

Checkin' Out My Walk
#37 - Called To Suffer

Rev. 2:8-11 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:

"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan.

Do Not Fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.

Be Faithful Until Death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

Question: What season of life are you in? Maybe everything is presently going great.

Some may be in a very difficult season of life. You are struggling and life is hard. Illness?

Financial problems? Difficult relationships with friend or family? Touched by death?

God never promised us that life would be easy.

In fact, He promised we would face suffering and persecution in our lives.

The letter to Smyrna was meant to encourage them in light of what they were presently facing and were about to face in the future. They were to undergo intense persecution and tribulation.

Jesus encourages them to stand strong, even if it meant physical death.

Our Daily Bread: Parnell Bailey visited an orange grove where an irrigation pump had broken down. The season was unusually dry and some of the trees were beginning to die for lack of water. The man giving the tour then took Bailey to his own orchard where irrigation was used sparingly. "These trees could go without rain for another 2 weeks," he said. "You see, when they were young, I frequently kept water from them. This hardship caused them to send their roots deeper into the soil in search of moisture. Now mine are the deepest-rooted trees in the area. While others are being scorched by the sun, these are finding moisture at a greater depth."

Someone asked C.S. Lewis, "Why do the righteous suffer?" "Why not?" he replied.

"They're the only ones who can take it."

Vance Havner - At the Nicene Council, an important church meeting in the 4th century A.D., of the 318 delegates attending, fewer than 12 had not lost an eye or lost a hand or did not limp on a leg lamed by torture for their Christian faith.

The Bible Is Clear: You Are Called To Suffer:

Phil. 1:29a For you have been granted [the privilege] for Christ's sake, not only to believe *and* confidently trust in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

I Peter 2:20-21 For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, If You Take It Patiently, this *is* commendable before God. For To This You Were Called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

Note: God gives us the GRACE to submit.

It takes a spirit-filled Christian to submit and let God fight his battles.

We lead by serving. We serve by suffering. This suffering ALWAYS leads to glory.

II Tim. 3:12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

Indeed, all who delight in pursuing righteousness *and* are determined to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be hunted *and* persecuted [because of their faith].

Question: How will you handle it when it comes?

I will be the first to admit > I do not like to suffer. I do not like it when life is hard.

My human flesh cries out against it. However, if I am really serious about a deeper and closer walk with the Lord, suffering is part of the process. Each time God takes me through a difficult period of life, I can always look back after it is over and say:

"Yes, Lord, I see how You used that in my life. I am so thankful."

Admittedly, when I am in the middle of it, it is hard to find joy in why He has me there.

He casts us in the fires of trial to Refine Us and Conform Us to the image of Jesus Christ.

Consider: I need to look beyond the pain. Look for the purpose He wants to accomplish in my life. Keep the end result in mind. Remember: Paul said there is a prize to be won.

Truth: Scripture says we will suffer in this life. The challenge is to Suffer Well.

Our Daily Bread: A man, in a time of business recession, lost his job, a sizable fortune, and his beautiful home. To add to his sorrow, his precious wife died; yet he tenaciously held to his faith -the only thing he had left. One day while out walking in search of employment, he stopped to watch some men who were doing stonework on a large church. One of them was chiseling a triangular piece of rock. 'Where are you going to put that?' he asked. The workman said, 'Do you see that little opening up there near the spire? I'm shaping this stone down here so it will fit in up there.' Tears filled his eyes as he walked away, for the Lord had spoken to him through that laborer whose words gave new meaning to his troubled situation.

Admonitions : Do Not Fear & Be Faithful Unto Death > I Will Give You The Crown Of Life.

These 2 admonitions form the immediate context for the promise > He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.

1. Do Not Fear is literally "fear nothing" - no matter how small or severe.

Luke 12:4-5 And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!

Phil. 4:6-7 Do not be anxious *or* worried about anything, but in everything [every circumstance and situation] by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, continue to make your [specific] requests known to God. And the peace of God [that peace which reassures the heart, that peace] which transcends all understanding, [that peace which] stands guard over your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus [is yours].

I Pet. 5:7 casting all your cares [all your anxieties, all your worries, and all your concerns, [once and for all] on Him, for He cares about you [with deepest affection, and watches over you very carefully]

Isa. 41:10 Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Note: Faith and fear are opposites. They cannot coexist. Faith banishes fear.

Eccles. 12:13 Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

2. Be Faithful Until Death - even to the point of martyrdom.

The promise: "I will give you the Crown Of Life." It is not eternal life. Eternal life is a gift through faith or personal belief in Jesus Christ (John 1:11-12; 3:16; I John 5:11-12).

The Crown Of Life is a special reward for endurance under persecution.

James 1:12 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.

Note: This approval will take place when we as believers stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. He will evaluate us for all the works that we have done on this earth.

I Peter 4:19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator. (He meets the needs of His people.)

Note: Commit = deposit for safekeeping = Be constantly committing

Believers live in a present that is controlled by their future!

