

The Blessed Path of Suffering

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of setting our minds on God's interests and doing His will, rather than following a false Jesus and seeking prosperity and escaping suffering.

Duration: 1:03:34

Scripture: Isaiah 53:1, Philippians 4:11, Revelation 2:9

Topics: "Suffering"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of following the example of Christ in suffering. He highlights the story of a man in a Chinese prison who converted 600 prisoners through his faith and endurance. The speaker challenges the notion of flashy and self-centered leaders, stating that true servants of the Lord embrace the lowest of people and take up the cause of the black sheep. He also encourages believers to discern between what is spiritual and soulish, and to understand the distinctions between the old and new covenants in the Bible.

Transcript

When we consider the preaching of Jesus Christ in the world today and what the Lord has called us to proclaim and what we have been proclaiming in the church here for many years, I find the big difference. Very often I see we preach a different Jesus from the ones a lot of Christians are preaching today. And that's not new to the 21st century.

We read that even in the first century, Paul preached a Jesus which was different from the Jesus being preached by a lot of other preachers. And we could say not only it's a false Jesus, but there is a gospel of the old covenant and there is a gospel of the new covenant. And Paul spoke about people who are preaching another gospel.

That is the essential difference. Sometimes when I ask people who have gone somewhere to listen to a public crusade or some meeting, I ask them, did you find any difference between what you hear in the church here and in those other places? And sometimes they say, no, it's the same thing. I never say anything more because then I know how much they have understood.

That's all. That's all I wanted to know, how much they understood. When we lack discernment, we will think the two are the same.

It's like people who are colorblind. Those of us, most of us, or perhaps all of us are not colorblind. So we really don't know.

I really don't know what colorblindness means, but it's a very serious thing. If you're colorblind and you're getting a driving license, you don't know what's red and what's green. You can have accidents if you're colorblind and everything looks gray to you.

And that's exactly what happens to a lot of Christians. They don't know what's red and what's green. You can't get angry.

You don't get angry with somebody who's colorblind, do you? We never get angry with sick people. We feel sorry for them. So it's very important in the Christian life not to be colorblind concerning what is spiritual, what is soulish, what is divine, what is human, and what is old covenant, what is new covenant.

What are the things emphasized in the New Testament and what are the things emphasized in the Old Testament? When Isaiah was preaching something in chapter 53, he began that chapter with these words, Isaiah 53, verse 1. And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? The arm of the Lord is the mighty power of God. And he begins by saying, who is going to believe what I'm going to say now? That's basically what he's trying to say. Who is going to believe that the true servant of the Lord will grow up, verse 2, the last part, with nothing attractive about him, a man who suffers and who knows pain firsthand.

People look at him and turn away. They look down on him because they thought he was scum. Who's going to believe that? That a servant of God stands up on the pulpit and he's going to be despised, misunderstood, not spiritually attractive because the message he preaches is not something which is acceptable to a lot of people.

And so people think he is scum. Is that a servant of the Lord? Is that the one whom God anoints and supports? It says in verse 7, he was beaten and tortured but he didn't say a word. And verse 8, middle, he died without a thought for his own welfare, even though, verse 9, last part, he had never hurt a soul.

He had never hurt a soul and he never said one word that wasn't true. But it was God's plan all along, verse 10, to crush him with pain. The last part of verse 12, he embraced the company of the lowest of people and he took up the cause of all the black sheep.

This is the true servant of the Lord. Not the flashy film star type of person who stands under the floodlights and runs across the platform and waves, and whom you cannot approach like you cannot approach the film stars. That is not the servant of the Lord.

Such a man is following another Jesus. Can you see the distinction between red and green? Or are you also colorblind? Isaiah says, who will believe this report? Who will believe that such a person is a servant of the Most High God, who does not have access to millions of rupees like others? I believe that if you don't get light on this type of distinction between red and green, you will be deceived in this day. This is a day when even the elect could be deceived.

I want to show you another verse in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 16. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 16, we read, it's the only time, the only time, and it's very significant, when Jesus uses a word only once when speaking to a human being. There are only two or three times when Jesus used the word Satan, devil.

You know, there are some Christians who are always rebuking the devil. Get behind me, Satan. Get behind me, Satan.

Get behind me, Satan. They think they're spiritual. I think they're paranoid.

