

Suffering

by Robert B. Thompson

Christians suffer because it is a means of salvation, breaking down the natural man and allowing God to create something new in us.

Duration: 54:44

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:3, 1 Peter 4:4-5

Topics: "Self Control", "Eternal Judgment"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of self-control and judgment to come. He shares the story of Felix, who trembled upon hearing the word of God but ultimately chose to ignore it. The preacher encourages the audience to love one another deeply, as love covers a multitude of sins. He also urges them to be clear-minded and avoid corrupting their minds with drugs, alcohol, and pornography. The sermon concludes with a reminder that our physical bodies are temporary, and God is working to create the true essence of who we are.

Transcript

Lord, as we come unto you this morning, we are so appreciative of your goodness to us, Lord. How true it is that through many dangerous toils and snares, we have already come. And Lord, you've been right there, and you'll be right there as we continue our journey to the end of our pilgrimage in this world.

And so Lord, we thank you for your faithful help. And we pray, Lord, for the families today that are in crisis or distress for one reason or another, Lord, that you will help and give peace and assurance and bring forth the total victory, as is your custom, for those who fear you. And we pray for the little children as they're being taught on their teachers.

And as we proceed, Lord, we need to hear from God. We need that which will sustain us in the days to come. We look to you, Jesus, and thank you, Lord.

Amen. You may be seated. And we're going to read 1 Peter 4, verses 12 through 19.

Now, I know, at least I believe, that the Lord wants me to talk today about suffering. It is a Bible thing that is a Christian thing. And God wants us to stand tough, hang in there, because it will have a good end.

It is necessary, but it will have a good end. And you don't want to miss it, because otherwise it will leave you a lightweight bubble head. How many in here want to be a lightweight bubble head? Probably not

more than five or six.

Well, the only way to avoid being a lightweight bubble head is to carry your cross behind Jesus. There's no other way, because it's the cross that saves us, not just through the atonement, but through crucifying the natural man so that the spiritual man can be created. You know, we look at people, but we don't see them.

What we see is the house they're in at this time. And no matter how beautiful or how handsome they are, while we're looking at them, they're disintegrating. The handsome man will someday be, as you can go visit them, when he was young and surfing, he was a young Adonis, and you go look at him in the nursing home.

Life beats the tar out of us. And the beautiful girl that drives men to distraction becomes a wrinkled hag, toothless. And that beat up guy, you see, bent over, pushing his shopping cart down the street with all his possessions, used to be somebody's little boy, waiting for Christmas morning so he could get his first bicycle.

I thought a lot about that. But what we're seeing is not the person. We're only seeing their house.

There's a person there. There's a person there. And the reason that we have to suffer, we have to endure these things, is because God is creating the real you.

The real you will never become a bent old man or a toothless hag. The real you, just your body. Just your body.

Hey, keep that in mind. I know it's hard because we can't see the real person. All we can see is their house.

Think about that. Picture yourself like one of these little beach critters or a snail. You're living within a house.

And Jesus said the flesh, prophets, zip. Well, it's hard for us to really grasp that. But it's well worth thinking, anything God said is well worth thinking about.

Because if we spend our life and all we see in ourselves and other people is the house, we're kind of dumb. That isn't really bright. Because that isn't the person.

Because while you're looking at them, they're changing. They're decomposing. It's the nature of life.

But inside, the real person, if they will do what Jesus said, are on a growth curve, and a learning curve, and a glory curve, and a beauty curve, and a handsome curve that is going straight up. Going straight up. So it's well worth reflecting on the cyclical nature and the brevity of life.

Well worth reflecting on it. And don't be bemused by it. Jesus, God incarnate, comes along and says the flesh, prophets, zip.

Well, what is our attitude? The flesh, prophets, zip. Or if we want to be so dumb as to fasten on the house, then we deserve what we get. Because we've been warned.

Now, God wants to build the real you. And part of that process is glory. Part of it is hope.

Part of it is courage. Part of it is suffering. And all these ingredients go into the cake to make the real you.

So that when you are aged, and in a nursing home, you'll realize, this isn't who I am. People may look at me, and here I am in my wheelchair, or I'm dead, or whatever. They don't know there's something inside that is growing and eternal.

The real you. The real you. The real you.

I got to thinking about that. I've been reading a book. I know we haven't read our scripture.

