

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

January 14, 2021

The Fellowship of Christ's Sufferings

Philippians 3:8

Prayer: *Father, I just again, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for the many provisions that you have made for us in the midst of this COVID. I just continue to thank you for You Tube, for the venues that you've presented not just to us but to the church everywhere, Lord, we are able to speak into folks' living rooms who can't be here, and so we're grateful and thankful for that. So we pray as we again go back to the book of Philippians, the book that we've been studying and that you would again give us the presence of your Holy Spirit, give us the insight and wisdom we need to make this of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, when we last left Paul, he had been battling the Judaizers. That was almost a month ago. And if you remember, this was the party that demanded a gospel plus. These were folks who accepted that Jesus Christ died on the cross but insisted that certain ceremonial laws had to be added to the work of Christ in order to make us worthy of heaven. Paul saved some of his harshest language

for these people. He called them dogs, called them evil ones, called them mutilators of the flesh. And what Paul reacts to among the Judaizers is their attempt to reduce God's demands of perfection down to something as simple as an act of circumcision, as if mere external rule keeping could somehow entitle you to be worthy of heaven. Well, I pointed out back then that God is all perfect and his standard is all perfect and his demand for all of us is perfection itself. And it couldn't have been stated more clearly than what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. In *Matthew 5:48* he said: *"You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* But as the cliché has it, we know nobody is perfect. Only God himself could pull that off. And that's why God himself became one of us and lived among us perfectly. His holiness set the standard of perfection and his life on this planet fulfilled that standard for us so that if we by faith place our trust in his death on the cross to pay the price of our sin, then we, too, would have his righteousness as our own and have his perfection that would now make us worthy of heaven.

The reason why Paul was so exercised at the Judaizers, they had the gall to insist that human effort, which would never ever meet the standard of perfection, that that effort had to be added to divine perfection in order to make salvation possible. Paul's whole argument to the Judaizers is personal. He says, look, I fall

ridiculously short of the mark even though my moral life is considerably better than yours. Paul goes on to demolish their argument by pointing to all of his accomplishments and then he says in *Philippians 3:8*: *I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.* The Judaizers insisted on adding our works to Christ's perfection and Paul sums it all up by pointing out that adding dung to perfection doesn't elevate the dung, it just attempts to demean Christ's perfection and God will not have it.

I said last time that we're grateful to Paul for putting the argument in such stark terms but I wonder how many times we've done the exact same thing as the Judaizers every time we think that we are earning God's approval by our good behavior. Well, then we think well then how in the world am I going to to get God to love me if all of my best efforts are literally a pile of dung? How could I possibly ever earn God's affection? Well the answer is you can't. It is there as a gift, period. I have no idea why God ever chose to fix his love on me or on you but he has. And once having fixed that love, he will never take it away. There's not a thing that you and I can do to increase it or diminish it because we didn't cause it in the first place. That fact alone should take your breath away. And what Paul says next may well take your

breath away also. Paul states his desire in *Philippians 3:9*, he says: *(to) be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith -- that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

There's three things that Paul desperately wants in his life. First of all that he may know Christ; second of all that he might know the power of his resurrection; and thirdly that he might share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. Paul's first great desire is *that I may know Christ*. What does that mean? I mean if I were to ask you if you knew Christ, how would you respond? I mean you might say, well, I know him historically, I mean, he's the son of God, he was born in Bethlehem, he was raised in Nazareth, he gathered his disciples and he lived out his public life for three years and then he went to the cross then after that he was resurrected. That's the historical way of knowing Christ. Today it's no small task to believe and know the historical Christ. That's come under withering attack in the last few decades. There are folks who call themselves Christians who don't feel any need whatsoever to believe in an historical Jesus. As far as they're concerned Jesus represents a goal, an aspiration, a model of love

to aim your life at and whether he actually existed in flesh and in blood, and in time, that's not that important to them. I mean the resurrection may have actually happened or it may simply be a metaphor for new life and new power that's available to anyone. That's become the mainstay for many progressive Christians. But believe me, those who believe that are not progressive Christians, they are in fact not Christians. I mean if there is no actual resurrection, there's absolutely no point whatsoever to what we believe in. There's no point to the Christian faith. 1

