

The Master's Minister, p.4

By Jeff Noblit

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ephesians 3:12-13
Preached on: Sunday, June 25, 2017

Anchored in Truth Ministries

1915 Avalon Ave.
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

Website: www.anchoredintruth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth

Let's go to Ephesians again as we will conclude this I think great great section of Scripture. Is there any section that is not great? But powerful section where the Apostle Paul gets to this part of the book and he's getting down to brass tacks. He's getting down to, "Well, this is how this is going to work out." He has given them all the splendid and glorious truths of the doctrine of salvation and God has been about this from before the foundation of the world, he has those he has foreknown and predestined, then he sent his Son to seal their redemption, and then he calls them and he uses the Spirit to seal them. We've been through all those glorious truths, unpacked it the best we could, and now he comes to this more practical part of the book as if he's saying, "Now here's the practical way he intends for this to work out." Well, not only intends, that he is indeed working this out in time and space history.

The eternal mind designed all this and how it would be implemented in history and one of the cornerstone aspects of that is he has his ministers. The Master has his ministers. God has ordained that the primary means of his building the church is through called men and primarily men called to preach. Other men may be led to full-time vocational ministry, the church identifies that and discerns that, but only God calls men to preach. And Paul talks about how that was true for him as we begin in Ephesians 3:1 and I'm going to read it very quickly in review. so you we'll not be here that long tonight.

Verse 1, "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles." Now I call this part, "God captures and calls his ministers." Paul says, "I am a prisoner of Christ Jesus." Two aspects there, he literally was a prison and imprisoned for the ministry of the Gospel, but also that Christ has apprehended me and called me to this work. On one occasion Paul said, "Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel. It's a compulsion. It's a calling I cannot get away from."

And then the last part of verses 1 and verse 2, he says, "for the sake of you Gentiles-- if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you." The stewardship of grace. God has given Paul a special empowering and God called preachers having a special gifting, if you will, or empowering. Now, they are not special. They are not more saintly or holy. That's not what we're saying but they have a unique and different gifting, our stewardship of grace, Paul would say, to carry out the ministry. That is that this office of preaching and pastoring is not dependent upon a man's

personality, natural gifts or charisma. Now, it would be understood that God would give that person some natural perhaps communication gifts or abilities but nevertheless, the aspect that makes that ministry effectual is God's grace empowering them.

How do you discern that? Well, pulpit committees. In our church that would be the elder body. If they were looking for a preaching pastor, they would seek God and say, "God, you're going to have to show us. We don't know how to dig one up. We don't know how find one out. You're going to have to lead us and show us the man who is to be the preaching pastor for this church, the man you have empowered and particularly the man that you have set apart from our church in particular."

Now we get to verses 3 through 8. Let's read those, "that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief." Paul says, "I was given a revelation that didn't come from men."

Verse 4, "By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men," that's the Old Testament times, it was veiled, "as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific," and here's the glorious truth of this new work God's doing called building his church, "that the Gentiles," verse 6, "that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ." So he says this Gospel message I received by revelation, this Gospel includes this magnanimous thing that was veiled before, not completely but to a great extent veiled before, and that is that God is saving people through the agency of his Son and through the preaching of the word about his Son and he is doing this among Jews and Gentiles and forming for himself in these last days his true final people. We call it the church. And God gives his ministers the message, that is, that revelation, that Gospel that they are required and responsible to preach which indeed converts souls and then builds his church.

Now, let me go on to verse 12 now and that is new material. Verses 12 and 13, let's read those together.

12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

13 Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf,
for they are your glory.

So Paul talks to them about the tribulations he has on their behalf, in other words, in the ministry because they were his ministry, the church is his ministry. So V. is that God designed that suffering would accompany the ministry. God designed that suffering would accompany the ministry. Now, generally that's true for all saints of God. If you're called to follow Jesus Christ in this world, there is going to be an element of suffering but primarily the application is to the men called into the ministry or to the pastor. It's a

calling to suffering. Now maybe not all the time and certainly not all of the time the same, but it is a calling to suffering.

