

# Called to Suffer and Rejoice

## Part 2- That We Might Gain Christ

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January 20, 2013

### Philippians 3:1-16

**1** Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

**2** Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;

**3** for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

**4** although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

**5** circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

**6** as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

**7** But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

**8** More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

**9** and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,

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

**11** in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

**12** Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

**13** Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,

**14** I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

**15** Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; **16** however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

To the Glory of God

Now whether you realize this or not, or whether you believe this or not- suffering is coming to you. Suffering may already be a companion of yours, but if you have not yet tasted of suffering- let me be the first one to let you in on a very neglected portion of Scripture and Christian life- especially here in America- you are going to suffer.

So the issue is not that we *avoid* suffering- but that we go through our suffering without that suffering doing damage to our souls and to our desire to love and serve God faithfully. So the issue is not that we *start* well with Jesus- but that we *end* well; the issue is not that we love Jesus today- but that we will *continue* to love Jesus- even when loving Jesus will bring great persecution our way; the issue is not that we are faithful to serve God *today*, but that we will *continue* to enjoy our service to Him- even though that faithful service will bring great suffering and persecution to us later on; and the issue is not that we desire to be in His Presence *today*- but that we will *continue* to desire to be in His Presence- even when things get really difficult.

Now if suffering has already come your way- let me be the first to let you in on another neglected portion of Scripture and Christian life- especially here in America and that is that because of the unbelievable safety and prosperity that we have enjoyed in this country over the last 230 + years- we have come to think that our way of life is normal.

We have come to think that going to the store and picking out which brand of pickles we would like to eat is normal- but it isn't. We have come to think that depositing money into a bank and being able to go get that same money a week or a month or a year from now is normal- but it isn't. We have come to think that choosing which restaurant to eat in, or what style suit you want to wear, or opening your refrigerator and getting another piece of ham, or getting up in the morning and deciding what it is we would like to do is normal- but it isn't. It isn't normal at all- it is rare; very rare.

All of those things are enjoyed by less than 12% of the world's population today- and that is the high water mark. In other words- until the 21<sup>st</sup> Century- it was *less* that 12% of the world's population who could ever enjoy the kind of life that we basically take for granted today. And of those 12%- who do enjoy them today- being able to drive down roads that are relatively safe and to sleep at night in a clean and comfortable bed and to shower with hot or cold water- depending on your preference- we must know that all of those things are all the kind and merciful blessings of a Good and Kind God, and not simply the results of our labor or the benefits of living in a free society. Every bit of these things are not something we- as wicked sinners- have earned or what we deserve or what we are entitled to- but all of those things are a demonstration of the Kindness of God; the Common Grace of God; the Mercy of a loving and benevolent God. And he alone is rightfully entitled to all the praise for these things.

But of the 88% who have not and who do *not* enjoy these things at all, or who do not enjoy those things on a regular basis- we need to know that many of these people are saved; they are our brothers and our sisters; they were drawn to Jesus by the same Sovereign Act of God that drew us; they have been bought with the same Blood that bought us; they have had the same spotless Righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to them; they are as loved by the Father as we are- and yet to them- suffering is what is normal- not ball games; suffering is what is common to them- not getting manicures; suffering is what they are used to- not a stable Government.

And it is precisely because we have come to think that all of these blessings are normal and that they are eternal that allows me to know that we all need to be prepared from God's Word to realize that they are *not* normal, and that we could all very easily lose everything that we hold dear, and that all of these comforts and all of these safe things and all of these pleasant things that makes our lives infinitely easier and better could all vanish away in a few brief moments.

And we need to know that if- in the future- it would be God's Will for all of these things to vanish and for us to be as acquainted with suffering as the 88% are, and for us to be as persecuted as the 88% are, and if it would be God's Will that we lose our safety or our financial stability or that we would keep our safety and financial stability and that we would simply lose our health or the health of our children or

that we would become a persecuted minority in our own country- that if that were to happen- that we would know that *that* is what is normal and that is what is Biblical and that is what is True- and not something odd or strange or weird. The Apostle Peter wrote in **1Peter 4:12&13** to tell us about this when he said:

**12 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;**

**13 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.**

And so even though suffering is probably one of the single most neglected issues in the modern Church- suffering is as common in the Bible as singing, it is as relative to believers as prayer, and it is as much a part of Christian life as Bible Study. So that is why I am bringing you this series of messages on suffering- for two reasons:

1. I believe we should prepare to suffer for Christ because the Bible says that we should
2. I believe that our modern situation says we should.

