

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 4- Luke 4:3-13**

41- The Temptation of Jesus Christ- Part 4

August 9, 2009

Luke 4:3-13

I have long believed that the hallmark of being a bondsman of the Lord Jesus Christ is not in how well you live- but is found in how well you suffer, how well you go through persecution, how well you handle trials and tests, how well you stand up under the pressure to compromise Divine Truth, how well you fight back against the tide of this pagan culture that seeks to break you and mold you and shape you into its own image, how well you speak the Truth in Love, how well you endure afflictions as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

That you and I so value the Lord Christ, so value His Grace and Mercy, so value His Death, Burial, and Resurrection that we deem it an honor to give up all that this world holds dear in order to gain Christ; that we will not turn to the right or the left but we stand and walk on a path that is very straight and very narrow and that we are so glad to do so.

That you and I recognize that we are great sinners and that God is a great Savior and that Truth fashions you, it changes you, it renews your mind to the point that since Salvation is so good, since Jesus is so sweet, since being on this side is so infinitely better than being on that side- that whatever God Sovereignly brings into my life, whatever God Sovereignly allows to come into my life, whatever God Sovereignly wills for me to do, whatever God Sovereignly requires of me, whatever God Sovereignly expects from me, and whatever God Sovereignly desires for me to do is just fine; it is my delight; it is my joy.

So my goal is not to just get out of my troubles- it is to be faithful in my troubles. My goal is no longer to escape pain and suffering- it is to honor God in my pain and suffering; my goal is no longer to be spared hardship and the misery of confrontation or rebuke- but it is to be

molded and shaped and formed into His Image and Likeness from those things.

So that is why I say that to suffer well is more of a glory to Jesus than living well. To be faithful against all odds is more precious to the Master than all the wealth of this present evil world; to hear those glorious words on that day, "*Well done good and faithful servant*", is more of a reward than perfect physical health could ever be; and to die well, to die content, to die in the Lord, to die grateful that you could be so privileged to die for His Name's sake is the highest glory that we could ever give to God.

That is why I firmly believe that satan does not want to hurt us near as much as he wants to bless us into apathy; he would do anything to keep us from suffering so he can lull us into sleep by the abundance of our material possessions and our safety and security; the devil seeks not to disturb us lest we pray, lest we turn to God, lest we cry out to God, lest we repent and forsake sin and grab the horns of the altar and lest we weep between the porch and the altar- but satan seeks to make us fat and content and happy with this sin cursed earth, to seek after its glory and applause and praise, satan seeks not to makes us discontent with this life but he seeks to encourage us to seek after the things that are passing away so that we will not strive to enter in at the straight gate, so that we will not labor to enter into His Rest, and so that we will not work while it is yet day.

So do not seek to escape calamity, dear friends; do not seek to be spared God's correction; do not seek to avoid the chastening of the Lord- because in those things- if we go through them well, full of faith, never doubting, trusting in the Promises of God, knowing that trouble and suffering and persecution and pain are a sign of God's great Love to us- we will be strengthened by them, God will be honored, and our joy will be full.

And we can see these very things in play here as we continue to examine this very important moment in the Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ- we need to remember that *unlike* all of our own personal confrontations with the devil- satan would have done *anything* to prevent Jesus from suffering. As Luke tells us in **Luke 4:1**- satan didn't seek Jesus out here- not at all- Luke tells us here that the Spirit of God drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil and to fast for forty days- so we see that satan did not initiate this confrontation- but

God did- and down in verse 14 the good doctor writes that after this 40 days of suffering-

... Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district.

So we see that instead of becoming weaker as a result of this time of suffering- Jesus actually became stronger from His suffering and His fasting and His torment and His time of agony, and that is why I say to you that satan would have done *anything* to keep Jesus from this suffering.

And this is a huge theological point that we need to center on this morning- especially because in our day it is so hard to actually hear any sound Biblical Teaching about suffering and the Glory of God.

In this passage- Dr. Luke gives us three examples of the temptations that satan threw at Jesus. First, in verse 3 the devil said,

If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.

And then, in verses 6&7 satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and says,

6 ... I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.

7 Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.

