



The Great Value of Suffering

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Matthew 5:10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Suffering comes from three sources: first, there is suffering of the mind, or mental anguish. Secondly, there is suffering in the body, and thirdly, there is suffering which is brought through persecution from people. Each one of these types of suffering can prove valuable if we let them affect us right. Someone is apt to say, "I cannot see how there could be any value in any suffering." In Romans 8:28 we read, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." If this Scripture is true (and I know that it is), then there is value in suffering.

I can think of three advantages of suffering for Christ. First, you can be drawn closer to Christ. Secondly, the saints can be strengthened to stand through your suffering. Thirdly, the outside world needs to see the church come through suffering and persecution to recognize the true church. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Paul explained it: "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

Paul continued on in verse 5, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." In other words, "As we abound in suffering so we abound in consolation."

If we do not suffer, then we have no need of being consoled by Jesus. Through suffering we are drawn closer to Him. Through suffering we learn some of our most valuable lessons.

Jesus allows suffering to come our way sometimes to discipline us and train us for His service. We read in Hebrews 5:8-9: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." Iron ore is worth only a few dollars per ton, but after it has been through the fiery furnace a few times, it is refined into steel and its value is greatly multiplied.

It is through suffering that our faith is tried. We would never know if our faith is strong or not if it was never tried. First Peter 1:7 states, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." So our suffering can be valuable.

Why does the goldsmith try the gold in the fire? It is to burn out the dross, to skim off the impurities. How does the goldsmith know when the gold is ready to take up? It is when he looks at the gold and can see his image. Christ wants to see His image in us. To perfect us, He has let sufferings come along. It is through suffering that we are drawn closer to and made stronger in the Lord.

With too many, the devil has used suffering as a tool to get folks discouraged and backslide. Many have lost faith in God because they had to suffer so long. In Hebrews 12:11 (Williams Translation) says, "Now for the time being no discipline seems to be pleasant, it is painful; later on, however, to those who are trained by it, it yields the fruit of peace which grows from upright character." Thus, there is real value in suffering.

The Psalmist was grateful for his sufferings, which taught him the meaning of the Scripture. He wrote in Psalms 119:71, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." We learn lessons through suffering and hardships that we never forget. There is a great value in suffering from this standpoint to help keep us low in humility, from being exalted in our accomplishments.

There was a danger of this in the Apostle Paul's life. We read in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh,

the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." Paul said all this was for his good.

If we grumble and complain when we are in suffering, the world will see no difference in us than in other religious folk. Christ wants to impart spiritual strength through our physical weakness. He just wants us to be as little children, dependent upon Him. Just as a little child would run to its father with a tiny scratch so Jesus wants us to run to Him with every care and every burden of life.

Peter said in 1 Peter 5:7, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." Some people have the feeling they could stay saved and keep the victory if it were not for all the hard trials. They think it strange that God should love them so much to allow any hard trial to come upon them.

Yet, we read in 1 Peter 4:12-16: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."

Many times because of long-standing afflictions and sicknesses many people are prone to seek relief other than through Jesus. When sickness and affliction come upon us let us first examine ourselves and see if we are really in the faith or just professing to be. When we have made this thorough investigation then let us be sure that we are not violating the laws of health. If, we are sure that we are taking the proper care of our body in eating properly, getting the needed rest, the proper exercise for the body; then I think we can implore God for His physical healing in our body. Then we ought to be patient and wait upon the Lord.

Luke 21:19 tells us, "In your patience possess ye your souls." So it sounds like we can lose our soul through impatience. In Isaiah 40:31 we read, "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Many times we do not understand that through our prolonged suffering in sickness and tribulation that He is weaving a pattern of good things for you ahead. He is doing it for your good and His glory. An older sister who had carried a long-standing affliction and had been prayed for many times only got temporary help each time, but she could never get permanent healing.

So, she called for her pastor to come and pray for her. The pastor came and prayed for her and again she got temporary help. While she was working at her embroidery, she asked her pastor why she could not be permanently healed of her trouble. He asked to see her embroidery work; she handed it to him, and he turned it upside down. There he could see the rough and ragged side of her work. She turned it over and said, "You are looking at the wrong side." Then, he said, "No, that is what you are doing. You are looking at the bottom side of this affliction. God is weaving a pattern that looks good from the top side, but from the bottom it looks ragged and rough." We should rejoice in the fact that God knows what He is doing. He does all things well!

When you are suffering and are unsure where to turn in God's Word, read the Book of Job. Through these chapters, God will encourage your heart to suffer long. Then, read of Paul's suffering in 2 Corinthians 11:24-27, where he wrote, "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."

However, through it all, Paul was able to say: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body" (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

Yes, you may have to die in your sufferings, but do not let that shake your faith. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, died suffering for Jesus. By his death came heavy conviction on a man named Saul, later called Paul. No doubt, Paul never got over Stephen's death. God knew that Stephen could never go forward and accomplish what Paul could. However, God could see that through watching a true child of God die, Paul could be convicted and brought to Christ. Through a true, tested and tried saint's dying, many have been inspired to take up the torch. Are you willing to suffer long and then die, that others may live?

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