

Cornerstone

CHURCH

Dear Cornerstone Church,

From time to time, pastors can say things that catch your attention! In this week's sermon, I made the comment that "I'd be doing you a disservice by telling you that coming to Christ will solve all your problems. It won't! In fact, it will cause more problems." Given the nature of this bold statement and some potential questions that may arise from this I felt the need to offer some additional insight from God's Word into this concept.

If you remember, the verse that drew this comment was from 2nd Timothy 3:12. Paul says to Timothy, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (NASB1995)" So the question is, will your life get harder as a Christian who desires to live a godly life? I think to be consistent with Scripture, our answer must be yes. Think of Jesus' words in Luke 9:23 when He says "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." This seemingly reverse means of glorification that Jesus displayed in humbling Himself to the cross is what we are called to attach ourselves to daily. Remember, Jesus is the one called "Man of Sorrows." Jesus embodied suffering and sorrow for our sake and we are called to join Him in this for His name's sake.

There is yet another passage, however, that I think adds to this conversation. Paul says in 2nd Corinthians 1:5 "For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ." What does Paul mean by this "comfort" that is abundant through Christ? Dare we say that this suffering in light of God's Kingdom, has a far more reaching effect than mere suffering as a result of a fallen world? This world we live in has common ailments and struggles. We live in this world and we share those sufferings. Our world is full of disasters and tragedies. We live in this world and we share those sufferings. Sinclair Ferguson sheds light on the additional sufferings that come as being followers of Christ.

"As we live our lives in Christ, thrust upon us — under the providence of God, and often in the hands of others — comes another layer of suffering. And that layer of suffering is related both to the fact that we are so profoundly counter-cultural in our lifestyle, and also to the fact that the gospel has sensitized us to the horror that sin affects in the world. So we experience a kind of suffering because we are Christians with new behaviors and sensitivities."

So because of our counter-cultural lifestyle, not only do we experience the sufferings common to mankind due to the fall, but we also experience suffering in our counter-cultural lifestyle. Ferguson also comments on the fact that we are more sensitive to the sufferings and horror that affects our world that we enter an entire new layer of suffering as we take on a gospel-centered and eternal perspective.

Yet, I want to draw out the hope that exists in 1st Corinthians 1:5. Paul also says that in addition to sharing with Christ's sufferings, we also share in His comfort. What hope we have in Christ. Even though we will endure hardships and sufferings, our hope is in a resurrected Savior. I don't know about you, but no amount of suffering can compare to the blessed hope of comfort in knowing that Christ is victorious. "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the World (John 16:33)." Take heart that this suffering that we face reminds us that this world is not our home.

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So, as Christians, we recognize that our regeneration through Christ gives us a whole new perspective on suffering. Not only do we recognize that we suffer along with every other human due to the depravity of human nature, but we also enter into the counter cultural suffering that Jesus exemplified in His own life. We are sensitized to the fallenness of this world but we find comfort in knowing that this is temporary and that Christ will ultimately redeem all things. However, let's look at one more set of verses that only enhances our eternal perspective on suffering from Hebrews 11:36-40.

“...and others experienced mocking and flogging, and further, chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented (people of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts, on mountains, and sheltering in caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.”

Our hope is not in gaining earthly comfort. Our hope is in God and His greater plan. Suffering of pain is not a sign of God's displeasure nor is a lack of it a sign of His pleasure. Remember God's promise of Romans 8:28. Remember that “our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal (2nd Cor. 4:17-18).”

Will Christians suffer? Yes. Not only will we suffer along with the world, but we will suffer along with Christ. This suffering has a purpose. Can you imagine how unrelatable Jesus would have been to mankind if He had not humbled himself by taking on the form of a man? By seeing what we see and feeling what we feel? If Jesus sat at His desk chair in heaven and dictated all things we would not be able to relate to Him. Likewise, we as Christians, if we were somehow given a free pass on suffering, persecution and hardships, how would we relate to a fallen world that experiences the same?

Finally, I want to leave you with Peter's words from 1st Peter 4:12-13. “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

Take faith, beloved, that the sufferings and trials that you will face as a result of your desire to live a godly life will be used for your good and for the good of Christ's name here on earth. Take hope in this and forever cling to the eternal perspective that you have in Christ Jesus.

Blessings,



Pastor Matt