And finally, in verse 9 satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem and said,

If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here;

...and then we find out that satan knows the Bible and he begins to quote the Word of God in his effort to tempt Jesus from **Psalms 91:11&12** and said to Jesus:

11 For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways.

12 They will bear you up in their hands, That you do not strike your foot against a stone.

Now as I said, these particular temptations are amazingly relevant for American Christianity in the 21st Century. Notice that satan skips over adultery, fornication, homosexuality, stealing, lying, and murder- because all those temptations would be too obvious. Those are the games that sub-devils play with weak lukewarm and backslid saints. Those temptations are reserved for those Church members who are playing around with the world and touching their foot into the brink of iniquity on a consistent basis.

But Jesus is certainly no fall guy. When satan means business with a *strong* saint- he always sticks with religion and he makes the Bible his textbook. And see if this doesn't sound like something you might hear on the Hay, Wood, and Stubble Television Network from the many TV snake oil salesmen who teach:

"If you are a child of God, why are you living like a pauper? If you are a child of the King, why don't you live like a prince? The children of the King don't eat casseroles- they eat steak. The children of the King don't drive second-hand clunkers- they drive new cars. The children of the King don't shop at K-Mart- they shop at Neiman Marcus. The children of the King don't sell everything they own to go to Liberia or Cameroon or Ecuador or Japan- to preach the Gospel and live on a shoestring budget- loving those savages- no, no, no,- they are out enjoying life and relishing in God's blessings.

If you are a child of the King- then claim your blessings! God has promised to send his angels to make you healthy, wealthy, and wise. Abandon yourself into these blessings. The best testimony you can have to the lost world is not to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ- and it certainly isn't to suffer- but it is to ride around in a fancy car, wearing the best clothes, and living in the best neighborhoods- because then the lost world will see how much God loves you and they will be jealous and they will want what you've got. So don't live a life of sacrifice and selfless Love- that's for chumps who don't know how to manipulate God to get what they want out of Him."

I tell you that this kind of preaching- although very popular today- is not new- it is very, very ancient. It isn't a new revelation from God at all- it is as old as the serpent in the Garden- and this kind of self-

centered ungodly preaching is only a derivative of satan's temptation to Jesus right here.

You see, dear friends, what we need to realize is that satan had only one goal here in the wilderness: to do whatever he could to keep Jesus *away* from any kind of suffering. He was willing to let Jesus have all the Glory and all the Authority of a world ruler if He just wouldn't gain it through His suffering.

The devil was very eager to let Jesus use His Own Individual Divine Power if He would just use it to *relieve* His suffering. Satan was willing to let all the worshipers in Jerusalem see and acknowledge Christ's Divine Sonship- if only the angels of God would keep Jesus away from any suffering.

And we must also understand that this is satan's plan for you and me too- not to cause us to hurt- no, but to set us free from suffering- without being obedient and faithful to God. And we must remember as we ponder this- that the Bible clearly teaches that it was God the Father's Will and it was the leading of God the Holy Ghost for Jesus to enter into the wilderness and to suffer.

And Jesus loved His Father more than anyone has ever or will ever love God. There is no love that exists for God like Jesus' love for His Own Father. And as fully God- Jesus was capable and able to do anything that God Himself could do. So in order to fulfill His Father's Will and in order to be fully led by the Holy Spirit- Jesus had to be humiliated; He had to be subjugated or brought low; He had to divest Himself or willingly set aside His Own Divine Prerogatives and Power in order to walk this world in true submission to His Father's Will and led by the Holy Spirit. And as I told you last time- this is what theologians call "The Subjugation of Jesus" or "The Humiliation of Jesus"- our Lord willingly setting aside His Divinity so that He may fully obey His Father and fully be led by God's Spirit- regardless of the consequences to Himself personally. Please turn with me and read **Hebrews 5:8&9:**

8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,

In other words- it meant more to Jesus to be obedient to His Father and to please His Father and to be fully led by God the Holy Ghost than it did whether He ate or not. It meant more to Jesus that He was faithful to His Father and in full obedience to the Spirit's leading than it did that He lived or died. Being happy and free and full and healthy and delivered from pain and set free from suffering and prosperous was *not* what was on Jesus' Mind- but to be obedient and faithful- that was what was on Jesus' Mind. Escaping pain and suffering and hardship and persecution and even dying- avoiding these things and being delivered from these things were *not* priorities for Jesus- and it is not what should be our priorities either.

