

How Our Suffering Glorifies God

by John Piper

John Piper emphasizes that suffering is a vital aspect of the Christian faith that glorifies God and extends the message of Christ through our lives.

Duration: 37:36

Scripture: Matthew 10:21, Matthew 16:24, John 16:1, Acts 5:41, Romans 8:16, Philippians 1:29, 2 Timothy 1:8, 2 Timothy 3:12, 1 Peter 4:12

Topics: "Suffering For Christ", "Gospel Sacrifice"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the call to embrace suffering for the sake of Christ, highlighting the need to endure persecution and hardships in order to display the glory of God's grace. It challenges listeners to follow Jesus on the path of sacrifice and missionary sacrifice, rather than seeking comfort or prosperity. The message underscores the importance of rejoicing in sufferings, completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions through personal sacrifices, and being willing to endure hardships for the sake of spreading the gospel.

Transcript

Late last night, the families gathered in Sago Baptist Church in Thomasville, West Virginia, began to hear the rumor circulating they're alive. They're alive. All the, all the 12 are alive.

So the USA has the headlines. They're alive. They're not alive.

Dead. All of them except one and he's in critical condition. Incredible news.

Blowout. 52 dead in Iraq yesterday. 32 of them at a funeral.

Floods in California. Fires burning houses down across the southwest. And what phone call did you get yesterday? Let me soak you, before I pray, with a series of Bible verses, just so that the, the feel of this message, where it's coming from, will be on you.

Matthew 16, 24, Jesus said to His disciples, if anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross. Thank you for the cross, his and ours.

If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household? Matthew 10, 21, brother will deliver up brother to death and father his child. Children will rise against parents and have them put to death and they will be hated by all for My name's sake. The one who endures to the end will be saved.

John 16, 1, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. Every radical Muslim believes that when he kills a Christian. 2 Timothy 3, 12, indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

You want to be godly? It's coming your way. There's no other way. 1 Peter 4, 12, beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that comes upon you.

It's no surprise to test you as though something strange were happening to you. It's not strange. Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad in His glory.

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. Romans 8, 16, the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God and children and heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with Him so that we may be glorified with Him. I count the sufferings of this present time unworthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed.

It's coming. If you haven't had it yet, it's coming if you walk with Him. If you walk with Him.

Philippians 1, 29, for it has been granted to you that for your sake you should not only believe but suffer. It's granted to you, it's given to you, it's a gift to you with a big bow that you will suffer. 2 Timothy 1, 8, therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or me, His prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel, for the power of God.

One more, Acts 5, 41. They left the presence of the council, Peter, John, they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to be shamed for the name. The purpose of God in creating the universe is to display the greatness of the glory of His grace supremely in the suffering of His Son.

That's yesterday. Today the summons, will you join the Son in displaying the supreme glory of His grace in satisfaction of the glory of grace in joining Him on the Calvary road of suffering because there's no other way the world is going to see the supreme glory of Christ today except that we break free from the Disneyland of America and begin to live lifestyles of missionary sacrifice that looks to the world like our treasure is in heaven and not on the earth. It's the only way.

The prosperity gospel will not make anybody praise Jesus. It will make people praise prosperity. Of course I'll have a Jesus who'll give me a car.

Who wouldn't want a Jesus who gives me health, a car, a fine marriage? I'll take your Jesus if the payoff is right. It's not the way you're going to win your campuses. Dressing the coolest, driving the coolest, typing on the coolest.

It's not going to get any praise for the suffering Christ. He calls you in this service, in this conference, in this life, in this world, in that newspaper world. He calls you to another way.

Let's pray. Father help me to lay open the biblical foundation for this, the hope that is in it, the glory that is in it, the power that is in it, the call that is on us from it. Help me.

Give us a mind, oh God. Give us a mind. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.

And being found in human form, became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Let this mind be in us, oh God. Create this mind in this room right now, I pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. I loved while he lived Richard Wernbrandt, the Romanian who was in jail for over a decade in Romania, because they're communists. And he told a story one time about a Cistercian monk, it's one of the orders in the Catholic Church, who was interviewed by Italian television.

And this is the order that is totally silent. They sing together, they confess sins to one another, and they never talk any other time. And a TV interviewer asked the monk, what if you were to realize at the end of your life that atheism is true, that there is no God, tell me, what if it happened that way? And here's what he responded.

Holiness, silence, and sacrifice are beautiful in themselves, even without promise of reward. I still would have used my life well. I read something very different in 1 Corinthians 15, 19.

