

Christ Is All - Joy in Suffering

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the joy and necessity of enduring suffering for Christ as a testament to true Christian commitment and perseverance in faith.

Duration: 52:42

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Colossians 1:24-27

Topics: "Joy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the transformative power of both joy and sorrow in the life of a Christian. He uses the analogy of steam being used to pull a train or blown as a whistle to illustrate how our emotions can either be directed towards self-promotion or towards serving God and others. The preacher urges the congregation to embrace the cross and to fully understand the significance of the elements of communion. He also highlights the importance of presenting the whole truth of God's Word, even if it goes against popular opinion, and calls on believers to offer themselves as living sacrifices to God.

Transcript

Now let us turn to the letter written by Paul to the Colossians, chapter 1, and the short passage that begins with verse 24 and concludes with verse 27. Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

The mystery that had been hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to his saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. You will remember that toward the end of the last passage, the one we were considering a week ago, we were led by Mr. McLeod, emphasis is there placed upon continuing in the faith when once we have set out in following our Lord.

Verse 33, there is a very important if there. If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out for you in the gospel. What the Apostle Paul there is saying is this, that all Christian men and women will at long last be presented before God the Father without blame, without fault, without blemish, he says in another place, faultless.

He's looking forward to the great climax of our redemption and of our salvation. But now he makes it hang upon that very important little if. If you continue in the faith and become so grounded in it that no one is able to shift you out of it or to shunt you up a side street or a side alley where you're away from the mainstream of divine truth and revelation and your upper cul-de-sac that never leads you anywhere.

What Paul is saying is this, as Mr. McLeod made it very clear last Sunday morning, eternal life has the capacity to go on. And if you have eternal life in Jesus Christ, the eternal life which you have is a life that will allow you to fall. But if you fall, you get up again.

It will allow you to be tempted. But if you're tempted, you will overcome it in due course. So that whatever temporary stay you may have in a land of doubt or a land of rebellion or a land of sin, you will overcome it and you will keep on going on.

In other words, you will persevere. This is of the nature of eternal life. Eternal life is not life to get you from the life you used to live to start a new life.

It's not that kind of temporary life. It's eternal life. Eternal in its quality, eternal in its duration.

So that you see, eternal life is a very mighty, mighty thing, mighty phenomenon experienced in the souls of men. Now let's put that in a different way. Putting it now from the vantage point of our situation here this morning, we would have to put it in this way.

The decision involved in becoming a Christian must be a lifetime commitment. It must include no clauses, no provisions for opting out. So that if you have come to Christ with the notion that you can opt out, you have never come to Christ.

If your allegiance to Jesus Christ is a kind of temporary thing to get you out of a difficult situation or to lead you through a certain area of your life and experience, it is not a saving experience or relationship. The saving experience is a commitment for life and a commitment to death. Now this is serious.

There is no such thing in the Christian life, for example, as an uncrucified person. That means you and I have to die to self in order to get a going with the people of God and to be united to Jesus Christ. The very baptism of the Spirit whereby we are united to Christ is a baptism which crucifies us to the world, to the flesh, and to the devil, and makes us alive and responsive to God.

And that comes not as the apex of a long experience leading to it, but at the very threshold of the Christian life. Now this therefore is a very important passage. A Christian enlisting as a follower of Jesus Christ must be prepared to burn his bridges behind him.

And from the epic story from whence we derive that imagery, to burn your bridge behind you means you're not going back, you're going forward. And you see this divides the professing church right down the middle. For there are many people who have made decisions for Christ that have not had their whole heart, nor their whole mind, nor their whole will in it.

And sooner or later they've turned away. Just as Judas found that he could have his price, others have found that the devil has offered them their price for turning off the path, and turning back, and becoming even the agents of Satan. And some who were in the church as apparently leaders, have become in due course the very opponents of the truth they once stood for.

Now that's the background to this text. Paul now is apparently going on to a different tack altogether. But he can't do so completely, so that in this new passage beginning with verse 24, we have, as it were, a little window opening into the soul of the Apostle himself.

Indicating, perhaps all very unselfconsciously, but indicating how he looked upon himself, as utterly bound to his crucified Lord. A little window that enables us to see into the heart of Apostle Paul, and see though that here is a man whose burnt his bridges behind him right enough, and who, here is the climax of it, who rejoices in sufferings for the sake of Christ and his church. Now there are two things alone that we can focus upon this morning.