No, what concerned Jesus was that His Father's Will was carried out completely and faithfully. What concerned Jesus was whether or not He was in full submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit. What was on Jesus' Mind was not how He was *Personally* benefitting from what God wanted done- but whether or not God was being Glorified. And that is the true definition of Love, and that is the true definition of devotion, and that is the true definition of obedience and service.

So for Jesus to listen to the devil here and take matters into His Own Hands and pick back up His Divine Prerogatives and Power and relieve Himself of His hunger by performing a miracle here, for Jesus to operate independently or operate outside of the Will of the Father and operate contrary to the leading of the Holy Spirit and go ahead and exercise His Own Divine Ability to perform miracles and get out of the suffering that God the Father had willed for Him and that God the Holy Ghost had driven Him into, for Jesus to ignore His Father's Desire and Plan for Him and to relieve Himself of the pain, to set Himself free from the hunger - that would have destroyed the unity of the Trinity and we would all be forever damned to hell.

We must remember, dear friends that 700 years earlier- God had moved on Isaiah the prophet to pen down these words found in **Isaiah 53:1-11:**

1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open 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 For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*?

9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

10 But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

The Bible says here in verse 10 that it "pleased" the Lord to crush Jesus. So that was God's Will for Jesus. And so if satan was successful in tempting Jesus to *remove* that crushing or to *avoid* that crushing or *escape* that crushing or be *delivered* from that crushing by the free exercise of His Own Divine Power; if Jesus did *anything* to relive Himself of this crushing and His suffering- satan would have been successful in destroying the unity of the Trinity and all of God's Plan would have been defeated.

Now let me give you another example of how the Will of God is so foreign to us and why we need to be taught by Scripture about the Will of God rather than depending on our own fallen human logic. Do you remember back in **Matthew 16** when Jesus said to the disciples that He

had to go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be killed and rise the third day? And the Bible says that Peter,

... took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.”

Now why did Peter do that? Did Peter do this and say this because He hated Jesus, or was it because he loved Jesus and didn't want Jesus to suffer and didn't want Jesus to hurt and be rejected and die, and because he wanted Jesus to live and be set free from all pain and suffering and to be exalted and lifted up and to enjoy His time here on earth?

And many people today would agree with Peter- after all- those are human emotions and human desires and human wants. I mean Jesus was the Lord and He was entitled to enjoy His time on earth- right? And He was certainly *deserving* of the adoration of the people and to have people cater to Him.

But that was not the Will of God for Jesus at that time. That is not why God sent Jesus to the earth. It was not God's Will that Jesus be adored and honored and lifted up and exalted in His first Advent. God's perfect Will was for Jesus to suffer and to be rejected and to be falsely accused and to be betrayed and to die. It pleased the Lord to bruise Jesus.

So because Jesus loved His Father, because Jesus wanted to do His Father's Will more than He wanted to do anything else- including live a long and prosperous life, because Jesus had fully submitted Himself to the leading of the Holy Spirit to follow and obey Him- what was Jesus' response to Peter's human emotional objection recorded for us in **Matthew 16:23**? The Bible says that Jesus turned and said unto Peter:

Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.

Now I have said this many times- Jesus was not rude or mean- but here Jesus Christ calls Peter "satan", and there are not five people that you know that would stand there and listen to Jesus or anybody else call them "satan" and then continue to walk with Him and be

faithful to Him. We would have gotten offended and walked away from Jesus and let Jesus have it all. We would have said something like, "*I mean just Who does Jesus think He is? I was only trying to save His neck! If He wants to go down to Jerusalem and die- go ahead and die- what do I care?*" That would have been most of our attitudes right here.

You see, like many of us- Peter was looking at things with his own fallen human eyes and using his own fallen human logic, and he was trying to fashion Christianity after what seemed to be right in his own eyes- rather than what the Will of God was- and that is why with even the best of intentions- while trying to save Jesus' life- Peter could actually be rebelling against the Will of God.

And Jesus correctly understood this- which is why He called Peter "satan", because Jesus knew that unless He perfectly accomplished His Father's Will, unless He obeyed the Spirit's leading fully- that Peter along with the rest of humanity could never be saved.