I've been reading a book called Slave of the Huns, something like that. Very well written. It's a Hungarian masterpiece about a young man, Roman, who was completely captivated by a Hun young lady.

He left the most wonderful place he had. He was a free man. He'd earned his freedom.

Wonderful house and everything. Go live as a slave of the Huns, because he was so captivated with this young girl. I was talking to the Lord about that.

I read, and then I talked to the Lord about it. I said, this poor guy had it made. He made overtures toward her, and he hit her with his whip.

She hit him with her whip, bang, across the face. She was of a noble family, and haughty, and he was just common Roman that was over there on a mission to Adolin the Hun in order to try. It was in the days, it reminds me of America, when Theodosius, I think he was emperor of East Rome, and the whole thing was corrupt, and they were weak, and the Huns were so powerful, the Romans were suing for peace and crawling on their hands and knees.

I got a one-liner out of that. I got a thing about the United States. It's right where we are, and the Huns are getting prepared.

Don't worry about it. They're getting prepared. The nation that does not remain instantly prepared for war will pay for its foolishness with bitter, bitter currency.

The same is true of the Christian. Our nation is preparing itself for a soupy peace that is not of the Lord. We should be instantly prepared for war.

We're going to catch it from a more disciplined culture someday. I thought, this girl, how does he know what's inside? He doesn't know what's inside of her. She may be nothing but an arrogant snob, and here he makes himself a slave, and he's educated in all the arts and everything.

She's trampling all over him. Well, I went to the Lord about it. I said, this is pretty dumb, Lord, and he said, it happens all the time.

So, remember, there's something in you. Let God cultivate it, and part of it has to be done through suffering, because it breaks down your natural strength and your ability to think and do for yourself and the natural man, and it gives God a chance to create something in you that's eternal and wonderful. So important.

So, ask yourself today when you go home, say, who is the real me? I mean, talk to yourself like that. Just don't let anybody see you. All right, we're reading 1 Peter 4, 12 through 19.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you, but rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ. Let's stop right there. Whoa.

So, Peter, who was crucified upside down, scholars tell us, was telling them to rejoice. Rejoice. Let's read on.

So that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the span of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal or even as a meddler.

How many here are meddlers? Slip up your hand. That was one. You've got to be careful.

All right, people are too willing here. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name, for it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God. Now, think about that.

Think about that. It is time for judgment to begin with the family of God. See, we've been taught for years Christians won't be judged.

This is where judgment begins. All right, let's go ahead. And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Now, what is that telling us? That's telling us that we're saved by suffering.

And by saved, it means saved from sin. Saved from sin. We're saved.

Hard for the righteous to be saved. Well, we know we're going to say, Jesus saved me and we received the blood atonement, but there's much more to Christianity than the forgiveness of sins. That's the door into salvation.

That's the door into the process. The process involves many things that save us from what we are. From the Adamic nature.

We don't want to remain as we are. God doesn't intend to save what we are. He doesn't intend to save what we are.

He intends to make a new creation. And that's eternal. God's not here to save what we are.

He's here to crucify what we are, so that we can be saved to the new world of righteousness. So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good. Now, the temptation when you're suffering is to stop doing good.

You feel like, what's the use? If I can't have this or that or the other, which God has taken away, whether it's a relationship, your health, or your job, or whatever. If I can't have that, I don't want to play. I'm going to take my trucks and climb out of the sandbox.

And God wants us, no matter how we're suffering, to just keep on good old loyal dog trade. Keep on doing good, doing good, doing good, because we're committing ourselves to a faithful creator. And what he is doing is saving us.

In the process of saving us. And it says, it's hard for the righteous to be saved. Why is it hard? We say, whoa, it's easy for the righteous to be saved.

Hard for the sinner. It's hard for the righteous to be saved. Why? Because the process of salvation involves crucifying what we are.

And it's difficult for us to keep our hope and our courage and our faith, our trust in God while this is going on. It's hard for us. So that's why it's hard for the righteous to be saved.

It's because God is out for blood. Let me tell you, he's operating, and we have to just believe, believe, and hope against hope and trust. And bear patiently with God, and it isn't easy.

That's what I mean. Does that make sense to you? And then this whole chapter, fourth chapter, let's go back to the first verse. This whole chapter is about salvation through suffering.

