

October 25, 2020

Sermon Title: The Missionary's Suffering and Sacrifice

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Sermon Summary

This message looks at the topic of suffering primarily from the perspective of a missionary on mission for Christ. However, an overview of suffering in general is presented. The text comes from Paul's introductory remarks in his 2nd letter to the Corinthian Church. Paul gives the rationale for the suffering a missionary endures and the sacrifices a missionary makes. Understanding the rationale for the suffering a missionary endures and the sacrifices a missionary makes is mission critical! This sermon reflects on the reasons a person on mission for Christ will at times endure suffering and be called to make sacrifices. There are five main points:

Suffering gives us the chance to take the high road with others!

Suffering teaches us how to comfort those who are suffering!

Suffering is something we share with Christ!

Suffering produces patient endurance!

Suffering builds reliance on Christ

Full Sermon Notes

"I will not fear when darkness falls, His strength will help me scale these walls I'll see the dawn of the rising sun, The Lord is my salvation." Those words speak directly to what we're going to talk about today. It's so important that I want us to go directly to the Lord in Prayer and we'll begin.

"Lord Jesus, thank you for going to the Cross and laying down Your life for me, for us! Thank You for conquering death and the grave for us! Thank You for not running away from that hill called Calvary, but for walking up Calvary with the cross in tow! You suffered unimaginable things so that we could be saved and reconciled with The Father! What You did for us has become the power we rely upon to overcome when we face suffering, troubles, hardships, persecutions, and tragedies! Thank You! Help us learn how our suffering and sacrifices can be used for Your glory and for the good of others! Hide me behind the Cross and let us hear from You today!! In Jesus sweet and precious Name I pray! Amen."

The introduction to this sermon I'm about to give you is extremely important and will last a few minutes, so don't get worried about the length of the sermon. We'll be fine! The purpose of the message today is not to expound on the problem of suffering and pain in our world, which is a human condition, but on why people on mission for Jesus go through suffering and are called to live sacrificially. However, the two do have some things in common, so I'm going to begin with something Jesus said to His disciples and then we'll look at our text for today. Jesus was very honest with His followers always, and some might question His wisdom in being so truthful when He was trying to get people to follow His teachings. What did He say?

John 16:33 "... In this world you will have trouble..."

So Jesus tells His disciples that in this world they would have trouble. He didn't say they might have trouble, but that they would! It's a part of living in this world and also a part of living for Jesus. Being a Christian does not exempt you from suffering but it does help you handle suffering and find meaning in the midst of suffering. Don't get me wrong, there's a lot of good in life too, not all things are trauma, and there are great blessings and wonderful purpose and meaning which come from following Jesus and living for Him! However, there will always be some level of sacrifice, struggle, suffering, and maybe even persecution for a follower of Christ. After all this earth is not heaven! We live in a fallen world, and that's the main reason there is suffering in this life for everyone, Christian or not. God did not create suffering, the fall of humanity, via Adam and Eve's original sin, brought suffering into an otherwise innocent world! God warned them of the consequences beforehand, but they ignored His warnings. Adam and Eve aren't the only people in history to ignore God's warnings, right? Right! But let me share this very important truth with you: sometimes suffering is a consequence of a bad decision, but many times people suffer and it's no fault of their own and is not the result of anything they did! Suffering is sometimes just the result of living in a sinful and fallen world, not the result of a personal sin. So when you get sick, that doesn't mean you've done something wrong and are being punished, it's just a part of living in this old sinful, fallen world. However, here's an amazing thing about God, even though the suffering of humanity is not His fault and can be traced back to the rebellion of Adam and Eve, He was heartbroken over our suffering, and took it upon Himself to right humanity's wrongs. That decision would ultimately result in the suffering of His One and Only Son Jesus on the Cross. But watch what happens as a result of Jesus' suffering and sacrifice. Let's look at the rest of that verse I just read. Jesus said...

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Thank You Jesus! Jesus knew the cross was coming! He also knew the outcome! And because He has overcome the world, Jesus has the power to take our suffering and make good come from it. He's the only one who can work that miracle! Paul stated it this way in Romans...

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Paul was uniquely qualified to write that verse and we'll see why in our text today. In 2 Corinthians 1:1-11 Paul gives the rationale for the suffering a missionary endures and the sacrifices a missionary makes. Understanding the rationale for the suffering a missionary endures and the sacrifices a missionary makes is mission critical! What are the reasons a person on mission for Christ will at times endure suffering and be called to make sacrifices?

For starters the very first two verses of Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians show us that....

Suffering gives us the chance to take the high road with others!

In Corinth pious Jews were attacking Paul's very character, his integrity, and his qualifications to serve as a leader in the church. They said, "Paul, you're weak, unimpressive, not a good

preacher, and we don't even think you know God!" These people considered themselves to be super-apostles. They bragged and flaunted their background, their connections, their wealth, and their perceived superior knowledge. Paul, reluctantly countered their claims with some claims of his own. The difference was he could back up his claims and qualifications!

