

Do Christians Suffer■

by Max Hougham

This sermon delves into the topic of suffering, emphasizing the need to arm ourselves with the mindset of Christ who suffered for us, the inevitability of persecution for believers, and the importance of counting the cost of following Jesus. It explores the idea that suffering can bring glory to God and challenges the notion that God always spares His people from suffering, highlighting the need for perseverance and faith amidst trials.

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:1, John 15:20, Matthew 16:24

Topics: "Suffering for Christ", "Perseverance in Trials"

Description

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Transcript

Good morning. I just want to greet you all in Jesus' name. I'm really thankful to be here.

It's just been a long time since we missed last Sunday. I really appreciated the opening, Brother Leroy. I feel like we've been on the receiving end of that action verb of love now here the last week or so.

It's very humbling, a very big blessing, and necessary for the people of God. I just wanted to share this morning on a topic I've been thinking about now for some time, and it's just come into sharper focus as of late. Oh, maybe even a year ago, Brother Harvey talked about it in an opening.

Just wanted to talk more about it, and as I was sitting here this morning thinking about it, I just kind of feel... I think when I started studying for it, I thought maybe it would be pretty short, and then it kind of got longer. Sometimes I feel like some of these topics are pretty weighty, and it's almost like, especially when it comes time to actually do it and to share, it feels almost like I'm a boy in a hay barn playing with a book of matches. If you see that this morning in anything that I say, just call me out of the barn and show me how matches are supposed to be used.

Hopefully that makes sense. I don't know. A lot of this stuff is a big deal, and I wouldn't want to get it wrong.

Why don't we all stand and pray? Father, thank you so much for giving us the ability to meet here this morning and to fill this place with music of worship to you. Father, let our hearts be tuned right, and God, please give me the ability to speak this morning and not be overcome by nerves, or just to be able, Father, to communicate clearly the things that are on my heart, and let us all be open, Father, for correction and reproof and to edify each other. God, please bless our time together.

Help us to live pleasing to you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

I wanted to read an account in Luke chapter 4, starting at the beginning of Luke 4 to verse 13, right after Jesus was baptized. And Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing, and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.

And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone, that it may be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. And the devil, taking him up into a high mountain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee in the glory of them, for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

And he brought him up to Jerusalem and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence, for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee. And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season, or for a more opportune time, I think is how it's put some places. There's a lot in this passage. There's a lot that could be said about it.

I had written down that two out of the three attempt, two out of the three temptations here put forth by Satan are trying to tempt Jesus to use his power for deliverance from the physical harm or hardship. But, and he didn't do it. But really, I guess, as I read this again, I almost feel like it's all three of the instances in some way.

Just one of the instances doesn't use Jesus' power, it would use the power of Satan to deliver kingdoms to Jesus himself. You look at each example here. I mean, we think about, so Jesus was fasting for 40 days and 40 nights.

And Jesus offers him deliverance from the suffering of hunger. Just use some of your power to turn these stones into bread. Then, when he shows him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time from a high mountain place, those are going to be long to Christ.

But at the time, at the present, they were kingdoms of the world and therefore in Satan's dominion, and he offered him relief from the suffering that he should have gone through or that he was going to go through, if only he would bow down and worship him. So there was a deliverance there from the suffering that was at hand for Jesus. And then lastly, you know, he tempts Jesus to use his power to escape physical harm

by falling down.

And I've been thinking about how Satan framed those things and how he tempted Jesus. You know, there was a temptation, there was something in it that was appealing to Jesus' flesh, otherwise it wouldn't have been temptation. He had to wrestle with it, he had to struggle.

I thought, you know, that that wasn't just a no-brainer for him. There was a human element to Jesus, and so he wrestled with this temptation, he wrestled with these offers of deliverance from suffering, and he prevailed. And I've been thinking a lot about that lately, about suffering.

With this pandemic and living here in a rural part of the country, it's just really hard to relate to those that are hardest hit by this thing, this pandemic, this COVID-19. Opinions about this are about as varied as the different people that we meet. There's a lot.

