

## SUFFERING

**“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” (Matt. 16:21)**

The disciples, as you know, were shocked by the idea that Jesus would suffer. Peter who had just made the good confession that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the Living God, took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him: **“Never, Lord” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”**

Jesus, as you know, rebuked Peter and said: **“Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men”.**

The Scriptures are clear that the Messiah would suffer. Please consider: **“Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Is. 53:1-12).**

DID YOU TAKE TIME TO READ THESE INSPIRED WORDS ABOUT THE SUFFERING MESSIAH?

APPARENTLY THE APOSTLES DIDN’T EITHER!

THE BIBLE HAS A GREAT DEAL TO SAY ABOUT SUFFERING THAT WE TOO OFTEN OVERLOOK!

IT IS TIME THAT WE TAKE A SERIOUS LOOK AT WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT SUFFERING!

After rebuking Peter, Jesus said to all of the disciples: **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul”** (Matt. 16:24-26).

## HOW THE APOSTLES SUFFERED AND DIED

Jesus warned His disciples: **“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.”** (Jn. 15:18-21).

We should not be surprised that the apostles suffered for Jesus sent them out like sheep in the midst of wolves (Matt. 10:16). Here is what happened to the apostles of Jesus:

- Judas Iscariot committed suicide (Matt. 27:3-10). Every other of the original apostles remained true to Jesus and suffered. All but John died as martyrs. The following information is found in secular history and not the Bible.
- Peter was crucified head downward in Rome. Jesus alluded to his martyrdom in John 21:18,19).
- Andrew died on an X shaped cross in Greece.
- Matthew was speared to the ground and then beheaded in Ethiopia.
- Bartholomew (Nathaniel) was literally torn to shreds by whips in Armenia.
- Thomas was speared to death in India.
- Philip was impaled with iron hooks in his ankles and hung upside down until he died.
- James, the brother of John, was beheaded by King Herod (Acts 12:1,2).
- Jude was crucified in Persia.
- Matthias, who took the place of Judas, was stoned and then beheaded.
- James (the less) was thrown from the Temple, stoned and beaten to death.

- Simon the Zealot was also crucified.
- John, the apostle whom Jesus loved, was persecuted and imprisoned on the Island of Patmos. It was as a prisoner that he received visions he incorporated in the book of Revelation. He was set free from this island prison and is thought to have died a natural death in the city of Ephesus.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A seed must have life inside it if it is to grow. Once planted in the ground the living seed must suffer the damaging affects of water, sun, and air in order to grow. As Jesus said: **“Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24)**. Exposure to death will cause the seed to grow if it has life inside it.

When you plant something without life in the ground, however, the water, sun, and air will destroy it. Plant a garment in the garden, for example, and it will not grow. The water, sun and air which are essential to the growth of the seed will destroy the garment. Because the garment does not have life inside it and will last longer if it is kept dry, not exposed to the sun, and sealed in an airtight container. This simple illustration helps us to understand how the suffering that destroys the unbeliever, will cause a person with the Holy Spirit to grow.

When we have the Holy Spirit we can **“rejoice in our suffering because we know that our suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us” (Rom. 5:3-5)**.

The Holy Spirit is essential to our success in suffering, as well as every other aspect of our Christian lives. This is why the apostles were forbidden to leave Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8).

Suffering does not destroy the child of God. It causes us to grow.

### PETER AND SUFFERING

- Peter learned his lesson about the suffering Messiah. When he preached he pointed out **“how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets saying that his Christ would suffer” (Acts 3:18)**.
- When Peter and the other apostles were flogged by the Sanhedrin we are told: **“The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:41)**.
- Peter gave this inspired advice to slaves: **“Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are**

conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” (1 Pet. 2:18-25).

■ Peter remembered the example of Jesus and wrote: **“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in the body is done with sin”** (1 Pet. 4:1).

■ Peter recognized that it was normal for Christians to suffer: **“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. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”** So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” (I Pet. 4:12-19).