The first is, as I have just indicated, this notion of rejoicing in suffering. Rejoicing in suffering. The beginning of verse 24, now he says, I rejoice in what was suffered for you.

Let's look for a moment, very briefly, at the suffering envisaged and the joy expressed there. The suffering envisaged. Now there may be an echo there to Christ's sufferings for the collusion, for their salvation.

There may be sufferings undergone by our blessed Lord Jesus Christ in order to bring pardon and reconciliation with God, and the knowledge of God, and sins forgiven. But if that is so, it is in this context secondary to Paul's reference to his own suffering. To Paul's suffering.

The sufferings that Paul himself has experienced in relation to the church in general, and in relation to the church at Colossae in particular. Now what were these sufferings? Well, I don't propose to take a long time to go into this, because there are many aspects to Paul's suffering. But let's just try and put it in a nutshell.

It boils down to this. Paul is in prison at this point. Why was he in prison? He was in prison because he insisted on declaring his master's word to men and women everywhere.

Now there was no other reason for that. Paul was only in prison because he was being faithful to God's calling, and to that which is involved in Christian discipleship. No other reason.

If the Apostle Paul said, I'm not going to be a Christian anymore. I'm not going to placard Christ abroad anymore. Well, Paul would no longer be in prison.

There was no reason for Paul's imprisonment other than this, his loyalty to the Christ who called him, and to the calling with which Christ addressed him. Here he finds himself imprisoned. I guess it is true to say that the words of Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 1 apply equally well to the Colossians addressed here.

In Ephesians 3.1 he says, For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the sake of you Gentiles. This is why Paul was in prison. One, he was a prisoner to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was dedicated. He was consecrated. Whose man was he? He was Christ's man.

But he was Christ's man for the Gentiles' sake. In other words, to bring the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles particularly. Not exclusively, but particularly.

He was called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. Why was he in prison? He was in prison because he insisted on being loyal to his Lord, and then loyal to his Lord's calling. Those words link us with the thoughts expressed in this very Colossian epistle.

Right at the end, chapter 4 verses 10 and 11 and verse 18, we hear little snippets which remind us of this. My fellow prisoners, he says, Aristarchus sends you his greetings, so does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, etc, etc. And in verse 18, this very personal word, I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

His own hands, you see, were in chains. He may have written a snippet here and there before, but at the end, he writes the last verse. He concludes the letter all in his own hand, chain or no chain.

He uses the quill, and he writes the last verse. But now notice, I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains.

Don't forget my chains. Here I am. I'm enchained in prison.

Why? Because I've insisted on being loyal to my Lord in the spreading of the gospel. That's why. And of course, it's not only the physical involvement.

There is the psychological, and there is much else. But now let's notice the joy expressed. But now I rejoice in what was suffered for you.

I rejoice in it. And this is where we come to the miracle of divine grace, you see. I rejoice in what I suffered for you, and am suffering.

Whatever the nature and extent of Paul's suffering for the spiritual well-being of the Colossians, he does not resent it, nor does he wish to forget it. He positively rejoices in it, both in its past aspects and in its then-present reality. Now lest anyone should rush to the premature conclusion that the apostle was somewhat psychopathic here, and he was a lover, a crazy lover of suffering, for example, let's hasten to add that there is no evidence whatsoever for that in the New Testament.

None whatsoever. Paul, like everyone else, every ordinary, every normal human being, escaped suffering when that was possible, and when it was morally tenable. But there were times when he could not escape suffering and be loyal to his Lord, loyal to his message, loyal to the commission that had been given him, loyal to the people who had been entrusted to him to evangelize and to care for.

And when loyalty to them and to his calling and to his Lord required that he suffer, suffer he did. But I want you to notice it was suffering when suffering was necessary, rather than deny his Lord. He wasn't the kind of crazy person who wanted to suffer, or delighted in suffering as suffering.

His joy is that he's allowed to bear in his body the brands of the Lord Jesus and suffer for him. But now even so, even so, and this is the point here, even though he embraced the sufferings of obedience and the anguish and the torture that came his way mentally, spiritually, physically, he was not a joyless sufferer, not a songless pilgrim. Here is the man who could sing with Silas at midnight in the Philippian jail.