Corinthians 15 has Paul saying the same thing. He says: *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. If in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

Paul's saying in essence if the resurrection is a lie then the gospel is a lie. Truth is absolutely critical to us because if Jesus is anything, he is truth incarnate. I mean after all Jesus himself said in *John 14:6*, he said: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* I mean if Christ's life was an historical lie, there's no reason whatsoever to believe anything else about his claims. I think it's relatively simple to know Jesus historically. There's so many extra biblical sources that prove that he existed historically and

there's reasons aplenty to demonstrate that there really was a man named Jesus of Nazareth who really did go to a cross. That's attested to by people who are not Christians. The proof of his resurrection is just as well attested to by anyone who wishes to pursue historical fact. So we don't really see a problem, a difficult problem in knowing Jesus historically.

What about knowing Jesus doctrinally? Well that would be knowing and understanding the doctrines of penal substitution and justification. I know they sound just like big words but they too are under attack by people who call themselves progressive Christians. Penal substitution is the doctrine that says that Jesus went to the cross in order to substitute himself for us in order to bear the penalty of our sin. That's not a popular view these days in progressive circles. I mean there are people today who view penal substitution as a form of what they say is cosmic child abuse. They think that the doctrine impugns both God the Father and God the Son. That it makes God the Father out to be this kind of tyrant who won't be satisfied and forgive sin unless he sees bloodshed. Jesus the son is portrayed as this hopeless victim of the father's wrath, tortured in order to satisfy God's cosmic anger. And instead Christ's crucifixion and death is portrayed not as a just payment for sin but simply instead as the ultimate expression of God's love for sinners. I mean according to

this view, the cross really didn't do anything. It certainly didn't satisfy God's wrath because God isn't a God of wrath, according to this view. It merely demonstrated how much God loved us and how willing Jesus was to speak truth to power, so willing that he went to the cross to demonstrate that love. Well the problem with that view is that it still leaves the whole issue of sin hanging. I mean such a display of God's love accomplishes, in that view, nothing. I mean someone pointed out that the cross then becomes as if God saw all of us in and over our heads and drowning and decided to show his love for us by jumping in the water and drowning alongside us. That may well demonstrate a great amount of love but it's love that accomplishes nothing. Instead, penal substitution insists that God accomplished the perfecting of his sheep by dying on the cross because God is not only perfectly loving but he's also perfectly just, and perfect justice demands a payment for sin. *Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death.* God's judgment demanded a payment be made either by us or by someone willing and perfect, willing to substitute himself while he bears that penalty. Hence we have penal substitution. It's Christ bearing God's wrath for sin for us. *Romans 5:8 says: But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*

There's a problem with understanding God's wrath. God's wrath against sin is not anger, it's not rage, it's rather the holiness of God's perfectly appropriate response to the awfulness of sin. I mean just imagine, if you will, a God who has no wrath, a God who is completely indifferent to sin, I mean a God who sees no difference between sacrifice and sacrilege, between nurture and murder, a God who simply shrugs his shoulders at evil. You have to understand that the wrath of God is an expression of the love of God. He hates those things that hurt and damage those he loves. The doctrine of penal substitution insists that Father, Son and Holy Spirit collaborated in finding a way to combine perfect love and perfect mercy and justice, and in so doing Jesus, rather than playing the victim, was whole-heartedly the collaborator and orchestrator of his own sacrifice and a willing participant in the Trinity's way of dealing with sin. *Hebrews 9* says: *So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.* The fact that Jesus substituted himself for us on the cross is attested to by the prophet Isaiah when he wrote this about Jesus in *Isaiah 53*. He says: *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*

