is God who gives men and women the talent to play such instruments, as well as the passions for music and excellence! And yesterday afternoon, just before 6:00, all of that came together in this one amazing rush of...glory. At least a small hint of it...

Moments like that are a glimpse of glory. And it’s found **in its fulness** and **in its perfection** only in God. And moments like yesterday only serve as evidence of and pointers to its reality.

But that’s not exactly the type of glory Paul is talking about in Ephesians 3:13. Let’s look again at 2 Corinthians 3:18:

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the **glory** of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of **glory** to another.*

We are being transformed into that same image – the image of God through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives – from one degree of glory to another. In this sense, *our* glory is derived from the glory of God – it has its root in Him, not in us! – and it describes what we are and what we will be upon receipt of the blessings of salvation. In Ephesians 3:8, which we read together earlier, it is the “unsearchable riches of Christ” transferred to me, to my account. It is “every spiritual blessing” that Paul talks about in the first couple of chapters of this epistle: redemption and forgiveness and access to God through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross! Those blessings are our glory, and in eternity they all await us in ever-increasing measure!

This future glory...we will come back to it later.

Question #3:

How Were Paul’s Sufferings “For the Ephesians’ Glory”?

Again, Ephesians 3:13:

So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

Simply put: the trials and hardships and sufferings that Paul endured were for the express purpose of bringing salvation to the Gentiles. This is the mystery that Paul has been talking about; look at verse 4:

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ...

This mystery is that, through the Church, Gentiles are fellow heirs with the Jews of the eternal blessings of God. As the Apostle to the Gentiles, this is the calling that God placed on Paul’s life: to take the

Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, and in this calling, God was clear with Paul that to fulfill this call, he was going to have to suffer.

Colossians 1:24 says:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church...

Paul is obviously not saying that in some way he is adding to the finished, atoning work of Christ on the Cross; no, that work is finished, because Christ Himself said so in John 19:30. But, through his suffering as the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul is making the name and work of Christ known throughout the world, and it is in this sense that he is “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.” And, notice in Colossians 1:24 – Paul explicitly says that what he is doing – all of his suffering – is **for the Church** (of which the Believers in Ephesus are now a part).

We see this also in 2 Timothy 2:10:

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Again, Paul says that everything he does, he does for the sake of the elect – which is the Church.

So, when Paul suffers in his efforts to bring the Good News of salvation through the Cross of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, his suffering is for their glory: their salvation, their being blessed with every spiritual blessing.

“My suffering, your glory,” Paul says. We’ll come back to that...

Question #4 (last question before we tie all of this together and apply it to our lives):

Why Should the Ephesians “Not Lose Heart” Over – Not Be Discouraged By – the Fact that Paul Was Suffering for Their Glory?

The answer to this question comes in two parts.

First, Paul clearly saw his calling as the Apostle to the Gentiles – yes, replete with sufferings of all kinds – as a result of God’s grace given to him. See vs. 2, 7, and 8 here in Ephesians 3:

*[2] assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's **grace** that was given to me for you...*

*[7] Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's **grace**, which was given me by the working of his power.*

*[8] To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this **grace** was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ*

Before God called him, Paul was a sinner bound for hell – just like all of us. And for Paul, it was the deepest, darkest part of hell, too, where he was headed: he was killing Christians, the people that God had saved by the blood of His Son! In fact, when God called him, he was on his way to imprison and kill more Christians (Acts 9)!

But, Paul was **saved** by the blood of Christ – just like the very people that he was previously putting to death! And more than that, he was now enlisted by God to take this glorious message of salvation to the entire world!

What’s a shipwreck? What are 39 lashes? What’s a little jail time in light of being called as an ambassador of the King of the Universe?

And not only did Paul not deserve any of the blessings he had received from God (for that’s what the word “grace” means), but Paul also knows that his sufferings would result in a greater eternal glory!

In Romans 8:15-18, Paul writes this:

...you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Paul’s looking at his sufferings... Looking **back**: in light of the **grace** he’s received from God – all of the blessings he’s received from God that he did not deserve...his **temporary** sufferings are put into perspective. Looking forward to eternity: he’s comparing the **glory** that awaits him – eternity with Christ! – with the measly, little, insignificant sufferings in this **temporary** life...