So I pray that you can see that it was actually satan's goal here in the wilderness- not to hurt Jesus- but to entice Jesus to alleviate or to stop or to remove God's Will and to remove the Spirit's leading from being accomplished by getting Jesus to deliver Himself *from* His suffering.

So in this case- satan is the one who sought to deliver Jesus from suffering while it was God Who sought to bruise Jesus. And that is why, dear friends, we must get our understanding of the Will and the Ways of God from Scripture and resist the temptation to use our own human logic and human reasoning lest we side with satan and be found fighting against God.

Now it needs to be said here that of course God didn't seek to bruise Jesus simply because God wants to hurt people or because God is mean or because God is hurtful by Nature- He isn't. It pleased the Lord to bruise Jesus only because the suffering and the death of Jesus meant the final destruction of satan and the Salvation of you and me. And what we must remember, brothers and sisters, is that- what God is most passionate about is not being nice or being liked- but what God is most passionate about is that His Will is being done and that He is being glorified. Those two aspects trump everything else.

God does what He does so that His Own Good Pleasure is carried out throughout all of the Creation that He made, and that He is worshipped and honored and glorified as God.

And what we also need to understand is that satan's goal in this Church today and with you today is the same thing as it was here- to frustrate or to hinder or to stop God's Will from being carried out. And the factor that determines whether you are obeying God and being used by God to further God's Will in the earth, or whether you are assisting the devil and being an offense to Jesus is not your own good intentions or the sincerity of your heart- but whether you are being faithful to what Scripture teaches about these things and that you savor the things that are of God rather than the things that are of men.

Now the Scriptures clearly teach that it is the Father's Will that He Sovereignly brings together all things that *we* would call "good" along with all things that *we* would call "bad", and by His Immutable Power- God "works" all those things- both the "good" things and the "bad" things "together" *in* our lives and *through* our lives so that the greater "good" of the Glory of God is brought forth by and through our sanctification into the Image and Likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now that is unmistakably the Father's Will and that is unmistakably what the Holy Spirit leads all believers into.

So by default then- we must say that there are times that it is the perfect Will of God that His people suffer and that they hurt, and that they are mistreated, and that they are persecuted and not delivered, and that they suffer indignities and are not relieved, and that they get sick and are not healed, and that they go through trials and that they endure temptations, and that they are confronted by the devil because that is God "working" all things- in this case the things that we would call "bad"- in our lives.

And in His great Mercy and by His great Power- God takes all of those things that we would call "bad" and God works them together with all the blessings, and all the healings, and all the wonderful and the kind and the pleasant and the good, and sweet and precious, and lovely things that He has also Sovereignly allowed or caused to come into our lives, and the net result is that through God working both of these things together- you and I are changed from one realm of glory to another realm of glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord, and we are molded, and we are shaped, and we are conformed to be more and more like Jesus.

And I suggest to you that it is precisely because we suffer these things that we are made strong- not because we are always delivered

from suffering, that it is precisely because we do hurt and are not relieved that we become stronger and that grow in our trust of God and our trust in God - not because we escape these things.

And I also suggest to you that this is the Father's Will and this is the Spirit's leading for all of those who have been chosen from before the foundation of the world and who have been gloriously saved by Grace alone through Faith alone in the finished Work of Christ alone. Please turn and read with me **Romans 8:26-30**

26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;

27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*.

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His purpose*.

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become conformed to the image of His Son*, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Now this is all that God is interested in- that you and I by and through the accumulation of all the things that God has Sovereignly allowed or caused to come into our lives working together brings us forth as sanctified people who are made fit for the Master's use and a people who live their lives for no other reason other than for the Glory the God.

And I would also suggest to you that these are the very things that satan despises and that he will fight against and that he will seek that we turn away from and he will do anything to keep us from.

So, by default then- I pray that you can see that God is infinitely more interested, for example, that you and I be holy than that we are temporarily happy, that we be found faithful rather than financial blessed, that we be obedient rather than delivered, and that we persevere to the end rather than that we are prosperous- because us being holy and us being faithful and us being obedient and us persevering to the end are the things that will glorify God.

And if that is true- then whatever God needs to bring into my life and whatever God needs to take away from my life that will bring about His Own Glory through my sanctification- that is what the Will of God is, and that is what the Holy Spirit leads me into - not *necessarily* what will benefit me personally or make me happy and secure at that particular moment.