Just a few verses here to remind us of how, this is one of those truths. I was meditating on this this afternoon, how regular, how I guess I could even say abundant the New Testament is, I guess you could say the whole Canon of Scripture is with the teaching that faithful ministers will suffer. Jesus talked about it. The Apostle Paul talked about it at some length, at considerable length. Amos in the next couple of sessions in Amos, Amos is going to talk about the ridicule and the persecution he received. But you don't find preachers today talking about it and perhaps that has always been true. I don't know and I'm going to get to why I think that is in just a moment. Well, let me throw in one reason why I think it is: I think far too many pastors, how shall I say it, they are just pastoring so poorly they're not stirring up any problems. The weight of the doctrine and the truth and the convictions about what they're doing just kind of flows with the flow of the world.

You know, Billy Sunday, the old evangelist, do you remember the name Billy Sunday? Some of you maybe read about him or heard about him. I wouldn't agree with all of Billy Sunday's theology but I think God used him to win some souls and Billy Sunday, you know, he was a pro baseball player and he got saved and he was a hard hard preacher and they said, "Billy Sunday, you stroke the fur on the cat the wrong way." He said, "The cat's going to hell. If he'll turn around, I'll be stroking it the right way." And that's kind of the abrasive aspect of faithful ministering. Look, pastors shouldn't go out and try to stir something up. You trust me, you be faithful to the book and it will get stirred up. It's just going to happen.

But it is so abundantly taught in Scripture. Matthew 5:10 and 11, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you," not if but, "when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." Jesus said, "Blessed are you when it happens." Now he's talking primarily, I think, to leaders but to all Christians. "Blessed are you when this happens to you. It's going to happen some." Young people, it's going to happen at school some. I mean, don't go out and try just preaching in people's faces but you just be real about loving Christ and honoring the Scriptures and that's going to happen some.

John 15:18 through 21. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you." He said, "Because you are a chosen one of mine and I've given you a new heart for another world other than just this temporary world, they just hate you for it."

Verse 20, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me," they nailed him to a cross, by the way, "they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me." Now, mind you, the context of this is the religious establishment of the day. The context of this was

the "Bible believers" of the day, the Jews, primarily the Pharisees. So don't you be shocked if people who call themselves Bible believing evangelicals are sometimes your enemies. These were the most Bible believing people there were in the day, the Jews and certainly the Pharisees, and that's the context of who he is talking about.

1 Corinthians 4:12 in Paul's ministry, "we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled," not if we're reviled, when we're reviled, "we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure." So over and over again the New Testament teaches us that this is somewhat expected. There are many other verses we could also look at.

So Paul comes to this last aspect of talking about the Master's minister and he says, "Don't let it upset you guys about my tribulations, what I'm going through in the ministry, because I'm going through it for you. And I don't know any better way to say it than that God has ordained all this to work this way." By the way, this isn't going to be a high five, slap your buddy on the back and laugh sermon tonight. It's a little more sobering than that and that's the way some aspects of Scripture are.

In 2 Corinthians 5:18, the Bible says we have been given "the ministry of reconciliation." And that's what Paul was, he was in that business of preaching that Gospel whereby men are reconciled to God and that's against the course of the world. The course of the world is to be separate from God, be in rebellion against God. The spirit of the age you and I live in today is every man does what's right in his own eyes, every man is his own god, every man decides for himself what his values will be, and we are rescuing men out of that into a God-ward perspective and that causes conflict.

Now he says something interesting here because I think it's in great balance with this concept of suffering is a part of the ministry. He says in verse 12 before he gets to the fact of his tribulations on their behalf in verse 13, "in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in him." So on the one hand he says we do have this unique calling that includes some suffering but, he said, by the way, we have bold and confident access to God and that really makes it all worth it. That really makes it all worth it.

In Jesus Christ our Lord, we have this free and unrestricted access to God and we have no parallel in our thinking but it's much like a child went to his father. I had sort of a rule at my home, I have my study at home and when my girls were little, I always made it a point if they ever came in to at least give them a little while. I wouldn't just yell at the door and say, "Don't come in here, I'm studying." I'd let them come in and sit in my lap and we'd piddle a little bit and pretty soon they wanted to do something else anyway, but I wanted them to know that they had access to their daddy. Now, none of you could have come in there and sat in my lap because I'm not your daddy, but they could and that's kind of the picture that Paul says, "We do have this calling to difficulty and suffering but we do have this bold and confident access to the Father."