That's what it's about. And judgment. We're judged now so that we won't be judged later.

If we are not judged now, we can forget about being resurrected with the Lord and the sin. You can't be resurrected, receive a body of glory, and after that be judged. That cannot be.

Because the resurrection is the sentence of judgment. If when Jesus comes you get a glorified body and ascend with him, that's your sentence. That's the sentence of the court.

You're sentenced to eternal life. Well, how many know that you're not sentenced until after you're judged? Is that too swift for you? You're not sentenced until after you're judged. Imagine going down to the court on trial and the judge passes sentence on you and after that you're judged.

So, when the Lord comes to receive a glorified body and to be raised, it's a sentence. That's your sentence. That's the decision of the judge.

So that isn't going to happen and then after that you're judged. You've been sentenced to eternal life and to ever be with the Lord. If so, you have to be judged beforehand, before you're sentenced to eternal life.

Does that make sense? Amen? Oh me, I thought I could just slough along and it would all come out in a shuffle. Well, no. So we find in 1 Peter 4.1, Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, so we're going to be taking communion this morning and I want you to know that Jesus suffered big time.

Big time. The first of the sons of God. Firstborn from the dead.

Beginning of the new creation. Arm yourselves also with the same attitude. Now, how do you do that? When something goes wrong, you don't begin to yell at God and people and the devil.

You pray. You commit yourself to God. You never seek God to accomplish what you want.

To do so is idolatry. God does not want to be used by you or me. He wants you to seek him for his own sake.

Then, after you have worshipped God, you politely let your request be made known. Yeah? Sometimes people are, God is crucifying them, there's something they want so bad, so instead of dying, they go to God trying to find out what religious act can I perform to persuade God to do what I want. Meanwhile, running around and trying to get all the church people to agree with you.

Instead of just dying like you're supposed to. Oh, God won't hear it. He will not hear it.

You can't snow God. He's not waiting to see how many good deeds you can do in order to persuade him to do what you want. That isn't how it works.

You worship God and seek him with all your heart for his own sake. You worship him. You offer your body a living sacrifice.

And then you politely, because the palace is not a place to go charging around and demanding stuff of God. There is such a thing as palace manners. So you politely, God's in the ivory palaces, you politely let your request be made known unto God.

You don't try to kick the door down. And anything other than that is idolatry. You've got something in there ahead of God.

Something you want more than you want God. The Lord. You worship God above all.

And of course, that requires a good deal of battering of the natural man. But he dies hard. Wow.

Showdown at the OK Corral. God against your natural man. Showdown at the OK Corral.

It's OK if you do what you're supposed to. First, God has to corral you. Well, amen.

If you haven't been there yet, you will be. So cheer up. Therefore, arm yourself with the same attitude.

Get used to it. This is the way God deals with his saints. He has for 2,000 years.

He doesn't change. He who has suffered in his body is what? Done with sin. So that's a good thing.

That's a good thing. Boy, that's just like going to the doctor and getting fitched up. Isn't it? Want to be done with sin? Well, God has his ways of doneing you with sin.

As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires. There's a paradigm shift there. You don't view your life as you used to.

You're trying to get away from focusing on your house. There's little crabs on the beach. And you can reach in with your finger and pull them out of their house.

And set the house somewhere else. And they'll scurry all over trying to find another house. Usually they can find one because when they die, they leave all these houses around.

Well, picture yourself like that. Don't get yourself confused with your house. Wow.

I like that thought. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. So the suffering brings you into the will of God.

Unless, unless you blame the tools that God uses. Endlessly complaining about the person that God is using to crucify you. I've reasoned with people about that.

Don't let me hear one more word about how terrible your wife or husband is. That is not the issue. The issue is you and God.

And the next week they forget all about it. And they're back telling me how terrible this one is and how terrible that one is. So we repeat the same old story.

Quit complaining about the tools God uses. That is not the issue. Well, how do you know when God's worked his will on that human being? When they quit complaining about the tool God uses and start talking about God.

Jacob is a good example of that. He is scared to death that Esau was going to kill his four wives and his children. And he could have run around the countryside talking about how terrible Esau was.

Well, the truth of the matter is it was Jacob who was the stinker. And it's usually that way. Usually the one you're complaining about is the honorable one.