Now even though this is God's perfect Will for our lives, and even though this is what the Spirit of God will lead all believers into- these things are usually *not* our will and they are usually *not* what we would normally choose and they are *not* what we would volunteer for.

So because of that- God doesn't ask our permission to do these things- they are His Will and God goes about to do them regardless of what we desire at that particular moment precisely because God has already bought and paid for us, and we are His purchased possession and God feels the liberty to do whatever He chooses with those who already belong to Him.

Now when I say that- I do not mean to say that God is arbitrary about this or that God simply pushes His Weight around because He can- no, no, no, no!

No, God is Good and He is doing what He is doing *in* us and *with* us and *through* us in accordance with His Divine Plan that is set up and firmly established so that He is glorified and our joy is made full. So for the sake of His Own Glory and for the sake of our full and eternal joy- God many times *ignores* our own wills and God ignores our own temporary and personal and physical and emotional and financial well-being and goes ahead and works all things together for good. And even though we may grumble and complain and bellyache about all this down here- nobody- absolutely nobody who is standing in Heaven right now has any complaints at all about how and why God did what He did in their lives to get them where they are.

But we must also understand that while we struggle against all of this due to our limited vision and our limited understanding- this process of Sanctification that involves God working both good and bad things together for the greater good of the Glory of God and our full and eternal joy is certainly not satan's will either. Jesus Himself said in **John 10:10:**

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly.

Now historically we have only taken this verse in one way- that it is satan's desire to hurt us, and to make us sick, and to rob our money from us, and to take away our possessions, and to kill us. This faulty logic says that God is good and the devil is bad, and, so, therefore- whatever makes us uncomfortable must be of the devil, whatever makes us sick and whatever causes us to not have enough money to do what we want to do, whatever hinders our freedom, and whatever kills our body must be of satan, and so it must be resisted and cast out and denounced and rejected and prophesied against.

And some take this human logic even further to teach that since God is good it would *never* be God's Will that His Own children suffer or that they be poor or that they get sick- and some would even teach that it is not God's Will that anyone ever die.

That is the logic behind the so-called "Health, Wealth, and Prosperity Movement" that is so popular in our day, and it is the fleshly human logic behind what is called "The Kingdom Dominion Movement." And I suggest to you that what makes these teachings so popular is not their Biblical accuracy- but that it appeals to the base and prurient interests of our fallen flesh- that whatever makes me happy and whatever blesses or heals or prospers me must be of God.

But what these people leave out of their theology is the fact that God works *all* things together for good- not just the pleasant and the soothing things, and that it is God's Will that His people glorify Him and come into the fullness of joy through their sanctification- not that we make this earth more appealing and more comfortable to live in.

So there are occasions when God will allow persecution to come to His Own children and not deliver them. There are occasions whereby God's people get sick and they are not healed; when they are imprisoned and not set free; when they are troubled and not comforted; when they have needs and those needs are not met; when they are hungry and they are not fed; when they suffer and are not relieved of that suffering.

And during those times - we are to submit ourselves to the Will of our kind and loving Father, and we are to yield ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit and endure persevere and trust and believe and hope.

But satan will come to us in that moment of our human weakness when we don't understand and when we do not see clearly, and in our weakness satan will say to us the very same thing that he said to Jesus here in the wilderness,

"Since you're a child of God, why don't you just tell these stones to become bread? What in the world are you doing out here suffering for? You've come to Jesus and Jesus has saved you, and now you're out here hurting and forsaken and you have given up the world and tried your best to serve the Lord and look at you- your being humiliated- even though you're an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ. You're out here in the wilderness and you've gone through all of this and now you're hungry and you're sick and you're poor, and God has not even provided food for you and you're supposed to be His child- What's with that?"

I mean God even fed those rebellious and disobedient Jews for 40 years in the wilderness- and God can't even get you a piece of bread? All those sinners are driving around in nice cars and you're struggling just to pay your bills? Those people who don't even serve God are being healed and blessed, and you're still sick and poor? How is that the Love of God?"

Are you sure God really loves You? Are you sure God really cares about you? If He did - wouldn't He get you out of all this mess you're in? Are you sure that this is God's Will? If God was with You- wouldn't you at least have something to eat? You must have missed God- because God wants you to enjoy life and live life to the fullest and You're hardly doing that out here in the wilderness starving to death!