Just a few cross references to bear out how precious this is. Hebrews 2:17 and 18, "Therefore, He," that's Jesus, "had to be made like His brethren in all things," Now you did notice that they were the brethren before his was made like them. Not just humans but

his brethren. That's election. "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." Think of all the ways that you are tempted. Think of all the ways you face trials and troubles. Think of all the different things that mess you up, get you off track, cause you to be jealous or angry or despondent or anxiety ridden. What Paul is saying is the Son of God put on human flesh like the children, the ones he loved before the foundation of the world, the ones he came to die for and save, he put on human flesh and he walked this earth and walked through the same things yet without sin and invites you today to come to him because he gets what you get. He feels what you feel. That's what he's saying. So he says think about what you've got. You've got God Incarnate welcoming you and he is a God who has come to earth so he could feel and experience what you're feeling and experiencing. What an inviting, what an encouraging aspect of truth that is.

Hebrews 4:14 through 16, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." In all of your blunderings and all of your failings and all of your wrong thinking and all of the ways you let yourself get all twisted in knots and pulled away by this and that, you can just run to Jesus and say, "Jesus, I'm a mess! I'm just a mess!" And you have a sympathetic high priest who says, "Welcome, my child. Welcome. I've been waiting for you. Let me love on you a while." That's the picture I think Paul wants us to get here when he says we have boldness, verse 12, and confident access through faith in him.

Hebrews 7:26 through 28, "For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests," that's the earthly ones, "to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever." What a comfort we have. We have bold and confident access to the Father through him in our times of troubles and weakness and sickness and need.

We don't have, I remember some years back the pope because it was Easter had heard confessions from 10 people in like six different countries and we're all supposed to go, "Wow, what a pope!" Well, my high priest hears the intercession of millions of people all at one time and sympathizes with them as the Lord God Almighty and the Savior of their souls. Aren't you glad we don't have to ring up Rome and say, "Can you get me in touch with God?" No, you just cry out in Jesus' name and God listens immediately.

So as we grow in the word and our faith grows, we enjoy more and more of this grand and unspeakable privilege. I hope that somehow as you're growing, this grips you, this

grabs you, and something in your soul says, "Wow, that's wonderful. That's wonderful that I have that kind of access to God through Jesus Christ." You know, as we discover the glories of his person, as we discover more of the efficacy of his work, as we discover more the certainty of his love, then the more fully we will enjoy the free and unrestricted access to the Father.

Once again, that's why faithful study and preaching of the word is so important because in 1,000 lifetimes, I could not unpack for you everything about the glories of the person of Jesus Christ. And you don't need to just learn a few things but you need to learn everything you can about how glorious he is. In 1,000 lifetimes, I could never unpack for you in my preaching all that there is about the efficacy or the effectiveness of his work on your behalf. He came here to work to save you and there is glories upon glories, dimension upon dimension, precept upon precept, wonder upon wonder about that. I hope as we go through books of the Bible you sit there sometimes and say, "Man, I hadn't thought about that! Wow, I didn't realize that!" It's glorious. I told you before you've let me study more than most churches ever let a pastor study and I'm still blown away by the stuff the word of God teaches us about the glories of his person, the efficacy of his work and the certainties of his love.

Haven't the last couple of three weeks if you've been listening, have you been doing expository listening? Have y'all been studying anything about that? Haven't some of the aspects of God's eternal love for his own sheep kind of blown you away? Now listen to me, listen to me: when you're troubled and you think you've blown it so bad and you're just a colossal mess up, just a colossal dunce, and just an evil and vile person, when you sit back, can you contemplate afresh somehow in incomparable divine wisdom and in love that's beyond my capacity to understand, he set his eternal love on me before the foundation of the world and caused it to be that I was born of this man and this woman, he caused it to be that I grew up, he caused it to be that I heard the Gospel, caused it to be through the Gospel and the effectual work of the power of the Holy Spirit that I was regenerated, came to repentance in faith, and he is causing it to be through the fellowship of the church, the preaching of the word, my own devotion to the word of God in growth and grace that I'll be sanctified, and he is going to cause it to be that I'll be glorified one day. He loves me so very much so when I'm at the end of myself, I can just know I've got confident access to him.

Can I tell you something? Are you listening to me? Your sin has never shocked him. It has never shocked him. He knew everything about you before you were ever born and chose you as his own and we need to grow to grasp the wonders and the glories of that very truth.