■ **“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”** (1 Pet. 5:10).

#### PAUL AND SUFFERING

■ After appearing to Saul (Paul) on the Road to Damascus the Lord told a believer named Ananias: **“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name”** (Acts 9:15,16).

■ Paul reminded the Thessalonians how he had suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi (1 Thess. 2:2).

■ Paul also reminded the Thessalonians: **“You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of sever suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit”** (1 Thess. 1:6). And **“You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men”** (1 Thess. 2:14,15).

■ In his second letter to Thessalonica Paul wrote: **“Therefore among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God’s judgement is right and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering”** (2 Thess. 1:4,5).

■ Paul wrote to the Philippians: **“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him”** (Phil. 1:29)

■ To the Corinthians Paul contrasted his suffering with that of the false apostles and deceitful workers who criticized him: **“Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?”** (2 Cor. 11:21-29).

#### TIMOTHY AND SUFFERING

■ It has been speculated that Timothy witnessed the stoning of Paul at Lystra (Acts 13:8-20). Timothy, as you know, lived in Lystra (Acts 16:1). It was perhaps at the time Paul was stoned that he saw Timothy crying and recalled his tears (2 Tim. 1:4).

■ Such a frightening experience may have caused Timothy to be timid when he preached. Paul reminded him, however: **“God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline”** (2 Tim. 1:7).

■ This also helps to explain these words of Paul to the Corinthians: **“If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you”** (1 Cor. 16:10).

■ So Paul instructed Timothy: **“Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God** (2 Tim. 1:8).

■ **“This is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day”** (2 Tim. 1:12).

■ **“Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”** (2 Tim. 2:3)

■ **“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself” (2 Tim. 2:8-13).**

■ **“You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,” (2 Tim. 3:10-12).**

■ **“But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” (2 Tim. 4:5-8).**

#### PROPITIATION AND PROPAGATION

■ **THE SUFFERING OF JESUS TOOK AWAY OUR SINS “FOR CHRIST ALSO HATH ONCE SUFFERED FOR SINS, THE JUST FOR THE UNJUST THAT HE MIGHT BRING US TO GOD!” (1 PET. 3:18 KJV)**

■ **NOTHING SHOULD EVER DETRACT FROM THE SUFFERING AND DEATH OF JESUS. IT IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR SALVATION!**

■ **THE BLOOD OF BULLS AND GOATS COULD NOT TAKE AWAY OUR SINS, BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS DOES TAKE AWAY OUR SINS! (HEB. 10:4).**

■ **“FOR YOU KNOW THAT IT WAS NOT WITH PERISHABLE THINGS SUCH AS SILVER AND GOLD THAT YOU WERE REDEEMED FROM THE EMPTY WAY OF LIFE HANDED DOWN TO YOU FROM YOUR FOREFATHERS, BUT WITH THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST, A LAMB WITHOUT BLEMISH OR DEFECT. HE WAS CHOSEN BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD, BUT WAS REVEALED IN THESE LAST TIMES FOR YOUR SAKE” (1 PET. 1:18-20).**

■ **“BY ONE SACRIFICE HE HAS MADE PERFECT FOREVER THOSE WHO ARE BEING MADE HOLY” (HEB. 10:14).**

■ **“MY LITTLE CHILDREN, THESE THINGS WRITE I UNTO YOU, THAT YE SIN NOT. AND IF ANY MAN SIN, WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE WITH THE FATHER, JESUS**

**CHRIST THE RIGHTEOUS; AND HE IS THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS; AND NOT FOR OUR'S ONLY, BUT ALSO FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD" (1 JN. 2:1,2 KJV).**

■ Our suffering is not for "propitiation" but for "propagation". Please consider these inspired words of the Apostle Paul: **"Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body which is the church" (Col. 1:24).**