By his wounds we're also justified, and justification is God actively declaring us as no longer debtors to sin based on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. And again *Romans 5:8*, he says: *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.* That's a doctrinal understanding of who Jesus is. You see it's incredibly important that we know Christ historically because if there was no Christ then Paul himself said, your faith is futile and you're still in your sins. And it's also incredibly important to know Christ doctrinally because today there are dozens of false christs proclaiming that they're the real thing who outright reject the doctrines and scripture that define who Christ is. I mean I have friends, I have relatives who sincerely believe in a christ but not at all in the Christ of the Bible and not at all in the Christ who saves. But knowing Christ historically and doctrinally is not the same as what Paul is referring to here. Paul's life is organized around one central theme and that is knowing Christ and him crucified. Verse 10: *That I may know him and the power of his resurrection.* Well, what does Paul mean by that? I mean Paul understood that there were different pathways to knowing Christ, that there was an historical pathway that's critical, that there's a doctrinal pathway which is also critical; but the knowledge that Paul is speaking of here isn't about history, it's not about

doctrine. What it is about is intimacy. Paul wanted intimacy with Christ more than he wanted anything and Paul was willing to go to any length of suffering in order to find that intimacy.

You know one hint that you have on earth of that intimacy is the relationship that you have with your spouse. You know your spouse more intimately than you know anyone else, you know him or her differently than you know anyone else because living together has made it so. I mean it's your spouse who sees you naked without the luxury of the pretenses that we clothe ourselves in. But that's only a hint of what true intimacy with God is like, because it's God who truly sees us the way we are, existentially naked, without any of our different disguises. Paul longed to stand before God stripped of any and all the pretenses like I long to stand before him stripped of my pretenses of husband and father and pastor and American and conservative, to find that the only cloak that I had remaining is sinner saved by grace. And then to find that that's more than enough to find myself basking in God's love. I said just last week that it's incredibly liberating to be able to see my own wretchedness and at the same time understand that it's never been a shock to God and it's never caused him to love me an iota less. But there's a hard part to growing this intimacy with Christ. The doorway to intimacy with God is oftentimes marked with one word and that word is "suffering."

Way back when we were in chapter one of Philippians we looked at Paul, he was starting to get this idea of suffering. If you remember it started when Paul cast the demon out of a woman and that starts a riot, Paul and his companion Silas, they wound up getting beaten and thrown into a Philippian jail. Paul and Silas are beaten bloody and they're placed in stocks. What do they do? They made a choice to rejoice. Acts tells us they sang. *Acts 16* says: *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.* So we ask how could it be that these beaten, bloodied and now tortured prisoners, how is it that they're singing? Well, they're singing because they had made a conscious choice to be joyful. They were singing because they counted it a privilege to suffer for the kingdom.

And we spoke about a principle that's at work here. You see all of us know this, we all know that life at some time is going to consist of difficult times and we're challenged by circumstances to believe that God really loves and cares for us. We just sang about it ten minutes ago. Each and every time we're challenged like that we face what the scripture describes as a binary choice. It's described by *Hebrews 12*. It says: *Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and by it, defiling many.* And what we see there is God calling us to make a choice, but it's not a choice

that you make in a vacuum. What God is saying here really is that the choice of grace or bitterness, it doesn't represent just two choices, it represents two completely different pathways to two completely different sources of energy. Anyone who's ever spent any time wallowing in bitterness knows that it, too, is a source of real energy. It's a deadly energy though. I mean it's like a toxic form of a sugar high. It may give you this burst of energy but whatever it gives you with the left hand is going to take away with the right. Bitterness and self-pity is poison. It can taste delicious as it cripples and kills you. Because bitterness derives its energy from within you, it weakens you as it convinces you it's giving you strength. It's also highly addictive. The more you indulge in it, the more bitter you will become. Deciding to choose the grace of God again is not a decision that's made in a vacuum. Instead it is a choice you make to tap into an unlimited energy resource that also changes you as you use it but this time for the better. None of us can choose the circumstances that we find ourselves under but we can choose the way we respond to those circumstances. If we choose bitterness, it will suck the strength out of us. If we choose grace, we tap into God's unlimited source of strength and grace can turn suffering into a blessing.

Suffering is going to come into the life of a Christian. It is guaranteed. But there's two very different ways that we respond to

it. There's actually two different sources. One is reactive, it's how we respond to suffering that comes from sickness and disease or relationship struggles that nobody chooses, they just happen to land in our lap. I mean it's there that we ask God for the grace to choose grace over bitterness. But there's another kind of suffering that's not reactive, it's proactive. It's suffering that you willingly choose to endure. Paul and Silas, they made a proactive choice, they both stood up for the truth of God and his word and at the end of the day they were bloodied, beaten and sitting in a dank cell, stretched out and tortured in stocks and yet they still trusted in the grace of God. They found that suffering had given them a new insight into their relationship with Christ.