I honestly do *not* believe that our situation here in this country can continue on its present course without there being huge implications concerning how the Church is viewed by the majority of Americans- which will bring about great persecution and hardship on the average American Christian who in any way seeks to maintain Biblical purity.

But I am not bringing these messages at this time simply because it is my belief that the days we are in are very evil and because the path of Righteousness God has called us to is very costly- but also because the Promise of the Bible is that God's people will suffer.

For example, **The Acts 14:22** says that Paul told all his young churches, "**Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom.**" And in **John 15:20**- our Lord Jesus Christ said, "**If they persecuted me, they will persecute you**". And the Apostle Peter said in **1Peter 4:12**:

**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**

... in other words suffering is not to be considered strange or odd or uncommon- it is to be expected.

And the Apostle Paul said in **2Timothy 3:12:**

**Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**

So we should all take it to be a Biblical Truth that the more earnest we become about actually being the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and reaching the unreached peoples of the world, and exposing the works of darkness, and loosing the bonds of sin and Satan- the more we will suffer. And that is why we should prepare to suffer. And that's why I am beginning this new year preaching from texts that will help us prepare.

Now on the one hand- the Bible makes the claim- very boldly and repeatedly that God is Sovereign. That God is absolutely Sovereign, that He is absolutely Sovereign over everything, and that He is absolutely Sovereign over everything- all the time. The Bible both says and teaches that nothing happens without- not only God's Knowledge and Permission- but nothing happens in the entire Universe- as big as a super nova and as small as a subatomic particle- except it is orchestrated and Ordained by God's Hand, and carried out according to His predetermined Will and Plan, and is done to His Glory and to the fame of His Name and so that all will know that there is none like unto Him.

And as we found out two weeks ago- Man is *not* Sovereign and Man's will is *not* Sovereign and Man's choices are *not* sovereign- and although God does *allow* some men to do some things- what God allows is only to further His Own Plan and Will, and therefore Man is never and has never and will never be Sovereign- God is.

And we also learned two weeks ago that satan is not Sovereign either. And that although God has *allowed* satan to do certain things- it is only to further God's Plan and Will, and therefore satan is not and has never been and will never be Sovereign- God is. That is what the

Bible teaches. And this is fundamental Biblical Truth- it is Theology Prime and it is called The Doctrine of the Sovereignty of God.

But the Bible doesn't stop there and goes on to declare that the one true living God Who is revealed throughout the Universe in the mountains that smoke and in bumble bees that fly and in the laughter of children and in the pages of sacred Scripture is "Good". That God is *not* simply Powerful- and strong and *able* to do whatever He desires- but that part of His basic Makeup down to the DNA of His Nature is that God is "Good"- that He is a Kind and a Merciful and a Precious God.

Now it is true that God loves- and the *way* that God loves and the extent to which God loves is beyond anything a mother could ever know, and it is deeper than any married couple have ever experienced as the word "love" is used a verb. And we are all the recipients of God's Love in a thousand different ways every day- most notably through the Life, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Salvation that He brought to us- that is the greatest example of God so loving us.

But it is also true that God *is* Love when Love is used as a noun. That He does not simply love but that God *is* Love. And so the Goodness of God means that everything that God Sovereignly *causes* or *allows* is also therefore "Good"- it is Right. And so by definition if God allowed something or caused something- it cannot be anything else but "Good" and "Right", and it is something that will in fact bring Glory to Himself or God would not have allowed it or caused it in the first place. And it is to further God's Will and Purposes in the earth- which are all Good and all Love- all the time.

Therefore what God *does* or what God *allows* is *not* simply what He did- but it is the *best thing* that God could have done to that person in that situation at that time. That is what the Bible teaches and it is called The Doctrine of the Goodness of God.