And one thought that I've come across, I guess as I've heard others, especially like in the realm of Christianity, talking about these things is an idea that I've heard at other times too, and it's the thought that true Christians will be spared hardship or suffering. And, you know, just believing that and hanging on to the idea that God will protect his people. And hearing that kind of really made me reflect a lot on, well, what is a Christian's role in suffering anyway? I mean, there seems to be a widely held belief, at least in Western Christianity, that God always relieves us or spares us of suffering, and he restores all of life's pleasantries as they once were, as we remember them, or as we hope they would be.

Is that accurate? Is that a right understanding? I'm not sure where all of that comes from. I guess I think maybe one, you know, Brother Joel has said that sometimes when we receive the light of the gospel and like a lot of the wrongs of society and the wrongs of the world are brought to our attention, it's like you wake up in Disneyland, and you decide you don't want to be there. And so you can make a decision.

You can figure out how to survive in Disneyland, or you can leave. You can leave and go to somewhere that's not Disneyland. And Disneyland would be like a reference when Joel uses it.

I think what he means is that this is a spoiled country. There's just every flavor of excess and wealth and overindulgence available here. I mean, I think somebody told me a while ago that like a family of four, for a week's vacation in Disney World could spend \$10,000 like for a week's vacation.

It just blows me away. And yet, like in some ways, that's kind of our reality living here in the United States is that there's just this overabundance. So I think some of these ideas about escaping suffering or that like somehow we ought to be spared from any kind of suffering come from this innate attitude that's embedded in us from living in a country with a lot of material wealth.

I've heard this idea expressed at different times throughout my Christian journey about God's people being spared from any kind of hardship. I mean, I've heard it from people that have a copy of Martyr's Mirror or Fox's Book of Martyrs on their bookshelf. And something just seems a little bit off.

And so I kind of wanted to dive into that this morning. This passage on Christ's temptation came to my mind. Satan preyed on Jesus's weakness in his flesh by offering deliverance from his physical hardship.

And I believe that there can be a sinister twisting of God's truth that leads people to believe that we'll always be delivered or spared. And so one question I have this morning is like, well, assuming that that's not the case, what promises do we have concerning suffering? I want to turn to another passage in Luke

chapter 21. I'm a little scripture heavy this morning, so I'll try to do a good job and get through it all.

Luke chapter 21 verses 5 to 28. Let's see what Jesus has to say. This is, I wrote down, this is suffering according to Jesus.

Starting in verse 5. And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, as for these things which ye behold, the days will come in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down. And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? And what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass? And he said, take heed that ye be not deceived, for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ. And the time draweth near.

Go ye not therefore after them, but when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified. For these things must first come to pass, but the end is not by and by. Then said he unto them, nation shall rise nation and kingdom against kingdom, and great earthquakes shall be in diverse places and famines and pestilences and fearful sites.

And great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony.

Settle it therefore in your hearts not to meditate before what you shall answer. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents and brethren and kinsfolks and friends.

And some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not a hair of your head perish, for in your patience possess ye your souls.

And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let them which are in the midst of it depart out, and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days. For there shall be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword and shall be led away captive into all nations.

And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled. There's a lot about suffering in this passage. Jesus tells us that we will stand before men to be condemned for the purpose of testimony.

He tells us that he will give us wisdom that cannot be refuted. He tells us that we will be hated for Jesus' namesake. He says that our patience will be tested, and therein lies your soul.

He says that we will not be eternally harmed. He says that women and babies will suffer. And he says that men who have this knowledge will panic and be incapacitated by fear, knowing what is coming.

I want to hear some more of what Jesus had to say in chapter 9, verses 21 to 26. I'm going to actually start in verse 20. He said unto them, But whom say you that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God.

And he straightly charged them and commanded them to tell no man that thing, saying, The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be slain and be raised the third day. And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world and lose himself or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he shall come in his own glory and in his father's and of the holy angels. I picked this verse or this passage. I mean, this is in a few of the gospels.

And I picked the one in Luke here because he said that we ought to daily take up our cross and follow him. So there is this element of daily self-denial and suffering. I want to turn to Jesus' charge to his 12 when he was getting ready to send his 12 out on their missionary journey.

He had some advice for them in Matthew chapter 10, which is actually very similar to things that he says about these latter days. Matthew chapter 10 verses 16 to 42. That's kind of a long one.