And he looks at the Believers in Ephesus and says, “Do NOT be discouraged! Don’t you know what kind of glory that is awaiting me when this hard race is over?! Don’t feel bad for me! My sufferings are **your** glory AND **my** glory!”

Do you feel that?

Question 5...

What Does This Mean for Us (Today)?

Suffering for Christ is not a cause to be discouraged – it is a cause for rejoicing! The New Testament is FULL OF THIS, isn’t it? I mean, just a cursory skimming of the New Testament will just pound this into us, won’t it?

Romans 8:18 (which we just read):

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17:

*...we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this **light momentary affliction** is preparing for us an **eternal weight of glory** beyond all comparison...*

1 Peter 4:13:

*Beloved, do not be surprised at the **fiery trial** when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But **rejoice** insofar as you **share Christ's sufferings**, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his **glory** is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of **glory** and of God rests upon you.*

James 1:2-4:

***Count it all joy**, my brothers, when you meet **trials** of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

And our Lord is the first to warn us in the New Testament in Matthew 5:11-12:

***Blessed** are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. **Rejoice and be glad**, for your **reward** is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

So, brothers and sisters, DO NOT LOSE HEART – DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED – when you suffer for the Gospel's sake. Rejoice! Rejoice, for you are blessed!

And the other thing that we can't get away from in the New Testament is that for God's people – for Christians – there **will be** suffering. Not: there *might be* suffering, or there *could be* suffering. Again, there are so many places we can go, but I will just give you one example; Acts 14:21-22:

*When they had preached the gospel [in Derbe] and had made many disciples, [Paul and Barnabas] returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that **through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.***

I mean, why did Paul and Barnabas have to “strengthen the souls of the disciples”? Why did they have to “encourage the Christians to continue in the faith”? It is because “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”!

What's the point? The point is this: Just like God told Paul in Acts 9 that he was going to suffer for the cause of Christ, so the rest of the New Testament tells us that **we will suffer** with and for Christ **if we are His**.

The path to glory is the path of suffering.

As a brief aside: I'm not talking about suffering for our own stupidity and our own sinfulness. I mean, let's be honest: sometimes we suffer just because we're screw-ups...

No, I'm talking about suffering for righteousness' sake, suffering for following Christ. Suffering **like** Christ, who “suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.”

I'm talking about losing your job, because you refused to lie, or because you refused to use pirated software, which is against the law.

I'm talking about losing a friend, because you stood for the truth when your friend was wrong.

I'm talking about being put in jail or even stoned to death for boldly proclaiming that God's design for marriage is monogamous and heterosexual and covenantal.

I'm talking about being shunned by your culture, because you believe and proclaim that abortion is the murdering of an innocent child – a human being made in God's image.

Maybe it's just being made fun of because you told someone about Jesus...

Maybe you'll find out this week that you have cancer... And for the next six months, you suffer... And your body wastes away to nothing, and you are forced to "put your things in order," and you are going to leave behind a loving wife and two incredible children... And you REJOICE all the way through it and you keep your faith in Christ to the end!

All of this, brothers and sisters, leads to glory – the unsearchable riches of Christ that He lavishes on those who love Him and trust Him!

More than this... Let me take this last example and apply it to myself.

I'm not the Apostle Paul, but... There is a sense in which my suffering in the way that I described can be...for your glory.

Ask yourself: How would it affect **your** faith if you saw me suffering from cancer (or being shut up in prison because I refuse to recant on God's design for marriage) – how would it affect **your** faith if you saw **my** rejoicing and **my** faith? I am convinced that you would be encouraged and strengthened in **your** faith, wouldn't you?

My suffering, your glory... Do you see that?

And in the same way, all Christians everywhere have an opportunity to be sources of strength and courage and faith in the lives of the Christians around them.

We are **all** called to suffer for Christ! Jesus says, "Take up **your** cross and follow Me!" Jesus says, "In this world, you **will** have trouble, but do not be discouraged: I have overcome the world!"