■ This truth does not in any way detract from the sacrifice of Christ! Jesus did exactly what God wanted Him to do. When Jesus said: **"It is finished" (Jn. 19:30)** He spoke the truth. **JESUS ALWAYS SPOKE THE TRUTH AND ALWAYS DID EVERYTHING THE FATHER WANTED HIM TO DO!**

■ In His infinite wisdom, however, God has given to the followers of Jesus the privilege of preaching the Gospel (1 Cor. 1:20-25). We are God's fellow workers (1 Cor. 3:9). Jesus does not preach the Gospel to the world, we do! Angels do not preach the Gospel to the world, we do! The obedience of Jesus provides propitiation. Our obedience provides propagation. The suffering of Jesus did not take the Gospel to Macedonia, the suffering of Paul did that! In this Paul filled up in his flesh what was lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions.

■ There is an association between our suffering and the propagation of the Gospel. Note: **"If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer." (2 Cor. 1:6).**

■ **"We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition." (1 Thess. 2:2).**

■ **"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have." (Phil. 1:27-30).** The death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, beautifully illustrates this truth. The fact that Stephen was not "frightened in any way", had a profound affect on Saul of Tarsus, and perhaps also on others. The fearless way that Stephen died was apparently a "sign" to Saul. As Jesus said to him on the Road to Damascus: **"It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14).**

■ **"So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God." (2 Tim. 1:8).**

## MARTYRS AND THE RESURRECTION

- Our English word “martyr” comes from the Greek “martur” which means “witness”. Those who died for Christ provide a powerful witness to the truth of the Gospel.
- We are not to deliberately seek to die as martyrs. Jesus commanded His disciples: **“When they persecute you in one place, flee to another” (Matt. 10:23)**. The book of Acts reveals many times when believers fled to avoid being killed (Acts 8:1; 9:25, 30; 14:6; 17:10, 14).
- It does, however, seem that martyrs are especially honored by Christ. Stephen, for example, was the first Christian martyr. Several unusual things happened in association with his death:
  - Stephen’s face was like the face of an angel (Acts 6:15).
  - God opened the heavens and allowed him to see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55,56). On other occasions Jesus was “seated” at the right hand of God (Luke 22:69; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; etc.)
  - Stephen died praying **“Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60)**.
- Those who are slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they have maintained seem to be in a separate category from others (Rev. 6:9-11).
- John saw the **“souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus” (Rev. 20:4)**. This is another example of God putting martyrs in a special category.
- Jesus spoke of a “prophet’s reward” and a “righteous man’s reward” (Matt. 10:41). Some believe that there is also a special reward for martyrs.
- Consider, for example, the reference in Hebrews 11:35: **“Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection”**. What is “a better resurrection”?
  - Paul wrote: **“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:10,11)**.
  - As you know, everyone will be resurrected whether they are good or bad (Jn. 5:28,29; Acts 24:15; etc.) What then does Paul mean about “attaining to the resurrection” of the dead?
  - The normal word for resurrection is “anastasis”. It comes from “ana” (up) and “stasis” (to stand). This is the word used by Paul in vs. 10 with reference to the power of his resurrection.
  - In vs. 11, however, Paul used a different word. He added the word “ek” to “anastasis”. This is the only time the word “exanastasis” is found in the Bible. “Ek” means “out of”. Thus Paul wanted to attain to a special resurrection which he called the “out resurrection” from the dead.



- Is this the “better resurrection” referred to in Heb. 11:25?

#### CONCLUSION

- We have considered suffering as it relates to Jesus, Peter, Paul, Timothy, and others. Now let us prayerfully consider suffering as it relates to you!
- Jesus never promised a problem free life to those who wanted to follow Him. Instead he consistently warned them to “count the cost” of being His disciple.
- Have you counted the cost?
- Do you believe that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the eternal reward waiting for you in heaven?
- Are you willing to put your hand to the plow and not look back?
- In the words of Jim Elliot the martyr: “He is no fool who gives up the things he cannot keep to gain the things that he cannot lose”.

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