

1. We are Called to Walk With Him in His Suffering Today

- a. The Kingdom of God is “already, and not yet”
 - i. That is, while Jesus came and accomplished real work to atone for our sins and justify the ungodly, to accomplish our redemption through his death and resurrection, and to grant to us His Spirit as a down payment, we are not yet experiencing the full redemption of His work or of the world, for sin, though defeated, has yet to be abolished
 - ii. Paul sees a dangerous functional denial of reality in the Corinthians’ insistence that suffering, repentance, dependence, and humility are the present way of walking with Christ
 1. They were living as if there was not “not yet” of the Kingdom, but that all things had arrived in fullness
 2. They spiritualized the resurrection and the future judgement, making all things now permissible without accountability or the possibility of sin
 3. The fact that these are yet to come means that we are to walk the same path of suffering which Jesus walked: incarnation (humble ourselves for the sake of others), death (give ourselves for the sake of others), and resurrection (future vindication and restoration *by God* after the suffering).
- b. The Corinthians were living with a “realized eschatology”
 - i. “Realized Eschatology” Interprets the Kingdom as Already and Complete
 1. It is unrealistic, in that it is out of touch with reality
 - a. They are “satisfied” and “reigning” as if Heaven had already arrived on earth
 - b. Yet, suffering, sorrow, pain, sacrifice, death still exist
 2. Confusing the certainty of the promise with the present experience will confuse the relationship between the presence of sin/suffering and the promise of salvation/newness
 - a. Victorious Christian living
 - b. Triumphalistic living, as if they were already in possession of the glory which will come at Christ’s return
 - c. Functional denial of sin and the need for confession/repentance, suffering and the choosing of weakness and service, sorrow and the labor and toil of life
 3. Triumphalistic living is a functional denial of the centrality of the Cross of Christ and the necessity of discipleship through taking up our own God-ordained certainty of dying daily
 - ii. They believed that the fullness of the Kingdom had already arrived and that they had already attained complete redemption so were to pursue power *through* Christ
- c. Yet, the way of the Christian is to imitate the Master – incarnation, suffering, then resurrection
 - i. They were living as victorious kings, while the apostles were humiliated and sentenced to death as captives of war
 - ii. You have already been satiated
 1. Every desire fulfilled
 2. There was to be no striving, no suffering, no sorrow, no repentance, no remorse, no struggle, no confession, no crosses, only victorious Christian living
 3. Their view that since Christ accomplished everything, then sin simply doesn’t exist (there is no “sin”, only weakness) led them to believe that sinlessness was not only attainable, *but attained*, for “all things are lawful.”
 4. It is cheap grace which leads to walking in sin believing that it doesn’t matter, “for grace has covered it.”
 - a. “giving hearty approval to those who practice it.”
 - b. This is why Paul has to admonish them throughout the letter

- iii. You are already made rich
 - 1. They had received the inheritance in full, they believed, and therefore were worthy of all good things now
 - 2. They believed that they *had a right to wealth* because of Christ Jesus NOW
- iv. You are crowned rulers without us
 - 1. They saw themselves as having the authority and right of kings, not servants
 - 2. Paul says that he wishes that were true, for then they also would have arrived, but they had not
- v. BUT WE, we are sentenced to death as humiliated captives of war – the captives of a triumph, not the triumphant
 - 1. Paul's metaphor or "last of all" is the image of war captives being led through the main street by a victorious general
 - a. The captives trailing behind the triumphant general were paraded through the city to humiliate them, expose their weakness, and flaunt their servitude
 - b. The captives at the end of the line, in last place, were those sentenced to die in the arena, which Corinth would have been very familiar with
 - 2. Thus, the way in which the apostles were walking was not full of power or honor or triumph in the eyes of world, but of humiliation, of powerlessness, of captivity
 - a. It is the way of Christ – incarnation, suffering as criminal, and execution
- d. We suffer our loss of honor and reputation with Him
 - i. "You are sensible with Christ, strong, and GLORIED in"
 - 1. Here Paul uses the word "glory" to describe their self-assessment as wise, strong, and glorious "with Christ"
 - ii. They were living as if they had already been glorified, that no sin existed among them: they were mature, wise, and could see all things rightly (wise).
 - 1. There was no present sin to them, no need to suffer or be humiliated, there was no accountability or need for future redemption
 - 2. They lived as if Jesus had already returned and the Church was to walk like this, in functional denial of any need of future redemption
 - 3. This led to dysfunction, not flourishing
 - iii. The apostles lived in dishonor and weakness
 - 1. The world will consider you morons, backwards fools
 - 2. You will be weak in the parlance and experience of the world
 - 3. You will be despised – not honored but shameful to the world
- e. We suffer with Him physically
 - i. The world is not fully redeemed, so suffering from original sin and from the curse upon the earth still exists, even for the Christian
 - ii. There is physical suffering
 - 1. We are hungry, thirsty, poorly dressed, beaten down, vagabonds, and weary from the toil of our hands
 - 2. Christians will still suffer the normal sufferings of living in a broken world yet-to-be redeemed by Christ when He returns
 - 3. We live in the hope of redemption, but not yet fully obtaining it
 - a. So we press on to take hold of it by faith in the resurrection and return of the Son of God, yet not as having already obtained it but pursuing it wholeheartedly, waiting.
- f. We suffer with Him relationally
 - i. When we are reviled, we speak well of others
 - ii. When we are pursued to harm, we patiently endure the ill without retaliation

