

# Power for Pain

## The Road to Heaven Part 5 Philippians 3:10-11 7-31-2016

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Summary: Paul desires these three elements of knowing Christ: power (the kind that gives life through a relationship), partnership with Christ in the work of redemption by suffering with him, and being conformed to the pattern of his death (living like he died, selflessly, putting others' interests ahead of your own in obedience to God). The destination is the resurrection of the righteous which can only be reached through the road of suffering with Christ.

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**Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.**

## Introduction

It stands to reason that if you are living in God's universe, the most important thing is to know God. J. I. Packer put it well: "Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord."<sup>1</sup> We have been studying through the book of Philippians and we are in the middle of chapter 3, which is all about knowing Christ. See if you can pick up on any particular theme in this paragraph:

**Philippians 3:8 ... I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ ... for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in [Christ], ... through faith in Christ ... 10 I want to know Christ in the power of [Christ's] resurrection and the fellowship of [Christ's] sufferings, becoming like [Christ] in his death**

I am going to go way out on a limb and say this paragraph has something to do with knowing Christ. And as I told you before, this not just information about Jesus; it is experiential, relational knowledge. Just as you can only know the taste of great food by eating it, or the glory of great music by hearing it, or the magnificence of a sunset by seeing it – so it is with knowing Christ. He must be known by experience or he is not known.

In fact, the illustrations of seeing light and tasting food and hearing music – all those fall short of this kind of knowing, because knowing a person is so complex and multifaceted. There are so many different

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<sup>1</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 34.

levels and facets to knowing a person. You can know his history. You can know his characteristics. You can know his thoughts and feelings. You can know his attitudes, motives, inclinations, preferences, desires, dreams, aspirations, failures, successes, values, beliefs. You can experience what that person is like in a thousand different contexts. When he is laughing, or when he is scared, or excited, angry, perplexed, discouraged, hopeful, irritable, exhausted, asleep, interested, uninterested. So many ways to know a person. You can know a person in the sense of experiencing what they do. So if someone asks you, “Do you know Dr. So-and-so?” and you say, “Yeah, in fact, he’s my doctor. He has treated me many times.” Then you not only know *that* he is a doctor, but you have experienced him *as* a doctor. You know firsthand what his doctoring is like. It’s one thing to know a judge personally; it’s another to experience him as your judge. It’s one thing to know a man who is a father; it’s another to experience him as your father. The more deeply you know someone, the more enmeshed you become in that person’s life.

Now, you apply all of that to knowing Christ, and the depth and richness and complexity of it increases exponentially. First, because unlike any other person, Christ is infinite. And second, because Christ is the only person who is always with you. In fact, he is with you and paying attention to you even when you’re not even paying attention to yourself – all night while you’re asleep. And we have all had different experiences with Christ. Some of you know Christ very deeply and intimately in many different ways, but you haven’t yet come to know him as the God of all comfort. You have read about his comfort, but you have no idea what it feels like to be racked with pain and then receive sweet, satisfying, joy-giving comfort from him even while the pain is as severe as ever. Some are just now being introduced to that side of Christ.

Some of you know him intimately as a comforter – you have experienced him that way many times, but you have only a superficial knowledge of him as the awesome judge. Some of you know him as one who can redeem anything – make something beautiful out of the most horrific mess. Others have heard about that, but haven’t experienced that side of Jesus yet. I have heard about him being a father to the fatherless, but I’ve never really experienced much of that side of him since I had a loving earthly father. But some of you have experienced him as a caretaker and protector and guide and disciplinarian and role model and provider in times when your earthly father was falling miserably short in those areas. Some of you have known him as a husband to the widow. Some of you have known him as the father in the story of the Prodigal Son, who ran to you and embraced you when you returned to him after a time of rebellion that you thought was unrecoverable and unforgivable. Others haven’t really known much of that side of him because you were saved at an early age and never had a period of extreme rebellion.

The whole New Testament is really just a whole lot of discussion of the various aspects of knowing Christ. But in our text today, we are just going to look at three of those aspects.