And the only reason why we do not always understand the Goodness of God or agree with the Goodness of God as it is manifested in our lives in what God allows or in what He causes is simply because we are finite and sinful and carnal, and we see things only in the present tense with very limited ability to put all the pieces together- while God is Holy and Righteous and Pure and Good and sees everything crystal clear with the advantage of seeing the past, present,

and future all at once, and with the advantage of *always* being able to put all the pieces together.

And so for us- in our limited knowledge and with our limited vision and with our limited understanding as we wallow in sin every day- for us to doubt God's Goodness in a particular situation or to argue with God about whether what He is doing is, in fact, "Good"- simply because it doesn't suit our fancy, or because it inconveniences us, or troubles us or even because it injures us or kills us, or because it imposes upon us restrictions and circumstances that we would never choose nor desire in a thousand years, or for us to resist or reject what God is doing or for us to become offended at what God is doing or allowing- for us to do that- is really the very height of arrogance and self- righteousness and doubt and is, in fact, sin.

The Apostle Paul put forth this question in **Romans 9** as the final answer to all those who doubt either the absolute Sovereignty of God or the Goodness of God in whatever God has done or in whatever God has allowed when he asked in verses 20&21:

#### **Romans 9:20b-21**

**20 ... who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?**

**21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?**

So if you are saved today- Jesus has promised you not only eternal life in Heaven, but trials and persecution and suffering here on the earth. Both of those are Promises from a God Who cannot lie. And a lot of attention has been spent on the Promise of Eternal Life over the years but little or no attention- especially in the modern Church- has been spent on the Promise of Suffering. But both are promises.

Most people here today have probably never gone through a real Holocaust or a genocide where thousands of believers are slaughtered by brutal and evil men. So we have, at most, only the dimmest notions of the horrors brought about through these things.

But we probably know all too well something about the many ways in which human beings hurt each other, both intentionally and unintentionally; and we may find this knowledge disorienting and shattering to our own faith. For example- Dennis Rader- the Wichita

BTK killer—"BTK" was Rader's own acronym for "bind, torture, kill"—was in the news back in the summer of 2005, and that fall there was a made-for-television movie of his life and his terrible crimes. And the Question came up then- as it always does-

*"Why does God allow such things to happen?"*

Several years ago- a famous Jewish rabbi analyzed this issue for about ten years. He examined the serious Question:

If God is Sovereign and God is Good- why is there such horrific evil in the world?

Some people try to answer this Question by coming to the conclusion that at some point in time and in some way- God gave away or delegated some or all of His Sovereignty to Man and that while God is absolutely Good- He is *not* absolutely Sovereign and therefore God *cannot* perform His Good Will and His Good Intentions in the earth to the extent that He desires to in saving or in delivering or in healing or in rescuing- unless and until Man chooses to *allow* God to do that or until Man chooses to *cooperate* with God in that effort.

Of course no matter how you slice that or dice *that*- while that view may satisfy some people's curiosity on some level- it doesn't answer the Question at all- precisely because the Bible clearly and repeatedly says that God *is* absolutely Sovereign over everything all the time.

Others try to answer this Question by coming to the conclusion that while God may be Sovereign- God is really not Good. That God's Righteous Justice and His Pristine and Holy Nature will not allow Him to exercise Mercy and Grace to sinful people, and, thus, God periodically steps aside and allows us to destroy ourselves. And again- while this may on some level offer some measure of satisfaction to these people- it doesn't answer the Question either because again the Bible is clear and unequivocal- the one true living God of the Bible is Good, He is Merciful, He is Kind, He is Love, and He is Gracious.

Atheists have come to the conclusion that God is neither Sovereign nor Good – that God Himself simply *isn't*- to which God replies by calling them "fools" and damning them by and through their



own self conceived foolishness that they are so blind about- they call it "wisdom".

