

## The Purpose of Suffering, Part 1 - Philippians 3:10-11 – January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019

- I have to confess that the text before us today is one for which I am currently struggling with in my own walk with Jesus Christ.
- This because, in order to know the power of Christ's resurrection, we must first be those who participate in Christ's sufferings.
- Suffering and struggling produces strength and power and we must participate in His sufferings to also participate in His power.

1 Peter 4:12–13 - 12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

- If you'll kindly indulge me, I'd like to explain how suffering is the catalyst to knowing Christ, and the power of His resurrection.
- Please know that I in no way wish to address this matter of suffering as if I have somehow figured it all out, because I have not.
- Actually, the Apostle Paul in the next verse, verse 12 says that even he had not obtained all of this and presses on to take hold.

Oswald Chambers echoed this in his commentary on the book of Job titled, "Baffled to Fight Better," - "It is in such a book of Job that many suffering souls will find consolation and sustaining, and this because no attempt is made to explain the why of suffering, ...The problem in connection with suffering arises from the fact that there is seemingly no explanation of it. ...There are things in our heavenly Father's dealings with us, which have no immediate explanation. There are inexplicable providences, which test us to the limit and prove that rationalism is a mere mental pose. The Bible and our common sense agree that the basis of human life is tragic, not rational, and the whole problem is focused for us in the book of Job."

- It's my belief that while we may not, this side of heaven, understand the why of suffering, we can understand the purpose of it.
- I'll take it a step further and suggest that not understanding the why of suffering leads us to understand the purpose of suffering.
- It's for this reason I sensed the Holy Spirit was leading me in this direction of talking about the purpose of Christian suffering.

### **1. It brings us to the end of ourselves**

- If you were to ask me what I thought was one of the main purposes of suffering in the life of a Christian, this would have to be it.
- The reason being is that suffering brings me to the cross where I am not only at the end of myself, but there's a death to self.
- Unless and until I die to self, pick up my cross and follow Jesus, I will never taste from the cup of the power of His resurrection.

2 Corinthians 4:7–12 - 7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

### **2. It brings a humble dependence upon the Lord**

- God will not entrust us with this much power absent the humility before Him and dependency upon Him that suffering produces.
- Replete throughout scripture we see examples of this with the men and women that God used in mighty and powerful ways.
- To me, the Apostle Paul is one of the best examples of how all that he suffered produced within him this humble dependence.

2 Corinthians 12:6–10 - 6 Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, 7 or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

I want to close with a quote from Charles Spurgeon for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that he suffered greatly physically with severe gout, and even mentally with mental illness and severe depression. So much so, his son ascribed his great suffering to his great preaching. He was quoted as saying, "There was no one who could preach like my father. In inexhaustible variety, witty wisdom, vigorous proclamation, loving entreaty, and lucid teaching, with a multitude of other qualities, he must, at least in my opinion, ever be regarded as the prince of preachers."

Here's the quote from Spurgeon concerning his own severe depression, "Fits of depression come over the most of us. Cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down. The strong are not always vigorous, the wise not always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyous not always happy. There may be here and there men of iron to whom wear and tear work no perceptible detriment, but surely the rust frets even these; and as for ordinary men, the Lord knows and makes them to know that they are but dust. Knowing by most painful experience what deep depression of spirit means, being visited therewith at seasons by no means few or far between... Should the power of depression be more than ordinary, think not that all is over with your usefulness. Cast not away your confidence, for it hath great recompense of reward [Heb. 10:35]. Even if the enemy's foot be on your neck, expect to rise and overthrow him. Cast the burden of the present, along with the sin of the past and the fear of the future, upon the Lord who forsaketh not His saints. Live by the day—aye, by the hour."