### **10 I want to know Christ and...**

That word **and** should probably be translated “*in*.” He is not saying, “I want to know Christ, and I also want these other things.” He is saying, “I want to know Christ in these three ways...” And the three aspects of knowing Christ that he points to are power, partnership, and pattern.

## **Power**

### **10 I want to know Christ in the power of his resurrection**

Paul wanted to know Christ in a way that involved Paul with the power of Christ’s resurrection. He wanted power. Have you ever wondered why some people are attracted to Satanism? Every time I have talked to someone who is getting into Satanism, their reason is always the same: power. Satanism promises supernatural power to control people, hurt the people who hurt you, control your circumstances, etc. Very often young people are attracted to it because they want that power. And Satan does give them a certain amount of power. But it’s nothing like resurrection power. The most powerful Satanist in the world is still very limited. The best they could ever do is serve in one of Satan’s strongholds. But we have power to demolish those strongholds. When a person gains Christ, they go from impotence to

omnipotence overnight. And that is what Paul wanted. But he didn't just want power from Christ – like you get electricity from the power company. He wanted an infusion of Christ's power that would come through a certain kind of relationship with Christ. The day you become a Christian, you know Jesus Christ by faith and you have access to the power of his resurrection that enables you to live the Christian life. And the closer you get to Christ in your relationship with him, the more of that power you get.

This is so much better than legalism. Trying to make yourself a good person by following rules – not only does it not work, but it's incredibly draining. But knowing Christ isn't draining – it is empowering.

## Taking Hold of the Power

The Bible often speaks of the fact that our power to live the Christian life comes from our connection with Christ's death and resurrection. The clearest description of that is in Romans 6.

**Romans 6:4 Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead ... we too may live a new life.**

Someday we will actually be raised from the dead physically, but that is not what this is talking about. This is a spiritual joining with Christ's resurrection that gives us a new kind of life here and now.

**5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with ... 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, ... death no longer has mastery over him. 10 ... but the life he lives, he lives to God.**

So as Christians we have access to spiritual power because of our connection to Christ's resurrection. We have access to that power, but we don't actually have the power until we take some steps to cooperate with it.

**11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life**

So the power is available, but there are things we need to do to experience that power. If you don't do what is necessary to take hold of that power, you don't have the power. And we all understand that, right? Very often we feel like we have no special power at all in fighting against sin. How can that be? If we are united with Christ in a way that gives us resurrection power to live the Christian life, why do we stumble so much in living the Christian life? It's because the power isn't automatic. If you just look at my track record of how often I lose the battle against sin, it's obvious that this power doesn't just automatically activate itself. There is something I need to do to take hold of it. What? The answer is in our passage right here in Philippians 3 - knowing Christ. The whole point of this paragraph is to describe what Paul means when he says, **I want to know Christ.** You gain more of the power of Christ's resurrection when you know Christ more. And so Paul wants to know Christ more so that he can gain more access to that power. So if you want more power, strive to go deeper in your knowledge of Christ.

## Go Deep

Never be satisfied with the current depth of your knowledge of Christ. When I asked you as a congregation a couple months ago why you come this church instead of another church, that was the #1 reason people gave – we come here because of the focus on going deep. We're not satisfied with a superficial knowledge of Scripture or superficial approach to worship; we want to go deeper. We are not content to swim around in the shallows when it comes to spiritual relationships in the church, or prayer, or serving in ministry – we want to keep progressing deeper and deeper into the ocean of knowing Christ.

## Life

So before we move to the second aspect of knowing Christ, I have one more question. Why does Paul say the power of Christ's resurrection? Why not just say he wants power from Christ? Any power from God is going to be omnipotent power, so any power from God will be plenty. Why specify resurrection power?

Evidently Paul doesn't just want power, but power that's connected to life. The kind of power and strength that comes from life and health and strength and vigor, as opposed to the weakness you feel when you are dying. Imagine a woman who gets sick, and it gets worse and worse until she finally goes to the doctor, and he tells her, "This doesn't look good. It's shutting down your organs. Unless we can cure it somehow, you're not going to make it." But they can't figure out what's causing it, so she just keeps going downhill.