Here's what he tells his 12 as he's getting ready to send them out to go preaching the gospel in the different cities. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves, but beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils and they will scourge you in their synagogues.

And you shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what you shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what you shall speak. For it is not you that speak, but the spirit of your father, which speaketh in you.

And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death and the father, the child and the children shall rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death. And you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another. For verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the son of man become. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord.

It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? Fear them not therefore, for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed and hid that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in the light.

And what you hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your father.

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father, which is in heaven.

But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father, which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword.

For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

And he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

I just kind of see a pattern. I see these ideas echoed, even though these are the instructions to the twelve. These are ideas that are echoed throughout all of Jesus' teachings.

In Luke 21, when Jesus talks about that temple, he talks about a lot of suffering happening the world over. And I believe that this suffering is not something that's exclusive to unbelievers. I think the people who are zealous for the kingdom of God will suffer right alongside the people of this world that are in straits, whether it's a pandemic or a drought or a famine or a pestilence.

I don't see anywhere where we're actually spared from those things. But also, beyond the troubles that are mentioned in Luke 21, when Jesus talks about these latter days, we're also going to suffer above and beyond at the hands of men. It's something that's nearly a guarantee.

And it's just notable that we can expect more of the same treatment our Master received, especially if we bear his message. There are so many passages that talk to this, and I'm trying to keep it concise, but one I think of for sure is in when he says all those who will live godly will suffer persecution. It's just nearly a guarantee.

And a noteworthy passage, I guess maybe I could just read part of it. I don't want time to run away, but in Romans 8, everybody's familiar with it, but it's just a short little passage. I'm just going to skim through it.

Paul says to the church in Rome, Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again. Who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long.

We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So like, why all the suffering? This is like a dismal picture. I mean, it's kind of discouraging. What's the purpose? Why? Why all the suffering? I mean, this is really, when you think about like a lot of messages in mainstream Christianity, the focus is really, and there's an element to this that's true, but again, it's like somehow, somehow the proper balance has been disrupted and corrupted, and the whole emphasis is on an improved life by switching to an allegiance in Jesus.

And it's a completely different message. It's a completely different way to look at things, and maybe it helps a little bit to know why. And in part, I think we find part of the answer in 1 Peter chapter 2. 1 Peter chapter 2, 11 to 25.

Dearly beloved, Peter says, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak evil against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. I would hope that some of that means that there would be some repentance.

I would hope that some people would be won by godly behavior, by righteousness, especially when you're being slandered. But that's not what it says here. It says that they will glorify God in the day of visitation.

And I think this isn't an idea that's original with me, but I think some of that, like, God will receive glory not just from people who have persevered to the end, who have gained the crown of life, but he's also going to receive glory from those who who lived a life in opposition to God and confess him even through their punishing. He receives glory from the sheep and from the goats, not just from one. In verse 13, he says, Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of them that do well.

For so is the will of God that with well-doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men as free and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness. But as the servants of God, honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward, for this is thankworthy.

If a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully, suffering wrongfully, for what glory is it? If when you be buffeted for your faults, you shall take it patiently. But if when you do well and suffer for it, you take it patiently. This is acceptable with God.

For even here unto were ye called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps. Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. A righteous response amidst unbelievers will bring glory to God when he comes again.

And righteous behavior amidst suffering also brings glory to God. So part of the reason, part of the why, is the testimony that it brings to the rest of the world. But like, it begs the question, what I want to get into next is like, well, what about deliverance? I mean, this has been pretty one-sided so far.

I've kind of had a heavy hand on the idea that God will deliver us from our suffering and that actually we're called to suffer. So does God not deliver his own, as Satan suggested to Jesus? And I'd say, sure he does. Sure.

I mean, just think about some of the examples that we have, you know, available to us without even like the testimony of those in the church, just in the scriptures alone. Peter was miraculously delivered from

prison by the angel. Paul was spared suffering and death from a snake bite.

Jesus's would-be murderers were frozen as they were about to throw him headlong off of a cliff. He walked through their midst and escaped them. And I mean, there are so many examples of that.

