

Suffering Becomes Privilege

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[0:00] Why did he do that? Well, it was for the gospel's sake. It was for the gospel's sake. Near the end of his life, he said, I never made a sacrifice.

And so we would ask, was all that pain for nothing? Or was it nothing to him? Did he not feel it at all? Well, you understand that he did feel it.

This is what he said. This is the quote in its broader context. He says, it is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege.

Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger now and then with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life may make us pause and cause the spirit to waver and the soul to sink.

But let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with a glory which shall be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice.

[1:05] Now, did he feel it? Yes, he did feel it. But it felt more like a privilege. The gospel was going forward. Christ's sufferings were worth suffering for.

Christ's sufferings were worth suffering so others could know about those sufferings. And that's what Paul has in mind in Colossians 1.24.

And so I'd ask you to turn there. Colossians 1.24. And Paul says this.

Now, 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.

Now, this is probably a very difficult text. What does Paul mean when he says, I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions?

[2:10] And that's what we want to look at first. What does Paul mean when he says there is something still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions? What does Paul mean there?

Well, it's obvious that Paul does not mean that he and his sufferings is somehow adding to Christ's sufferings on the cross.

That he's saying that there is something missing in Christ's sufferings upon the cross. No, when Christ died, he said, it is finished.

There was nothing to add. Nothing for Paul to add. Nothing for anyone to add. There's nothing lacking. Jesus Christ has secured redemption by his blood shed on the cross.

So then what is lacking? What is lacking that Paul is filling up? And let me give you the answer first and then I'll tell you why and how I got to that answer.

[3:15] Here is the answer in summary. What is missing is the personal presentation of Christ's sufferings to the people for whom he died. What is lacking was a personal presentation of Christ's sufferings.

And you'll see why I say that in a second. It might sound strange. But Christ's sufferings are only lacking in this regard. The people for whom Christ died have not yet heard.

Not all of them have heard about it. Not all of them have embraced it. Not all of them have believed it. Not all of them have seen it, have felt the greatness and the goodness of what we remember tonight.

All that was missing was a personal presentation of those sufferings. Now, why do I say that? Well, if you would turn back a couple of pages in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 2.

Philippians chapter 2 and verse 30. Philippians chapter 3.

[4:46] So they had collected a gift for Paul and then they had sent Epaphroditus with the gift. But it wasn't an easy journey at all for Epaphroditus. Somewhere along the line, he got sick and he nearly died completing this ministry.

And so why is all this suffering? Why did Epaphroditus go through this? Why did he suffer so much? Well, verse 30 in the NIV says this. Risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

In the ESV, which is a little more literal translation, it says, He nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete, to fill up, what was lacking in your service to me.

The same language of completing what was lacking. Now, Epaphroditus had suffered so that he could present this gift to Paul in person.

That's what was missing in the Philippians' gift. One commentator wrote this. What was lacking, and what would have been grateful to Paul and the church alike, was the church's presentation of this offering in person.

[5:54] That was impossible. The whole church of Philippi couldn't get up and present this to Paul. But Paul represents Epaphroditus as supplying this lack by his affectionate and zealous ministry.

So, what did Epaphroditus make up, fill up, complete that was lacking in the Philippians' gift? Well, it wasn't the gift itself. It wasn't the gift itself.

Later on, he says, I'm amply supplied. I've received a full payment and even more. So, it wasn't the gift itself. Epaphroditus wasn't taking money out of his wallet to make up what was lacking in the Philippians' gift.

The gift was complete in and of itself. But what was lacking, that Epaphroditus fulfilled and completed, was a personal presentation of it. So, Epaphroditus, as a messenger of the church, came, suffered, to give Paul the gift in person.

And I think that's what Paul is saying here in the book of Colossians. It's almost identical language. Paul is suffering to present Christ's gift, Christ's afflictions, in person to people.

[7:14] The gift is perfect. There's nothing lacking in the gift itself, but people don't know it. The gift is complete.

Christ's sufferings are perfect. They're all that God requires. You don't need anything else except for them. But you do need to hear about them.

You need to see them. You need to have them presented to you. And so, what did the Colossians need? What did the Gentiles need? They needed to hear a gospel, the gospel from a messenger, from a servant, from a person on the ground.

And Paul says, I've suffered to do that. So, Epaphroditus suffered to give Paul the gift that the Philippians gave. He suffered to give Paul the Philippians' gift in person.

Paul suffered to give the Gentiles Jesus Christ's gift in person, which was his sacrifice, which was his sufferings. So, I think that's what was missing.

