

"Suffering in the Will of God"

Part 3

2 Corinthians 4:8-18

Introduction: We have recently been looking at the Apostle Paul's teaching on the subject of suffering. He was truly someone who was able to teach on the subject for he himself had suffered throughout his ministry on earth. It had been announced to him shortly after his conversion that he would suffer for the cause of Jesus Christ.

Acts 9:13-16

¹³ Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

¹⁴ And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

¹⁵ But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

¹⁶ For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Paul did suffer for Jesus Christ and it was out of this suffering that he was able to teach other believers about suffering in this life.

Last week in our study we looked at 2 Corinthians 4:10-13 and it is in these verses that we see a great principle taught in God's Word and it is, "Life comes from death".

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:10-11

Paul had taught earlier in this chapter that we have a TREASURE in earthen vessels. The vessels are our bodies which are simple clay pots and the TREASURE is The Light of the Life of Jesus Christ which shines forth from the believer's life when our clay pots are broken and we surrender to the Holy Spirit instead of being controlled by the flesh.

Paul suffered greatly for his preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and there were those who no doubt wondered why he would continue to stand by a message that brought so much suffering into his life. Paul's answer to that question is found in this passage.

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:13

Here in this verse Paul reaches back to Psalm 116.

Psalm 116:3-4, 10

³ *The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow.*

⁴ *Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.*

¹⁰ **I believed, therefore have I spoken:** *I was greatly afflicted:*

The Psalmist was in great distress and in the midst of his distress he prayed to God because HE BELIEVED GOD ANSWERED PRAYER. In the very same way Paul states that he preaches the message of Jesus Christ because HE BELIEVED IT TO BE THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH. Sure, there were costs but the importance of the Message far outweighed any costs or any amount of suffering.

This now brings us to where we are in our study tonight.

"Broken Vessels"

Part 3

This statement by Paul in verse 13 would have brought another reply from critics and from fearful believers. They would have replied, "This stand you have taken and this FAITH you have in the message you preach is going to eventually cost you your life if you do not let up and stop being so dogmatic." Now let me show you Paul's response to those who may say that.

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:14

Paul now points to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and to the assurance that he too would one day be raised from the dead. The point which Paul is making here is that he did not fear death. The message may cost him his life but he knew that there was coming a day when God would resurrect him and give to him a new glorified body. Let me show you what Paul held to in the face of death.

1 Corinthians 15:20-22, 54-58

²⁰ *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.*

²¹ *For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.*

²² *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

⁵⁴ *So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*

⁵⁵ *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.*

⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

⁵⁸ *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

Where did Paul get this information? When Paul taught the believers at Thessalonica about the rapture he spoke of the Source of the Truth which he was teaching.

1 Thessalonians 4:15

¹⁵ *For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.*

Then there was the experience which Paul was permitted to have.

2 Corinthians 12:1-4

It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

² *I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.*

³ *And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)*

⁴ *How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*

Here it is believed that Paul is speaking of his own personal experience and we will see this when we get to this chapter. But the point we need to grasp is that Paul had received his doctrine on the resurrection from the Lord and he had also been caught up into the 3rd heaven. All of this combined with his faith in God's promises allowed him to speak the words of Philippians 1:21.

Philippians 1:21

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

The bottom line was that Paul did not fear death for he knew it was but a door way into eternity with Jesus Christ. If he was permitted to live then he would die to self and in so doing he would magnify Jesus Christ. If he died he would die doing what he was called to do and his death would be a gain for him.

Philippians 1:20

²⁰ According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:15

There is so much within this verse to consider. Let us look at this verse in sections.

1. Paul always esteemed others above himself.

Here in this verse Paul tells the Corinthians that what he was going through was for THEIR sakes. Let me show you what Paul wrote in Philippians.

Philippians 2:1-4

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

² Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

³ Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

⁴ Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Paul endured the sufferings which came with preaching the Gospel because he saw the importance in each and every soul. He did not see himself as superior to anyone. Paul became a slave to all of those around him. This too was a result of his surrender to the Holy Spirit and it was the Light of the Life of Jesus Christ shining out of him. Let me show you the Words of our Lord from Matthew.

Matthew 20:25-28

²⁵ But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

²⁶ But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

²⁷ And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

²⁸ Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Paul saw himself as a servant people so that he could reach them with the Gospel so Paul esteemed others above himself. He stated here in 2 Corinthians that all he went through was for their sakes. Paul had the mind of Christ.

2. There was always enough grace to sustain Paul in the suffering.

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:15

The "abundant grace" which Paul spoke of here was the grace given to him from God in order to endure the sufferings. Paul spoke of this grace in 2 Corinthians 12.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

⁷ 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.

⁸ For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

*⁹ 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.*

God's grace was always there to carry Paul through whatever it was that he faced.

Application:

The same is true for our lives also. There is an ABUNDANCE of grace to carry us through those time when we feel the bite of the nails, when we must abandon our hopes and dreams, and when life hurts so deeply that you do not want to live another day. There is

always an ABUNDANCE of grace to sustain us in the midst of the valleys. Let me show you what Paul recorded in Romans concerning grace.

Romans 5:1-2

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

² By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Here in Romans 5:2 we can see that we are **STANDING** in grace. This means that we are surrounded by grace and it saturates our lives as we need it. The point which we need to grasp from this is that we are given grace so that when we face suffering (physical or emotional) there is an abundance of grace to get us through.

3. The suffering and the grace were to bring glory to God.

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:15

The grace was given to Paul to sustain him in the suffering so that others could be reached with the Gospel and then as they gave praise to God the praise or thanksgiving would abound bringing glory to God. The idea here is that Paul endured the sufferings by God's grace and therefore others were able to hear the Gospel and those who were saved gave praise to God and therefore the entire experience brought glory to God.

2 Corinthians 4:6-7

⁶ For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

No matter what Paul faced, no matter what he endured and no matter who was saved through his ministry, it was God who received the glory and the praise because it was His power alone that saved the lost sinner. Paul was simply a clay pot filled with a valuable **TREASURE** from God.

Conclusion:

What does all of this mean to you and me?

God allows us to go through the sufferings of this life so that the EARTHEN VESSEL can be broken. It is painful and there are times when we feel as though we cannot go on. But there is always enough grace to sustain us in the midst of the sufferings so that we can then magnify Jesus Christ by surrendering to the sufferings. It is when we surrender that the life of Jesus Christ is seen in us and others are permitted to see the power that works within us which often gives us the opportunity to speak of the goodness of God. This is then used by God as a great witness which He uses to reach those around us. Ultimately it is God who receives the glory.

Let me show you a picture of this Truth in action.

Jonah 2:10, 3:1-5

¹⁰ And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,

² Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

³ So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

⁴ And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.

⁵ So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

I believe that Jonah's message was very effective because they could see the power of God in Jonah's life. You see he had spent 3 days in the belly of the fish and his skin would have been bleached white. He would have looked like a ghost. Word would have spread rapidly why he looked the way he did and they would have known that he was in the fish 3 days and that God brought him out of the fish and gave him the message of coming judgment. They repented and it was because the power of God could be seen in Jonah's life.