

PRAY FOR THE PERSECUTED

The Voice of the Martyrs
vom.org

HOSTILE
Areas or countries where extremist groups, family members or community members routinely persecute Christians for their faith and witness.

RESTRICTED
Nations where governments oppose Christian faith and witness to varying degrees of severity. Christians are also persecuted by extremist groups, family members or community members.

"Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body."
—Hebrews 13:3

Pray that our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters, including those driven from their homes and women whose husbands have been martyred in hostile areas, will experience God's provision through the global body of Christ.

Pray that Christians who are in prison for their witness in restricted nations will sense God's presence and know that the global body of Christ is praying for them. Pray that Christians whose churches have been closed or destroyed will find ways to fellowship.

icommitto pray.com

Turn in your Bible to 1 Peter Chapter 3 and we will be looking at verses 18-22. A couple of weeks ago we saw where we as believers can suffer unjustly for our faith. In this letter, Peter continues to encourage, challenge, and cheer on these dispersed followers of Jesus Christ! He is reminding them that persecution will come for their faith and to not be alarmed when it does. Stand strong, be bold, be unwavering in giving a reason for your hope of that eternal hope we have in and through Jesus Christ.

What I just shared, through Voice of the Martyr's map, we see that this unjust suffering and persecution is still very prevalent and will continue until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We will get there soon in this letter, but Peter says this in Chapter 4 verses 12 and 13.

1 Peter 4:12-13

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

There is one that suffered before any of us that gives and brings us victory in the sufferings, we may receive because of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Lord Jesus Christ that suffered for all people that they might come to a point of repentance of their sin and surrendering their life in obedience to the Lord.

It is the unjust suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ that brings hope to all that will believe unto salvation. Let's read our verses for tonight.

1 Peter 3:18-22

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

The word "for" is a conjunction that ties back to the previous verses. The previous verses talk about that if we suffer for righteousness' sake we will be blessed. We are to give a defense and a reason for our hope that is in us because of Jesus Christ. If we are slandered, if we are persecuted, we are not being persecuted for a righteousness of our own.

We are suffering or being persecuted for proclaiming, heralding, living out with our lives the fact of who Jesus is. The fact that Jesus is the Son of God. The fact that Jesus is God in the flesh. The fact that we are all sinners and in need of forgiveness of our sins and salvation and Jesus is the only one that can bring salvation to a soul, to a person. But knowing that fact is not enough!

It starts here (pointing to the head) but it has to get here (pointing to the heart). When it gets here, to the heart, then we humble ourselves before God in repentance for our sin and ask God to save our soul. 1 John 1:9 says, that, ***"If we confess our sins, he (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."***

That is what we are proclaiming, look at verse 18 again.

1 Peter 3:18

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

So, what are we proclaiming?