Here is a man who could sing in prison at midnight notice, despite the fact that he had been illegally, illegally arrested. Now if anybody's illegally or allegedly illegally arrested in Toronto today, can you imagine them singing praises at midnight in Don Joe's? Is Don Joe's still open? That shows my ignorance. Never mind about that.

Can you imagine them not on your life? We've moved such a long way from there. But here is a man who was illegally arrested, then he was stripped of his clothes, then he was beaten all illegally, and then he was put into the care of the of the jailer, and he was cast into the very innermost cell, and when he got into

the innermost cell, his feet were placed in the stocks, all illegally, all painful to bear. But he's singing at midnight.

Unless you have any misunderstanding about the kind of songs he was singing, he was praising God at midnight. That's what it says. You see, the Christian is a nightingale, singing in the night.

And here is this man, out of the anguish of soul and of body, expressing his gratitude to God for the privilege of being bound to a crucified master, and the privilege of serving him to bring life from his wounds to the miseries of men. Oh yes, Paul knew something of the quality of joy that is not dependent upon circumstances without or within. And here he sings, rejoicing in suffering.

Now, you see the point. It's illustrating what Mr. McLeod finished with last year. Paul is going on, you see.

His Christian calling was not just to make a decision, period. His Christian calling was to was to become Christ's servant. Lord, what will you have me to do? You go into Damascus and it will be told you what I want you to do, and we shall see something about that in a moment.

I'll tell you what I have you to do. I have a life work for you to do. I want you to be bound to me, the crucified risen Lord, and I want you to do something for me.

You're going to be a special messenger. And you see, here is a man rejoicing in his suffering. Do you know anything of that? Is there someone here this morning who was grating against the service of the Lord? Is there someone who's itching to get out of the post of duty for Christ? Oh my friends, there's nothing that reveals the quality and the fiber of your spiritual life and mine like this.

The way we just try to run away from a duty laid upon us by the very Christ who died for us. Now that leads on quite naturally rejoicing in suffering to this. Perhaps they're not to be distinguished.

I have distinguished them. Resolute in suffering. Resolute.

Having assured the Colossians of his joy in contemplating what he had already suffered for the sake of Christ and his church, Paul proceeds to assure them of his resolution to persevere in the exercise of his calling quite irrespective of what may happen. I, sorry, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body which is the church. I have become its servant, the servant of the church, by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in all its fullness.

What this man is saying is this. I've had a commission and therefore I must not become, I must not become so self-conscious and so conscious of the past sufferings that I've undergone as to forget my duty for the present and for the future. I must keep on going and I'm doing just that.

And I mean to be resolute. Have you noticed, I'm sure you have, how the emotions of joy and of sorrow can alike lead to self-indulgence. Self-indulgent reveries on the one hand or self-effacing sacrifices on the other.

They can make us look inward and brood over our own experience, whatever its nature, joy or anguish, or they can goad us to action for the sake of others. Now joy and sorrow can do that. You see, that's the marvel of Terry Fox's experience, isn't it? Doesn't often happen that way.

His pain and his traumatic experience has made him more and more conscious of the needs of others and determined to do something to meet the needs of others in and through his own suffering. Rather than be

devoured with trying to console himself on thoughts of self-pity, he has turned out. He's seen the world in need, and his very suffering, you see, has been a kind of dynamite that has catapulted him into orbit.

It's not often that sorrow does that, say, with good, godly, Christ-loving, Christ-honoring Christian people. Joy may do it oftener than sorrow, but both joy and sorrow can take this turn, and we become so full up with them, we go around advertising our joy. See what a joyous person I am.

You know, my life is a thrill. I sing day and night. I never have a cloud.

My life is all bright. My, I just want to dance. I must be careful what I do.

The elders are in the front here. You know, you find people like that. You see, it's a very sad thing.

The same steam that can pull a train can be diffused by blowing a whistle, and you can use all the steam in the boiler to blow a whistle that calls attention to yourself, or you can make that steam drive the engine, pull the carriages across the continent. Men and women in Christ, what is your pain, and what is your joy doing with you and with me? Am I whistling to call attention to my joy or to my sorrow, or is it driving me to think of others, others, others, others, others, to fulfill the ministry that God has given me in His blessed Son, the Lord Jesus Christ? Now that's what we have here, and this in turn, you see, takes us back to where Mr. McCloud left us last Lord's Day, to this principle of perseverance. Eternal life has the quality of sending us on, sending us forward.