[8:23] Now, secondly, what was Paul's attitude toward his suffering? What was Paul's attitude toward his own suffering? Well, what does it say in Colossians 1.24?

If you're not back there, I invite you to turn back there. What does it say? And this is so convicting. And this is a real test of our own thinking.

He says, I rejoice in what was suffered for you. He rejoiced in it. He says, I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking.

Is there suffering that I need to do in order for people to hear and understand the gospel? Is there suffering that I need to experience in order that people might embrace Jesus Christ and his sufferings?

Then it's worth it. It's worth it to me. And I rejoice in it. 2 Timothy 2, Paul says, Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.

[9:25] This is my gospel for which I am suffering, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

Paul is no hyper-Calvinist. Will the elect be saved without suffering, without people suffering to go and speak to them? No. No.

Paul says, I endure everything in order that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. So brothers and sisters, the elect come.

They believe when people, when men and women, suffer in order to present to them Christ's sufferings.

The gospel of the suffering servant comes through suffering servants. So one man who was from Romania, and he was exiled from his own home country for the gospel's sake.

[10:40] And he put it like this. Paul is saying this. If I had remained a pastor in Antioch, in that affluent and peaceful city, in that wonderful church with so many prophets and such great blessings, nobody in Asia Minor or Europe would have been saved.

In order for them to be saved, I have had to accept being beaten with rods, scourged stone, treated as the scum of the earth, becoming a walking death.

But when I walk like this, wounded and bleeding, people see the love of God. People hear the message of the cross, and they are saved.

And then he adds, if we stay in the safety of our affluent churches, and we do not accept the cross, others may not be saved. How many are not saved because we don't accept the cross?

Paul joyfully accepted the cross. He isn't saying, boo-hoo, poor me. No, he's saying, I join Jesus in suffering.

[11:53] When I join Jesus in suffering, people are saved. They hear the gospel. People see how precious Christ's afflictions are, his sufferings are, and Christ is glorified.

Christ is enjoyed. Christ is rejoiced in. And so tonight, as we come to the Lord's table, we need to ask, what do I want from life?

What do I want from this life that I'm living? Do I just want comfort? And ease? And nice homes and vacations and convenience, and having it in my time and in my way, or do we want people to drink deeply of Jesus Christ and be satisfied in him?

We have to ask, is Jesus' sufferings worth suffering for? Tonight, Jesus comes and says, I died for you. What will you do for me?

How will you live for me? See, who gets the joy of seeing sinners come home? Who gets to taste the wine of the banquet?

[13:13] Well, it's those who have suffered for it. It's sweet to them. To those who have no skin in the game, it's not a big deal when you see a lost person come.

But when you've prayed and you've suffered, then you get to taste the sweetness of it. And so, imagine, imagine someone that you work with. Imagine one of your unchurched neighbors.

Do you know their lives? Do you know their life? Do you know their story? Do you see in their life how the winds of sin are just given full sail and they blow them about and destroy their lives?

Now, can you imagine what would happen if Jesus came into that life and saved that person? Can you imagine what would happen?

How much glory would Christ have? How sweet would that be? What would their life be like? What would your life be like? Seeing them come to faith in Jesus through your witness, through your sharing with them.

[14:24] So imagine that. Imagine one of those unchurched neighbors of yours who seems so far away coming and believing in Jesus and then maybe sitting here with you.

Now, what will you give up for it? What will you give up for it? Jesus left his neighborhood and came to ours in order to save us.

He came down and suffered. In love, he gave up his comfort and his familiarity and his convenience. He left the joy, the peace, the prosperity of heaven and he embraced suffering for you.

And he embraced poverty and he embraced death. He held it to himself for our sake. And the question we have to ask is, now what will we do so others can see Christ and embrace him as beautiful and wonderful?

What will we do to see others come to believe in Christ? What will you suffer? Because to the degree that you value Christ's sufferings is the degree that which you will suffer in order to see other people embrace them.

[15:44] You see, we don't only remember and treasure Christ's sufferings tonight. We do to one degree or other every day. We'll do it tomorrow and we'll do it next week and throughout this coming week.

And so, what would it be like to not only remember his death and sufferings not just tonight, but tomorrow and the next week and the next week?

Well, Paul shows us. Paul shows us what it would look like to remember Christ's sufferings continually. How do you honor his death? How do you remember his death? You suffer so others will be able to see it.

You suffer so others will be able to embrace it and believe it and see how valuable it is themselves.

