

Hebrews 2.10

The Stewardship of Suffering

As we enter holy week and intentionally set our minds on the great and terrible last week of Christ and all of the many things He suffered for us, it is also very appropriate for us to spend some time considering just how His suffering shapes our own suffering; to ponder the part it plays in our lives, and in our service to the King. It bears earnest consideration and careful thought, for how we think about our suffering not only changes the experience, but it also changes both the sufferings themselves and us as well. Sorrow and suffering are sacred trusts, and how we handle them is a powerful form of stewardship. But with any stewardship the difference between faithful and faithless is but a hairsbreadth across. And it is so very easy for us to waste our suffering with a self-indulgent, foolish inward focus, rather than seeking to find the heart and the intention of the Father in giving us this particular suffering. And make no mistake, it is a gift, to be found worthy to suffer for the sake of His name, and for the purpose of His character being formed in us.

We are constantly battling a perspective challenge, for it is easy to spend our energy looking at the things which are lost, to mourn over the waste of our hopes, our dreams our potentials. But to do this is to desire the scraps instead of the sculpture. Michelangelo, while carving on a block of marble told his onlookers, "As the marble wastes, the image grows." And that is always what is going on in our lives, we are being shaped and fashioned into a specific image. The image of our elder brother, firstborn among many brethren, Christ Jesus our Lord. And we are told in Colossians 1.27 that "Christ in [us] is the hope of glory". Since a steward uses what his Master entrusts to Him for the purposes of his Master, let us consider this trust, God's tool that is so very powerful for the shaping of Christ in us. But remember that it is not our suffering alone that makes it so precious and powerful, it is our suffering in light of the suffering of our Savior which is the real issue.

I. HIS SUFFERING SHAPES OURS...

- a. He was the priest, the sacrifice, and the altar of His own consecration... for nothing else could

ever have lent value and worth to Him by its own nature, he would have conveyed HIS worth to them... Consider the words of Jesus to the Pharisees

Matthew 23.16 – 22

There is nothing that could ever have made Him worth more than He already was, but in His coming and living, suffering and dying He sanctifies every single one of those actions for us.

- b. He consecrated our lives, including our own sufferings in that baptism of His own...

Romans 6.3-11

- c. Our sufferings are needful and unavoidable –

Rom 8.28 - 29.

God has ordained them, as all things have been since the foundation of the whole of creation.

d. They are appointed for us to bear our share – to engage in the work of sharing the gospel with the nations.

Col 1.24 – 27

e. We have been frequently and adequately warned about the truth of this

Acts 14.22

2 Tim 3.12

Matthew 16.24-26

II. HIS SUFFERING SANCTIFIES OURS

i. He became our curse

Galatians 3.10 – 14

ii. His Death and Resurrection provide the way of escape for us in our own struggle with sin.

a. He has made all of the sufferings for the Gospel completely honorable.

He displayed the discrepancy between how the world sees our sufferings and how God sees it, and in so doing, helps us to see It the same way.

Heb 11.24 - 26

Phil 1.27 -30

1 Peter 4.14-16

- b. He has made all of our "regular" sufferings useful and profitable
 - i. No longer connected to wrath and judgement, but rather the loving discipline of our heavenly Father. A murderer is punished for the crime he has committed in the past, a child is disciplined for the good he will do in the future.
 - ii. All our access to God is no longer works but grace. We are not purchasing heaven with our suffering; we are not undergoing penance when we suffer. We are not atoning for our sin... to even suggest such a thing makes Christ's death a needless tragedy, and the

whole of God's' plan of salvation into a colossal mistake

- iii. No longer bitter, but rightly understood, they are sweet and wholesome to our frame. Consider Paul's words in

Romans 5.1 – 5

c. He has made all of them, both "sacred" and "secular", completely safe

- i. The wildness of our sufferings has been tamed
- ii. Nothing of real value will ever be lost
- iii. Nothing can separate us from the love of our Father

III. HIS SUFFERING GIVES US HOPE IN OURS

- a. He made a way through His own sufferings for us to pass through unto glory

- b. All of the suffering and pain, sorrow and misery of this benighted life, will all be swept away in the perfect light of His glorious morning!

Psalm 30.4 – 12

- c. Again, our perspective helps us to understand that the union that we share with Him in the likeness of His sufferings are part of the promise of our ultimate glorification.

Romans 8.18 – 25

- d. Part of that glory is the opportunity to give Him the worship of our suffering. Consider that this is the only place where you are permitted to suffer for Christ. In eternity you will love Him, worship Him, praise Him, and bow before Him as King forever... but there will be no suffering there, it is only here that you can share in that cup for the sake of His name.

Beloved, I urge you in light of all this, to strive to reframe your mind in regards to your suffering. It is an

investment in your eternal person, a chance to send forward something that will actually be retained when you leave this life. You have the unique opportunity to use it for growth or hide it in the ground and await the day of your Master's reckoning. Remember that your suffering is the chance to store up treasures where thieves do not break in and steal, and neither moths nor rust destroy!!