These are the words of the Apostle Paul. If for this life only we have hope in Christ, in other words, if it's over, the end of life, it's over, zero, beyond, we are, we Christians are, of all men, most to be pitied. And my question is, why didn't Paul say what this monk said? Isn't it the good life? Isn't Christianity the good life? And if it's a delusion, it doesn't really matter, we're gone.

So who cares if it's a delusion, it's the good life. Wrong! It's not the good life. Paul could not possibly have said, if we have hoped in Christ only for this life, we are most to be pitied if this is the good life.

Oh, how wrong we've got it in America. It's really hard to be a Christian in America, really hard. It's about the hardest place in the world.

We have convinced ourselves that the psychological benefits of believing in Jesus, the relational benefits of believing in Jesus, the prosperity benefits of believing in Jesus, the health benefits of believing in Jesus, make a pretty good life. So if it proves to be wrong in the end, no big deal, it's been a good life. It's so different from what Paul said.

So different. What's wrong with Paul? What's wrong with you? If there's no resurrection, we are of all men most to be pitied. I mean look around! What's to be pitied? School, right? It's a big room, it's got air conditioning and cool music and we're clothed and we're all well and what's to be pitied? If it's false, it's been a good life.

See you later. No, won't see you later. Well, the answer that Paul would give to what's wrong with you, Paul, is I have freely chosen to take so many risks with my life in the cause of serving my King that I suffer way more than I would choose to suffer if I knew this was false.

There's a better way to maximize pleasure on the earth than being a Christian. I'm a Christian hedonist. There's a better way to maximize pleasure on the earth than being a Christian.

Paul said, in fact, verse 32 of chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, if this is not going to be followed by a resurrection and reward and seeing the Lord Jesus and having everlasting infinitely growing joy, then let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die. And when he said let us eat and drink, he didn't mean let's all become drunks and gluttons. They are to be pitied in this life as much as Christians if there's no resurrection.

The way to maximize the pleasure in this life is not become a drunk and a glutton, just become middle class. Just drive a nice car, have a nice house, and have nice clothes, nothing exorbitant, no drunkenness, and just kind of the middle, this is the way forward if there's no resurrection, just like most Christians live. Paul said, if there's no resurrection, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Listen to how he puts the point on his own experience. He said, if the dead are not raised, why am I in peril every hour? I protest, brothers, by my exaltation which I have in Christ, Jesus, our Lord. I die every day.

So he says two things. I'm in peril every hour and I die every day. I choose, I make so many choices to magnify Jesus in hard places, it hurts me every day.

I would not choose this if it weren't true. I would not choose this if I couldn't expect a resurrection from the dead where everything would be paid back to me a thousandfold that I have laid down in the service of Jesus. I wouldn't go this way.

I'm in peril every hour. I die every day. And I want to ask, why, Paul? What are you up to? What's the meaning of this chosen life of risk and suffering? And you need to ask that right now.

Why would I choose to deny myself ordinary, innocent things and take risks with my life for the cause of Christ? Why would I do that? And I want to take you to Colossians 1. If you have a Bible and you can see it, then you can look at it with me if you'd like. I'm going to read Colossians 1, 24 to 29. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake.

He was a very strange man, wasn't he? I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. And in my flesh, his body, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, that is, the church. Let's just stop there.

That's enough. Let's focus on that. I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, talking to the church.

And in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. That's almost heresy. Almost.

To say in my body, my fallen, sinful body, I am completing or filling up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, that's almost heresy. It would be heresy if he meant the sufferings of Christ lack something in their atoning worth. In the death that he paid for sin, there's not enough there.

I'm going to add the rest so that the world can have an atonement that is sufficient for their sins. That's heresy. And that's not what he meant.

What did he mean? What did he mean when he said, in my body? What would you mean? If you walked out of here tomorrow and said, alright, I am, God helping me, going to fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on my campus or among the unreached peoples of the world, what would you mean? You really should be able to say that. I hope you will. I think what you should mean is, not that you add to

the atoning merit or value or worth of the death of Christ, but that you add the extension of that suffering to those for whom he died in your own body and suffering.

Let me show you where I'm getting that. Just listen or you can follow if you want. There's a parallel statement to this Colossians 1.24 in Philippians 2. The situation is that the Philippian church loves Paul.

Paul is in prison in Rome, hundreds of miles away. Epaphroditus says, I am willing to take the offering and the blessing that we as a church want to show, the love that we have for Paul, we want to show. So Epaphroditus takes whatever it was, we're not told, it could be money, it could be books, it could be food, whatever, clothing, and he takes it to Rome and he almost dies.