So we are left then to say that the Holy Bible says and teaches that God is both Sovereign and Good, and yet there is great evil and great destruction and great hurt going on in the earth all the time. So the conclusion we must eventually come to is that God has "willed" to allow some evil in the world to touch even His Own children- some more than others. And the issue we are seeking to understand is- "*Why?*"<sup>1</sup>

For example- most of us know couples where a spouse has been unfaithful, causing immense grief to the other spouse and to their children. We know of situations where drunken drivers have veered into the wrong lanes and killed or maimed "innocent" people. In any large crowd, there are bound to be some people who were sexually abused as children or who have been raped.

Some of us may know someone who was tortured. Indeed, things like these may have happened to us, while we were Christians, and while we were begging God to make them stop. So, why didn't He?

Some of you may sometimes consider your childhood and wish your parents had been more careful to help you to grow up as godly Christians. You are perplexed about why they didn't seem to care more about doing that. Why didn't they talk to you about how much you would regret doing some of the things you did? Some of you may be thinking right now about coworkers who distress you. Perhaps your supervisor really dislikes you and treats you unfairly, and even lies to his superiors about you, but you can't stop him. Maybe there are family members who seem to live for no other reason other than to find fault with you or to malign every action that you carry out. Or perhaps you are part of a Christian organization that has some employees who teach or live in clearly unbiblical ways, and this distresses you day after day.

In that situation, you may find yourself wondering why God doesn't just move those people out and make the organization more like what, it seems, He must want it to be.

Then, again, some of us may be thinking about our *own* choices.

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<sup>1</sup> The word "allow" when used about God and evil is a theologically loaded term. It is my purposeful intention to show that God does not merely passively permit such things by standing by and not stopping them. But that He actively wills them by ordaining them and then bringing them about- and He does all this without Himself becoming the Author of sin in any way. Further, the only reason why God does permit such things is to further His Own Will and Purpose- which are unimpeachably "Good" and to further the development of the fullness of Joy in all who truly believe. As the Reformers insisted, although God is not the Author of sin, He is also no mere "Idle Spectator" to it.

We may be regretting something we have said or done. And we may realize that if our circumstances had been just a little different, then everything, it seems, would be *fine right now*—if you hadn't had that porn site pop up unexpectedly on your computer screen, then you might never have gotten hooked on Internet porn, or if you hadn't bumped into that co-worker when you were already so upset, then you wouldn't have said those things that have now cost you your job, or if you hadn't met that man, there would have been no chance of your having cheated on your husband with him.

But why did God allow things to go the way they did? You may not doubt or deny your *own* responsibility and guilt, but it still seems that God could have kept you from falling into that sin or stopped you from making that decision.

And we can all praise God because the Bible is not silent about this issue. And whereas most people in the modern Church do not like or accept what the Bible teaches about this- nevertheless- the Bible is crystal clear about the issue of suffering and all throughout the pages of inspired Scripture- we can find at least four purposes for suffering:

1. **The Moral (Spiritual) Purpose**- because suffering refines our holiness and hope (**Romans 5:1–8**),
2. **The Intimacy Purpose**- because in suffering our relationship with Christ becomes deeper and sweeter (**Philippians 3:7–14**)
3. **The Missions Purpose**- because God calls us to complete Christ's Afflictions as we extend the Worth of His Suffering through the reality of our own (**Colossians 1:24**)
4. **The Glory Purpose**- because this slight, momentary affliction is working for us an eternal weight of glory (**2Corinthians 4:16–18**).

Last week- we examined the first one, and today I want to look at the second one:

**2. The Intimacy Purpose**- because in and through our suffering our relationship with Christ becomes much deeper and much sweeter (**Philippians 3:7–14**)

The Bible teaches in the passage that Brother Andy just read to you that the God of all Grace helps us prepare for suffering by teaching

us and showing us that through our suffering we are meant to go deeper in our relationship with Jesus Christ. You get to know Jesus much better when you share His Pain. One of the indisputable facts about the Christian Life is that the people who write most deeply and sweetly about the Preciousness of Christ are the very people who have suffered with Him the most.

For example, Jerry Bridges' book, *Trusting God, Even When Life Hurts*, is a deep and helpful book about suffering and going deep with God through affliction. And so it's not surprising to learn that when Bridges was 14 years old- he heard his mother call out in the next room, totally unexpectedly, and arrived to see her take her last breath. He also has physical conditions that keep him from being "normal", and that encouraged others to make fun of him all his life. And just a few years ago his wife died of cancer.