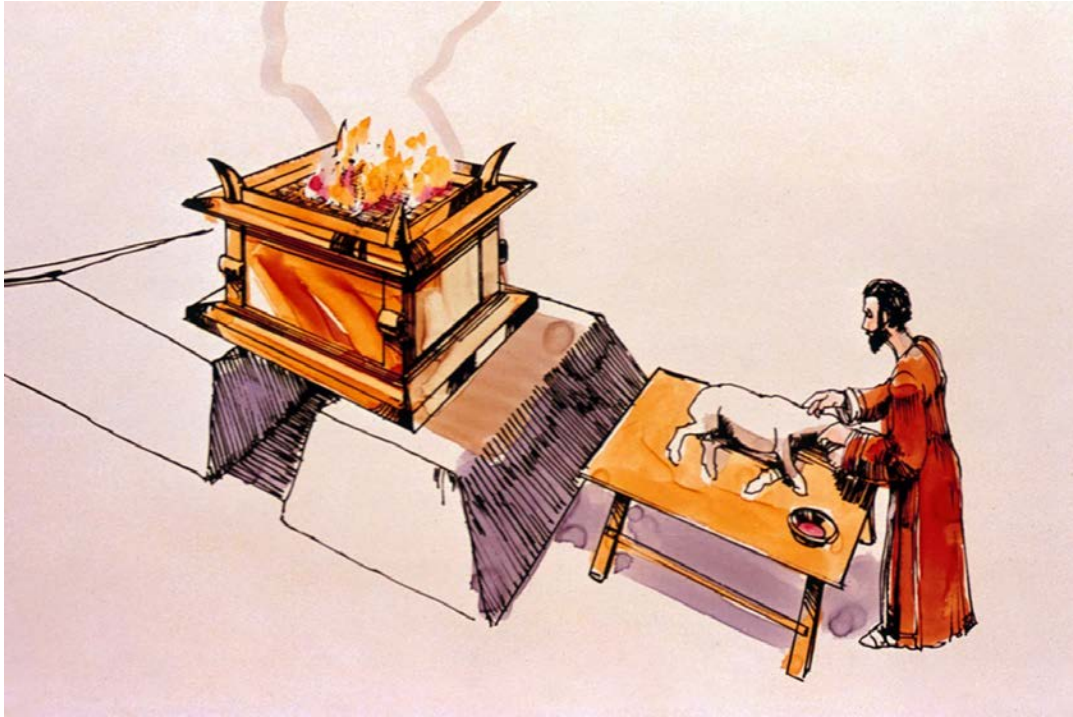
For Christ also suffered once for sins! Some translations say died once for our sins. That would be true, Jesus suffered in that he was whipped with a whip, called a cat of nine tails, that had rock, metal, and broken pottery intertwined with the cords. Jesus was beaten with fists and slapped with open hands across the face. Jesus had a crown of thorns mashed upon his head, so the thorns pierced his skin to cause blood to come gushing out.

Jesus was nailed to a cross and suffered through one of the most excruciating deaths in one of the most violent ways through crucifixion upon that cross. Jesus suffered, died once for sins!

The word once there is very important. When the sacrificial system was implemented by God for man to bring a sacrifice to the priests for repentance and a sacrifice for sin. It was a sinful man, bringing a perfect, without blemish lamb, to another sinful man.

Though a priest, the priest had to go through a purification process of washing with water and sacrifices made for them as well before they could perform their duties in the Tabernacle or Temple and could offer the lamb as a sacrifice for the sinful man that brought the sacrifice for his family.

These sacrifices were brought over and over and over and over during special celebrations, like the Passover, and throughout the year.



That done over and over was just a picture, a shadow, to be done until this happened.



The sacrifices were all done in anticipation of the Messiah to come. But, the Messiah was not to come as a governmental or military leader, at least not this first time. The Messiah was to come as a lamb to be sacrificed for our sins!

Isaiah 53:7-10

⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

Of course, we know the promised Messiah was Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, Jesus came as one of us, a baby, born of a virgin, yes Christmas is 47 days away. But who is counting? Me!

Jesus was born to die and when he died on the cross the plan of salvation was complete and there was no need of any animal sacrifice, and there was no need for a continuous sacrifice. So, when Jesus was sacrificed on the cross for our sins, Jesus did it once and for all.

Hebrews 7:26-28

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

As it is described here it shows us again the point of when Jesus died, it was once, it made all other sacrifices null and void. Also, the righteous for the unrighteous!

We just read the word perfect, describing Jesus in Hebrews 7:28:

- *The perfect for the imperfect*
- *The holy for the unholy*
- *The sinless for the sinner*

Why did Jesus go through all of that for us? Think about it! We have who and the what!

- For Christ also suffered once for sins

We have the for!

- The Righteous for the Unrighteous

Why?

- That he might bring us to God

The Greek word for the phrase, “Bring Us To”, is:

Prosago – To lead, to open a way of access to God, to render one acceptable to God.

Does Jesus drag someone? No! He summons, Jesus says, Come, Come! Look at what I did for you. In John 10 Jesus refers to himself when it comes to an entry way as what? The door! Jesus also tells us he is the “Good Shepherd”, and he will lay down his life for his sheep. Jesus said, ***“I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it back up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”***

Through the death that he died on the cross and the fact that he rose from the dead, Jesus is that door, Jesus is that access to God that has been separated by our sin. It is through his blood that was shed and through our true repentance of sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that renders us, makes us acceptable to God. Not that we become righteous, remember it is the righteous for the unrighteous. But it is Jesus’ righteousness that God sees as he looks upon us after our repentance and the surrendering our lives to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is described through Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Hebrews 9:22!

