

SUFFERING

“For to this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His steps.”

1 Peter 2:21

Often, when we are suffering illness, injustice, unfair treatment, frustrations and traumatic situations, we cry out ‘Why?’ Why do bad things happen to good people? For what reason am I suffering?

Perhaps we should ask ourselves why Christ suffered. He was the only truly good, perfect and completely unselfish person who has ever walked this earth. Yet Christ suffered. Jesus was misunderstood, slandered, falsely accused and lied about. People accused him of being insane (Mark 3:21). He was accused of being demon possessed! (John 7:20). Some accused him of being a glutton and a drunkard (Matthew 11:19). He was accused of teaching people not to pay their taxes, and of inciting riots (Luke 23:2-5). None of which was true.

Jesus was hated and betrayed. The Lord warned us: *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”* John 15:18-19

The religious leaders made plans to kill Jesus (John 11:53). One of his handpicked disciples, Judas, betrayed Him (Luke 22:48).

Jesus was forsaken by His friends and followers. Many of His disciples turned back and would not follow him any more (John 6:66). When Jesus was arrested all of His disciples left Him and ran away (Mark 14:50).

Jesus was unjustly arrested, illegally tried and wrongly condemned (Mark 14:55-56; Luke 23:14-16; John 19:15).

Our Lord Jesus Christ was mocked, insulted, slapped, beaten, whipped and crucified (Mark 14:65; Luke 23:11; Matthew 27:26; Matthew 27:39).

Christ Himself suffered for us and left us an example to follow in His steps.

Many people may consider teaching on suffering to be negative. It is not negative to teach on the reality of everyday life. To recognise that suffering is inevitable is not discouraging at all. The Lord does not keep us **from** suffering, He keeps us **in** suffering. And the Lord has never expected us to do anything for Him that He has not already willingly done for us. Our Lord and Saviour has led from the front, by example.

The Apostles taught: *“We must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God.”* Acts 14:22. In this way Paul and Barnabas strengthened the followers of Christ and encouraged them to continue in the Faith.

It is always a privilege to suffer for our Lord Jesus Christ. The suffering is temporary, but the glory is eternal. We should note the example of the Apostles, who, rather than claim comfort, safety and luxury at home, chose rather to suffer for Christ while obeying the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20).

After a lifetime of church planting, the Apostle **Peter** was crucified upside down in Rome.
 After fearless preaching, **James** the elder was beheaded by Herod in Palestine.
 After preaching the Gospel in Greece, **Andrew** was crucified.
 After preaching to the Gauls, **Phillip** died as a Martyr in Asia minor.
Nathaniel preached the Gospel in India and Armenia before being flayed alive and beheaded.
Thomas established churches throughout Babylon and India before being axed to death.
Matthew was burned to death for preaching the Gospel in Abyssinia.
James the younger was crucified while evangelising in Egypt.
Jude preached the Gospel throughout Syria and Persia before being martyred.
Simon the Zealot preached the Word throughout Syria and Mesopotamia and was sawn in half in Persia.
Matthias was crucified on a missionary outreach in the Crimea (present day Ukraine).
John was banished in exile to Patmos. (He was the only one of the Apostles who was not martyred.)

The Apostle Paul described some of his sufferings in these words: *“In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, imprisoned more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils amongst false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness – besides the other things, what comes upon me daily; my deep concern for all the churches.”* 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

The Apostle Paul was inspired to write this injunction: *“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”* 2 Timothy 2:3

“Yes, and all who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” 2 Timothy 3:12. Not some. Not many. Not even most. All. And not *may* suffer persecution, but will.

And so many of us can say with the Apostle: *“We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ, that the life of Jesus Christ also may be manifested in our body.”* 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

So what then is the purpose of suffering in the Christian life? The Apostle Peter wrote: *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, that is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”*

1 Peter 1:6-7

The Apostle James encourages us: *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience....Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”* James 1:2,3,12

Suffering purifies us and prepares us for special service. All of God’s great men knew great suffering while God purged and prepared them for His service. **Joseph** experienced twelve years in slavery and prison before being raised up to be governor of Egypt. **Moses** was forty years in the desert before becoming the deliverer of Israel. **David** was an outlaw and a fugitive for years before becoming the King of Israel. The

Bible is full of examples of great men of Faith, enduring sufferings for the Lord. There is no shortcut to maturity.

As Joseph was able to say to his brothers who had sold him into slavery: *“What you meant for evil, God used for good”* (Genesis 50:20).

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28

Peter exhorts us: *“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His Glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”* 1 Peter 4:12

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