I just threw that in free. Well anyway, Esau is riding along like he has good sense with his army of 400 men without a care in the world. Well, the old founder of the nation did the right thing.

He went to God. Well, it doesn't tell about all the screaming and hollering he did to begin with. But finally God said, will you let me go? And he said, not until you bless me.

Not until you bless me. And then he asked, Jacob asked his name. You know what happened? He forgot all about his four wives and his kids and Esau and he got involved with God.

He prayed through and God said, alright, I'm going to call you Israel because you struggle with God. Furthermore, and this is the point, you have prevailed with God and with men. And when you try to reverse that process and try to prevail with man first, you would just do what I say, pray, and we'd all be blessed.

It doesn't work that way. You have to prevail with God first. And that's how you know when people have finally got the victory is when they begin to talk about God instead of the tools God is using.

And blaming everybody in town, including the devil. The problem is not the devil. The problem is we're refusing to die.

Well, that's good preaching, Brother Thompson. That is it. You have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do.

Living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry. They think it's strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

This was 2,000 years ago. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead. Well, the commentators do not like that and they waltz all over that thing like the Tennessee waltz.

But the truth is the gospel is preached to those who are dead. It's a good thing, too, because you can't enter the kingdom unless you're born again. Right? One says.

And so that leaves out Abraham and Daniel and Noah and Job and Ezra and everybody else because nobody was born again until Jesus rose from the dead. Therefore, to be born again has to be on the other side. No, I'm not going to belabor that, but I will call your pure minds to the fact that on the Mount of Transfiguration there was two dudes.

I hope that's not disrespectful. Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets, were there. And believe me, they were not trading Pokemon cards.

They were discussing with Jesus his death. Why? Because the atonement has to apply to them also. And they were curious about it.

Maybe Peter did know what he was talking about in spite of all the commentators. But this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, so they might be judged according to men in regard to the body. Now, I don't know, but we're all coming through it together.

The body of Christ, when the Lord appears, those people will be made perfect together with us, according to Hebrews 11, about the last verse. They'll be made perfect together. So when the Lord comes, there's going to be a lot of people on the earth, starting with the righteous able and coming up to the people who are alive at that time.

So therefore, that tells us that the whole body is being built up together. Isn't that wonderful? Physical death is just not that consequential in the scheme of redemption. It's the body that sleeps.

But what God has created inside of us does not sleep. Well, we know that. So, how did they build us up? Well, we have their testimony in the Bible.

How many have been built up by the testimony of Abraham? Well, sure, they're still testifying. Once you become God's witness, it's for eternity. Oh, I never stop witnessing.

But how are we helping them? They're up there with notebooks. Well, doesn't it say we're encompassed with all these witnesses from the past days? Witnesses of God. I saw that one time.

I was walking up the street, and I was in great duress. I mean, you can't preach this stuff unless you first live it. The farmer must eat the fruit first.

And I'm going along like this, and I looked up, because sometimes I see stuff, but most of the time I don't. And I think sometimes it's in my imagination. But I was looking up, and it just seemed like I could see all these people standing up there with notebooks.

Well, what I was going through at that time, it would have taken a whole notebook. Well, do that as you will. I'm only reading what it says.

So that they might be judged. You know, I think King James is better on this, as though they were men living in the body. But living according to God in regard to the Spirit.

The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear-minded. Now, don't touch drugs or alcohol.

It's something to corrupt your mind. You need to be clear-minded, and don't pollute it with pornography and a lot of sex on television or something. Clear-minded and self-controlled.

How many here are self-controlled? Oh, you do groan appropriately. I used to preach to my fifth graders. I never preached Christ to them, because that would have been in violation of my contract.

I tried to be square with people, not sneak stuff in. But there was nothing wrong with teaching them morals, and I taught them morals, and I taught them about self-control, ten years old. And I said, now look,

you go out with a bunch of kids.

How many know God said, the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, and I want to turn the hearts of the children to their peer group? No. Well, that was... That's... All right. Now, here we are.

I'm saying, you know, kids want you to go. I don't know what they call it now. They used to call it chicken, driving around in cars, seeing who was the last guy to turn aside and so on.

I say, you're going to... I mean, even at ten years old, man, what the kids do now is unbelievable. And so I said, they're going to do wrong things. They're going to try drugs, and they're going to mess around with nasty stuff and everything.

