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“Seeing Him Who is Invisible” (Hebrews 11:24-27)

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Introduction

1) Good morning, Church!

We have been studying Christian suffering in concert with Jesus’ admonition in **John 12:25-26a** that “whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me ...”

We’ve seen that suffering as a believer is a part of the ‘cup’ the Father sovereignly mixes for each believer – the cup that represents His perfect will for our life. We may not always love this cup, but as Jesus showed us, it is not our will that matters, but His.

2) We mentioned that there are two *broad categories* of suffering which believers experience in this life – and they are very different indeed. They have different *causes*, different *purposes* and different *results*.

Deserved suffering is the suffering we bring upon ourselves when we continually say ‘No’ to the Holy Spirit and embrace sin.

This kind of suffering comes to believers as *divine discipline* when we continue to *grieve* the Holy Spirit or *quench* Him. We’ll be taking this up soon.

Undeserved suffering, which we’re currently studying, is the kind of suffering that often throws believers for a loop if they’re unaware of God’s purposes for allowing it. To that end, the Apostle Paul saw undeserved suffering as a gift on par with the ‘gift’ of believing in Jesus.

“It has been granted¹ to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only (1) believe in him but (2) also suffer for his sake ...” (**Philippians 1:29**).

3) God has two reasons why He might visit *undeserved* suffering upon His people:

The *first* is that He might *accelerate our growth to spiritual maturity*.

The *second* is that we might *glorify the Lord Jesus Christ through our suffering* in this life, only to be rewarded forever in the **Ω** Ages.

God may invest a mature Christian with the greatest of all honors he or she could possibly receive in this life: the privilege of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ through our suffering as one of His true disciples.

In **Philippians 3:8-11**: Paul wrote of himself: “For his [Jesus’] sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death ...”

Notice it: “[that I] may share in His sufferings.” Paul saw the sufferings of this life as a privilege. And, painful as they were for him personally, he did not count them worthy to be even compared to the future Jesus had in store for him.

He wrote in **Romans 8:18**, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

He also wrote – and this is really important – that “this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (**2 Corinthians 4:17-18**).

¹ The word translated “granted” – **χαρίζομαι** – means “to give freely as a favor, to give graciously.” Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 1078.

Don't miss this! The afflictions of this life – light and momentary compared to eternity – are “preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” All undeserved suffering in this life will be rewarded forever in the **Ω** Ages.

Because of this second great reason why God allows undeserved suffering, we considered a phenomenal, yet little-understood, principle of life in the Spirit: being filled with the Spirit doesn't make us immune to suffering; in fact, *it may actually present us to it!*

- 4) We left off looking at joy as the believer's provision in times of suffering – for the “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (**Nehemiah 8:10**).

James tells us that when we ‘smash into’ trials of various kinds, we should “count it all joy” (**James 1:2**). Why? Because undeserved suffering is a clear indication that God is working intimately within us, molding our character and glorifying Himself.

We can “count it all joy” because we have come to know – either through teaching or experience (**γινώσκω**) – that the “testing” of our faith produces endurance (**ὑπομονή**) which results in spiritual maturity (“that you may be perfect (**τέλειος**, “having attain[ed] an end or purpose”²) and complete (**δλόκληρος**, having met all expectations³), lacking in nothing” (**James 1:3-4**).

What is James saying? *‘Endure suffering joyfully! It will produce within you the endurance you need to press on to maturity.’*

- 5) Furthermore, Peter tells us that Jesus left an example of suffering so that we too might follow in His steps. For “Christ also SUFFERED for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps” (**1 Peter 2:21**).

This example refers to the words He spoke to Peter when He was being arrested: “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup (**ποτήριον**) that the Father has given me?” (**John 18:11**)

² *Ibid.*, Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 995.

³ *Op. cit.*, Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, pp. 703–4.

There's the example: our cup might not be pleasant, but nonetheless, our duty as followers of Jesus is to drink the cup that has been prepared for us and to glorify God in so doing.

- 6) After describing his own many sufferings, Paul asked an extremely insightful question: “Who is sufficient for these things?” (**2 Corinthians 2:16b**)

It's a good question! It's one that we all need to ask ourselves. Who can endure suffering like this and still be joyful? Who *is* sufficient for these things? The answer is: *none of us are*.