Paul's reference to suffering in our text this morning, it's proactive. I mean it's actually a welcome for more suffering to come. He says: *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.* Well the suffering that Paul seemed to welcome was a form of political suffering. Remember, Paul's writing this letter from a jail cell. He's been in prison for refusing to acknowledge the lies of his government, that it was worthy of worship as opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ. And what Paul is lauding in his letter is not the physical benefits but the metaphysical benefits

of suffering. What Paul desired and what he actually found through suffering was actually the deepest longing of the human heart. That's a longing for intimacy with your Creator. And you know most people don't even know that this longing exists but the closer you draw to Christ, the more intensely that longing grows and Paul knew that precisely. Jesus himself said that that longing is literally what we were made for. And once we've truly tasted it, we will spend the rest of our lives pursuing it. Jesus said in *John 17*: *"And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."*

Here's where suffering comes into play. You see, we can't begin to scratch the surface of knowing the loveliness of Christ until we begin to fully grapple the extent with which God himself was willing to suffer for us. *2 Corinthians 5:21* says: *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* I can tell you that human minds cannot begin to grasp the depth of those words on our own.

Christ's suffering becomes real and our intimacy with him and his suffering becomes palpable only in times of suffering. I mean Paul's not a masochist, I mean, he and everyone else who is sane, they want to avoid suffering. It's just that in the midst of suffering you get invited into an intimacy with Christ that you can't get any other way. And I know that personally because I have

been there and I have done that and so have many of you. Paul and many others see the reward of suffering as far outstripping the risk. And one way that Paul found intimacy with Christ was through his willingness to suffer politically rather than live the lies that Rome insisted on.

Now I just finished a book last week that my sister recommended to me. It was written by Rod Dreher entitled "*Live Not By Lies.*" The title is a quote taken from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He was a Russian writer who became world famous after he was imprisoned in the Soviet Union for actually writing a private letter critical of Stalin. Solzhenitsyn wrote extensively of his experience of suffering in a Russian Gulag, and he was one of a long list of Soviet and eastern bloc Christians who suffered horribly at the hands of the atheistic totalitarian government that ruled the Soviet Union at the time. The lie that that entire culture lived under, the lie that Solzhenitsyn refused to live under was the same lie that Paul refused, that the state was god because there was no god. It was a lie that everyone was required to live by. And the extent you acquiesced to it was the extent that no matter how free you thought you were, you were enslaved. Paul and Silas experienced firsthand the freedom that comes when they refused to live under the lie that Rome was god and Jesus was not. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and a host of other believers suffered immensely for

refusing to live the very same lie packaged in the doublespeak of the Soviet Union's propaganda. And Dreher's book gives us insight as to how intense suffering opened up for Solzhenitsyn a new and deeper intimacy with Christ. This is what Dreher says:

"Bless those who persecute you," Jesus taught. Vengeance is easier to resist if you have that mind-set. In his masterwork, *The Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn reveals how he and his fellow inmates were beaten, humiliated, deprived of liberty, made to live in filth and freezing temperatures and crawling with lice, and to endure many other grotesque manifestations of communism's determination to create heaven on earth. That's why nothing in that epochal book's pages shocks more than these lines from Solzhenitsyn: 'And that is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me: 'Bless you, prison! Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!'

Solzhenitsyn's audacious claim was that suffering had refined him, taught him to love. It was only there, out of the experience of intense suffering, that the prisoner began to understand the meaning of life and first began to sense the good inside himself.

To be clear, there is nothing in the Gospels that requires Christians to seek out suffering. The Word of God is not a prescription for masochism. But the life of Christ, as well as the Old Testament's example of the prophets, compels believers to accept the impenetrable mystery that suffering, if rightly received, can be a gift. (Dreher, Rod. *Live Not by Lies* (p.194) Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition)

Dreher points out that those who are willing to be physically imprisoned for refusing to live in the lie, like Paul, were the most free and they were for the most part Christians. I mean it's amazing to me to read over and over again the accounts of those who suffered things beyond my comprehension who were absolutely convinced that they had been gifted and blessed through it by God. I mean Paul is no exception. Remember where he's writing this letter from, he's writing it from a dungeon. And yet instead of freedom all he wants is *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.* And *Live Not by Lies* uses the experience of these Christians as proof of the author's argument that suffering is in fact a blessing and not a curse, that it's a gift sent from God to those who he loves.

