

## "THE BLESSINGS OF SUFFERING"



**TEXT:** 2 Cor. 4:7-12

**INTRO.:** A. At Paul's miraculous conversion the Lord sent Ananias to go to him to heal his blindness and to deliver an unusual message: **"I will show him (Paul) how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."** Acts 9:16  
Talk about a blow. After only being saved 3 days, Paul is told he must begin a life of suffering in order to carry the message of salvation.

B. As we look at Paul's ministry we see that prophecy come true. When we read the text we see the price Paul paid to carry the **"treasure"** of the Gospel in the **"earthen vessel"** of his body. If the **"light of the glorious Gospel"** (v.4) is to shine, the vessel, like Gideon's pitchers must be broken.

**ILLUS.:** Dr. Henry Jowett said: "Ministry that costs nothing, accomplishes nothing." One day two preachers were listening to an eloquent sermon, but it obviously lacked something. "There was something missing" one said, & his preacher friend's reply was: "Yes, and it won't be there until his heart is broken. After he has suffered awhile, he will have a message worth listening to."

We need a reminder that the vessel is not celestial, but earthly,  
not angelic, but human,  
not strong, but frail,  
not perfect, but imperfect,  
not prideful, but lowly,  
not boastful, but unimposing.

Someone else said "We are 'vessels' so we may be used and 'earthen' so we may be broken." Then we can depend on His power & not our own. People do not want the vessel, they want the contents. Also, the contents must change the vessel, not the vessel change the contents!

### **I. SUFFERING IS DESIGNED:**

A. A Divine Appointment:

1. Suffering for the believer is no accident.

#### **Acts 14:22**

**Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.**

#### **2 Timothy 3:12**

**Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.**

- a. Like Paul we all have a Divine appointment with suffering.
- b. That suffering make take many forms: physical, geographical, financial, emotional, hardships, heartache, difficulties, personality problems (Paul, John Mark), etc.

2. Paul's sufferings were planned by God for others benefit – for our benefit.

**ILLUS.:** How many saints over the centuries have derived comfort from the sufferings of the Apostle Paul? His handling of problems and pressures and persecution in as example for us. He never got diverted, detoured discouraged, or depressed. He just kept on going. He didn't give up, give out, give in or give way!

## **II. SUFFERING IS DIDACTIC: V.8,9**

**ILLUS.:** The word "didactic" means instructive or having a moral message.

### A. A Divine Program:

1. Suffering is a means of instruction for the child of God, where God is teaching a lesson which may be designed to build character, or just to strip the saint of weights, sins or distractions.

**ILLUS.:** When you are in prison, like Paul, deprived of food, friends and fellowship; you have no need for money, possessions (except necessities: "*cloak...books...parchments...*" **2 Tim.4:13**), and things you once thought were indispensable. Severe sickness refocuses our priorities. A sick child gets our mind off ourselves. A crisis changes our perspective. A near death experience places things that our truly important in the forefront of our thoughts.

2. Suffering by definition is never pleasant – Paul describes his own situation:

- a. Hemmed in (**v.8a "every side"**), not hammered down (**v.8b "not distressed"**)
- b. Without explanation (**v.8c "perplexed"**); not defeated (**v.8d "not in despair"**)

**ILLUS.:** We won't always understand why certain events befall us. Our situation often brings us to the "Why me?" stage. We somehow believe we should be exempt from the very things which will build character, make us more Christlike, earn rewards for us or even mature us. We may indeed be "*perplexed*" but we never have to be in despair.

- c. Beat up (**v.9a "persecuted"**); not alone (**v.9b "not forsaken"**)
- d. Thrown for a loss (**v.9c "cast down"** – a wrestling term); not whipped (**v.9d "not destroyed"** – or to carry the wrestling image "*not pinned*")

**ILLUS.:** Professional wrestling is a phony. It is acting and entertainment. Now it is dirty also! When TV first came out my rich friend who lived in a mansion on the hilltop would invite me to watch wrestling. ("Gorgeous George" who later got saved, was my favorite!) Of course it was staged, and just when you thought the good guy would be pinned, at the count of 2 ½ (!), he would raise a shoulder from the mat.

Paul is saying that every time the devil had him thrown and nearly pinned, he would get a shoulder up again! Paul is not telling us all this so we would feel sorry for him, but that we might learn from his experiences not to get distressed, in despair, feel forsaken, or get whipped! His suffering was indeed didactic for us.

## **III. SUFFERING IS DEADLY: V.10-12**

### A. A Divine Imperative:

1. In Paul's vocabulary to die is to live: "***For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. "I die daily..." "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live..." v.10a***
2. We must die for Christ to live through us and in us. V.10b

**QUOTE:** Oliver Greene: "*When we surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ we say by that surrender, 'I am dying to the world and coming alive in Jesus, to walk in His steps, to share the cross with Him, to lose my life in His service.'*"

3. Surrender = death; to our will whims and wants. V.11
4. Death to self = life for others. V.12

**ILLUS.:** As Paul sacrificially gave himself in ministry, others benefited. His crucified life meant new life for others. As his vessel continued to be broken, the "treasure" within shined more brightly and provided light and life for others.

**CONCL.:** To the selfish believer the phrase in our title **"THE BLESSINGS OF SUFFERING"** seem to be hollow, empty words and a contradictory statement. But in Paul's life and ministry it became a reality.

In reality suffering often accomplishes what material possessions and "things" can never do for the child of God. It sharpens his sense of priority, it focuses his direction, it hones his maturity, it redirects his energies, and it builds his spiritual muscle.