And I said, and there you are. And right then, you're either... You're going to be controlled by the group if you don't have any strength, if you flop around like a herd of amoebas. That's what you're going to do.

You're going to follow what they do, brainless. Tell me what to do. Or, you're going to control yourself instead of being controlled by the group.

Opinions of people. You can never lead if you're moved by the group. How many here have self-control? Can you do what you know? This is how I defined it to the fifth graders.

All right? Self-control is doing what you know you ought to do. Instead of worrying about anybody's going to call you chicken or a nerd or something else. If you go by them, good luck to you.

You'll be led by the most wicked person in the group. Groups are always led by the most wicked person. Secular groups.

Okay? Now, there was a man named Felix, and Paul was preaching to him, and he sat down next to him, and he says, Brother Felix, slip up your patty and say Jesus is Lord. Felix slipped up his patty, and Paul says, Congratulations, you're a Christian, and you can never be lost. Oh, you're going to rule and reign with Christ.

Is that what he said? How about it, Kylie? Is that what he said? Kylie says, Not in my Bible. What'd he do? Yeah, he said something about Caesar Rome. What he did was he reasoned with Felix about righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come.

Is that the gospel? This is the good news? Who needs the bad news? Righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come. And Felix says, I hear you, man. Woo, cool.

Right? What'd he say? He didn't say anything. He trembled. Trembled.

How to win souls for Christ. Then he says, I'll see you later, and he skipped out. Self-control.

Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins. Am I supposed to love somebody when I can see what they're doing wrong? Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Grumble, grumble, grumble.

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others faithfully, administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. There's nothing wrong with saying, Thus saith the Lord, if the Lord is talking.

If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial. But over in the next chapter, he says something, and I love it. It's 1 Peter 5.10. And that's a good verse to pin on the refrigerator.

Oh, you don't pin that. Stick on with a magnet. On the refrigerator.

Good verse. One to know. The God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ after you have suffered a little while.

Well, it seemed to you like forever. And so how do I know when it's going to be over? You don't. And that's what's tough.

If God could just say, I'll be over in 20 years, you could at least mark it off on the walls of your cell, carving in the granite. But you don't know. And that's the killer.

It must take a while. Well, a while with God is a thousand years. A little while.

After you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you. It won't be other people. You know, after you pray through your idolatry, are you there? After you pray through your idolatry for this thing you wanted so bad, you were kicking the door down.

After you pray through your idolatry and get a hold of God, you won't care that much about whether you get what you wanted or not. C.S. Lewis says, you mean, you want oatmeal, you want oatmeal, and God works till you don't want oatmeal anymore. Oh, it's not quite that way.

God restores what will really bring you joy. See, our problem is, we don't know what will bring us joy. We think we do.

God will restore. Don't worry about that. He's in the joy restoring business.

God will restore that which really will make you happy. And that's all you want anyway. You don't want him to restore stuff that won't make you happy, do you? It all boils down to faith and trust in God.

And you won't lose anything. You won't lose anything. Don't worry about that.

There's no disappointment in Jesus. Restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. To him be the power forever and ever.

There's another verse that's on my heart and it is found, ta-da, I'm looking for it. Where is it? It's in Timothy. I know that.

I know. 2 Timothy 2.3. 2 Timothy 2.3. And Stan, this is when you do, ta-da, 2 Timothy 2.3. Endure hardship. Now, there is a commandment that is needed very much in America.

We are as soft as jelly. We are soft, soft, soft. I've read, and you have too, a number of anecdotes and stories about athletes or people who were caught, mountain climbers maybe, or someone who was caught in a terrible situation and they found out that the human body is capable of much more than we believe.

If you're put to it and really have to hang in there, the human body is capable of much more than we think or the demands that we make on it. So, we can survive. You read about, I like to read about the frontiersmen sometime, and some of them would have to, to save their lives, they would have to jump into icy water, break the ice and swim, and then maybe run through the woods for miles and miles and miles, very lightly clothed, very lightly clothed, maybe bare from the belt up, and maybe without shoes, running away from the Indians when their feet were bloody, in the cold and in the snow after swimming through an icy river.

You think, I couldn't do that. Yes, you can. You don't realize what your body is capable of doing.