- iii. When slandered, we come alongside to strengthen
- iv. We treated by others as the trash of the world, even the scrapings at the bottom of the barrel
- g. Note that IT IS GOD who is displaying this weakness to the world!
 - i. Paul views his humiliation as the display of God, not of God's enemies
 - 1. This means that God is using our humiliation, weakness, and deaths to bring honor to Himself
 - 2. Knowing this, then, and the goodness of God, we are not afraid to be displayed as such, for we know that after death comes resurrection
 - 3. We trust the God who gave Himself for us, that all these are working good
 - ii. This connection between present suffering with Christ and future glory is common in the NT
 - 1. **Luke 9:23-24** (gospels) – disciples must deny themselves and carry a cross daily
 - 2. **Romans 8:17-18** (Paul's letters) – made heirs if we suffer with Him so that we might be glorified with Him – these present sufferings can't compare to the glory to be revealed to us
 - 3. **Hebrews 2:9-10** – Jesus' glory is intimately tied to his suffering death
 - 4. **1 Pet 5:10** (Peter) – suffer a little while, then God will restore you
 - 5. **Rev 2:10-11** (Apocaplyse) – he who overcomes through suffering receives Life as a trophy
 - iii. It is vital to remember these things in the midst of this truth:
 - 1. God promises to walk with you and care for you in the valley of the shadow of death – He loves you still
 - 2. He is bringing greater glory out of these sufferings, more meaning through the moments of pain
 - 3. He brings suffering to show His sufficiency for what the suffering brings to the surface of the affections of our hearts
 - a. We want comfort – He is our safety and provider
 - b. We want joy – He is our delight and our lover
 - c. We want life – He is our creator and sustainer

2. We Do Not Suffer Alone, but He is With Us NOW

- a. Jesus knows this humiliation and suffering and death because He lived it!
 - i. Knowing that Jesus understands our suffering gives us courage, for He now walks with us as a brother who has experienced the difficulties and sympathizes with our weaknesses
 - ii. We are never alone, even in the most dire situations; He has given us His Spirit as a portion of His presence NOW
- b. Jesus walks with us through our suffering to give us courage and strength to persevere
 - i. It is in our suffering that we grow to know Christ Jesus more
 - ii. Suffering is our tutor who enrolls us in the school of Christ, to know Him, love Him, trust Him
 - iii. **2 Thess 1:3-5 – persecutions and sufferings are evidence of the righteous judgment of God – that you may be considered worthy of the Kingdom of God..**
- c. There is a greater purpose in God's economy and plan than comfort, and that is that we might know Him and the power of His resurrection
 - i. While we do not enjoy suffering, we rejoice in it (**1 Pet 4:13**), for it is working for us – producing in us an eternal weight of glory incomparable to the joys of this pitiful broken world (**2 Cor 4:17-18**)

- ii. It makes us long for glory of the eternal and prides our gripping fingers from the lesser temporal things which will not last (**Rom 8:18**)
- iii. Yet, we acknowledge that it is difficult, for we must wait for things which we cannot see, sacrificing the lesser blessings now for the greater ones later – faith is hard unless we fix our eyes upon Christ Jesus