And even like in personal testimony, I think everybody has an example of being spared something terrible. And so I'm not trying to take away from that. I think that it's clear that God works in some of those ways.

But there's other kinds of deliverance too, that don't just come from being spared something uncomfortable or unpleasant or worse. I think about Joseph suffering, not just hours, not just days, not just weeks, but for years as a slave and in prison. That was God's will.

That was Joseph's testimony is that it was God's will, and that it was part of a plan bigger than Joseph to spare Jacob and all of Israel. I think about Stephen, he delivered, he was filled with the Holy Ghost and he delivered one of the most powerful sermons ever. And his deliverance came through being stoned to death.

I just, well, I don't know. I guess I never really ceased to be blown away by Paul and the things that happened to Paul. I mean, he's got some in both lists.

He's got some in the list where like he was delivered from terrible things and he didn't have to suffer. And then he's got these accounts of horrible suffering. And I'm going to turn to, I always think I need to do this with caution, but in 2 Corinthians 11, he kind of gives a little rundown.

I think nobody can say it better than Paul himself, of all the things that have happened to him, just a little list. And I think it's important not to take this out of its context, which is that Paul is telling people not to glory as men and not to glory in their feats and their accomplishments and not to glory in suffering. In other words, boast.

So it's important to say that he's putting these people, he's trying to put these people in their right place by telling them not to be boastful and not to be proud. It is not a list of bragging. I just feel like to read this, it's important to put that in context.

I'm going to read chapter 11, verse 23 through chapter 12, verse 1. I'm in the wrong chapter. Let's see. Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool.

I am more, in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes, save one. I think that might just about kill a man, you know, to be lashed forty times, thirty-nine times.

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned. Thrice I suffered shipwreck. A night and a day I have been in the deep.

In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness, beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. I don't know. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not? For if I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

I'll just stop there. I'm also blown away, I mean, any of these things in here, like I have this thought, I mean, yeah, just about Paul, the one where he was stoned outside of, where he was stoned outside of Lystra, I think, and then he was dragged out of the, no, he was stoned in Lystra, and then he was dragged out of the city and walked to Derby. Like, they didn't just throw a few rocks to, you know, shake him up a little bit.

Like, it was attempted murder, and maybe they were even successful. I mean, maybe he was really killed, you know, but somehow, I mean, I just, I always have this picture of like, okay, you know, like he's been dragged out of the city, he's done, I guess it's time to take care of him, and like, and he like, he gets up and like dusts himself off and goes into the next city to preach some more. I just can't relate to that.

It's just this, I mean, if I receive scorn of somebody for sharing a truth of the scriptures, like, it hurts. Like, but he received the ultimate scorn. They're like, not only do we not agree with what you're saying, and we're gonna kill you for it.

And then he got up and like went to tell more people. I'm just blown away by that. I was thinking about all of these things, and I guess there's one thing in particular about Paul I just want to read because I think it's relevant in the vision to, I think it was Ananias, Acts chapter 9 verses 10 to 16.

Okay, so Paul is blind. He's still Saul at this point, and the Lord's got a message for Ananias. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias, and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias.

And he said, behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, arise and go into the street which is called straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus. For behold, he prayeth.

And he hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard many, I have heard by many of this man how much evil he hath done to thy saints of Jerusalem. And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on the name.

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. For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. That was, these sufferings that I've been talking about with Paul were a part of God's will for his ministry and for the way that he was going to reach people.

And I've just in all of these examples, like I tried to think of one, because like the scripture is a story, it's a story of people's suffering and how they dealt with it and how they turned to God. And there are just so many stories that you could touch or turn to, to try to explain the subject of suffering. And the one that just really struck me was one of Jesus himself.

And somebody who suffered right next to him in Luke 23 verses 26 to 49. I'll just start reading. And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon and a Cyrenian coming out of the country and on him, they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus.

And there followed him a great company of people and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming in the which they shall say, blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bear in the paps, which never gave suck.

Then shall they begin to say to the mountains fall on us and to the hills cover us for if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry. And there were also with, there were also two others male factors led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him in the male factors, one on the right hand and the other on the left.

Then said Jesus, father, forgive them for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment and cast lots. And the people stood beholding.