As verse 18 tells us, Jesus died a physical, bodily death, proven by having a spear thrust into his side, then was made alive in the spirit. But what does that mean? Made alive in the spirit!

Several points here. In John Chapter 4, as Jesus was talking with the woman at the well, Jesus described God. God is what? Spirit! Very good! In Genesis Chapter 2 verse 7, God formed Adam out of the dust of the earth and then he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living creature, ESV, a living soul, KJV.

At that time the body was created to never die. But what did Adam and Eve do to bring death into this world? They disobeyed God! This disobedience was more than just merely eating of a forbidden fruit. It was rejecting God’s authority, really rejecting God’s love towards them. Therefore, bringing death to the body but a spiritual separation from God as well.

To bring us to God, Jesus came and put on flesh as we have. Jesus became the God-Man! Fully Man and Fully God! Jesus took off his glory but never lost his deity.

What does it mean that Jesus was made alive in the spirit? We know God is spirit and is eternal! We know we were created in the image of God with a physical body but also a soul. Therefore, our souls live forever. Did Jesus' spirit die? No! As we learned from this letter in Chapter 2 verse 24, Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree, the cross. When Jesus became sin at that time, he took and felt the separation from God because at that time he took and felt the unadulterated wrath of God for our sins.

Remember, at that point, Jesus cried out, "My God, My God! Why have you forsaken me! That is the separation that he felt for the first time in all of eternity past and it was agonizing to the point of it feeling like death.

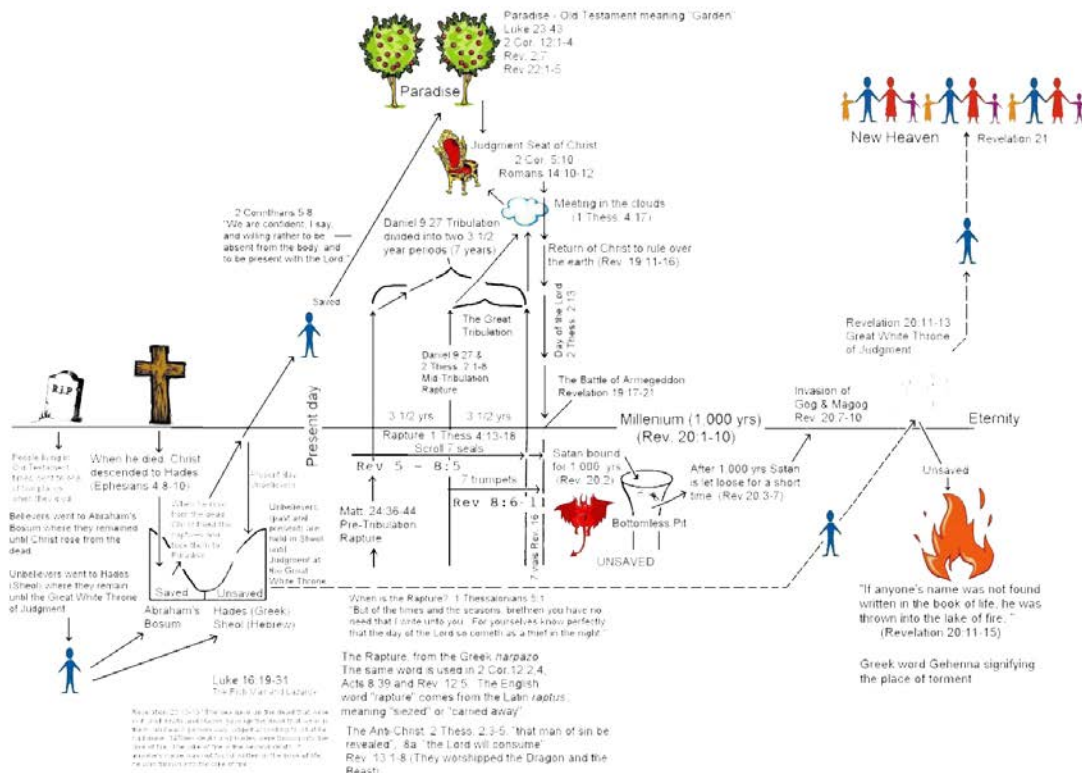
At that point, God, said, "Paid, my son!" Jesus said two more phrases on that cross! It is Finished! As recorded by the Apostle John in his Gospel. Also, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" Recorded by Luke, Dr. Luke, the missionary companion of the Apostle Paul.