The Spirit of God is given to us not just gradually or occasionally, but He lives in our hearts to enable us to be other than we would be. There are two things alone that I can just refer to here. Paul embraced his suffering as a facet of his Christian calling.

Paul embraced, now let's get there, he put his arms around suffering as something which Jesus gave him as part of his calling. I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body. Now I suppose there's something there I ought to say a word about first, isn't there? Otherwise somebody may misunderstand the passage.

Does Paul mean here, let me deal with a problem before I move on. Does Paul really mean to say here that the sufferings of Christ were not adequate in themselves and that he must add to them? Is that the implication of this passage, that Jesus suffered, but the sufferings of Jesus Christ were not enough, so Paul fills them up, fills them up to the brim by his suffering? Is that what he's saying? Well now let's try and distinguish this. If Paul was saying that, he would be contradicting himself over and over again, because there is no context in the New Testament where Paul says anything of that order anywhere else.

On the contrary, even in this epistle to the Colossians, Paul will soon be telling the Colossians, look he says you are complete in him. It's a beautiful word that. All the fullness you need, everything you need right up to the full, nothing missing is in him.

You're complete in him. Not only that, but throughout his ministry he has been writing to the to the Romans. If I were here for a much longer time, I would like to deal with the implications of a passage such as this, and a word such as this, how Paul says we are justified by faith apart from the observing of the law.

Faith in Christ, not our faith so much as faith in Christ, it's the object of the faith, because God set Christ forth upon the cross to be our sin bearer and our Savior. He died in our stead and is risen again. Our faith

in him alone justifies us, takes away our condemnation, imputes righteousness to us, clothes us in the very righteousness of Jesus himself, and we are accepted in the beloved one, justified in Christ alone.

Not one solitary labor of my hand, not one tear that flows over my cheeks can add to that savingly. If I am to be saved it is because Jesus died for me and nothing I can do can add to that. Anything that I put alongside of that by way of addition is subtraction.

It means I don't know Jesus Christ and I don't understand his suffering. When Paul went to Corinth you remember he said, I was determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified. Now there was a place to talk about philosophy and the value of learning and culture and so forth, and of course in one or two places he does have hints in those directions, but he did not preach these things.

The thing, the message that he brought to the Corinthians in their moral quagmire was this, Jesus Christ and him crucified. He puts it later on like this, for what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and that he was buried and that he was raised again on the third day. Now that's Paul's gospel.

Christ did it all. He died an atoning death and he finished salvation. He wrought redemption.

What does he mean here then? When he says that he is suffering up that which is lacking in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. Now in trying to capsule this, encapsule this, can I try to put it like this? In terms of procuring redemption for any sinner, Jesus Christ has done everything that is necessary, and you can add nothing to it. That's the tragedy of the self-righteous person.

He's trying to establish a righteousness which in his estimation or her estimation will add to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, and on the basis of the two things together he or she hopes to be saved. Now that is not Christian. You cannot add anything to what Jesus Christ has done, but what does this mean then? What it means in this context is this.

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Jesus Christ is ascended to the right hand of the Father on high, and Jesus Christ crucified, risen, ascended, is the head of his body, the church. How are the Colossians, how are the Colossians, pagan, Gentiles as they were, how are they going to know that the Christ who allegedly died for them on Calvary still loves them and still cares for them? And if they come to Christ, how are they going to grow in grace? Who's going to look after them? How is the mind of Christ to be revealed to them and the love of Christ to be expressed? Paul says, here am I, send me, love them through me, speak to them through me, suffer for them through me.

It's not the sufferings that bring salvation within the realm of possibility, but the sufferings that carry the message of salvation to the needy. And the sufferings involved in bringing the babes in Christ toward maturity, in coming between them and the wolves as there were in Colossae at this time. It's the suffering of challenging heresies and expounding the truth and loving those that are wayward and going after them into the desert and bringing them back again into the fold.

That's the suffering. It's the suffering of bringing the full salvation of Jesus Christ and declaring it to men and loving them so that Christ's love flows through him. And speaking to them so that Christ's mind becomes known through him.

