

Thanksgiving and Suffering
Selected Scriptures (NKJV)
Dr. Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher
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INTRODUCTION

1. Today is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.
2. Churches all over the world are praying for those who are persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ.
3. As we remember “the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body” (**Heb.13:3, NASB**), I want to talk today about “Thanksgiving and Suffering.”
4. Last week I begin a month long series on “Cultivating Thanksgiving.”
5. In fact, I challenged you last week to be thankful in whatever circumstance you find yourself in.
6. How did you do this week?
7. I have to admit that I didn’t do all that well but praise the Lord that “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (**1 John 1:9, NASB**).
8. As you have already realized it takes work to cultivate thanksgiving.
9. It takes work to die to self.

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10. But that's what is involved in walking by the Spirit.
11. Andrew Murray said, "Humility is the path to death, because in death it gives the highest proof of its perfection. Humility is the blossom of which death to self, is the, perfect. fruit. Jesus humbled Himself unto death, and opened the path in which we too must walk. As there was no way for Him to prove His surrender to God to the very uttermost, or to give up and rise out of our human nature to the glory of the Father but through death, so with us too. Humility must lead us to die to self" (<http://www.worldinvisible.com/library/murray/5f00.0565/5f00.0565.10.htm>).
12. Paul told the elders at Ephesus in **Acts 20:19** that he served "the Lord with all ***humility and with tears and with trials*** which came upon me through the plots of the Jews" (NASB).
13. He told the Ephesians that "***humility***" was "the manner" in which they were to "walk...worthy of the calling with which [they had] been called" (**Eph.4:1, NASB**).
14. And to the Philippians that they were to "do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with ***humility*** of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves" (**Phil.2:3, NASB**).
15. If we are to cultivate thankfulness then we must first and foremost cultivate humility.
16. Humility is the foundation to thanksgiving.

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17. As we think more on this today, I want us to see it in light of persecution.
18. All of us remember the horrific events of April 20, 1999 when Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold opened fire on students at Columbine High School.
19. One of the students who was killed, Rachel Scott, was asked by one of the gunmen if she still believed in God. She looked at him and said yes, she still believed. He asked her why, but he didn't let her answer before killing her.
20. One year before this tragic shooting, Rachel Scott wrote in her diary:

“I am not going to apologize for speaking the name of Jesus. I will take it. If my friends have become my enemies for me to be with my friend, Jesus, then that's fine with me. I always knew being a Christian means loving your enemies, but I never thought that my 'friends' were going to be those enemies.....I am not going to hide the light that God has put into me. If I have to sacrifice everything, I will” (*Extreme Devotion*, p.4).
21. Her commitment cost her everything! Your commitment to Jesus will COST YOU EVERYTHING TOO!
22. The question is will you die for them?
23. Some recant their beliefs when they have to suffer for them.

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24. But tonight I want to ask you not so much are you willing to die but are you willing to live?
25. Because it's in living that we may die.
26. When we live the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a Christ-hating, Christ-rejecting world, there will be a reaction.
27. It will be positive or negative.
28. In **Acts 16** after Paul commanded a demon come out of "a certain slave girl" (v.16), when her masters saw "that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities" (v.19).
29. **Verses 22-23** records "Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely."
30. Paul writes about this later to the **Philippians** and said that "the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel" (1:12).
31. And now we're introduced to what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.
32. Everything in our life is for "the furtherance of the gospel."

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33. “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (**Phil.1:21**).
34. You see, when you receive Jesus Christ you become a disciple.
35. And a disciple is basically a “learner” or “follower” of Jesus Christ.
36. And in that life long aspiration to be like your Lord you adhere to whatever Jesus has designed for your life.
37. If He chooses suffering, then that is the course and pattern He has designed for you.
38. Whatever the course, we know that it will, include suffering or persecution.
39. John MacArthur, in his book *The Power of Suffering*, says, “The key to preparedness in the Christian life is the foundation of truth upon which we build our lives — in other words, discipleship. If we are disobedient and refuse to walk loyally the narrow path of discipleship, sufferings, and trials will surprise and defeat us. So it is crucial for us to firmly grasp the role of the disciple. In that way we can guarantee our strength, endurance, and joy in suffering” (p.105).
40. **There are 2 truths about discipleship that I want us to consider this morning to prepare us for suffering.**

I. Suffering Comes with Discipleship

There are three passages of Scripture that give us the same truth regarding discipleship. They tell us....