Did Jesus' physical body stay dead? No, glory to God, 3 days later he was physically/bodily raised from the dead and is alive! What did Jesus do during those 3 days. Well, we do know two things! Look at verses 19 and 20 of 1 Peter 3.

1 Peter 3:19-20

19 In which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

What we just read is one of the two places that Jesus visited after his death. Let's discuss. Before Jesus' death burial and resurrection, where did the unsaved and the saved go when they died? In the Old Testament the place was called Sheol (Hebrews), and in the New Testament it is called Hades (Greek).



Look to the left of the image and you will see the cross. Sheol/Hades was divided into two compartments. For the saved, they went to Abraham's Bosom when they died. This would also be none as Paradise. The other side is Sheol/Hades where the unsaved went, was a place of torment. This was described by Jesus in Luke Chapter 16 when Jesus told the actual event of the rich man who had died and went to Hades and the poor man, Lazarus, who died and had been carried to Abraham's bosom, side, a place of peace, comfort, which we can call Paradise.

The saved and the unsaved could see each other. Because in verse 24 of Chapter 16 we read that the rich man in Hades cried out to Abraham with these words.

Luke 16:24

And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue for I am in anguish in this flame."

The saved were waiting for Jesus' sacrifice for sins upon the cross, his resurrection from the dead. When that was accomplished, Jesus descended to Hades to show the sacrifice had been completed and when he ascended back to Heaven, he emptied out Paradise, by taking Paradise to Heaven and took the saved with him.

Ephesians 4:8-10

⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men." ⁹ (In saying, "He ascended, what does it mean but he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Now, that is why we can say when a believer dies, the same thing Paul said, "To be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord!"

Jesus made another little visit as well, as we read in verses 19 and 20. Jesus made a visit to the spirits who were in prison. Who are these spirits and where is this prison?

We have to go back to Genesis Chapter 6, during the days of Noah, to see this come about. Turn to Genesis Chapter 6 and we will read verses 1 through 8.

Genesis 6:1-8

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. ³ Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." ⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. ⁵ The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Now, what I am about to say is what Pastor Kevin and I believe, I can't get into everything here but I am going to teach this from that premise. There is some disagreement of who the Nephilim are and how the daughters of man became pregnant.

Angels are spirit beings that do not have a gender. Throughout Scripture they are referred to in the masculine context. Anytime any names were used in reference to an angel is in the masculine form, such as Gabriel and Michael.

We believe, the sons of God, mentioned in this Scripture, were angels who were part of the rebellion with Satan in heaven and were cast out of heaven and became demons. They then possessed men of earth married the daughters of man, these women of earth, and were able to have children that way. Because of what these angels, demons, did they were chained and cast into the abyss.

Jude 6-7

⁶ And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day ⁷ just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example of undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

Where these angels are chained is what is called the Abyss. In Revelation Chapter 9 verses 1 and 2 this area is called a bottomless pit, but the word in the Greek for bottomless pit, is Abyss.

Remember when Jesus cast the legion of demons out of the man in the region of Gerasenes? Where did they beg Jesus for him not to send them? Luke 8:31, ***They begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss!***

We believe that is the prison that is referred to in these verses and the spirits are these demonic angels that committed these acts which are called sin. Peter refers to this again in 2 Peter Chapter 2.

2 Peter 2:4

⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell, and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.

The point of all this though is what did Jesus do while he was there? In verse 19 it says he proclaimed, preached, he was heralding the Gospel. This was not an opportunity of salvation for these angels. As created beings as well, they were with Jesus in heaven before they joined Satan in rebelling against God. They know who Jesus is!