Now then, says Paul, in order to get there, in order to get there, I want you to notice all this is due to God. I had very little to do with it. I have become its servant, he says, the church's servant.

The word is diakonos, its servant, sometimes transliterated deacon. Doesn't necessarily have that technical sense here that it has when we speak of a deacon in the church, but it does mean a servant. I have become a servant of the church.

I've made myself a servant of people like the Colossians, and they were a pretty difficult lot of people. But Paul had made himself their servant, and this was part of the suffering of yielding and submitting to serve a rather difficult people. Not only that, he says, God has commissioned me.

I have become its servant according to the commission of God. The word is oikonomion, and it's made up of two words, oikos and nomion. Oikos is house, nomion is law.

House law. I hope you have a house law in your home. If you don't, it'll go to, it'll get a little bit out by and by if there is no house law.

God has a house law among his people, and one of the rules of the family is this. The children must suffer to share the wealth of the family, the riches of the family, the benefits of the family, the privileges of the family with other people. Suffer to give, not to get.

We expect our children to suffer in order to bring more of the riches of the world into our home. God's rule of the family, God's family law is that all the children of the family suffer to share the riches of the home with a vast teeming world of needy lost men and women. See, it's all so different.

And here the Apostle Paul recognized himself as singularly called, not just as an illustration of a general principle, because Ananias had gone to him, or rather Ananias had been sent to him by the Lord. And this is the conversation that went on between Ananias and the Lord when Paul was still in a trance. The Lord said to Ananias, go.

And Ananias didn't want to go to Saul. This man is my chosen instrument. What for? To carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the peoples of Israel, the people of Israel.

I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. That's very significant. Pardon me for bringing it in.

But that very word, carry my name or bear my name, is the very word that we encounter in Galatians 6.17 where Paul says, I bear in my body the brands of the Lord Jesus Christ. What are you saying for? This. I'm carrying the name of my God to the uttermost parts of the earth, and the proof of it is in my bones, in my wheels, in my wounds, on my back, and wherever I am, as well as in my spirit.

By my sufferings, I'm declaring that he is Lord and he is Savior, and I'm his prisoner and his child. Paul embraced his suffering as a facet of his Christian experience. And the last thing to which I can only refer, Paul was experiencing suffering as well as joy in the fulfillment of that calling in two things, in two ways.

If you read carefully in the NIV, you will find these words. The commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness. Here was the ministry that was going to cause him to suffer a lot, to present the word of God in its fullness.

The background to that is this. The Old Testament is the word of God, but it is not the full word of God. God had more to say than he said clearly in the Old Testament.

But you see, when people had discovered that the word of God was the word of God in the Old Testament, they got so attached to the Old Testament they couldn't envisage of anybody adding anything. God himself must not add anything to the word that he has written. Now this is conservatism at its worst, which could not see that God had more to say than he had said when Malachi was completed.

Paul says here there were certain mysteries hidden from before the foundations of the world which God had not said. He'd hinted at them in some of the prophets, but he hadn't said them clearly. Now he says he's revealed them to his apostles and his holy prophets, and it is given for me to declare the full message, he says.

But you see, people don't like the full message of anything, even of Christianity. Now this is part of the rub. Most of us like some part of Christianity, and we can get along with that part that we like, and we want everybody else to acknowledge that and forget the others.

But the fact of the matter is this, there is a wholeness about Christianity. It adds to the Old Testament something, and it brings out something that was only latent in the Old Testament. And what what it does bring out particularly is this, of course, that the Gentiles are to be fellow heirs with the Jews in the very best that God has to give to the lost among men.

This is a very difficult and a dangerous thing to say. You imagine going to a crowd of Pharisees and Sadducees and the ancient Jews as Jesus himself preached to them, and say, and say, look, I have grace, and I have power, and I have a message that is going to elevate the most outrageous Gentile, so that the middle wall of partition between you is broken down, and he and you become not Jew and Gentile in one partnership, but a new creation. Now it's dangerous to talk like that.

You know it's dangerous to talk like that still, and sometimes even in evangelical congregations. It is dangerous to talk about the middle wall of partition broken down between Jew and Gentile, so that it is the new man in Christ that God is looking after and looking for. It's dangerous.

