

Faithful in Suffering

The Book Of Ephesians

Acts 21:27–36 Rom 8:18-30 Matt 5:10-12

July 14, 2019

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This summer we have been looking at the book of Ephesians, and learning truths from God's Holy Word from it. St. Paul wrote this book from prison, and it may have been when he was in prison¹ in Caesarea.

In the book of Acts we heard the story of his arrest. After his third missionary journey, St. Paul goes to Jerusalem to encourage the church there. When Paul is at the Temple in Jerusalem, the Jews stir up trouble for him and he is detained by the Roman Empire. As you read the story in the book of Acts, every one of his judges knows that he is innocent, but yet they are afraid of the Jews, so they keep Paul in prison. Some are even looking for bribes! Paul is detained – *not arrested nor charged* --- but detained in prison for 2 to 3 years! He moves from a prison in Jerusalem to a prison in Caesarea and finally to house arrest in Rome.

In the book of Ephesians Paul refers to his imprisonment three times:

For this reason, I, Paul, **a prisoner** for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles-- Ephesians 3:1

I therefore, **a prisoner** for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, Ephesians 4:1

Also pray for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador **in chains**, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. Ephesians 6:19-20

¹ There is some debate whether the "Prison Epistles" (Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon) were written from Caesarea or from Rome. If from Caesarea, it would have been shortly after his visit there. If from Rome, it would have been 2-3 years after his visit. For the moving story of Paul's prison saga, read Acts 21:17-28:31.

Passages like this is why some of the Paul's epistles are called His "**prison epistles**". He wrote them while he was detained by the Roman Empire for 2-3 years.

Paul's imprisonment reminds us that suffering is a part of the Christian faith and life. In fact, we should expect suffering,

The word "**suffer**" means "**to endure, to undergo, and to experience.**" There many different kinds, levels, and degrees of suffering. The word "**suffer**" is usually used in terms of something **unpleasant**:

- † we "**suffer**" in **pain**, we "**endure**" **disappointment**, we "**undergo**" **hardships**, or we "**experience**" **grief**.
- † We can suffer physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.
- † Suffering occurs with our health, in relationships, because of finances, with pain, stress and changing circumstances.
- † Sometimes we suffer because of things **we** have done;
- † sometimes we suffer because of things **other people** have done, and
- † sometimes there is just **no explanation**, we suffer just because we are part of this broken, sinful world.

In addition to all of this, for us as Christians, sometimes we suffer simply because we are Christians. The world hates Christ and his people; and so we face persecution, slander, bias, and exclusion for the sake of Christ.

We suffer with all kinds of pain, difficulties, and hardships in this life!

Just as we suffer; and just as St. Paul suffered; **even more** did the Lord Jesus suffer. In fact, He came into the world to suffer and die for us and our salvation. Jesus' suffering took Him to a cross; where He was brutally killed. His suffering took Him to a cold grave of a stranger. **Jesus' suffering was for us and our salvation**; He suffered by carrying our sins and taking our punishment. In His suffering, we are set free from the Wrath of God. On the Third Day, Jesus rose from the dead; in His resurrection we are given forgiveness, life and eternal salvation. Everything Jesus suffered was

for you and your salvation; His love for you brought Him to earth to suffer and die in your place!

Jesus teaches us how to suffer: we learn from Him that we are to **patiently endure** in the midst of pain, difficulties, and in the hardships of life.

As believers in Christ, our stance towards suffering is “**patient endurance**”. Biblically, “**patiently endure**” is the **posture of faith** in the midst of suffering. **Patient endurance is active trust in God and His Promises as you suffer! Patient endurance** is holding on to God and His promises through your hardships. **Patient endurance** is looking to God for all good things and turning to Him in times of trouble.

Suffering is like pain. Pain never heals you, but it moves you to see the doctor. Suffering doesn't save you, but it moves you towards God and His help!

Let me give you a couple of examples of “**patient endurance**”.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1

Patient endurance holds on to a promise like this and doesn't let go! God promises to both be present with you and to help you! This is a promise that God makes to you! You can trust it! God's presence and power is at work in your life! Nothing is happening by chance; nothing is spinning out of control; nothing is beyond God's power to help you. **Patient endurance** trusts God's promises; and when you trust in God's promises, then you have stability, and peace in the midst of your trouble, pain, and suffering². **God really is your refuge and strength; and ever-present help in times of trouble!!**

Here is another example of “**patient endurance**”: God promises to make **all things work for good** in your life.

² For other encouraging and comforting verses, see the separate insert with today's worship materials. If you did not get one, please ask the usher for a copy; I can also send it to you by email if you want.

And we know that **in all things** God works for the **GOOD** of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

This is a fascinating promise! God promises to make **all things work for good** in your life. The Lord teaches us that nothing can seriously threaten your spiritual well-being!

Patient endurance holds on to a promise like this and doesn't let go!

God promises to make EVERYTHING --- including your suffering, your pain, your stress --- all the unknowns and all the unexplainable – EVERYTHING is made to work for your eternal well-being!

This is a blessing that comes only through faith in Christ. Unbelievers do not have this promise . But you do! This is a unique blessing that God gives only to His People – to those who trust His Son Jesus Christ for salvation!

Patient endurance trusts God's promises; and when you trust in God's promises, then you have stability and peace in the midst of your trouble, pain, and suffering. The Lord promises to watch over your life in such detail that **EVERY SINGLE THING** will be made to work **for your good** and your eternal well-being. **Patient endurance** holds on to a promise like this and doesn't let go!

St. Paul's imprisonment reminds us that suffering is a part of the Christian faith and life. In fact, we should expect suffering.

Even in the midst of suffering, we know and believe that the Good Lord is ultimately in control of all things in our lives; even our suffering, pain and hardships.

Your pain, suffering and hardships do not catch God by surprise; nor are they outside of His power and control. **God is an ever present help in times**

of trouble; He promises to make everything work for good in your life –
because of that, you can *patiently endure!*

Amen!