He suffers in doing this. He suffers in extending the love of the Philippians to Paul. And then you have this sentence where Paul encourages people to praise such a one as Epaphroditus.

Because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to fill up what is lacking in your service to me. He said that to the Philippians. You've got almost exactly the same wording in Philippians 2.30 as you do in Colossians 1.24. Almost exactly the same wording.

I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. Epaphroditus fills up what is lacking in the service of the Philippians. Now, what was lacking in the service of the Philippians? Listen to this commentator Marvin Vinson.

I think he gets it exactly right. He says, the gift to Paul was a gift of the church as a body. It was a sacrificial offering of love.

What was lacking was the church's presentation of this offering in person. This was impossible. And Paul represents Epaphroditus as supplying this lack by his affectionate and zealous ministry.

I think that's exactly what Colossians 1.24 means. Let me say it like this. When Paul says, I rejoice in my sufferings for you and I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, the afflictions of Christ, in my body, in my flesh, he means Christ died for millions of people all over the world.

People on your campus, people in the unreached peoples of the world. Their debt has been paid. And they don't know it.

They can't taste it. They can't feel it. They can't sing that song.

I thank you for the cross, my friend. I thank you for the cross. There is something missing in this offering.

It's not showing up. It's not showing up in 639 unreached people groups, over 100,000 in population, that have zero testimony from the people in this room or me. It's not connecting.

There's something lacking in the sufferings, namely the presentation of the sufferings. Now, here's the amazing thing. You might say, well, obviously the gospel has to be spread.

It's not obvious what he's saying here. He's not saying simply the gospel has to be spread. He is saying it is through my body and my sufferings that the sufferings of Christ arrive in the unreached peoples of the world, on your campus.

How do the sufferings of Jesus arrive on your campus? They arrive through your sufferings. That's the meaning of Colossians 1:24. I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ in my own flesh.

It's an amazing statement. And just think about the history of missions for a moment. If you have any inkling of how we got to where we are today with 1.3 or 4 billion people professing faith in Jesus Christ when it started from 12, how did we get there? You know what the answer is? Suffering.

There never has been a breakthrough into an unreached place or people without suffering. If you're going to be a missionary, mark it down. Pain, loss of a child, malaria, marital strife, tensions on the team, demonic opposition, martyrdom.

It's going to come. Don't think it's strange when it comes. It's the price.

He paid his life for his suffering. He paid our salvation. We join Him in that suffering to display the nature of it.

How are they going to see how satisfying He is in us if we look like it's the computer toy that is really satisfying? It is wonderful, I think, that Paul in this verse says, now I rejoice in the sufferings for your sake. I'm not summoning you to a miserable life. I am summoning you to a painful life.

But in this pain, all over the Bible, you find Christians rejoicing in tribulation. Rejoice in tribulation, for tribulation works. Patience and patience works.

And a provenness works. Hope and hope will not put us to shame because the love of God is poured out in our heart. You want to experience the deep joy of knowing yourself loved by God.

Lay out your life for another person. Take a risk with your body. Take a risk with your mind.

Take a risk with your money, your schooling. What an amazing thing God calls us to do and to be. The cross of Christ is for propitiation.

Our cross is for propagation. That's a quote from Joseph Son, another Romanian. Let me close with a few stories to illustrate what I'm talking about.

J. Oswald Sanders is dead. He was alive when I heard him in his 89th year at Trinity Seminary in a chapel a few years ago. I think it was early 90s.

And he told the story of his travels. I've just got to say this. He was an old man, right? 89 is old.

And he's preaching and he's preaching with power. And he said that none of us should ever retire. And that he had written a book a year since he was 70.

I just thought that was awesome. 19 books starting at age 70. You want to be an author? You've got about 50 years to get ready.

And then pour it on at age 70. Oh, America. Don't go to Mexico or New Mexico or Florida.

Go to the library. Or use your senior discount to get on a plane and go to Oman. Well, anyway, he told a story.

And I want to tell it to you. An indigenous missionary walking barefoot from village to village in India, where he had been. His hardships were many.

After a long day of many miles and much discouragement, he came to a certain village. And he tried to speak the gospel there, simply before dusk. And they rejected him.

Drove him out of town. We don't want to hear you. And exhausted and discouraged, he lay down under a tree and fell asleep.

Later in the evening, he suddenly was awakened and the village was all around him. And the main man was over his shoulder. And he was over him.

And though he was startled, the head man said, we came out to see what kind of man you were. And when we saw your blistered feet, we felt bad for what we had done and concluded you must be a holy man with a very important message for us. And we are here to let you speak to us.