You'll have a sword in your side. You'll have tongues wagging. You'll have all kinds of criticism.

Paul had to go out and declare what God had fully and finally revealed, the whole truth, the gospel in its fullness, not a part of it. Then the other thing is this. Along with that, following from that, to them, that is to the saints, God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles, the saints among the Gentiles, the glorious riches of the mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Now my friends, I really am at a standstill. I don't know how to put this just briefly. What Paul is saying is this.

When God came down among his ancient people, he became tabernacled in one form or another. Ultimately, he caused the tent in the wilderness to be erected, then the temple in Jerusalem, and when God moved in, the great Shekinah glory filled the place, so that you knew that God dwelt there. Marvelous.

But God did something more than that. God tabernacled in Messiah Jesus. God built the structure of his own tabernacle in the confines of Mary's womb by the Holy Ghost, and he erected for himself a tabernacle of flesh, and he moved in, and he dwelt in him, and Paul says that all the fullness of God was caused to dwell in him in body form.

Now he says God has done all that, but listen, God's doing something beyond that now. What's he doing? Christ, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead resided and resides, is dwelling in the hearts of Gentiles. Surely that can't be true.

Gentiles in a little town like Colossae that was booming industrially a little time ago, but is now on the way down and on the way off the map, and today there's very little to be said about it. Yeah, God is coming to dwell in all the fullness and plenitude of his grace in the hearts of Colossian Gentile pagans. Jesus is moving in by his spirit to dwell in their hearts, to dwell in their lives, and that means this.

They too have the hope of the glory of God. One day the body of the flesh, one day the bodies of those Gentile Christians in distant Colossae, shall know something of the fullness of the Shekinah, when they will receive a new body. This will be transformed according to our Lord's glorious body, and the body will be filled, the temple will be filled with the glory of God.

Have you got the picture? Now what's all this got to say to us this morning? Well, my friends, it has this to say for us. First of all, as we come to the table of our Lord, let's leave behind us all thoughts of an easygoing Christianity. A cross is at the heart of it, and you and I cannot eat these elements and drink of the cup today if we haven't come to terms with that.

But more than that, we need to see that the pattern for us is to turn both sorrow and joy so that they drive us out for God, out for God and for others. Send us further. Enable us to do more for God and His church.

Have you, as the Apostle Paul was, have you been given as a servant to the church of Jesus Christ? Every true member has. Are you living up to it? But then this, and with this I must close. Let us be sure we represent the whole truth in its integrity, in its totality, and not just little fragments of the truth by means of which we can become very popular, very popular.

If we preach what people want to hear, and if we say it in the way people want us to say it, and if we toe the line to the desires of fallen human nature and carnal Christians, you and I can yet be popular. You've got to bring your popularity to the cross of Christ. That's the call of these elements today, and that's the call of this word today, and I believe therefore that's the call of the Spirit of God to your heart and mine.

Men and women, I beseech you by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice. Let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, when we measure ourselves by one another, we so often evade much of the just sense of sorrow and criticism that might be leveled at us.

The sense of sorrow coming from such criticism as might be leveled at us. That when we come to your Word and see ourselves in the light of the cross and of the death of your Son, and of your purpose for us who are related to him by faith and allegiance, and when we even compare ourselves with his apostles who were frail, fallible men in their natural condition, just like ourselves, save that they had the mighty fullness of the Spirit to enable them to be what they were called to be. When we compare ourselves with them, we recognize the multiplicity of our blemishes, and we need your forgiveness.

Forgive us, O Lord, who are before you today. Forgive us for our sins. Times without number we have toyed with your truth and tried to strike a bargain with your lordship.

Times without number we have promised and not delivered the goods. Times without number we have testified to the fact that we belong to you as your servants, when we have proceeded only to serve our own purposes. O Lord, as you read our hearts and know our thoughts, grant us now the kind of sorrow of

heart that we need to have, in order that with our whole heart and mind and soul we may re-embrace the cross and the crucified, and recommit ourselves to you in him.

For whatever you may have ahead for us as a people, and for each of us as individuals, draw near to us at your table. Speak there the same message. Confirm what you have said from the scriptures, and let the broken bread and the outpoured wine be most eloquent to every heart before you today, to the everlasting praise of your holy name.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26582.mp3>

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