But then she meets someone. It's the man of her dreams, and she falls in love. They spend lots of time together, just getting to know each other. And after a week or so, she's actually looking and feeling a lot better. She goes back to the doctor, and he's amazed. He says, "Wow - you're definitely improving." And she can tell – she feels stronger and healthier by the day.

At first she writes it off as coincidence, but then that man goes away on a business trip for a couple weeks, and she goes right back downhill again. And when he returns, she gets better. The doctor doesn't know what to make of it. He just says, "I can't explain it, but somehow, your interactions with this man are having a healing, life-giving effect on you."

I don't know if something like that could actually happen medically, but I think it does illustrate the idea Paul has in mind. He doesn't just want power. He wants a relationship with Jesus Christ that infuses spiritual life into him – that quality of life that just moves through your whole being like yeast permeating a lump of dough, and giving strength to your spirit, fortitude to your will, integrity to your conscience, power to your resolve, liveliness to your godly emotions, sweetness to your desires, clarity to your understanding, insight to your heart, and courage to your soul. Paul says, "I want that!" He had it, but he wanted more of it. He wanted to go deeper in knowing Christ, and get more life-giving power.

## Partnership

Power for what? Power to work miracles? Power to control people? Power to control circumstances, so that things work out well? Power to avoid suffering? What kind of power does Paul want?

### **10 I want to know Christ in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings**

What he wants is power to suffer. Grammatically, the **power** and the **fellowship** are closely connected.<sup>2</sup> They aren't just two things in a list. They go together. It is power for the purpose of **fellowship** with Christ's sufferings.

The word translated **fellowship** (your Bible might say **sharing**) – the Greek word is *koinonia*. It's the same word he used back in chapter 1 that was translated **partnership**.

### **Philippians 1:4 ... I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel**

I think he is using that word in the same way here. Paul wants to know Christ in a partnership where he partners with Christ in Christ's sufferings. And that makes for a really hard life, which is why he needs the power.

If you can see your suffering as partnership with Christ instead of as rotten luck, it will change your life. Joining with Christ in his suffering is one of the great privileges of being a Christian.

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<sup>2</sup> In the English it says **the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship...** But in the Greek, the word *the* only appears the first time, not the second time. So literally it's **the power of his resurrection and fellowship of his sufferings**. The reason that matters is because when you have two things that are referred to by the same "the" it means those things go together.

**Philippians 1:29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him**

God is doing a great work in this world. And it is all happening through the suffering of Jesus Christ. Jesus suffered in his earthly life and on the cross, and now that suffering continues through his body, the church. We suffer in order to carry on Christ's work in the church.

**Colossians 1:24 I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.**

So what is our role in that suffering? Did Jesus suffer to pay for most sins, and our suffering picks up that tab for the last little bit? No – Jesus' suffering was totally sufficient to atone for all sin. No other human lips could ever even begin to taste the bitterness of the cup that Jesus drank for us, nor could our worst suffering ever atone for anything since we deserve to suffer for our own sin. So what role does our suffering play? How are we partners with Christ in his suffering? Our role is to take the grace that Jesus purchased through his suffering, and through our suffering deliver that grace personally to the people who need it.<sup>3</sup> Jesus died on the cross to purchase grace. But he wants that grace delivered to his people in a personal, face-to-face way, by people with hands and feet that can offer physical help and comfort, and an audible voice that can speak words of grace according to the specific need. That's our great privilege, to be the ones God has chosen to do that, but in the process, we suffer.

## Variety of Suffering

Sometimes it is intense suffering – beatings and imprisonment; other times it's less severe. Not all suffering for Christ is being thrown in prison or burned at the stake. Sometimes it's the suffering of ministry - all the problems and headaches and heartaches that go along with trying to serve in ministry. Sometimes it's the suffering of loss – when following Christ means saying goodbye to something that was really precious. Paul needed a whole lot of power from God in that area because he lost pretty much everything. And you will lose things too. If someone hurts you, and you follow Christ, you lose your right to revenge. If you have a strong desire for something God has forbidden, like sex outside of marriage, or taking something that isn't yours, or indulging in some sinful pleasure – following Christ means losing those things. If people mock you for following Christ, you lose your reputation, and you lose their respect – that hurts. If following Christ requires a lot of your time (time spent in Scripture, time spent in prayer and ministry), then you lose that time that you could have spent doing something else. If following Christ means helping someone financially, or giving to the church, or saying no to a high paying job because it's a bad situation for your walk with the Lord – you lose that money. Those are all forms of suffering for Christ.