And the rulers also with them derided him saying he saved others. Let him save himself. If he be Christ, the chosen of God.

And the soldiers also mocked him coming to him and offering him vinegar and saying, if thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew. This is the king of the Jews.

And one of the male factors, which were hanged, railed on him saying, if thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him saying, dost not thou fear God seeing thou art in the same condemnation and we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds. But this man has done nothing amiss.

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, verily, I say unto thee today, shalt thou be with me in paradise. And it was about the sixth hour and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.

And the sun was darkened and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit. And having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

It's an incredible story. Jesus told the women who were following after him and wailing that there would be suffering to come. And as he was, I just think like, if we have the premise that God is always going to deliver us from suffering, if we just call on his name, that his will is always to save us from something, then we would have to believe that when this man turned to Jesus and said, remember me when you come into your kingdom, that he would have walked off the cross and been spared anything.

I don't know. I want to hear your thoughts too on this. But like when Jesus turned to him and he says, verily, I say unto you today, you will be with me in paradise.

Like there's no offer there from the trial at hand of deliverance. Deliverance, even though Jesus doesn't say this or say it this way, he tells the man where they're going to meet again. But the deliverance is going to come through suffering and through death.

And then they die together. It took that suffering of Jesus to be able to say to that man that together they'd be in paradise that day. Because had he not suffered, he wouldn't have said that to the man.

I wanted to shift to something before I go into, because I think it's important. Like this all has a point, and there's something that we do have, and it's in this story that we just read. I read an article this last week, and I found it kind of disturbing.

It's from 2019, and it's about black vultures. There's a vulture. They're the turkey vultures, which are big, and they're pretty harmless.

They're docile. They're good for the ecosystem. Black vultures are good too.

They're not as big. They're about five pounds, and their wingspan is about five feet. They've been pressing up higher into the U.S. than they used to be.

They're now into southern Indiana. They used to range from South America up to the southern states, and now they're up into Indiana today. What's unique about the black vulture is that they're more aggressive.

I learned something too in reading about this, and that's that vultures know where carcasses are, even above a tree canopy, because they have a very keen sense of smell, and they can smell when an animal has died. It gives off a kind of a gas that they're designed to pick up on, and so these black vultures... Turkey vultures are more solitary animals, and they always are looking for something that's dead. However, a black vulture kind of relies on other vultures to smell for them, because they don't have that keen sense of smell that a turkey vulture has, or like a king vulture.

So sometimes they can be seen following those. Rather than being solitary, a black vulture will actually feed in flocks. Sometimes I think I've put some of the accounts I've read set up to 60 birds at a time, and they will actually drive off other vultures.

But one thing about the black vulture is that if they get hungry, they'll go after live meat. There's been a big problem among cattle farmers in Kentucky and Indiana, especially where this story came from was Indiana, and they'll target animals that are vulnerable. And I just want you to hear, there's one farmer in here, and he explains how they do it.

These birds are incredibly intelligent, these vultures are. And so they've kind of got, like when they develop a taste for something that's alive still, they're very strategic in how they bring down an animal. Now remember, they're about five, it's about a five-pound bird.

Here's what this man says, I'm just going to read his account. Lawson said he's noticed more vultures since 2009 when he thinks they started nesting near Fox Hollow Farm. He plans his year around the predatory habits of the vultures, which circle the skies and wait of anything dead or vulnerable.

He remembers one eerie morning that he saw a flock of 60 vultures perched on adjacent gates in one of his fields. He mainly worries about them during calving season when they like to feast on easy marks. His 2019 calving season opened with him topping a hill and seeing six vultures pecking a calf to death.

Here's what he says, they like to play with the newborns, he said. They'll hop around and get the calf comfortable with them before they peck out their eyes. Then they can't see, he said, so they take them over.

The whole process from the playful taunt to the complete skinning doesn't take long at all, he added. Depending on the size, it may only take minutes. They're very efficient at what they do.

Lawson said Fox Hollow hasn't lost any full-grown cows to the vultures, but the birds have taken down full-grown ewes while in labor when both the mother and its baby are vulnerable. He remembers finding a ewe once that had been in process of giving birth when she was attacked. A full-grown ewe weighs

between 160 and 180 pounds.

