

Does Your Suffering Have a Purpose?

Most of us have a suffering problem and it all begins with our warped view of suffering. We often categorize the discomforts of everyday life as a type of suffering we need to avoid. Our bills are too high and we think we are suffering. The air conditioning is broken and we think we are suffering. And as a result of that warped view of suffering, we begin to believe that this “suffering” is something we need to avoid at all costs. So then when the Bible suggests that we ought to “share in the sufferings,” the phrase is not just foreign to us, it’s offensive to us. Truth is that Paul is not speaking about the discomfort that comes with everyday life, but he is speaking about the suffering that comes when we are misunderstood, marginalized, maligned and mistreated because we identify with Jesus. Not many of us have had to experience that suffering....but maybe our time is coming.

2 Timothy 2:1-13

1 You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, **2** and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. **3** Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. **4** No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. **5** An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. **6** It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. **7** Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, **9** for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!

10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. **11** The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

12 if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

As Paul encourages Timothy in the suffering that will befall him as a follower of Jesus, he lets him know that his suffering will have a purpose. We too must remember that should we suffer for the name of Jesus, there are four reasons here in this passage that give purpose to our suffering.

I. **We Possess a Sacred Trust (vv. 1-2)**

a. The Gospel of Christ, preached by Paul, is a deposit, a trust, that Timothy is supposed to both “guard” (1:14) and “entrust” to others (2:2).

II. **We’ve Been Given a Cosmic Mission (vv. 3-7)**

a. The examples of the soldier, athlete, and farmer are meant to encourage Timothy to keep his eyes and efforts focused on the mission/prize/harvest that are before him. This comes with hard work and suffering.

III. **We Follow a Risen King (v. 8)**

a. Timothy is encouraged to remember Jesus. He is the one who is both God and man, the one who has secured our salvation and has established His Kingdom. Jesus is the one who has suffered for us, and we will share in His sufferings.

IV. **We Are Guaranteed a Sure Victory (vv. 9-13)**

a. Paul is not concerned about his own imprisonment or sufferings because the Word of God is not bound and through his sufferings the elect are coming to Christ. Paul knows that he will live with Christ and reign with Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it that we have such a misunderstanding of suffering in the American church?
2. How do you think the church is doing at guarding the “trust” of the Gospel? How do you think we are doing at “entrusting” this Gospel to others? What do we need to do differently?
3. What are the things that take our focus off the mission Christ has given us?
4. In what ways do we often get “entangled in civilian affairs”?
5. How did Christ’s sufferings differ from our sufferings? How is His example and encouragement helpful to us today?
6. What are the ways we often think the Gospel is bound in our country? What would be Paul’s perspective on that if he lived here in the US?

Going Deeper

1. How do your views of suffering for Christ need to change?
2. What “civilian entanglements” do you need to get rid of in order to get refocused on the mission Christ has given you here in Memphis?