There is also the suffering of being the first one to say you're sorry when you have gotten into it with somebody. There's the suffering of confessing your sin to the people you hurt. There's the suffering of having to rebuke someone for their own good when everything in you just wants to ignore the problem. There's the suffering of losing friends when you won't go the places they want to go. There's the suffering that Lot experienced, when he was tormented in his righteous soul just from being surrounded by so much wickedness. When you love righteousness and you are surrounded by wickedness, it hurts. There's the suffering of saying no to the flesh when the flesh is being especially insistent. Even though what you get instead is far better - great gain - still – in the immediate moment you feel the loss of that earthly thing, because many times the gain is in the future and the loss is right now. There is the suffering of considering others' needs more important than your own, so you are looking out for other people's interests, but no one is looking out for yours. There's the suffering of loneliness when you're the only one

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase "to fill up what is still lacking" is used only one other place in the Bible – Php.2:30, where Epaphroditus filled up what was still lacking in regard to the Philippians' financial help for Paul. Epaphroditus did that by taking that gift and delivering it personally.

following Christ. Anytime any of that happens, it is so important to see it as evidence of your *koinonia* – fellowship – partnership with Christ.

## Reminders of Partnership

Moises Silva: “The stinging reality of Christian suffering is a reminder that we have been united with Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Every time you suffer in any of those ways, it’s a reminder: “Oh yeah, that’s right. I am one with Christ.” If you are trying to do some ministry and you find it really hard because someone is causing problems for you, and that’s all you see – just that person and what he’s doing - that is such nearsightedness. Look up and see what’s really going on. The right response isn’t, “That guy is such a pain in the neck, I think I’ll quit.” No, it’s, “Oh, that’s right. I’m in this world to partner up with Jesus Christ in his sufferings because it’s through suffering that his atoning work gets done. And so this problem I’m going through – this is me knowing Christ. This is me partnering with Christ. This is me working right alongside my Savior in his glorious work!” When Paul suffered for Christ he could say, “My dreams are coming true! This is the very thing I said I wanted – to know Christ like this. To be so close to him that I partner with him in his suffering.”

And not only is the suffering a *reminder* that you are one with Christ, but it is also the very *means* God uses to make you even more united with Christ. The more you suffer for him, the deeper your knowledge of him goes.

## Pattern

So what does it mean to know Christ? It means power, partnership, and one more: *pattern*.

### **10 I want to know Christ in the power of his resurrection and partnership in his sufferings, becoming like him<sup>5</sup> in his death**

He wants to become like Jesus in Jesus’ death. What was Jesus like in his death? Paul described that in chapter 2. Jesus died as the supreme example of putting others’ interests ahead of his own.

**Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves. 4 Each of you looking not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

**5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the very form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very form of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!**

That’s what Jesus was like in his death. He died as an example of selflessness and he did it out of obedience to the Father. And Paul says, “I want to be like that. I want to be morphed into that shape. I want to be molded, conformed, shaped to look just like Jesus looked when he died.”

Does that mean Paul wants to die as a martyr? No, he’s not talking about death here. He is talking about living. He is saying he wants to live like Jesus died. He wants to live his life in a way that imitates the pattern Jesus laid down in his death – serving the needs of others ahead of his own out of obedience to God.

That’s another aspect of knowing Christ. You really draw near to Christ relationally when you live that way. Every time you have a hard relationship issue, or some difficult ordeal, some delicate situation, or scary situation, you go into it thinking, “I want to handle this situation the way Jesus handled the whole

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<sup>4</sup> Silva, *Philippians*, 165.