However, he wanted to make it clear that while he had greater qualifications, he did not depend on his qualifications for his life or ministry! He depended upon the grace and mercy of Jesus for everything. This will help you understand why Paul started off his second letter to the Corinthians the way he did...

2 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia:

So Paul makes it clear from the very get go that he is an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God!! He counters all the negative by letting them know he was not an apostle because of his credentials, but by the will of God! And then Paul takes the high road and pronounces a blessing on the church by saying this..

2 Corinthians 1:2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even though some of the leaders of the church he planted were not being very nice, Paul was such an amazing servant of God! He set such a great example for all of us to follow! His greeting includes a blessing of grace and peace! Kids, I'm so glad you are with us this morning. In your packet you will be asked how you handle bullies, and people who are mean to you. Instead of being mean back, Paul offers them grace and peace. Being nice to someone who has been mean to you is not always easy is it? In fact it can be one of the hardest things you are asked to do. I saw on Facebook this week that one of our church members was stuck in traffic in a school zone and their little girl was looking out the window at the vehicle beside them and the guy in the vehicle made an angry face at the little girl along with a bad sign. How sad! While the mom was obviously upset her little girl had to see that, here's what she said: "I'm just sad for people like that and others who act this way. I pray that they find some peace in this world we live in. Happy Friday my friends, Jesus loves you!" Wow! Folks, wouldn't our world be a better place if everyone had such a Christ like attitude?

You might remember from Paul's first letter and our sermon last week that Paul had said...

1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

When people were mean to Jesus, did He fight back or call them names? Nope, he prayed for them! I don't think that was an easy thing to do, but it was the right thing to do and some of those people after hearing Jesus pray for them were sorry they had done what they did and became believers in Jesus! A second reason a person on mission for Christ will at times endure suffering is that...

Suffering teaches us how to comfort those who are suffering!

2 Corinthians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,

2 Corinthians 1:4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God

a. We are wounded healers (we understand)

A wounded healer is someone who has suffered, who has been hurt or has made sacrifices and has felt the pain, been there done that! A wounded healer is someone like Paul who has been through tragedy, and extreme hardship and yet has come to realize that it's not God's fault! A wounded healer has learned how to handle their anger, and has allowed God to comfort them. He knew a thing or two about suffering because he had suffered a thing or two! Let's see... Paul had been imprisoned on numerous occasions and he said this in his letter...

2 Corinthians 11:24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

2 Corinthians 11:25 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,

2 Corinthians 11:26 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.

2 Corinthians 11:27 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.

Paul certainly understood suffering for his faith in Jesus! For this reason he could encourage those who were suffering. He understood how hard, how difficult and how painful it could be. But Paul was not only experienced in suffering, he was experienced in God's comfort! In fact, Paul makes it clear that God is a God of compassion and desires to comfort us in our times of trouble.

b. A wounded healer has survival tips for others!

Paul not only suffered from others, but he had something going on physically that was causing him suffering. We don't know what the problem was, but Paul shares his experience and gives a survival tip...

2 Corinthians 12:8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 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.

2 Corinthians 12:10 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.

A third reason a person on mission for Christ will at times endure suffering is that...

Suffering is something we share with Christ!!

2 Corinthians 1:5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

What does it mean to share in the sufferings of Christ? That is a very deep subject indeed! But one thing we understand is this...

A. A missionary shares Jesus' burden for the lost

Remember Jesus' burden for the lost sheep of Israel? Remember His mission? Remember His mission was transferred to His followers in the great commission?

Matthew 23:37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.

Paul had a similar burden for his unbelieving Jewish friends...

Romans 9:1 I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—

Romans 9:2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

Romans 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race,

And Paul had the same burden for the people in the gentile churches he had planted...

2 Corinthians 11:28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

2 Corinthians 11:29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

So we suffer like Jesus when it comes to the burden for others to know the good news of God's love for them, but another way we share in the sufferings of Christ is...

B. Like Jesus, a missionary also carries a cross!

Why did Jesus carry the cross? We discover this in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

What could possibly be the joy set before Jesus that He would endure the cross? The joy was He knew that once He was sacrificed on that cross you and I would have the opportunity to be saved, to be forgiven, to be reconciled with God the Father!

Paul reminds us that we carry a cross of suffering for the same reason!

2 Corinthians 6:3 We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.

2 Corinthians 6:4 Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses;

2 Corinthians 6:5 in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger;

2 Corinthians 6:6 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love;

2 Corinthians 6:7 in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left;

2 Corinthians 6:8 through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors;

2 Corinthians 6:9 known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed;

2 Corinthians 6:10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Making many rich? What does Paul mean by that? The only really rich people in this world are the ones who have the riches of God's grace, His forgiveness, His love, His promises, and most of all His presence by way of The Holy Spirit! Paul was saying, I may not have the treasures and comforts of this world, but I possess everything that really matters! A relationship with God and souls that have been saved through the sharing of the Gospel!