And Oswald Sanders made the point that the these feet, these beautiful feet, how beautiful on the mountain are the feet of those who bring good tidings, that these feet, blistered, said, I have a message worth hearing. I think that is a perfect picture of I complete in my body, my sufferings, what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. Christ can't be there in that village, but we are his body on the earth.

And Christ has mainly a suffering to offer the world. And he means for the missionaries to offer themselves to the people. Here's another one.

Billy Graham had an itinerant evangelist conference in Amsterdam, I think 1990. A Maasai warrior showed up there who was an evangelist. And Michael Card, who lives here in town, a singer, wrote this story up in a magazine that I read.

And let me read it to you, because it's even more interesting and more dramatic than the other one. One day, Joseph, this is the Maasai warrior who showed up in Amsterdam from his tribe. One day, Joseph, who was walking along one of these hot, dirty African roads, met someone who shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with him.

And then and there he accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. The power of the Spirit began transforming his life, and he was filled with such excitement and joy that the first thing he wanted to do was return to his own village and there share the good news to the members of his own local tribe. Joseph began going from door to door, telling everyone he met about the cross, suffering, and the salvation that it offered, expecting to see their faces light up the way his had.

And to his amazement, the villagers not only didn't care, they became violent. The men of the village seized him, held him to the ground while the women beat him with strands of barbed wire. He was dragged from the village and left to die alone in the bush.

Joseph somehow managed to crawl to a waterhole, and thereafter, days of passing in and out of consciousness, found the strength to get up. He wondered about the hostile reception that he had received from people he had known all his life. He decided he must have said something wrong or left something out from the story of Jesus.

After rehearsing the message that he gave at first, he decided to go back and share this message again. Joseph limped into the circle of huts and began to proclaim Jesus. He died for you so that you might find forgiveness and come to know the living God, he pleaded.

Again he was grabbed by the men of the village and held while the women beat him, reopening wounds that had just begun to heal. Once more they dragged him unconscious from the village and left him to die. To have survived the first beating was truly remarkable.

To live through the second was a miracle. Again days later, Joseph awoke in the wilderness, bruised, scarred, determined to go back. He returned to the small village and this time they attacked him before he had a chance to open his mouth.

As they flogged him for the third and possibly the last time, he again spoke to them, Jesus Christ the Lord. Before he passed out, the last thing he saw was the women who were beating him began to weep. This time he awoke in his own bed.

The ones who had so severely beaten him were now trying to save his life and nurse him back to health and the entire village came to Christ. I think that's an example of what Paul meant by Colossians 1:24. I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf and I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions in my own body.

One more story. It's almost impossible to imagine that the story of the widow's might. You remember all the rich were being generous out of their wealth as they put in their money in the temple and a widow who had two coins came along and she put them both in.

And Jesus was watching and he says to the disciples, she put in more than everybody else put in. You don't have to be a great person, a wealthy person, a smart person to make a tremendous impact for Jesus. She put in everything.

Now almost everybody would say, that's just stupid. How's she going to pay her rent? Prudence is common in local churches. Prudent, careful, don't take too many risks by putting in everything you have.

Well we can hardly imagine that in this country but here's an illustration of a story from Haiti that is a modern day version. The church was having a Thanksgiving festival and each Christian, I'm telling this story from Stanford Kelly, each Christian was invited to bring a love offering at Thanksgiving. One envelope from a Haitian man named Edmond held \$13 cash.

The amount was three months wages for a working man there. Kelly was as surprised as those counting a Sunday offering in the United States seeing \$6,000 in cash in an envelope. He looked around for Edmond but couldn't see him.

Later Kelly met him in the village and questioned him. He pressed him for an explanation and found that Edmond had sold his horse in order to give the \$13 gift to God for the sake of the gospel. But why hadn't he come to the festival? He hesitated and didn't want to answer.

Finally Edmond said, because I had no shirt to wear. The aim of God in creating the universe, creating all 18,000 of you, the aim of God in creating all of you and your parents and your schools and this world, the aim of God in creating you, was to display the greatness of the glory of his grace supremely through the sufferings of his son. And then the son said, anyone who would be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me.

And Paul said, if you want to be my disciple, I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf and I complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. I complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ in my own body. And so on behalf of Jesus, I simply beseech you to come and to join him on this Calvary Road for the sake of the nations.

There are so many nations and so many campuses and so many of your friends that need you to take risks to display Christ to them.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/17/SID17823.mp3>

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/ZK00Tcb6ROY.mp4>

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