Application: Note that victory in this present life is closely associated with occupation and orientation to the weightier things of eternity and the glories which shall follow.

II Cor. 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward *man* is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which *are* not seen are eternal.

Unknown: One thing I've become convinced of is God has different definitions for words than I do. For example, He does work all things for my eternal good and His eternal glory. But His definition of good is different than mine. My "good" would never include cancer and young widowhood. My "good" would include healing and dying together in our sleep when we are in our nineties. But cancer was good because of what God did that He couldn't do any other way. Cancer was, in fact, necessary to make Bob and me look more like Jesus. So in love, God allowed what was best for us ... in light of eternity.

Truth: Believers are to be sojourners who live with a view to eternity.

I Pet. 1:17 If you address as Father, the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in [reverent] fear [of Him] *and* with profound respect for Him throughout the time of your stay *on earth*.

I Pet. 2:11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers [in this world] to abstain from the sensual urges [those dishonorable desires] that wage war against the soul.

Heb. 5:8-9 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

Purpose of Trials, Tribulation, Persecution: James, Peter, Paul

I. Facts About God's Furnaces

I Pet. 4:12-16 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial [refining process] 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. ¹⁴ If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. ¹⁶ Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

A. Happened = To Go Together > Persecution & trials do not just "happen." They are a part of God's plan and He is in control.

B. Rejoice = be constantly rejoicing > Why?

1. Our suffering means fellowship with Christ. It is an honor and a privilege.

Acts 5:41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

2. Our suffering means glory in the future.

3. Our suffering brings to us the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of glory.

Suffering Christians do not have to wait for heaven in order to experience His glory.

This explains how martyrs can sing praises to God while bound in the midst of blazing fires, and how persecuted Christians can go to prison and death without complaining or resisting.

Rev. 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

4. Our suffering enables us to glorify His name. Every time we are reproached for the name of Christ, we have opportunity to bring glory to His name.

II. God's Grace Enables Us

II Cor. 12:9-10 My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

A. His grace is sufficient to keep us and strengthen us in our times of suffering.

B. God permits us to become weak so we might receive His strength.

C. Continuous process: My strength is being made perfect.

D. We receive many of our blessings by transformation: not substitution. He may not remove the affliction, but He gives us His grace so the affliction works for us and not against us.

E. His thorn was a gift! Accept it and allow God to accomplish His purposes.

F. We do not live on explanations; we are to live on promises.

G. Promises generate faith which strengthens hope.

III. Suffering Builds Christian Character

Rom. 5:3-5 And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character ; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

A. Sequence = Tribulation > Patience > Proven Character > Hope

My hope in Christ will stabilize me in the storm.

B. God's love within us

Prov. 13:12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But *when* the desire comes, *it is* a tree of life. As we wait for this hope to be fulfilled, the love of God is "poured out in our hearts."

Note: The first 3 of the fruit of the Spirit are experienced: Love [Rom. 5:5]; Joy [Rom. 5:2] and Peace [Rom. 5:1]. It is the inner experience of this love through the Spirit that sustains us as we go through tribulations and persecution.

Note: Faith, hope and love combine to give the believer patience in the trials.

Patience makes it possible for the believer to *GROW* in character and become mature.

IV. Freedom From Discouragement

Rom. 8:18 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together. ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

A. We do not focus on the suffering today; we focus on the glory tomorrow.

V. Turning Trials Into Triumphs

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall [encounter, come across] into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

A. Count = To evaluate; When I face trials & persecution, I must evaluate them in light of what God is doing in me.

B. I can have joy in the midst of the trial if I am living for the things that matter most.

Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take; *When* He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

Truth: To end with joy, I must begin with joy.

Phil. 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

VI. I Am Being Prepared For Life & Service In Glory

I Peter 1:6-9 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, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, 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, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

A. If Need Be = Some for discipline; some for spiritual growth

B. Various Trials = God matches the trial to our strengths and needs. Do not think because you overcame one kind of trial you will automatically overcome them all.

C. Trials produce heaviness > experience grief or pain

D. They are "for a season." When God permits us to go through the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat.

E. If I rebel, He may have to reset the clock, but if I submit, He will not permit me to suffer too long.

F. It is important I learn the lesson and bring glory to Him alone.

The Lord keeps me in the furnace until I reflect the glory and beauty of Jesus Christ.

G. This glory is not fully revealed until Jesus returns for His church.

My trying experiences today are preparing me for glory tomorrow. Rejoice as I look ahead.

God is training me for future ministry in His Kingdom.

H. A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted.

Quote: Do not become discouraged with your circumstances.

These are the very tools God uses to make you more like Jesus Christ.

If suffering today means glory tomorrow and for eternity, then suffering becomes a blessing.

Prov. 29:25 The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.

Ps. 27:1 The LORD *is* my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The LORD *is* the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Isa. 46:1-2a God *is* our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear.

Deut. 31:6 Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He *is* the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

Ps. 34:4, 7 I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.

The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.