A. The Disciple is Not Above His Teacher

1. He is subordinate to him

Again...

a) Jesus repeats this truth several times to the twelve

- (1) He says to them in **Matthew 10:24**, “A disciple is *not above his teacher*, nor a servant above his master.”
- (2) In **John 13:16**, He says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, *a servant is not greater than his master*; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.”
- (3) He also says in **John 15:20**, “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘*A servant is not greater than his master.*’”

3 Times Jesus states that a disciple is subordinate to his teacher — and all three times he was referring to their relationship to Him.

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- b) In our relationship with Jesus we are both disciples and slaves

- c) Both roles require the same element — *submission*

“We have to submit in order to ‘learn.’ We have to submit in order to ‘obey.’ Submission and obedience go hand in hand.”

Notice two passages where both submit and obey are used:

- (1) **Titus 3:1** says, “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work.”

- (2) **Hebrews 13:17** says, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

As disciples we are to be both obedient and submissive.
As a disciple...

- 2. He is to learn from Him

“A disciple is a ‘learner.’”

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- a) He is a learner in sufferings - **John 15:20** -
“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ ***If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.***”
- b) Jesus offered to us the greatest example of responding to suffering
- (1) **1 Pet.2:21-23** says, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth;’ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.”
- (2) **Mark 15:1-5** says, “Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate. 2 Then Pilate asked Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” He answered and said to him, “It is as you say.” 3 And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. 4 Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, “Do You answer

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nothing? See how many things they testify against You!” 5 But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.”

“The same expectation applies to us. The more like Christ we become, the more the world will treat us as it treated Him” (Ibid., MacArthur, p.106).

Not only is a disciple not above his teacher but:

B. The Disciple is Not Afraid of the World

“Fear” Gr.phobeo, “to be alarmed, to frighten” (Strong), “panic” (Kittel)

“In Greek superstition phobos is a powerful deity, the son of Ares, and a god of war. Sparta has a temple to Phobos. He is depicted in a fear — inspiring form that actualizes the god of terror presented by Homer” (Gerhard, Kittel, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Abridged in One Volume).

1. Genuine disciples of Jesus have no reason to fear

- a) Because they are of great value to God - **Mat.10:29-31** - Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. 30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Do

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not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

- b) Because God is not the author of fear - 2
Tim.1:7-8 - For *God has not given us a spirit of fear*, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.

“Fear” Gr.deilia, “timidity, cowardice” (Thayer), “fearfulness” (Wuest)

John MacArthur says, “The threat of Roman persecution, which was escalating under Nero, the hostility of those in the Ephesian church who resented Timothy’s leadership, and the assaults of false teachers with their sophisticated systems of deceptions may have been overwhelming Timothy. But if he was fearful, it didn’t come from God” (*The MacArthur Study Bible*).

- c) Because they possess the peace of Jesus Christ -
John 14:27 - Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

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The second reason why genuine disciples are not afraid of the world is because:

2. Genuine disciples are not of this world
 - a) God is their Father - **Rom.8:15** - For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’”
 - b) Jesus is their Lord and Master - **John 20:28** - And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and My God.”
 - c) The Holy Spirit is their Eternal Comforter - **John 14:16** - And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever.
 - d) Their citizenship is in another place: heaven - **Phil.3:20** - For our citizenship is in heaven.
 - e) Jesus said we are not of this world - **John 15:19** - If you were of this world, the world would love it’s own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

So we have no reason to fear — we are not of this world

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William Gurnall said, “We fear men so much, because we fear God so little. One fear cures another. When man’s terror scares you, turn your thoughts to the wrath of God” (*The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*).

Suffering not only comes with discipleship but...

II. Discipleship Prepares Us for Suffering

A. It Teaches Us How to Respond to Suffering

1. A true disciple will respond with thanksgiving
 - a) He will be obedient to the command to give thanks in all things (**1 Thess.5:18**)
 - b) He will care more about God’s sovereign plan in his life rather than his personal comfort

Job 1:20-22 says, “Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD.” 22 In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.”