Go ahead and stop trusting God; why would God want you to go through all this suffering anyway? Go ahead- take matters into your own hands and do what is best for you for a change. Stop trying to yield to the Holy Spirit- look what that's gotten you. Stop trying to obey the Father's Will- God doesn't even keep bad things from coming into your life.

God wants you to be happy and God wants you to become an important person and God wants you to reach for the stars and become powerful and rich, and you can't do that on this silly old path that is so straight and narrow.

So leave this tired old way of serving God and join in with those who have both the world and all its pleasures, and still have God, too."

You see, dear friends, like Jesus- satan will do anything to keep you from suffering, too. He will do anything to try to get you and me to take matters into our own hands and forget about what God's Will is and forget about yielding to the Spirit of God and forget about being

faithful and obedient and go ahead and do what is right in our own eyes to accomplish our own results.

Satan will do *anything* to hinder you from following Jesus when He says in **Luke 9:23**:

... If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

People have asked me why, if satan is real, why we don't see more demon possessions and exorcisms in America. I have an idea why. Satan holds American Christianity so tightly in the vice-grip of comfort and wealth and blessings that he's not about to tip his hand with too much demonic activity. You see, what Satan fears most in this Church is not that you are rich or fat or dumb or happy. No satan would love to bless you and heal you into a spiritual sleep whereby you do not hear God's Voice and you are not busy about the Work of the Lord and where you are not found faithful.

I have said for many years that if the devil can't get you to backslide- then he'll get you to frontslide. He will do anything to keep you dull, anything to keep you ineffective, anything to keep you sleepy, anything to keep you satisfied with what is- rather than what should be; anything to keep your belly full- so that you are no longer hungering after Jesus- and most of that time that means that satan must keep you into things that are good and that are pleasant and that are pleasing to our flesh rather than things that are hard on our flesh- because hardship makes us cry out to God while comforts makes us content and lazy.

In fact- I am convinced that the unprecedented prosperity that we have enjoyed here in the United States over the last 100 years is not from God at all- but is nothing more than a trap of satan to cause God's people to love this present evil world; to become comfortable around wickedness and that has made sin look attractive.

The vast accumulation of material goods that we have enjoyed in this country has not- for the most part- caused us to abandon ourselves into a high risk life of Love and Service- but it has quieted our spirits so that we see no need to risk losing all that we have. Our technological advancements have not- for the most part- brought us more knowledge of God and His Word- no, according to the great Anglican theologian,

John Stott- we are the most Biblically illiterate generation of believers in the 2,000 year history of the Church- but our technological advancements have helped to make sin look more attractive and compromise more acceptable.

If our great material wealth was from God- if being blessed financially was the main focus of a good God toward His people- then it would have brought about a corresponding rise in holiness in us- but we are less holy than our fathers, we are less spiritual, we are more worldly and less godly, we are less on fire for God, and we are less true to Scripture than those generations who came before us who did not have any wealth like we have known.

But if financial prosperity and good health and material wealth causes a corresponding *decrease* in godliness, a *decrease* in obedience, a corresponding increase in loving this present world and of loving pleasures more than God and of loving ourselves more than God and a *decrease* in hungering after Righteousness- then wouldn't that be a tool that satan would love to use?

So that is why I say that satan would love to bless us into a spiritual coma, he would love to give us all the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them as long as we do not stay faithful to God, and he would do anything to keep us from suffering so that we would never turn to God and become strong in the Lord and in the Power of His Might.

The Apostle Paul had a prayer that he prayed that has to do with this issue and I want to look at it this morning. Please turn with me to **Philippians 3:10:**

... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

Now this prayer is broken down into four parts. Firstly, Paul is praying that he might know Jesus Christ; that he might know Him intimately, fully, correctly. And I would dare say that most people today would say "Amen" to that request. Secondly, Paul is praying that he might know or be intimately aware of the Power of Jesus Christ's Resurrection- and the line of people who want that kind of power runs down the aisle of the church- out the door- and around the block.

Everybody and his brother want more power- nobody wants less

power. And we want more power because having more power will get us more stuff.