So serving God faithfully has not spared him any pain. And so Bridges writes with depth about suffering- precisely because he has gone deep with Christ in his own suffering.

Over a hundred years ago Horatius Bonar, the Scottish pastor and hymn-writer, wrote a little book called *Night of Weeping, or, "When God's Children Suffer."* In it he said his goal was,

"to minister to the saints . . . to seek to bear their burdens, to bind up their wounds, and to dry up at least some of their many tears."

It is a tender and deep and wise book. So it's not surprising to hear him say,

"It is written by one who is seeking himself to profit by trial, and trembles lest it should pass by as the wind over the rock, leaving it as hard as ever; by one who would in every sorrow draw near to God that he may know Him more, and who is not unwilling to confess that as yet he knows but little."

Both Bridges and Bonar show us that suffering is a path deep into the Heart of God. God has special revelations of His Glory for his suffering children.

After months of unbelievable suffering- seemingly for no apparent reason- Job finally says to God in **Job 42:5**,

**I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You**

Now Job had been a godly and upright man- one who feared God and who walked uprightly way *before* any suffering came his way. But what Job says here is that the difference between what he knew of God in prosperity and what he knew of Him through adversity was the difference between simply hearing *about* God and actually *seeing* Him.

So how much is it worth for us to go beyond simply hearing about God and actually see God in His Glory? And yet this blessed gift came to Job in no other way other than through his sufferings.

When Stephen was arrested and put on trial for his faith and given a chance to preach- the upshot was that the religious leaders were enraged and ground their teeth at him. And they were just about to drag him out of the city and kill him. And at that very moment, Luke tells us in **The Acts 7:55&56:**

**55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;**

**56 and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."**

I say to you that the Bible teaches over and over again that there is a special Revelation of Jesus and a special intimacy with Jesus that is prepared and reserved only for those who suffer with Christ. And if the result of our suffering is that we do, in fact, receive this special Revelation and that we possess this special intimacy with Christ- how could our suffering then be called, "bad"?

The Apostle Peter put it this way in **1Peter 4:13-16:**

**13 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.**

**14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.**

**15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;**

**16 but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.**

Now most of the time that people talk about “blessings”- they are *not* talking about the blessing of having the Spirit of Glory and of God resting upon them through their sufferings- but the Bible says right here that God reserves a special coming and a special resting and a special blessing of his Spirit and His Glory on His children who suffer for His Name- and the Bible calls that a “blessing”. Why would any child of God avoid a blessing like that?

So the focus of today's message is on this kind of deep and precious intimacy with Jesus Christ that only comes to us through our sufferings. So what I mean to prove to you today is that one of the Purposes for God to allow suffering to come to His saints- even horrific suffering- is that by and through that suffering- their relationship with God will become less formal and less artificial and less distant, and become more personal and more real and more intimate and much closer and far deeper.

In the Passage that Brother Andy read in **Philippians 3**- I want us to see at least three things that bring this out very clearly- so let's go back to **Philippians 3** and leave your Bible open there so we can refer to these verses together. So there are three things that bring out the Truth that there is a special and deep and very precious intimacy with Jesus that God gives to those who suffer with Him:

1. Paul's preparation to suffer by reversing his values
2. Paul's experience of suffering and loss as the “cost” of his obedience to Christ
3. Paul's goal in all of this- to gain Christ: to know Him; to be in Him; and fellowship with more intimacy and reality than he knew with his best friends Barnabas and Silas.

## **1. Paul's Preparation to Suffer**

### **Philippians 3:5&6**

**5** circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

**6** as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Now here Paul lists the distinctives that he enjoyed *before* he became a Christian. He gives his ethnic pedigree as a thoroughbred child of Abraham- a “**Hebrew of Hebrews**”. And this human pedigree brought him great gain, a great sense of significance and assurance. He was an Israelite. Then he ticks off three things that go right to the heart of Paul's life *before* he was a Christian (at the end of verse 5):

- ✓ as to the law, a Pharisee
- ✓ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church
- ✓ as to the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless.