Just one, final point as I conclude. Why...?

Why is the World This Way?

Why is the path to glory the path of suffering? I mean, let's all take a moment here and ask God, "God, why is it this way in this life? **Why** is it easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven? Why can't we just cruise on into heaven? What's with all of this suffering stuff?"

Well, I don't know if any of you have noticed or not, but there's something wrong with the world. And I'll just cut to the chase, here: the root of what's wrong with the world – the root of the problem – is you. And me. It's our sin. It's our refusal to honor and obey and worship God in the manner that He deserves.

You know, there's a sense in which this world is not quite completely God's just yet... We have already seen back in Ephesians 2 a few weeks ago that Satan is called the "prince of the power of the air." Elsewhere, Paul calls Satan the "god of this world."

And so when you add the actions and desires of sinful men and the influence of God's Archenemy together...well, you get a mess. What you get is a world that hates God. And I can prove it with a simple question: Why did Jesus **suffer** and die at the hands of men? I mean, what did He do to deserve any of that?

I'll tell you what He did. He lived a life of perfect obedience and worship to God, His Father. He always did what the Father desired. He was holy and righteous and good and beautiful and...**glorious**! And the people of this world couldn't stand it!

And men today are no different. Paul says in Romans 8 that men whose minds are set on the flesh are hostile to God...enemies of God. Before God came down to give me a new heart and save me, I was an enemy of God. And if you are not a Christian, you need to understand that you are an enemy of God.

You see, this is the primary purpose of preaching...and evangelism. We, Christians, take God and His Son, Jesus, to a lost and dying and sinful world, and we hold God up before men in all of the radiance of His manifold perfections – in all of His glory! (Is this what your evangelism looks like?) And when we hold God up before men in all of His glory, we ask, "Are you coming? Will you worship Him with me? Will you serve Him with me in a manner that He deserves? Will you **suffer** with and for Christ knowing that this world – with all of its sin and all of its worthless trinkets – is passing away and a new heavens and new earth are coming when King Jesus returns?!"

And do you know what happens when you do that? Sometimes, people come!

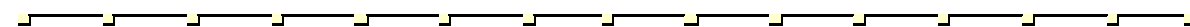
And sometimes they hang you on a cross...or stone you and leave you for dead outside the city gates...or simply make fun of you as some sort of holier-than-thou Bible thumper person who's out of your mind.

Jesus said, "They hated me; they will hate you, too."

The path to glory is the path of suffering, and there is no way around it! But rejoice! The writer of Hebrews tells us that Christ suffered...for what? "For the **joy** set before Him!" Yes, brothers and sisters, my suffering and your suffering like Christ **is not worthy to be compared** to the riches that await all of us who believe: eternal, perfect, unhindered fellowship and JOY with Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the World!

Let's pray. [PRAY]

As we prepare to celebrate Communion, let us briefly meditate on...



Our Lord's Suffering, and Our Own

Let me read again to you Acts 14:21-22:

*When they had preached the gospel [in Derbe] and had made many disciples, [Paul and Barnabas] returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that **through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.***

I pray that we would hear this, this morning. This is not just a message for the Christians in Antioch who lived 1,950 years ago.

Do you understand this? Have you embraced this, that the only path to glory is the path of suffering for Christ, like Christ?

This meal we are about to celebrate is for Believers only. It is only for those who have repented – who have turned away from their sin – and trusted in Jesus Christ alone for their right standing before God. This meal

is only for those who have taken up their own cross and who are committed to following Jesus regardless of where He takes them.

This meal is not a religious ritual! By this meal, we remember Christ's suffering and we identify with it in our own lives.

You are not too young to come! You are not too old to come! Just come! And join us as we follow Christ on this path to glory – this path of suffering.

Perhaps you're not sure... Perhaps you need to talk to me or to one of the other Elders... perhaps you have questions, and that's OK.

But, I do remind you again of that great promise in Romans 8:18, where the Apostle Paul writes:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

This is true, brothers and sisters! We are headed for glory after the sufferings of this world, and this meal is intended to help guide us there.

[STOP]