And so, you suffer the shame. It's not popular to be a Christian and so some people, I think less than we would like to, less than we imagine, but you're going to be put to shame.

You're going to suffer rejection. You're going to suffer inconvenience. It's not convenience. Sinners rarely fit into our schedule. You're going to suffer the loss of money.

[16:56] Really remembering Christ's death and his body broken and his blood shed will look like less money in your bank account. And I'm not talking just about sending it to missionaries, though that's true, but I'm talking about offering hospitality to your neighbors, offering hospitality to your coworkers, doing good to others in the name of Jesus, to give of yourself so that they can see your good works and honor your Father in heaven.

It's going to cost money. You'll suffer the loss of personal time. Living so others can embrace Christ's sufferings is going to mean less time for yourself.

It's going to require death on your part. Loss of evenings. Loss of Saturday afternoons. It's going to cost you time alone with your family. If you're going to bring these people into your lives, things have to be rearranged.

It might mean more busyness. But what a thing to be busy about. What a thing to be busy about. Not the same old stuff that the whole world's all busy about, but heaven, the souls of men, the souls of the lost coming to believe in Jesus Christ, the brokenhearted, and the poor, living so that they might find riches, and health, and healing, and salvation, all to the praise of God.

[18:26] That is something worth being busy about. You're going to suffer the messiness of other people's lives. Sin is a messy way of living.

And if we are going to serve them so that they can see Jesus and embrace his sufferings and love him, then we will have to suffer their messiness. Their lives aren't nice and clean.

Their lives don't make a lot of sense sometimes. But you suffer for it in order for them to come to faith. And you're going to have to suffer the wickedness of their lives. The very night Jesus gave us this meal, his disciples argued about who was the greatest in the kingdom.

The only thing smellier than their feet was their pride that night. And yet Jesus was on his hands and knees washing their feet. And Jesus was there with them, giving them the bread, giving them the cup, saying, you're my friends.

I'm with you. I give myself for you. It made me ask a question.

[19:47] Why is it that so much of the time, the longer you are a Christian, the less non-Christian friends you have? There could be lots of reasons.

But I think one, one at least, is because we find their overt sinfulness uncomfortable. We find it offensive.

And so we back away from them. It's better, it's easier not to deal with them. But Jesus was called a friend of sinners. sinners. And Paul himself suffered all of these things.

He says, I endured everything in order to see the elect saved. And they were saved. They were saved. Through Paul's sufferings, they saw the glory of the gospel, they saw the glory of Jesus Christ, and they came to faith.

And so they came to see that I am a great sinner. They didn't know what even sin was. But now they say, I am a great sinner. I have offended God, but he has loved me.

[21:00] And he sent his son for me. He was broken for me. And Jesus was pierced for me. All so that I could come and know God. And so tonight, as we remember Jesus' death, we remember that our suffering is not for our salvation.

Our suffering on behalf of Jesus is not for our salvation. It is finished. He bore our sins upon the tree. There are no sins left to have atone for.

He bore my sins. He faced God's wrath and anger for my sins, so I would never have to. He became a man of sorrow so that I would never have to face the sorrow of being condemned for my sin.

And so we don't suffer because we have to. We don't suffer because we lack something that we have to make up for. No, Jesus shares his life and his death with us.

So let the weak say, I am strong, and let the poor say, I am rich because of what the Lord has done. So we lack nothing. We have everything, and that sets us free to suffer in order that others might find that fullness.

[22:13] The lost out there are broken. If the passing of Robin Williams doesn't show us anything, it certainly shows us that behind a smiling face can hide a broken heart.

We have everything, and that sets us free to suffer so that others can find fullness. And we remember tonight that because of Jesus, I have nothing to lose.

I have nothing to lose. Nothing to lose. I don't have to be afraid of pain. I don't have to be afraid of death. We saw that this morning. I have salvation kept in heaven for me.

The worst thing they can do is send me to my eternal reward. And so I can embrace the cross because he embraced the cross for me. Jesus has set us free from living little lives to ourselves. He has set us free to live so others can see him and know him. That's what Paul is saying. And so tonight, remember, Jesus was broken. He has set us free to live for us.

[23 : 30] But he invites us to follow him. To die that others might live. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I do pray that you would help us to find such joy and strength and fullness in the cross that we will give ourselves to your purposes.

that we would embrace suffering so that others might know and see how beautiful the sufferings of Jesus Christ are.

Encourage our hearts even as we partake of communion. Ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.