In other words- this was Paul's life *before* he was saved. These are the things that mattered to him *before* he was regenerate and *before* he was born again. These are the things that gave him meaning and significance. This was his gain and his fortune and the source of his joy.

Paul said what floated his boat before Jesus washed his sins away was that he belonged to the upper-echelon of law-keepers- the Pharisees- and that among them he was so zealous that he led the way in persecuting the enemies of God- which was the Church of Jesus Christ; and that he kept the law meticulously.

He got credit from people by belonging and from excelling and he got credit from God—or so he thought— through his blameless law-keeping.

But then Christ imposed His Salvation on Paul on the Damascus road. And Christ was faithful to tell Paul very early on how much he would have to suffer for Him and so Paul prepared himself.

And the way that Paul prepared himself for the suffering that was promised to him by Jesus is described in verse 7:

### **Philippians 3:7**

**But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.**

So Paul looked at his standing in the upper-echelons of religious society- the Pharisees; and he looked at the human glory of being at the very top of that group with all its credit and applause; and he looked at the rigor of his law-keeping and the sense of self-righteous moral pride

he got from that; and he prepares to suffer for Jesus Christ by taking his whole world and turning it completely upside down and by reversing everything he held dear to himself- and in verse 7 he says:

**Whatever things were gain to me... [that's all the stuff in verses 5&6]**

**... those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.**

Before he was a Christian- Paul had a ledger with two columns: one was labeled "gains" and the other was labeled "losses". And on the "gain" side of the ledger was all the human glory of verses 5&6. And on the "loss" side was the terrible prospect that this new Jesus movement might get out of hand and Jesus might prove Himself real and Paul would have to give up the very things that brought him the most comfort and the most joy and suffer for this Jesus in order to obtain an intimacy and a joy that he never knew.

So when Jesus imposed Himself violently on Paul on the Damascus road- Paul took a big red pencil and wrote "LOSS" in big red letters across his "gains" column. And he wrote "GAIN" in big letters over the "loss" column that only had one name in it: Jesus Christ.

And not only that- but the more Paul thought about the relative values of life in the world and the surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ- he moved way past the few things mentioned in verses 5&6 and he put *everything* but Jesus in that first column- read verse 8:

### **Philippians 3:8**

**More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,**

So he started by counting his most precious accomplishments as "loss" and he ended by counting *everything* as "loss"- except Christ.

Now what we need to understand is that this is not something out of the way or strange or some amazingly great sacrifice on Paul's part- but this is what it meant for Paul to simply be a Christian. And lest anyone of us think that Paul's thoughts and actions about this is unique or particular to him and that somehow we are exempt from all this- notice that in verse 17 he says with his full Apostolic Authority:

### **Philippians 3:17**

**Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.**

So counting every human accomplishment and source of pride and joy as a “loss” for the purpose of gaining a deep and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ is simply normal, Biblical Christianity. What Paul is doing here is showing how the teaching of Jesus is to be applied to our own lives and lived out in the earth. For example, Jesus said in **Matthew 13:44**:

**The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.**

Becoming a Christian means discovering that Jesus Christ Himself and not just the stuff that Jesus gives you or the things that Jesus does for you- but Jesus Himself- is a Treasure Chest of holy Joy that give the believer both the power and the desire to write: “LOSS” over everything else in the world in order to gain Him.

**... from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.**

Or again in **Luke 14:33** where Jesus said

**So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.**

In other words, becoming a disciple of Jesus means writing “LOSS” in big red letters over all your possessions—and everything else this world offers. Now what does this all mean practically? I think it means four things:

- A. It means that whenever I am called upon to choose between anything in this world including my own life and Jesus Christ- I choose Jesus.



- B. It means that I will deal with the things of this world in ways that draw me nearer to Christ so that I gain more of Christ and enjoy more of Him by the way in which I use the things of the world.
- C. It means that I will always handle the things of this world in a way that proves that they are *not* my treasure and that proves that Christ *is* my Treasure.
- D. It means that if and when I lose any or all of the things this world can offer- I will not lose my joy or my treasure or my soul- because Christ is all and all.