3. Tomorrow We Triumph With Him

- a. Our ability to suffer and see it as God's good for us, to endure it with courage, is rooted in our ascertaining of "the joy set before us"
 - i. **Hebrews 12**
 - 1. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus that we might strengthen our feeble knees and droopy hands to run the race set before us
- b. This is why Paul says to imitate him: He imitates Christ and has set his eyes on the eternal things, the return of Christ Jesus and the promise of the fullness of our redemption yet to come
 - i. Every time Paul speaks of imitating himself or the other apostles in his letters, it is connected with waiting for the return of Christ
 - ii. **1 Thess 1:4-10** – "you became imitators of us...you turned to God from idols...to wait for His Son from heaven...Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come"
 - iii. **Phil 3:17-21** – "join in imitating me...our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself."
- c. The only way that we will be willing to die to our own honor, triumph, and power to follow Jesus into suffering and death is by an experience of God's mercy through the Christ who suffered *for me*.
 - i. We must see Him laying down His right to glory and taking the form of a servant *for me*
 - ii. We see him going towards death, compelled by love, to secure our hope
 - iii. We see the High Priest who seals us by His own agony and blood, giving us as a gift to His Father, so that we might proclaim His excellencies for He called us out of darkness and into the marvelous light
 - iv. I cannot say, "Whatever your will ordains is right" without a deep understanding of His mercy towards me in Christ Jesus, and I cannot push out any affection for power, comfort, or honor in this world unless a greater affection swells within my heart in the gratitude and ecstatic apprehension of the depths of mercy towards me, the sinner, saved by His willingness to endure such great and terrible suffering for me, to make me a saint according solely to the counsel of His own gracious will
- d. Remember your King who sits on the throne of heaven and is in full control of your current suffering
 - i. He is using it for your good and for your glory – remember what He gave for you so that you trust Him in the dark hour, in the valley of the shadow of death so that you fear no evil but trust his rod and staff as a comfort, not a threat
 - ii. Do not despise it, but know that His ways are not to shame you or punish you, but are in maturing you and shaping you and revealing His greatness to you so that your hearts might be filled to all the fullness of joy with Him
- e. Fix your eyes upon the joy set before you: God is pleased with your faith, as weak as it is, and the Lord is returning to finish your redemption
 - i. The "not yet" will one day be "now" – hang on, the King is coming!
 - ii. **Revelation 21:1-5**

Conclusion:

Your freedom isn't everything. God is. Your home isn't everything. God is. Your children aren't everything. God is. The truth is that Jesus is worth losing every relationship, parting ways (if not physically, at the least in emotional priority) with every comfort of this world. This is how the Christian can rejoice in the midst of a marriage where the unbelieving spouse constricts and restricts and is simply overly-strict in regards to following Jesus; to having joy when sexual pleasure has been taken away or never given; to deep and abiding peace when there are no dollars left; to steadfast and immovable hope when the pain of cancer swells or the executor drags you to the pyre.

This is eternal life, the life of God manifest and revealed to those in Christ and in those in Christ. By repentance and faith His life is in us, a down payment now in His Holy Spirit, and the fullness of eternal life when sin and death are obliterated forever. This is the coming age's ultimate fulfillment and the glorious promise for those in Jesus.

It is only in seeing Jesus, the depth of His love for you and God's mercy through Him, that He is the only Master worth following, for He will never fail you or ruin you and if you should fail Him He draws near to you on the basis of His own blood, not your togetherness. Only then will I repent freely, acknowledging my sin, my brokenness, my desperate need. Only then will you find eternal life. Only when you see that He took your judgment upon Himself, for you, that you will be able to know the truth which sets you free from the bondage of having to please everybody around you, including your own desires, which may be sinful and broken still.

When we see Him, really see Him as He is, the things of this earth grow strangely dim, our need for attention wanes, and our clamor to be loved and honored by others fades to silence in the glow of His great and glorious grace until all that we see is Him. In Him our joy is made complete, our hope made stalwart in our ever-changing reputations and relationships, and our dependence swells to the fullness of the knowledge of the Son of God by which we are transformed to truly be who we were meant to be. This is the daily repentance which makes up the walk of the Christian. I die daily that Christ may live in me to the glory of God the Father.

Communion – Union with Christ before the foundation of the world – “with Him”

Benediction:

Our sufferings, from wherever they may come, are not held within the power of our enemies or the power of random Nature, but are held within the power of God. No enemy can harm you but by the will of God, and if God wills our trials, then no man can save you from them. And this is good news, for we know the heart of God! He who gave His Son, whose blood was poured out for you and body was broken for you, that you might know Him, love Him, and belong to Him for eternity, is the same God who has ordained each of our sufferings for our good and for our glory.

Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. (2Co 1:9 ESV)

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:11 ESV)

Let us, then, take our eyes off our sufferings for a moment, and put them on the God whose character is sublime and by the riches of His grace is determined that you would know Him for your joy. He gave His Son for you. So, do not run from such trials, but run to the glorious Christ. Do not fear the sufferings which He has ordained, but fear the unbelief which would ruin us. And do not despise the trials which He has placed you under, but “exult in your tribulations” (Rom 5:3) as one whom the Father loves and has united to His Son. With Him you have died and you will be raised up at His return in the fullness of who you really are: children of glory for the honor of God. Go in the light of this truth.