<sup>5</sup> The word is *summorphizomai*. That calls to mind the terms from chapter 2 that describe Jesus as being in the **form** (*morphe*) of God and in the **form** (*morphe*) of a slave.

cross thing.” So if someone read the account of the crucifixion, and then they saw you dealing with some situation, they would say, “Wow, I can tell she is a follower of Jesus. She acts just like him.”

We talk a lot around here about peacemaking principles. Jesus said “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they (and they alone) will be called sons of God.” James said peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. Paul said we must keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Peace in the church is very, very important to God, and so we really go out of our way at Agape to follow the principles in God’s Word about confessing our sins to one another, forgiving one another, rebuking when necessary, receiving rebuke well, encouraging and restoring the repentant, reconciling broken relationships, looking out for each other’s interests, etc. But when we do that, we don’t just do it so we can get along have some peace and quiet in the church. We do those things because we want to live like Jesus died. We want to be walking billboards pointing to the death of Christ in the way we live. We want to know Christ in that way.

## The Destination

So that’s what it looks like to know Christ. And where does all that lead?

### **11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.**

It all leads to someday being lifted up out of the grave and receiving a new, glorified, imperishable, incorruptible body that you will use to live with God and enjoy paradise forever. This is what Jesus referred to as **the resurrection of the righteous** (Luke 14:14). At the end of the age there are going to be two resurrections - first the righteous then, and later on, the wicked.

### **Daniel 12:2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.<sup>6</sup>**

What Paul is saying here is that the result of knowing Christ in these ways will be that he will be included in the resurrection of the righteous.

In the previous verse he was talking about resurrection power in a spiritual way here and now in this life. But now he is talking about literal, physical, bodily resurrection in the future. He makes that clear with the wording. Literally it’s: **11 And so, somehow, to attain to the out-resurrection out from among the dead.** Resurrection out from among the people who are still dead is a graphic way of describing that first resurrection. That is where the knowing Christ road takes you.

Not only does Christ’s resurrection give us spiritual power now, but it also guarantees our physical resurrection at the Second Coming.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ... 16 the Lord himself will come down from heaven ... and the dead in Christ will rise**

### **1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.**

### **52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable**

Your new body will be imperishable and incorruptible. There will be no decay or decline. Your joints won’t get worse. Your teeth won’t get cavities. Your cholesterol will be right on. You are going to feel and look great.

We won’t be floating around in the clouds in eternity. We will be on a real, physical earth like this one, with real, physical bodies. Christ will eliminate the curse, no more entropy, and he will make a new earth that has all the great stuff about this earth – canyons and rivers and mountains and oceans, but no

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<sup>6</sup> See also Jn.5:28-29 and Rev.20:4-5.

thorns or cactus or weeds or mosquitos. We are going to live with God and enjoy him forever, not just emotionally, but also physically. That is where Paul wants to end up, and so he says, “I want to know Christ in power and partnership in his suffering conforming to the pattern of his death, **and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.**”

## Somehow

Somehow? He just made it crystal clear exactly how it’s done. You attain to the resurrection of the righteous if you know Christ through faith. That’s how. So what’s with the “**somehow**”? The English word “somehow” is a little misleading because it gives the idea of varying methods – by one method or another. But that’s not what the Greek word means.<sup>7</sup> If you want a feel for what this phrase means, the exact same phrase is used in Acts 27:12.

**Acts 27:12 Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, if somehow to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete...**

They fully expected to make it. If they thought they wouldn’t make it, they wouldn’t have gone. And they know exactly how – they are taking a boat. What that little phrase does is imply introduce a degree of difficulty. We expect to make it, but it isn’t going to be easy. So this phrase<sup>8</sup> is used to describe something that is an expectation, but that involves great difficulty.

So what Paul is doing here in verse 11 is not saying, “I hope, by some fluky chance, that I somehow make it to heaven by hook or by crook.” No – he knows he is on the road to heaven. But he is letting us know that that road is not going to be a cakewalk. He can make it, but in order to make it he is going to have to participate in Christ’s sufferings in this life.