We can say with Paul, “Who is weak, and I am not weak?” (**2 Corinthians 11:29**) But we can also say with Paul, “[T]hanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (**1 Cor. 15:57**).

The same one who asked, “Who is sufficient for these things,” also declared, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (**Philippians 4:13**).

This is the reason *remaining* in the filling of the Spirit is so important. It is He and He alone who can make us sufficient for these things and bring us to our expected end, the **τέλειος** of spiritual maturity.

Seeing Him Who is Invisible

- 1) But here's the big problem: many times, when we suffer, we complain about it. And when we do, we fail the test. Rather than proving the *genuineness* of our faith, we prove the *puniness* of it (**ὀλιγόπιστος**, ‘O you of little or puny faith’ – **Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, 17:20**; cf., **Mark 9:24; James 1:6–8**).

Suffering must be faithfully endured if God is going to realize His purpose in us. Rather than grumble or complain when we encounter suffering, we're to “count it as joy” realizing that God is allowing it for a good purpose: to bring us to maturity, or to glorify Himself through our suffering.

When we patiently endure suffering, we glorify God and we grow. But when we grumble and complain, we neither glorify God nor grow. In the latter case, the lesson is not learned and will have to be repeated. To that end, Paul writes:

“Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world ...”
(Philippians 2:14-15).

What is our mission? To “shine as lights in the world” in the “midst of a crooked and twisted generation.”

How do we do that? By doing “all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish ...”

2) Obviously, it *pleases* the Lord at times to allow suffering. To deny that is to betray a fundamental ignorance of the plan of God and of Scripture itself.

- Nearly all of the Apostles suffered as martyrs.
- John the Baptist was beheaded (**Matthew 14:1–12**) and the Apostle John was boiled in oil and imprisoned on Patmos (**Revelation 1:9**).
- Stephen, a faithful deacon, was executed, stoned to death (**Acts 7:1-60**).
- We read of much persecution directed toward the early Church in the book of Acts.

Acts 8:1–3: “And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.”

3) But I want to return to a passage we read a few moments ago from **2 Corinthians**. Let’s consider it carefully:

This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the

things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Moses offers us an eye-opening example of how mature believers are able to endure undeserved suffering.

Hebrews 11:25-27 tells how Moses chose “to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.” ²⁶He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. ²⁷By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.”

Notice it:

- ✠ He saw that it was far more beneficial to “be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin” for a season (**Hebrews 11:25**).
- ✠ He “considered the reproach of Christ” – that is, the very worst that Jesus could offer – to be “greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt,” which was the richest nation on the planet at the time (**Hebrews 11:26a**).
- ✠ He was “looking to the reward,” that is, the rewards that accrue to believers who endure undeserved suffering into all of the Ω Ages (**Hebrews 11:26b**).
- ✠ And he was able to do this because he saw something that others did not: “he endured as *seeing Him who is invisible* (**Hebrews 11:27b**).

Clearly, Moses’ faith did not insulate him from persecution and suffering; *it presented him to it*.

- 4) The writer of Hebrews speaks of the many believers who suffered for their faith:

“Some [godly believers] were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were stoned, they were sawn in two,

they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—³⁸ [people] of whom the world was not worthy” (**Hebrews 11:35b-38a**).

Yes, that’s what they were: Men and woman “of whom the world was not worthy”! And do you know what? The Lord has forgotten NONE of them! After saying this, the writer of Hebrews speaks to us and says ...

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us [follow their example and] also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us [‘running the race’ is another way of saying ‘drinking the cup’],² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted” (**Hebrews 12:1-3**, brackets mine).

And so, we’re to look to Jesus – and to these early followers of Jesus (this ‘great cloud of witnesses’ – and to “run with endurance the race that is set before us” [i.e., ‘drink the cup the Lord has mixed for us’].

And *how* are we to run this race? By *purifying* our walk with Jesus – ‘laying aside every weight and every sin’ (**Hebrews 12:1**).

As the writer of Hebrews put it in another place, “Pursue peace with everyone, as well as holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (**Hebrews 12:14**).