And here's where the book connects directly with us and our culture. See, Dreher's contention is that there are two types of totalitarian governments: There's the hard type and the soft type. Hard totalitarian governments use as their primary source, their primary weapon in shaping their citizens, they use fear. Those that are atheistic have an entire system that's based on a lie and the lie has to be propped up by using arrest and torture and imprisonment and execution to cow the population into accepting the lie as truth. But over against the idea of hard totalitarianism is the soft version. And soft totalitarianism governments, they no longer have to rely on arrest and torture and imprisonment in order to get their citizens to believe a lie. What soft totalitarians rely on is the citizen's *aversion* to suffering. An addiction, if you will, one that the church has fostered for many, many years. "God loves you and has a perfect plan for your life," it's absolutely true on one level. But like Solzhenitsyn and countless others have discovered, God's perfect plan for you may include imprisonment and torture and execution. This is something the American church is woefully unprepared for. Dreher said this. He said:

"In 2005, the sociologists of religion Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton coined the phrase Moralistic Therapeutic Deism to describe the decadent form that Christianity (and all faiths, in fact)

had taken in contemporary America. It consisted of the general belief that God exists, and wants nothing more from us than to be nice and to be happy. In therapeutic culture, which has everywhere triumphed, the great sin is to stand in the way of the freedom of others to find happiness as they wish. (Dreher, Rod. *Live Not by Lies* (page 12-13). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition)

You know years ago Aldous Huxley wrote a dystopian novel about the future. It was entitled *Brave New World* and in it he referred to what Christianity would become. And it was a devastating commentary that consisted of just three words of how he described what faith would become. He described it as "a Christianity without tears." Dreher describes how this is unfolding right now right here today by telling us where the title of the book comes from. This is a long quote, but just bear with me. He says:

"What is happening here? A progressive—and profoundly anti-Christian militancy—is steadily overtaking society; This spiritual power takes material form in government and private institutions, in corporations, in academia and media, and in the changing practices of everyday American life. It is empowered by unprecedented technological capabilities to surveil private life. There

is virtually nowhere left to hide. The old, hard totalitarianism had a vision for the world that required the eradication of Christianity. The new, soft totalitarianism does too, and we are not equipped to resist its sneakier attack. As we know, communism was militantly atheistic and declared religion to be its mortal enemy. The Soviets and their European allies murdered clergy and cast an uncounted number of believers, both ordained and lay, into prisons and work camps, where many suffered torture. Today? The Western world has become post-Christian, with large numbers of those born after 1980 rejecting religious faith. This means that they will not only oppose Christians when we stand up for our principles—in particular, in defense of the traditional family, of male and female gender roles, and of the sanctity of human life—but also they will not even understand why they should tolerate dissent based in religious belief. We cannot hope to resist the coming soft totalitarianism if we do not have our spiritual lives in order. This is the message of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the great anti-communist dissident, Nobel laureate, and Orthodox Christian. He believed the core of the crisis that created and sustained communism was not political but spiritual. After the publication of his Gulag Archipelago

exposed the rottenness of Soviet totalitarianism and made Solzhenitsyn a global hero, Moscow finally expelled him to the West. On the eve of his forced exile, Solzhenitsyn published a final message to the Russian people, titled 'Live Not by Lies!' In the essay, Solzhenitsyn challenged the claim that the totalitarian system was so powerful that the ordinary man and woman cannot change it. Nonsense, he said. The foundation of totalitarianism is an ideology made of lies. The system depends for its existence on a people's fear of challenging the lies. Said the writer, 'Our way must be: Never knowingly support lies!' You may not have the strength to stand up in public and say what you really believe, but you can at least refuse to affirm what you do not believe. You may not be able to overthrow totalitarianism, but you can find within yourself and your community the means to live in the dignity of truth. If we must live under the dictatorship of lies, the writer said, then our response must be: 'Let their rule hold not through me!' (Dreher, Rod. Live Not by Lies (p. xiv). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.)