But notice that while most of us stop praying at this moment- Paul does not. He continues to pray that God will grant him the gift of not only knowing Jesus Christ Personally, and of not only knowing the power of Christ's Resurrection- but Paul goes on to pray that he will be granted the gift of being able to fellowship the sufferings of Christ as well.

Now I will be honest with you. I have been saved and in Church since 1971, and I have heard a lot of praying- but I have not heard anyone pray that God will grant them that they may fellowship- not the just the power of Christ's Resurrection, and not just the Person of Christ- but that God would allow them to fellowship in the *sufferings* of Jesus Christ as well!

Now why did Paul pray that way? Was Paul just a more noble person than most people? Is this request some form of 1st Century poetry that makes Paul look good? Or was Paul just a glutton for punishment?

No, Paul realized something that we need to understand today. It is impossible for you and me to come into the likeness and image of Jesus Christ absent suffering. It is impossible, in fact, for you and me to even get to a place in Jesus where our walk with God is stable and established unless and until we have fellowshiped the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

Paul knew that there is something wonderful that occurs when a saint of God suffers and is not delivered. And the Apostle Peter understood that our ability to overcome sin is directly attached to our suffering when he wrote in **1Peter 4:1** and said:

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

And again in **1 Peter 5:10** that says:

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

And so since it is God's Will that we cease from sin, and since it is God's Will that we be confirmed, and since it is God's will that we be productive in the Kingdom for God's Glory- Paul prayed that God would allow him to suffer. That's why he prayed that way.

But he didn't even stop there- notice the last part of **Philippians 3:10**:

... being conformed to His death

So in addition to praying that he could know Jesus Christ personally, and that he could know the Power of Christ's Resurrection and that he could fellowship the *sufferings* of Jesus Christ- Paul also prayed that he might be given the ability to be conformed or changed into the *death* of Jesus Christ.

Paul knew then as we must know today that by fellowshipping Christ's sufferings- we change, we are conformed, we are molded and shaped, and we lose some of our earthly, carnal characteristics, and we put on other more heavenly characteristics.

And that change pleases God; that change gives God glory; that change honors Jesus Christ; that change promotes Christianity; that change elevates things that are holy and right and edifying. So, therefore, it is God's Will, and, therefore, the Holy Spirit will always lead believers into that change, and, also- in equal proportion- satan will do anything to keep us away from this change.

Now lest there be any misunderstanding of what I am talking about here- let's go back to the hospital bed example that I was talking about three weeks ago. Remember how I set the scene up for you- that even though you are financially blessed and materially great and technologically advanced- the doctor has just told you that you are going to die in just a few minutes.

And the shocking news of your imminent death has caused the haze and the fog and the cloud that has been over your mind and eyes to lift. The confusion about what is truly important has been hidden from you through all your money and all your technology and all your possessions but now with this terrible news- your vision has now suddenly cleared away.

And now you can see perfectly clear and you can see what is really important and you can see what really matters. The mountains of

eternity lie just before you. The dove hovers over the grass and trees and streams on the right, and the lion of destruction crouches in the wasteland on the left.

Do not think that if you are filled with the Spirit, your call is to sit under the fruit trees with your feet dangling in the water. No- because nothing would please the lion more than we would do that.

No. Those who are touched by the dove and filled with the Spirit and who delight to do the Father's Will take heart and courage from the taste of Paradise- absolutely- but then they know the Father's Will and they know the Spirit's leading and they turn away from what would be best for *them* to the wasteland and pain and suffering of this present evil world, and these faithful bond slaves deny themselves and they pick up their cross and they follow Jesus out into the wilderness to do God's Will among the heathen and among the sin- even though it would be far better for them to stay behind.

So the cry of our hearts Christian Church should be that God will graciously grant us a revival of the fear of the Lord and a revival of us trembling at His Word and a revival of us being a people who are broken and contrite and humble and obedient and faithful- not that we might be safe and secure and protected.

Our prayer should be that we would fear the least sin rather than the greatest suffering; that we would fear being unfaithful more than we fear missing some blessing; that we would fear compromising with the world more than we fear persecution; that we fear being worldly rather than we might not have the latest technological gadget. And that in our suffering- we might cease from sin, and because of our suffering- we might become established and strong so because God loved us enough to not give us what we *want*- but gave us what we *need*- that God is now glorified in the Face of Jesus Christ and our joy has been made full.

Let's come and pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.