That's all. Uh, I just, I mean, I, that bothers me. That account is like, it's uh, it bothers me, but I think like we get this idea about the adversary, about Satan, that like he's only interested in, in the spiritually dead and wreaking havoc among them, you know.

But, but it's not true, like he's, he's also got a taste for, for something live and something fresh. And if, and if he sensed vulnerability, he'll, he'll pounce on it. And I think that like, I mean, I was especially thinking about this method where like, these vultures, I think Satan operates a lot like them.

You know, they, they taunt an innocent newborn calf, get it comfortable with them, and then they attack it, pecking out its eyes. And when it's blind, that's when they really, that's when they really go after the thing and bring it down. And, and, and sometimes I think like when we have real dogmatic ideas, they can get us into uncomfortable corners.

Like saying that God always delivers us from trouble. Uh, it's not necessarily consistent with the scriptures. Uh, sometimes deliverance comes through other forms like time, perseverance, or even death.

And so if we are expecting deliverance from a problem, if we're expecting, and I'm not saying it's wrong to pray for that, I think that's good. I think we should. But if we're expecting like a deliverance from any discomfort or any suffering at all, uh, and that's not what happens, we can kind of be like those poor calves.

Um, you know, we feel injured or betrayed by God because we know that like He's somebody who does bring deliverance and He does, He cares about suffering. It says that He knows, like I read a while ago, that like He, He takes note when even a sparrow falls to the ground. So aren't we much more value than a sparrow? And if we, if it doesn't work that way for us, if we have to suffer through something, we can, we can miss God's will for us and even become blind to what the scripture is actually saying about suffering.

Then we'll doubt God and become vulnerable to the adversary's attacks. Uh, I mean, I just thought I'd share like, another one is, is like one of these dogmatic ideas, not necessarily about suffering, but just to help, help understand like what I'm trying to say is about faith. Like, and I've, there's, I've seen this, you know, in some circles, this idea and kind of the fruits of it.

Um, but I saw like a plaque that you can hang on the wall and it just like, it just so like concisely and clearly puts forth this, this dogmatic idea that I think gets people in a tight corner. And it's this, faith isn't believing God can, it's knowing he already has. Um, and so like one personal story, like when we had my first daughter, um, my wife had this condition called placenta previa.

And, uh, and that means that, that the placenta is in the way the baby can't, can't get out because of where the placenta attached to the uterine wall. And so it's an automatic surgery. Um, but we were, I mean, we were really disappointed.

We wanted to have a natural birth. And so we prayed hard. We prayed fervently for this, for this placenta to move away, which is a possibility.

And, um, the doctor humored us. I mean, even up to like, we had to schedule the, the cesarean, the surgery to get, to get the baby. And, and the day of we, we had the doctor bring an ultrasound machine into the room, even though like scientifically and, and probably speaking, you know, like by, by how things

have progressed, it was impossible that this placenta would be moved.

But we were, we were like, God's going to do this for us. He just is. And so we, we had the ultrasound and there it was, it was in the way.

And we had to go ahead with surgery. And it just, it was like a season of really struggling with like, well, what went wrong? What happened? Like, why didn't, why didn't God do that for us? And, um, it's one of those corners we can get backed into when, when we, when we just only have like a partial truth or not, not the full truth about what something is and how it should be. There was another, like, and I find this even more grievous, but like a friend of ours had a parent who died and, uh, and, and she would be in more like a, you know, it'd be like more of a Pentecostal persuasion for lack of a better term.

And that's, and a lot of this idea comes out of that about faith, you know, like faith is, isn't believing God can, but it's knowing that he already has. And, and so like, that's where a lot of the claimant comes from, you know, and name it and claim it circles. It's like, listen, like we all agree that this person is healed.

They are healed. We're going to talk about it like they're healed. And if they're not healed, it's because somebody here didn't believe.

And so this, this person carried with them for years, the idea that, that their mother had died because they didn't have the faith to heal the cancer. And I mean, how, how, how easily can the enemy, can the adversary take something like that and just use it to, to really divide you and create a wedge between you and, and God? And I think, and I think that if we don't understand suffering properly, if we don't understand that it's something that we will face, that we will have to go through, and that that even can be the will of God, I think it can put us in a similar predicament. It's a pretty bleak picture so far.