I love what Jim Elliot said, a missionary who lost his life to take the gospel to a group of people in the jungles of Ecuador...

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

A few years later Jim's wife and others were able to bring the very folks who killed Jim to faith in Christ!

And this is what I believe Paul was referring to in the second part of verse 5...

2 Corinthians 1:5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

We are comforted through Christ as we find the same purpose, meaning and joy that Jesus found comfort in: bringing others to know God! The writer of Hebrews once again helps us understand...

Hebrews 2:9 But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Hebrews 2:10 In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.

Hebrews 2:11 Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

And this leads us to a fourth reason a person on mission for Christ will at times endure suffering is that...

Suffering produces patient endurance!

2 Corinthians 1:6 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 Corinthians 1:7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

A. Suffering builds patient endurance

What is patient endurance? Endurance is the ability to make it for the long haul! Endurance is patiently holding on to the promises of God even when you can't see Him working! Patience builds our character and our trust in God! Sometimes when the world sees us suffering they ask all kinds of questions. They might ask "if your God is real then why doesn't He just fix all of your problems? Why does He even allow His children to go through hard times, trials, struggles, and suffering?" What they can't see is that our relationship with Christ is more important to us than our circumstances in this life! What they don't understand is that God is more concerned with our character than He is with our comfort! And what they can't get their minds wrapped around is the fact that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness, like Paul said in the survival tip! You see, when we realize we are weak we depend on His strength and He comes through for us by exerting His power into our situation! Paul give a powerful illustration of this in chapter 4...

2 Corinthians 4:1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.

2 Corinthians 4:5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

2 Corinthians 4:8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;

2 Corinthians 4:9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

2 Corinthians 4:10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

2 Corinthians 4:11 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.

And this leads us to a final reason a person on mission for Christ will at times endure suffering...

Suffering builds reliance on Christ

2 Corinthians 1:8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.

2 Corinthians 1:9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

2 Corinthians 1:10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again.

On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

2 Corinthians 1:11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

Paul says it got so bad he thought he was going to die! He said the pressure was so great it was beyond his ability to endure and he didn't think he could go on. When it gets that bad, how can anything good come out of that? Well, Paul says it caused him to realize he didn't have the strength on his own to bear the burden. We've all heard folks say "God won't put more on you than you can bear." That is taken out of context. That Scripture actually is talking about temptation and says...

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

But when it comes to suffering and hardships in life, we, like Paul, will face things that we could never bear alone. We don't have the human power to overcome all the trials we face in life, but God will give us the strength and the power! It may be more than I can bear, but it's not more than my God can bear! Paul gives an impassioned statement about this in this letter...

2 Corinthians 4:13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak,

2 Corinthians 4:14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.

2 Corinthians 4:15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

2 Corinthians 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Folks we walk by faith and not by sight! We rely on the promises of Jesus and not on our circumstances or our emotions, or what we see! We fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before Him endured the cross!! Let me say this: Going to live on a mountain top somewhere and live in safe mode, with all your survival food and gear until Jesus comes again is not an option for a follower of Christ! Isolation is not a luxury afforded to the Christian Missionary. We are called to go into the world and make disciples. In order for us to do that we cannot simply sit back and relax. We are called to be on a mission. When you got saved you received your orders and your deployment began immediately! You could ask any of our military families and they would tell you that when you are deployed, there is always some level of sacrifice involved. It's the same when you sign up for the service of the Lord! Followers of Christ are not only called to have a good witness, but also to be willing to suffer and sacrifice for the glory of God and the good of others! While we certainly need times of solitude, meditation, contemplation, study, and a good old mountain top spiritual experience from time to time, we must be willing to sacrifice much of our time in service to God and to others down in the valley. If you just want feel good, easy does it, hassle free, no pain, just make me comfortable, and you don't care about having real purpose, real meaning, real significance, and being able to make a real difference in the lives of others, then you might not be willing to sign up for anything that would require sacrifice or suffering, meaningful or not. But I can tell you that after being a follower of Christ for 46 years, I wouldn't trade my life with Christ for all the treasure, fame and comfort this world could offer me. The world just can't offer me anything that compares to the joy, the purpose and the meaning that accompany following Jesus Christ regardless of any suffering that may be included! Paul said this in his letter to the Philippian church...

Philippians 1:20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

A member of our church, who has become a dear friend to me, introduced me to a friend of his who lives in Las Vegas. This friend out in Vegas faithfully listens to our podcast. He has a powerful testimony of how he came to Christ and is an amazing witness to a lot of people out there. In the last year or so he has suffered very serious and life threatening health issues. But listen to what he said in an email this past week...

“During my appointment today, Doc Kiani said he thinks my heart may be well in the early stages of shutting down. Everything wears out, eventually. That doesn't bother me at all, because as I've said a million times before, ‘You can't threaten a Christian with heaven!!’”

Lets pray!