Thomas Brookes said, “Our greatest good comes through the sufferings of Christ” (Ibid., *The Golden*

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- 2.. A True disciple will respond with prayer
 - a) He will give heed to James' advice to pray -
Jas.5:13 - Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.
 - b) He will call upon God for help in his suffering
 - (1) **Jas.1:5** - If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.
 - (2) **Ps.50:15** - Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.

Joseph Hall said, "Good prayers never come weeping home. I am sure I shall receive either what I ask for or what I should ask" (Ibid., *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*).

3. A true disciple will respond with dependence on God
 - a) He knows he needs God in his suffering
 - b) He does not seek to handle this on his own
 - c) He is Spirit-filled - **Acts 4:8-13**

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Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: 9 If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, 10 let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” 13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. 14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

4. A true disciple will respond with blessing
 - a) He will bless his enemies

Remember Rachel Scott’s note in her diary:

“I am not going to apologize for speaking the name of Jesus. I will take it. If my friends have become my enemies for me to be with my

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friend, Jesus, then that's fine with me. I always knew being a Christian means loving your enemies, but I never thought that my 'friends' were going to be those enemies.....I am not going to hide the light that God has put into me. If I have to sacrifice everything, I will."

- (1) **Rom.12:14** - Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

"Bless" Gr.eulogeo, "to speak well of a person." (Pres. Imp.) "Be constantly blessing or speaking well of a person"

- (2) **Rom.12:17-21** - Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,"[£] says the Lord. 20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

"Heap coals of fire on his head" —
"Refers to an ancient Egyptian custom in

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which a person who wanted to show public contrition carried a pan of burning coals on his head. The coals represented the burning pain of his shame and guilt. When believers lovingly help their enemies, it should bring shame to such people for their hate and animosity” (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*).

- b) He will pursue what is right for everyone - **1 Thess.5:15** - See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourself and for all.

- 5. A true disciple endures through it all - **Jas.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.

A true disciple then responds to suffering with thanksgiving, prayer, dependence on God, blessing and he endures through it all. So discipleship teaches us how to respond to suffering.

Notice the second thing discipleship teaches us:

- B. It Teaches Us How to Be Prepared for Satan’s Attacks

Samuel Rutherford said, “Satan is only God’s master fencer to teach us to use our weapons” (Ibid., *The Golden*

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1. A true disciple is not ignorant of Satan's devices - **2 Cor.2:11** - "For we are not ignorant of his devices."

"Devices" gr.noema, "purpose, in a bad sense, design, plot" (Bauer, Wilbur, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*).

2. A true disciple has the armor of God on - **Eph.6:10-17**

Paul begins **verse 10** by saying, "Be strong in the Lord."

The words "Be strong" (enduanamoo, pres.pass.imp.) means, "to endure with strength." It carries the idea of "clothing one's self with strength as one puts on a garment." Lit. "Be constantly strengthened" (Vincent).

This was Paul's charge to Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:1** (NASB77) 1 You therefore, my son, ***be strong*** in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

How are you to be strong? Depend on the Lord and use His weapons.

To use His weapons, you have to "put" them on.

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Putting them on (“Put on” enduo, aor.mid.imp.)
“carries the idea of once and for all, of permanence”
(MacArthur).

John Calvin says, “We ought to be prepared on all sides, so as to want nothing. The Lord offers to us arms for repelling every kind of attack. It remains for us to apply them to use, and not leave them hanging on the wall. To quicken our vigilance, he reminds us that we must not only engage in open warfare, but that we have a crafty and insidious foe to encounter, who frequently lies in ambush” (Calvin’s Commentaries: Ephesians).

Notice each piece of the armor that is listed in verses 14-17:

a) The girdle of truth (**v.14**)

Girding up was a matter of pulling in the loose ends as preparation for battle. The belt that pulls all the spiritual loose ends in is “truth” or better, “truthfulness.” The idea is of sincere commitment to fight and win without hypocrisy-self-discipline in devotion to victory. Everything that hinders is tucked away.