So I just wanted to move into something a little bit more positive and talk about like, what, what do we have? What kind of a promise do we have to cope with, with some of these grievous things? John 14 and verses 15 to 27 says this, if you love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the father and he shall give you another comforter that he may abide with you forever. Even the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him, but you know him for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless.

I will come to you yet a little while and the world seeth me no more. But ye see me because I live, ye shall live also. At that day, you shall know that I am in my father and ye in me and I in you.

He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me and he that loveth me shall be loved of my father and I will love him and will manifest myself to him. Judas said unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, if a man loved me, he will keep my words and my father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings and the word which he hear is not mine, but the father's which sent me.

These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.

Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Jesus does promise us the comforter, the Holy Ghost.

It's a promise we have. And like the story of the thief on the cross, like Jesus went through that with that man in the physical, but his promise is to go through all of these challenges with us in the spiritual. Like his presence with us is a promise that we have to face these challenges, to face these things.

Just a short one in the very end of Matthew, the Great Commission. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.

And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. I just want to wrap up my thoughts here.

I don't believe it's sound to say either that we will be spared all suffering or that we will only suffer. I think God operates through his saints both ways. One thing is sure, and that is that suffering will come in one form or another.

And we will suffer alongside the rest of the world. So we have a decision when those things happen to us. We can choose to be dismayed and slip into discouragement and be a prime target for Satan, or we can take it patiently and we can know that Jesus is with us and that he takes note and special care of our suffering.

That will bring glory to God. And I just wanted to, part of Jesus's message to the church at Laodicea to close. I guess his message to the church at Laodicea.

Angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, these things saith the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou work cold or hot.

So then because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth, because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing. And knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear and anoint thine eyes with thyself that thou mayest see.

And as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten, be zealous therefore and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him and will sup with him and he with me.

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my father in his throne. He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." I just find those last few verses especially encouraging. That's not to push a message at all of experiential salvation or to discredit somebody with an experience in salvation.

It's just an assurance of Jesus' willingness to commune with and sup with anybody who chooses to follow him. I find that encouraging. God bless you all and I'm really glad to be here.

Thank you brothers for sharing. Not sure that I have any great ideas or I agree with the idea that we will suffer persecution. I also had the thought that I'm thankful I don't have to choose what that is.

I guess we all often think how we might die. It's comforting to me to know that I don't have to decide that. I think maybe suffering would be the same, but there is something that we can do.

There's this one thought I had when Leroy was sharing. Combined with the thought of the church that did all these good things, but they had lost their first love. I have often pondered about that.

I don't know if I shared this thought. I think it's my own thought. But it seems to me like that first love or that there's something in us where we sell out to God.

We're going to go the whole way. We're going to forsake all. We're going to allow Christ to teach us.

We're going to allow Him to lead us. When we make a decision that it's based upon truth or it's based upon what Jesus taught us instead of our feelings or things we've heard. We lay down our lives for that.

We forsake all for that. I just tend to think this is what happened to that church. They did good things.

They did right things. They started off right. We know this in looking at history of churches, how churches fall away.

Instead of making their decision based on the truth, they make their decisions based on other things. I'm not sure what all examples. Maybe just like the church where I came from, I grew up in.

Technically, they taught the right things, but I don't think they were making decisions based on conviction of the heart. Their decisions were not made anymore on what Jesus taught, but rather what they had been doing. I'm not sure if it's an exact parallel, but I think there's something similar about it.

This is something we should never lose, is to continue walking in that way of basing our decisions on truth and righteousness and holiness of Christ and walking in His will. Anyways, it's been encouraging. I thank you and I'm thankful to be here.

May God bless us all. Yeah, I'm thankful to be here too. I guess you kind of covered some of my thoughts there, Walter, and some of that was based on a comment by Duane, just how that church just had all these good things.

I just appreciate bringing that to the attention. They couldn't tolerate evil people. They wouldn't put up with false people, things like that.