When Paul says he wants to **attain to** (The Holman version says **reach**) the resurrection, that word means to arrive at a destination. Paul wants us to think of the final resurrection not as something we have in our back pocket, but something we are traveling toward and striving for, and hope to reach in the future. So that’s why Paul can sometimes be so sure that he’s headed there, and other times introduce an element of contingency. Back in 1:23 there was no doubt – he said, “If I die right now I’ll be with Christ.” He knew that for sure. And yet he could also speak of it as being contingent (I’ll get there if and only if I travel down this road).

A student who is half-way through his four years in college might say, “Two more years and I’ll have my degree,” and we don’t think of that as being presumptuous. We don’t expect a bunch of caveats every time – “That is, if I persevere, and if the college doesn’t shut down, and if we don’t get into a nuclear war...” He doesn’t have to say all that. We understand that he means, “If I keep on the current path, I’ll get the degree – and I fully intend to stay on this path.”

But on the other hand, if you are talking to a new freshman who isn’t really taking it seriously, you might throw in some of that contingent language, “You’ll get your degree *if* you actually come to class and work hard and don’t give up...” Because you don’t want to convey the idea that just because he enrolled it’s a done deal apart from any effort. And I think that’s what Paul is doing here. He is headed for the resurrection of the righteous – he’s on that road, no question about it. But he wants to make it clear that he must travel that road in order to arrive at the destination at the end of that road. And that road is the road of Christ’s suffering.

The promise of resurrection is conditional - even in passages like Romans 8. Nowhere in the Bible is there stronger language promising our final glorification than in Romans 8.

**Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**

**16 The Spirit himself testifies ... that we are God’s children. 17 ... we are ... co-heirs with Christ**

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<sup>7</sup> Moises Silva states, “True, the word “somehow” is a common English equivalent to *pos*, but the semantic area common to these two words is that of indefiniteness ... not means or method.” *Philippians*, p.166.

<sup>8</sup> *ei pos*



**23 we ... wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**

**35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?**

**37 in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

That's pretty solid, right? Our future resurrection is promised in the strongest possible terms. And yet, even in the soaring certainties of Romans 8, our sharing in Christ's glory is conditioned on our suffering with him.

**17 ... we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.**

To get to the destination, we must travel the road of Christ's suffering. If you go through life trying to dodge the sufferings of Christ, you might be successful, but you will find that when you get to the end of the road, it's not the road that leads to heaven. This is the folly of those who leave churches because things become difficult. Or leave a marriage because it's difficult. Or quit a ministry because it's difficult. Those people fail to realize that knowing Christ means partnering with him in his sufferings on your way to the resurrection. That's what the Christian life is. You leave the suffering at this church and go suffer somewhere else if you want, but if you want to arrive at the destination of the resurrection of the righteous, the only road that goes there is Heartbreak Highway.

## **Conclusion: Be Encouraged!**

And I hope that's not discouraging to you. It should be encouraging and strengthening. That's how Paul and Barnabas strengthened the believers in Acts 14:22.

**Acts 14:21 Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.**

You can make it, but you have to pass through suffering. That is encouraging and strengthening because it gives meaning to your suffering. Your suffering is not just some other person being a jerk. It's not just people being mean to you. It's not bad luck, it's not misfortune, it's not the ball just not bouncing your way, it's not “you win some, you lose some.” Your suffering for Christ is a glorious partnership with the King of kings in the greatest work he has ever done – the work of redemption! You are his partner in that work, and you have unlimited, life-giving power that comes to you in the sweetest possible way – knowing Christ. That power enables you to live like Jesus died, and takes you to the destination, which is the final resurrection of the righteous on the day of Christ.

**Benediction: Hebrews 10:32 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering...35 do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.**

## **Application Questions (James 1:25)**

- 1) What are some ways you have known Christ by experience (as comforter, as guide, as provider, as disciplinarian, as redeemer, etc.)?

- 2) Of the hardships, difficulties, and disappointments of ministry, which are the hardest for you to remember: "This is partnership with Christ"?
- 3) In which ministry hardships is it easiest for you to remember that it is a partnership with Christ?
- 4) If you could have greater spiritual power in one area of suffering (power to forgive, power to trust, power to remember spiritual truths, etc.) what variety of his power are you most in need of right now?