So the girdle of truth refers to knowing the Word of God.

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b) The breastplate of righteousness (v.14)

To put on the breastplate of righteousness is to live in daily, moment-by-moment obedience to our heavenly Father.

In other words, to obey the Word of God.

c) The gospel of peace (v.15)

In this passage the gospel of peace refers to the good news that believers are at peace with God. The unsaved person is helpless, ungodly, sinful, and an enemy of God (Rom. 5:6-10). The saved person, on the other hand, is reconciled to God through faith in His Son (vv. 10-11).

So the gospel of peace refers to resting in the assurance of God.

d) The shield of faith (v.16)

Paul begins verse 16 with the phrase, “in addition to all.”

This introduces the last three pieces of armor. The first three—girdle, breastplate, and shoes (vv. 14-15)—were for long-range preparation and protection and were never taken off on the battlefield. The shield, helmet, and sword, on

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the other hand, were kept in readiness for use when actual fighting began.

The shield of faith refers to believing God.

- e) The helmet of salvation refers to believing God's Word **(v.17)**

The fact that the helmet is related to salvation indicates that Satan's blows are directed at the believer's security and assurance in Christ.

But with the helmet of salvation, the Christian is not daunted, since he knows that ultimate victory is sure. Assurance of eventual deliverance preserves him from retreat or surrender. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

- f) The sword of the Spirit refers to using God's Word **(v.17)**

The word "Spirit" (pneuma) is the genitive of origin and indicates that the Holy Spirit is the origin of the sword.

Paul says the sword of the Spirit is "the Word of God."

It is the "word" (rhema), "sayings" (Strong),

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“individual words or particular statements”
(MacArthur).

Romans 10:17 says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ”
(NASB).

3. A true disciple is ready to resist
- a) **James 4:7** - Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

The word “submit” is a compound verb (hupotagete), which consists of the preposition, hupo, “under,” and tasso, “to order, place, station” and it means to “place under.”

This was “primarily a military term” and it could literally mean, “to rank under” (MacArthur). It occurs here in the passive voice which indicates “the submission is to be voluntary” (MacArthur).

The word “resist” translates anthisetmi, a compound verb composed of anti, “against,” and histemi, “to stand.” It literally means, “to stand against,” “to oppose.”

- b) Anthisetmi also occurs in **1 Peter 5:8-9** where it says, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your

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adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 But ***resist*** him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world” (NASB).

D. Edmond Hiebert says, “As a definite act, they must take their stand in opposition to ‘the devil’ as their true enemy...Instead of their conflicts with each other, here is the true field for the exercise of the combative element which enters into man’s nature. Let them wholeheartedly participate in this perpetual resistance movement” (James, 261).

You resist the devil by submitting to God.

CONCLUSION

1. What is your view of suffering?
2. Do you understand that it comes with discipleship?
3. Do you respond to it with thanksgiving, prayer, dependence on God, blessing and endurance?
4. I remind you the question is not are you ready to die but are you ready to live for Jesus and if dying in the process then you die as an obedient God-honoring, Jesus confessing believer!

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5. Let me close with this quote by John MacArthur in *The Power of Suffering*: “If we are not suffering much for His sake, then perhaps it’s time to examine our lives (2 Cor.13:5). If we want to be Christ’s followers in every way, we need to be prepared to pay the price...When conformity to Him is as it should be, it becomes possible to triumph in suffering” (p.106).
6. This doesn’t give much attraction to the Gospel.
7. No—but it is what is at the heart of the Gospel.
8. To follow Jesus is to follow Him in suffering.
9. It is to sorrow over sin.
10. It is to experience a transformation through the Gospel.
11. If you surrender your life to Jesus right now, He will not only transform your heart but also your life and you may suffer for it.
12. Your friends may have nothing more to do with you.
13. Your family may abandon you.
14. You may lose your job.
15. You may lose all these things but you will gain eternal life.
16. Jesus said, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it;

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but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul”
(Mat.16:25-26, NASB).

17. As you live your life for Jesus—live it in constant surrender.
18. Love Him with all your heart!!!!
19. If you are persecuted for it, thank Him!
20. Let’s pray.