Well as Dreher states, there are three major lies that are in our culture today that we are now being insisted -- it is now being

insisted that we live under these. There's the lie that says that babies in the womb are no different than a tumor; there's the lie that says male and female is an artificial construct changeable at will; and then there's the lie that says who you choose to love makes no difference whatsoever. But there's an additional lie to these three and it's the most dangerous of all, it's the lie that these lies don't matter. I have folks insist that even addressing this issue is majoring on minors. I mean after all Christ never said a word about homosexuality or gender or abortion. The fact is he did say words about all three but that's not the point. Folks think that we are obsessed with these three minor aspects of the gospel but it's not believers who are obsessed. It's the culture that has elevated these three points of disobedience to God as markers of what it now means to be free, to be woke, to be a functioning member of our culture.

I mean in ancient Rome the issue was accepting Caesar as God and rejecting Christ. In present day America there's almost no chance that Christians are going to be confronted with that demand to explicitly reject Christ, I mean that would be way too blatant. Instead we will be asked to live by lies such as the three we've just seen. Accept those three, abortion, gender and homosexuality and there's guaranteed more to come. Because our Christianity without tears is a Christianity unprepared to make any sacrifice

that causes personal pain. Understand also, if you are not willing to live with those three lies, you are going to suffer. I mean at a minimum you all know you're going to be considered a hater. If word gets out that you actually refuse these lies, you may well be canceled when it comes to social media. I mean in the last few weeks we've just seen dozens of conservative and Christian sites that have been canceled, sites like *Focus on the Family* or *Citizen GO* or *LifeSite*, they've all had their sites labeled hate speech. They've been deplatformed for one reason and one reason only: They refuse to live the lie. You may lose your job or your friends or your family and eventually your home and your goods because our culture has made these three lies part of the religious observance of what it means to be a citizen. And if you choose not to live by those lies, you are going to suffer.

Part of my role as pastor is to prepare each and every one of us for such a time as this. What is oftentimes as devastating a burden to those who have only known Christianity without tears is that our Christianity is with tears, but it's also a Christianity with joy. Dreher describes a past that may well be repeating itself and he discusses what happened to Baptists who are as close to what we are, in Russia. He says:

To be a Baptist in Soviet Russia was to know

that you were a permanent outsider. They endured it because they knew that truth was embodied in Jesus Christ, and that to live apart from him would mean living a lie. For the Baptists, to compromise with lies for the sake of a peaceful life is to bend at the knee to death.

"When I think about the past, and how our brothers were sent to prison and never returned, I'm sure that this is the kind of certainty they had," says the old pastor. "They lost any kind of status. They were mocked and ridiculed in society. Sometimes they even lost their children. Just because they were Baptists, the state was willing to take away their kids and send them to orphanages. These believers were unable to find jobs. Their children were not able to enter universities. And still, they believed."

The Baptists stood alone, but stand they did. If you have been disciplined in a faith that takes seriously the Apostle Paul's words that to suffer for Christ is gain and are prepared to live with reduced expectations of worldly success, it becomes easier to stand for the truth. (Dreher, Rod. Live Not by Lies (p. 13). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.)

So my question for us this morning is actually simple. It's have

you been disciplined in a faith that takes seriously the apostle Paul's words that to suffer for Christ is gain? Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Let's pray.

Father, again I acknowledge that what we are experiencing here now in this country is a pittance compared to what our brothers and sisters around the world have experienced. But Lord, we see what is growing on the horizon and we see what is happening and we want to be prepared. We don't want to have a Christianity without tears. We don't want Christianity with tears because we are afraid of suffering. We fear it and that's a legitimate fear. We want to believe far more and trust far more that you will give us the grace and the strength and the wisdom and the presence to be able to suffer even a little or a lot as this time approaches. We pray for your grace, we pray for your wisdom, we pray that you would give us the ability to trust you in all things, and we pray this in Jesus'

name. Amen.