Now, he comes to verse 13 after talking about this glorious bold and wonderful confident access we have to God and then he says, "therefore." In other words, considering all that we've learned so far, I ask you not to lose heart. He's telling the believers in Ephesus, "I'm the only real pastor you've had, though I haven't been very personal there, I haven't personally been there all the time." But he's the only real pastor they have had and he said, "I know you're hearing about what I'm suffering. I know that you're hearing that I'm

in prison and I don't want you to be discouraged by these circumstances that attend the ministry." We have reason to maintain a habitually joyous spirit. You see, the ministry that brings suffering also brings glory to those who come to God through Christ. I think what Paul is saying is the suffering is just not that big a deal when I consider all that God is accomplishing through the ministry of the Gospel that includes some suffering. That's the way I think he's packaging it because he says, "I don't want you to be too upset about the sufferings I'm going through," he uses the word tribulations, "on your behalf." That's pretty interesting, isn't it? On your behalf.

You see, God gave his Son for you and he puts his ministers through suffering for you. Did you hear that? God gave his Son for you and he puts his ministers through suffering for you. Paul didn't suffer for Paul, Paul suffered for the church. Now, while it's true that all Christians will suffer for the Gospel and for the church, but not in the dimension that we're talking about here. This is primarily pointed to ministers and that calling to suffering.

Some of you, many of you, have prayed for years to have a faithful, glory of God focused, Christ honoring, Bible saturated pastor and God perhaps, I hope in grace, has answered that prayer, but God says that will include suffering. That's what it's going to take for me to keep the pride out of this man enough that I can use him like he needs to be used for your sake.

Paul was suffering in prison for bringing the Gospel to the Ephesians. There is a close parallel truth in Colossians 1:24 where Paul says, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings," here it is again, "for your sake." I rejoice in my sufferings because it's for you. That's what a minister does, he suffers and in his suffering, his suffering is kind of like the travails of a woman in childbirth. His suffering births more into the church. Look, not in any way am I drawing some parallel to Catholicism and popism whereby the church is responsible for the bride, or for salvation primarily in the building up of the bride. No, I'm just saying in God's purposes, he has ordained that the church, a true church is birthed and grows and matures accompanied by and helped along by the suffering of the minister he calls to pastor that church.

Let me read it again, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body," now listen, "which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." Paul says, "I am suffering and I'm filling up what was lacking in Christ's afflictions or in Christ's suffering."

"Wait a minute, pastor, that's not our theology. We know the Bible teaches that Christ's vicarious atoning work on the cross was fully effectual and completed." Yes, that's referring, though, to redemptive sufferings. Your redemption was paid in full when Jesus died but the actual regenerative work requires suffering on the parts of individuals to see that actually happen. So the redemptive suffering finished by Christ, but the regenerative sufferings, that which brings individuals to faith in Christ requires suffering on the part of God's ministers.

When I studied through this and was thinking over this, I thought about the men who I've studied and read about through the years and I couldn't find a one who didn't talk about seasons of suffering. I remember studying about the old Puritan, Thomas Boston in the late 17th century, how difficult many of his pastorates were and some of the historians record that he walked bowed down. He walked bowed down because he was under such a load in his difficult pastorates that he carried, but some of Thomas Boston's writings have helped me stay in the ministry today. His suffering helped your church through me.

George Whitefield, one of my heroes, he was a Calvinist Methodist. Hardly any of those left. But he was a Calvinist Methodist of the Great Awakening of the 18th century and he was hated. He was a member of the Church of England and he was hated by the clergy of the Church of England because he would go to their pulpits and thunder the Gospel of repentance and faith, thunder the need for a true, regenerate, born again experience and they didn't want him to do that. They wanted everybody to feel they're okay because they were sprinkled as babies and he'd say, "That's not good enough. You'd better know that you're born again." And people started getting genuinely converted and lots of people were getting saved. Then he went back to England and ministered and came back to America. As a matter of fact, he and John and Charles Wesley shook up the whole 13 colonies. It was just a Great Awakening, just untold numbers of souls swept into the kingdom.

And one time, he and John Wesley got on the outs. Of course, John Wesley was the Arminian and John Wesley stole his whole church from him by the time he got back to America, and just had muskets blown up in his face and his face would be black and charred and commonly rocks, boulders thrown at him while he would preach in outdoor meetings. Just crazy stuff.

Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards, if you haven't read some of Jonathan Edwards, you ought to, perhaps one of the most brilliant intellectuals American soil has ever known. What a powerful godly man. His grasp, his knowledge and his grasp of the English language was phenomenal. He wrote the sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Do they still require that in English Literature? Anybody know? I don't know if they do or not, but they used to have to read that. I don't know why English Literature never required people to read Spurgeon because Spurgeon is the master of the English language. No question about it.

But Jonathan Edwards, this great preacher, he wrote this sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," and it just swept through New England and it was part of a great revival and a Great Awakening and the man that shook literally the whole early continent of America with the Gospel and a brilliant brilliant man was fired by his church in his 25th year of his pastorate over a silly doctrinal issue that they were clearly wrong on. And what a difficult blow that was to his life and his ministry.

Charles Simeon in the late 18th and early 19th century. He was the pastor of the Holy Trinity Church at Cambridge University. Pam and I got to visit there a couple three years ago and got to see the church where he pastored. He was the guy that was so hated by the

church in the university, it was years, all of it was Church of England and Anglicanism and he was assigned to that church but he was an ardent evangelical. He would preach the Gospel. They didn't want that. And he would talk about how many years he walked across campus before anybody would walk beside him. Finally one day, one person walked beside him and it was a big deal. And back in those days, remember that you bought your own pew. You'd pay for your own pew and you had the key to it. Now I don't know why they did that but they did. You'd have doors on the pew and you'd have the key and literally the whole church locked the doors and wouldn't come if he was going to preach. That's their pastor.

So the people who came to hear Charles Simeon would have to stand in the aisles and they'd stand in the aisles and hear him preach because there was nowhere to sit and it was the custom of the church elders to decide who would preach the evening sermon and it was understood, though, our pastor will also preach the evening sermon but for 12 years they picked a man who was contrary to the doctrines of their own pastor to fill his pulpit on Sunday night. For 12 years he had to sit there and hear some heretic preach in his own pulpit and Charles Simeon, somebody asked him one day, said, "How have you held up? How have you endured this?" And he said, "You know, I figured if you're going through a thick hedge of bushes, if you can get your head and shoulders through, the rest is going to get through too." And he said, "That's just..." I remember hearing somebody who was, well, he wasn't actually playing the role of Simeon but he was doing Simeon's biography and Charles Simeon, one of his favorite phrases was "Brethren, we must not mind a little suffering."

Spurgeon, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the 19th century pastor over in London who to this day, his commentaries and his writings are about the most published in the world. If you're an atheist, you ought to read Spurgeon because his capacity to use the English language is unparalleled. Spurgeon loved God, was deeply committed to Christ, and Spurgeon used to go through deep bouts of depression. He was hated by the Arminians in London. He was hated by the hyper-Calvinists in London and the Church of England folks because he was kind of a separatist, a Baptist. And he was immensely popular and the newspaper would often have his face on the front of it in some kind of caricature, in some kind of ridicule of him. And he went through deep depression. One time Spurgeon said, "In the castle of despair, there's a dungeon and that's where I live."

Spurgeon spent the last half of his ministry on the French Riviera and he was not vacationing. That's where they sent sick people to go breathe the salt air and they were thinking that would help heal him because he was just unable physically to keep carrying on in the pulpit from the weight. Just a few months before his death, he was quoted as saying, "The fight is killing me." Are you encouraged?

Martyn Lloyd-Jones's book "Preachers and Preaching," Martyn Lloyd-Jones was also a pastor in England and great expositor. His commentaries are still very very popular. And Lloyd-Jones helped me with a lot of my thinking in the pastorate and he would talk about how he would get down and get discouraged and he would just get on a train and he and his wife would go across Europe and visit museums. That just refreshed his soul and of

all weird, odd things, a redneck like myself, I love museums. You can put me in a museum and it just refreshes me. I just like to go and look at that stuff. I'm just fascinated by it. But Lloyd-Jones had to do that to deal with the difficulties he bore in the ministry.

Then Dr. John MacArthur. It's been many years ago, I flew to California and he was very gracious and kind to me. Now we're not buddies but he knows about our work and he's a kind man and I didn't know anybody I could talk to that was trying to do the things we were trying to do but him. Literally I knew nobody else that had pastored at any length that was trying to lead a church in the things we would call are biblically true or healthy things. And I went out there and asked him, "How is it working? How did you do it?" He didn't really tell me anything about the difficulties it took him to get there because he was way ahead of me. And I remember leaving kind of discouraged. I thought, "This guy should have been able to help me and he didn't say much about those things." Then later I learned he actually has a message where he outlines some of the stuff. I mean, he was almost fired one time because he took a teenage boy into his home just to help him out and he was a runaway kind of kid, and the kid spread all kind of rumors and lies against him in the church. And he had a great percentage of his church that hated him for a long time and there were splits and divisions. When I found that out later, I wanted to go and choke him or something. I thought, "Why didn't you tell me that that's a part of the ministry?"