And I remember, what was his name? Komori, Komori. When I was in the occupation forces in Japan right after World War II, I had two Japanese boys who were helping me, Sakai and Komori. And I believe it was Komori that told me how they trained the young men in Japan, how they trained them for war.

And they would get them up early in the morning, it's cold in Japan in the morning, it's very cold, just a t-shirt, just a t-shirt. And they would be out there and they would have to endure that cold, and they did that to toughen them up. If you want to read about something, really want to read about something, read the way the Spartans trained their young men.

Tony, it is unbelievable that any of them ever lived. Some of them died, actually, some of the Spartan young men died during the training because they were succumbed. In fact, in one of our Navy SEALs programs, there's a Navy Super SEALs program that was in the Reader's Digest about two months ago, and they would beat on those guys so hard until their urine turned red with blood from being beaten with sticks in their kidneys.

Well, you think, this is being trained to be battle-hardened. It was in the Reader's Digest about two months ago, this guy, and he told how many had dropped out, and they had a doctor there all the time watching them, and they'd be there while more than half of them had to drop out. These were the top, top physical specimens.

And they'd be sick, and they'd have pneumonia from the exposure, and they were still, don't drop me out, don't drop me out. That's more true to life than our American way. That's more true to what people have endured over the years.

I was thinking of the Christians as they marched out of, it wasn't Turkey, I think it was Armenia. There was a march out of Armenia by Christians, and they were dying along the way. It was a big exodus of people when they were, it may not have been Armenia, but it was in that area of the world.

This has happened many times, many times, many, many, many times in history. That's called enduring hardness, and we need to get a hold of it. I can't tell you what's, we may have another 15 years of prosperity.

For all I know, I hope we do. That will give us time to get the word out, get more and more and more. There is a device out now that will, I don't think it's through with the beta testing, but it's still in development, but it's coming along where you can just take an audio tape, plug it in, and it comes out in your computer, you can print it out.

I mean, we could get all these 5,000 tape masters in pamphlet form. It's called audio mining. That's already in development now.

So another 15 years of prosperity, we'll be able to blanket the earth with God's words. So I'm not looking for trouble. I thank God for every day that goes along that we can work for and do the work that God has called us to do.

Praise the Lord. But eventually, eventually, unless we have a massive turning to God in this country, we're going to be in for it, and you're going to survive. You're going to do it.

But you're going to have to remember to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, because you may have an opportunity to maintain your soft way of life if you will compromise what you believe. Not a great deal. Just a little.

Don't wave your flags anymore. Don't get so excited in church. Just little things.

Just little things. And the minute you give in, the minute you deny Jesus, you're in big spiritual trouble. So you've got to learn.

You've got to toughen yourself up. And those of us with small children, we've got to toughen ourselves up. We can't say, well, if they came and threatened my child, I don't think I could stand.

We cannot do that. We have to be prepared in advance. I am serving Jesus no matter what.

Endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. He said, no man serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs. He wants to please his commanding officer.

And you see, it's our involvement in the things of the American culture that make us soft. I was thinking of those people in Kosovo. They had a bad time there for a month or two.

Those were people that came out of warm homes, televisions and everything, and here they are with their kids laying on the ground on their own frozen vomit. Before they were able to get goods to them, they had several weeks of that. Would you do that? And still praise the Lord? Still say hallelujah, Jesus? Still get up in the morning? Wave your flag? That's what God wants.

Christians have done it through the centuries. It's time. That's what God is saying to us today.

You're going to suffer, but it's going to make you what you want to be. But you're going to have to endure hardness, arm yourself with this. Say yes, I'm not going to believe that this soup that I'm living on now and all the crazy garish stuff that goes on in the television is anything but what it is.

The antics of the demons, I'm here, I use the world, but I'm holding it very lightly and I'm keeping myself in readiness for what's coming down the trail. That's what God is telling us today. Hallelujah.

Shall we stand? We're going to be taking communion today. It's a good time to think about the Son of God and the hardness that He endured in order to purchase your salvation and my salvation. And your ability to endure hardness is going to affect other people, whether they stand or whether they fall.

So I figure, Lord, how can I do less in the light of what you have done? How can I flop around like a fish when you have been courageous and have gone to the cross for my sake? Give me the courage and strength to go to the cross for your sake, that I might rejoice with you in that day. If you want to come and take communion at the altar, please feel free to do so.

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