I wonder if some of that has to do with a commitment that surely all of us have made, or surely these people have made, and they weren't quite willing to continue with that. If we committed ourselves to follow the Lord, and who here could say that we knew exactly what that all would entail? All of us probably have faith things that we didn't know about whenever we did this thing, this acceptance of the true faith and this walk that we saw that we need to do, and we set out to do it. We say, yes, Lord, we're going to do it, but then maybe years later something comes up unexpectedly that we say, no, Lord.

It seems like maybe that would be the big offense to God or to His kingdom that makes that scripture there that you read, Duane, so weighty. I just want to take that to heart and ponder on it more. I appreciate the message, Max.

I just really thought I could follow along. Maybe there was one certain point I want to think about some more. Not anything you said, but just a certain scripture about the ungodly glorifying God.

I haven't really looked at that much. There's just a lot about suffering that I don't understand. I think maybe it's more and more clear, but I think it's just bad if we go about life looking for just the fleshly good things, and then if they don't quite happen, then that affects our mood and our emotions and things.

That's just not good. Part of the fruit of the Spirit is to be tempered, and it's just something you need to work on. That's all.

I just really appreciate being here. Greetings in the name of Jesus. Thank you, Brother Leroy and Max, for your labors there.

I just wanted to read a couple verses here. 1 Peter 4, verse 1 says, For as much then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind. And also, in John 15, Jesus said, Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord.

If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my saying, they'll keep yours also. So it shouldn't be any surprise if we should expect certain persecution at some point in our lives.

Like you said, not all will be persecuted, but as the Church as a whole, the Church of God will be persecuted at some points of time. But thank you. Lord bless you.

Amen, Brother Max. There's so many good points that I had to comment on. Like Leroy's, it's a great exhortation.

Like Brother Walter said, well, basically paraphrasing what Walter said about counting the cost. It's something we count the cost. We should before we accept that the Lord is our Lord.

Going back to why we're suffering, like Paul could have said when he won 2 Corinthians 11, Paul could have said, this thorn in the flesh, whatever that is. I don't know what the thorn in the flesh is, but I think it's eyesight. But the thorn in the flesh, why? His response was obvious.

I mean, not obvious, but it's what we have. My grace is sufficient for you, for Paul. And so his grace is sufficient.

I know in John's gospel, it says, say, these Greeks came up to Philip and then they went up to, who's the other Greek? Philip and could have been Daniel or Thomas. And so we like to see Jesus. And Jesus's response was, uh, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground, it cannot be a fruit.

So playing Jeopardy, or what's the question they must've said, or not the question, but what was the, uh, brain teaser? What was the, what was the, what was the, uh, suggestion that these Greeks wanted to ask Jesus was probably, we, we can, we can, uh, we can protect you. We'll give you refuge. We'll take you away with us.

You know, and we know they're about to destroy you and kill you, but we'll, we get power, we get money, just get away from these, these Jews. We'll, we'll give you, we'll give you help. And his response was no, unless a grain of wheat falls in the ground.

And so, um, uh, yeah, the, the way up is down. Humility is, is, is, is, is the way it's not tried. And, uh, one of the Psalms, I thought of Psalm 73, it says, uh, the wicked, they have, they have no anti, uh, anti prosperity claimant gospel.

The wicked, they have no, uh, pains in their death. They lived their whole life, whatever, without ever having to go to the doctor and it's rich in prosperity. But, but the Psalmist says in a moment how they are utterly destroyed, they're cast down.

And so the suffering is, uh, the wicked of Psalm 73. I thought of that. Justin Martyr said, we do have a debt to pay everyone.

We're all going to die. Every one of us is going to die. Why not die the way helping the poor, uh, telling about the gospel and do those things.

I've been meeting Justin Martyr lately and that we all have a debt to pay. Why don't we do it in following in the footsteps of the Lord. And one point you could have, if you kept on going further, I know it would be, uh, at the beginning, uh, the, uh, the Sermon on the Mount.

And Jesus said, blessed are the poor in spirit. And he builds up and he said, blessed are those who persecute you and blessed are those who revile you. And that's counting the cost.

And, uh, they don't want to hear that today. It's, I mean, it's sad. We pray for them.

They want it. And you had all those excellent points. The Lord be magnified.

Jesus knows our strength and weakness. Understand we are but friends.

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