And it's really kind of interesting how the Bible says a lot about this but a lot of preachers don't say much and I thought, "I think I know why." Let me tell you why I think that's true: because if you're faithful and you have seasons of suffering, it leads to glorious seasons of blessing.

Thomas Boston, whose book, "The Crook in the Lot," he's an old Puritan and in his book "The Crook in the Lot," he means in the lot of your life, there is a crook in it that you didn't see coming. There is something happening and it's messed you up and it's blown your mind and it's broken your heart and he says, "What I figured out is if God puts you through a lot as a younger man, you've probably got the big stuff done for your latter years." And I held onto that and that has been my experience, that the latter years, my last third let's say that I'm in now, I'm experiencing wonder sweet love and blessings in the pastorate and once you start tasting that, you forget the other.

I was counseling a pastor this week and he was talking about some things he was going through and thank you for letting me have the time to try to encourage these men and mentor these men because it does take time and it does take energy and I could be doing other things for you, but you let me do that for them. But anyway, in counseling him as he talked about the difficulties, I had to stop and make myself think on those days that we've all been through here because you just kind of forget them.

But the Bible doesn't let us forget them and so for whatever reason in the Scripture, it's very clear to point out to us to not let us be shocked or think it's unusual. Now I've seen this happen. I've met more than a few deacon boards or bodies who had the notion that our job is to help keep God's pastor humble. Utter foolishness. As a matter of fact, the

Bible declares right the opposite. Your responsibility is to do all you can to be a blessing to him. The difficulties will come. You don't have to be difficult on him. You'll be judged by whether or not you helped hold him up under it. But the suffering will come. It'll come for me, it'll come for you, it comes for all of us but I hope to a great degree in God's grace, that if we as a people have been faithful and have endured some things for God's kingdom and God's glory, that perhaps we've gotten a lot of the big stuff done. Amen? Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil," there's toil in it, "is not in vain in the Lord."

Well, this wasn't happy church night, was it? Woo, boy, were we blessed at church tonight! Well, that's what the book says. We're going to take what the book says next and we're going to just unpack it and look at it. How about that?

Romans 8:17-18, "if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Listen, friend, we serve a transcendent God and we are transcendent people. We transcend this life and I'm not signing up for any extra suffering. In fact, I've told our elders if we face some of the stuff that we've already faced, I'm out. If it happens again, I'm gone. I'm saying that tongue-in-cheek but I'm not signing up for any, I'm not out to prove anything. But whatever we face and we deal with for the truth, it's just temporary. We transcend that. Our connection, our home, our joys, our treasure, our eternity is not here.

I don't know where I found this little statement: I suffer due to a sinful heart. I suffer due to a sinful heart. A heart that is ever prone to look and treasure things other than God. A heart that's prone to look at and treasure things other than God, the things of the temporal world. Now think about that. All of our suffering is always connected to how much we're treasuring things other than God. You can't really suffer if God's your only treasure because he can't be taken away from you. He can't move. He can't be dissolved. He can't be abandoned. He can't be pushed away. We just get our hearts and minds on things other than God and that's the dimension to which we have a capacity to actually suffer.

But that's the way Paul ends this whole section. He just tells the church at Ephesus, "Don't be surprised, don't get shook up about my situation. This is just part of the process." And you know, I don't know what the future may hold. I feel like our generation has really failed the next couple because they're not going to inherit the America we've had and there may be more outward suffering. But one thing you need to understand about suffering is don't measure one man's to another because we're all different. One man can face the kind of thing that because the way he's raised or what he's been through, it's terrible suffering for him and for you it wouldn't be much. But God knows what he needs. Another man faces something over here that would be huge suffering but for me it may not be much at all. God knows how to get our attention and how to make us effective in the Gospel ministry. So some of you young men feel God's

called you in the ministry, don't be afraid. Don't shy away from it but don't be alarmed when these things come your way.