So that was the reckoning that Paul reckoned in his soul (v. 8):

### **Philippians 3:8**

**I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,**

Now let's stand back a minute and get our bearings. I am still dealing with the first point: namely, that this is Paul's way of preparing to suffer. Now why is that true? Why is becoming a Christian, and writing "LOSS" across everything in your life but Jesus- the way to prepare to suffer?

The answer is that suffering is nothing more than the taking away of "bad things" or "good things" that the world offers for our enjoyment- like our reputation and our self- esteem among peers and our job and our money and our spouse and our sexual life and our children and our friends and our freedom and our health and our strength and our sight and our hearing and our success, etc.

And when these things are taken away (either by force or by circumstances or by choice), we suffer. But if we have followed the example of Paul and the Teachings of Jesus and have already counted these things as loss for the surpassing value of gaining Christ- then we are prepared to suffer.

So if, when you become a Christian you write a big red "LOSS" across all the things in the world except Jesus- then when Jesus calls you to forfeit some of those things- it is not strange nor is it unexpected. It is only strange and unexpected when we are deceived into thinking

that having those things is normal and having those things is better than having Jesus.

The pain and the sorrow of losing some or all of those things may be great. The tears may be many, as they were for Jesus in Gethsemane- but even though we may grieve- we will be prepared. We will know that the surpassing Value of Christ is infinitely greater than all the things this world can offer and that in losing them- the Promise of God is that we gain more of Jesus Christ.

## **2. Paul's Experience of Suffering**

### **Philippians 3:8b**

**... for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,**

Now in the second half of verse 8- Paul moves from *preparing* to suffer to actual suffering. He moves from counting all things as loss in the first half of verse 8 to actually suffering the loss of all things in the second half of the verse.

And if God is willing we are going to see more about this next week. Paul had experienced so much actual loss of the normal benefits and comforts of the world that he could say that he was not merely counting things as loss- but that he was actually suffering loss. He had prepared by turning his values upside down, and now he was being tested. Did he really value Christ above everything else?

## **3. Paul's Goal (and God's Purpose) in Suffering**

### **Philippians 3:7b&8a**

**7 ...I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.**

**8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...**

So let me close by focusing our attention on God's Purpose in this suffering. *Why* did God ordain and Paul accept the losses that it meant for him to be a Christian? He gives the answer again and again in these verses so that we cannot miss the point. He is not passive in this

suffering loss. He is very focused and very purposeful. And the purpose is this:

**to gain Jesus Christ.**

Now follow with me through verses 7-10:

Verse 7b: **"I counted them loss for the sake of Christ..."**

Verse 8a: **"I count all things to be loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."**

Verse 8b: **"For him I have suffered the loss of all things."**

Verse 8c: **"And I count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ . . ."**

Verse 9: **" . . . and that I may be found in him [so as to have God's righteousness, not my own] . . ."**

Verse 10a: (still giving his goal in accepting the loss of all things) **" . . . that I may know him"**

And then in verse 10b and 11- Paul gives four specifics of what it means to know Jesus Christ:

- I. " . . . [to know] the power of his resurrection"; and**
- II. "the fellowship of his sufferings";**
- III. "being conformed to his death";**
- IV. "in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."**

In other words, what sustains Paul in suffering the loss of all things is the confidence and joy that in his losing precious things in the world- he is gaining something infinitely more precious- Jesus Christ. And two times that gaining is called "a knowing":

—verse 8a: **" . . . in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."**

Verse 10: **"That I might know him."**

So dear friends- this is the intimacy factor in our suffering. Do we want to know Jesus? Do we want to be more personal with Jesus and deep with Him and real with Him and intimate with Him- so much so

that we count everything else as loss in order to gain this greatest of all Treasures?

And if we do, then we will be prepared to suffer. And if we don't- then our suffering will take us by surprise and we will rebel and become bitter and turn to sin. May the Lord open our eyes to the surpassing Worth of really knowing Jesus Christ!

Let's pray.