Jesus was there proclaiming victory! The angels had their chance in heaven to obey and follow God but did not and their fate was set.

If you are not saved here tonight, your fate is not set. If you have not hardened your heart to the point of being a reprobate, you still have a chance. The Lord is being patient with you.

Just as we read about Noah in verse 20. What the angels/demons did corresponds with the heart of man during this time as well.

Genesis 6:5

⁵ The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

I believe it to be very important to see the words, every intention of the thoughts of mankind's heart was only evil continually. I don't think we can even imagine the wickedness and evil that was going on. Well, wait a minute! Maybe we can with what we see happening in the world today!

This grieved God to the point where, as we read, he would blot out all living creatures not just mankind. Hey kids! Do you know what this is a picture of?



The ark! Correct! This is the Ark Encounter at Answers in Genesis and was built to the specifications in the Bible that were given to Noah. How was God going to destroy life upon the earth? A flood!

Though all of mankind's heart was wicked, Noah found favor with the Lord and God told him to build an ark to save his family. 45 feet high, which is about 20 feet higher than these ceilings. 75 feet wide, 450 feet long! That is one big boat! How long do you think it took Noah to build the ark?

A long time! We know it had to be less than 100 years, because Noah had his sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth after he was 500 years old, and the flood came when he was 600 years old. As Noah was building the ark, what was he doing as well?

2 Peter 2:5 tells us Noah was a herald of righteousness, proclaiming the victory over sin, and salvation through faith and obedience to God. I would say that Noah probably was proclaiming that truth for much longer, but I would say now that he knows God is going to destroy the earth, this put a bit of urgency and intentionality to his preaching.

During this time God was still showing his patience towards the people as the work was going on to build the ark. But we do see God's patience does end.

What was that a depiction of? The door was closed to the ark. Who closed the door? God! The flood began and only those in the ark were saved.

Peter describes this event as it pertains to Baptism. He makes a statement that sounds confusing, but it is not. Read verse 21 again.

1 Peter 3:21

²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We know that Baptism does not save you. What saves you? Look at the screens for a few moments again.

Ephesians 2:8-10

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

What saves us? Faith! But in what or who?

Titus 2:11-12

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

What is this grace that has appeared? Jesus Christ! ***For Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God.***

As Jesus died for our sins, we are to die to our sins and walk in newness of life.

The ark represented the salvation that is ours through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus. Faith in God's commands. As Noah and his family were in the ark and the water that had come upon the earth that destroyed all the wickedness that was upon the earth, as they floated upon the water it kept them safe from God's judgment.

Then when the waters subsided, they were brought into a whole new life for them and a new life on earth of nature.

Baptism is a reflection of the newness that has taken place in our life as we have repented of our sins, but now show that we are identifying with Jesus and giving witness to God and to the people around we have died to sin and now are walking in newness of life as Romans 6:4 says.

Romans 6:4

⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Ladies and Gentlemen! Victory! What Peter is describing to these persecuted Christians that there is victory through suffering for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!

There is victory over sin through the suffering that Jesus Christ did on the cross. When Jesus left heaven and came to earth, remember he came to offer his life as a ransom for many. Through that suffering to bring us to God.

Jesus suffered through ridicule, threats, lies about him, and loneliness. Jesus suffered through beatings, crown of thorns, being hung on a cross by nails being pounded through the flesh of his wrists and his feet. Jesus suffered as he took our sin upon his body and experienced the separation from God the Father that sin creates. Jesus suffered as he took his last human breath on the cross and committed his spirit to God the Father.

Jesus suffered as that body was placed in a tomb, but 3 days later through the power of God, through his resurrection, victory was won as verse 22 says. Look at your Bible or at the screens:

1 Peter 3:22

22 Who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the father in victory!

We now have victory in our suffering! We suffer as we face the persecution of our obedience, faith, living for the Lord Jesus in truth and purity! We suffer as we fight off Satan's lies and deceptions! But we do it with a spirit of power and love and self-control as we are herald of the Gospel and proclaim, Victory in Jesus because the Old Rugged Cross made and makes the difference!