Something's wrong with their head. Jesus wasn't always going around saying, get behind me, Satan. Get behind me, Satan.

No. There's something wrong with such people. They're not spiritual people.

It says about Jesus in Acts, chapter 2, I have set the Lord always before me. He saw his Father all the time, not Satan. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Those who are impure in heart, I presume they will see Satan. They'll always have to go around rebuking Satan. I don't waste my time rebuking Satan, because I follow Jesus.

I don't believe the devil can touch me. My conscience is clear. Not if he makes mistakes.

We all make mistakes. But if our conscience is clear and we're really seeking to live a God-fearing life, before the face of God, we don't have to spend our lives seeing the devil everywhere. I see God everywhere.

The whole earth is full of his glory. The therapist in heaven said, and that's what I say too, I see God's glory everywhere. Because Jesus has conquered.

Satan is a defeated foe. But Jesus did say, get behind me, Satan, in the wilderness, when he actually confronted Satan, just once. Another time we read in John, chapter 6, he referred to Judas Iscariot as a devil.

He said, one of you is a devil. But he didn't name him. But there was only one time, only one time, when he turned to a human being and said, get behind me, Satan.

And that was, amazingly, not the Pharisees, but his closest co-worker, Simon Peter. Oh, how he must have loved Simon Peter to rebuke him so strongly. Revelation 3.19 says, as many as I love, the Lord says, I rebuke and I discipline.

And if he rebukes you strongly, he must be loving you very much. If he rebukes you mildly, it's probably not because he doesn't love you, but because he feels you're the type of person who'll get offended with a rebuke. And if he doesn't rebuke you at all, I just feel sorry for you.

God's probably given up on you. God rebukes me all the time. All the time.

If you ask me today, how do you know that Jesus loves you? My younger days, I'd say he died for me. Today I say, he rebukes me. He disciplines me.

That's how I know. He hasn't given up on me. And I'm so thankful that he does that.

He rebuked Peter. And he said to him in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 16, verse 23, he turned and said to Peter, get behind me, Satan. Now, we can, you know, paraphrase that and say, well, what he meant was that Peter was being influenced by Satan.

And what he said, what Jesus could have said to him. I mean, how would you say that? How would you say that to your closest co-worker? Get behind me, Satan. I mean, Ian and I worked so many years.

He's never said to me, get behind me, Satan. I've never said that to him. I've never said that to my wife.

My closest co-worker in life. That's a strong word. I mean, he called the Pharisees snakes and vipers.

But to turn around to Peter and say, get behind me, Satan. And the wonderful thing about Peter was he didn't get offended. That's what marked him out as the man who's going to be the speaker for God on the day of Pentecost.

He did not get offended with rebuke. It was around the same time that Jesus told his disciples, will you also go away? When many people left him in John chapter 6. And Peter was the one who said, Lord, to whom shall we go? You said just now, get behind me, Satan. These are the words of eternal life.

Boy, what light. He was not colorblind. He knew clearly what was green and what was red.

He knew that those words were green. They were words of eternal life. And blessed is the man who understands that when God rebukes him, either directly, or when he reads the Bible, or when he hears a message like this, or through a brother who comes to you personally and rebukes you because he loves you so much.

If you can say, let the righteous smite me, like the psalmist said, that is like anointing oil upon my head. These are the words of eternal life. You are a blessed woman.

You are a blessed man. You are a blessed young brother, young sister. You are a blessed child.

You can receive it like that. But now what I want to point out to you is, in what context did he say that? What did Peter say that made Jesus use such strong words? I can think of another time when Peter was discussing, am I going to be the greatest here? After Jesus, I mean, Jesus just told us that he's going to die. Okay, who's going to take over the leadership? It's like these mission compounds in India when the missionaries were planning to leave.

There was a great discussion among the Indian people there who were going to take over, not how souls are to be saved, but who's going to take over as a leader. Well, that's not new. That's not old.

That's not a new thing. It's an old thing. It happened at the Last Supper where the disciples discussed who's going to be the greatest.

I mean, if Jesus had told Peter, get behind me, Satan, don't talk about who's going to be the greatest. That's a Satanic attitude. You always want to go off like, that's what made Lucifer a devil.

That I can understand. And you can understand that when people want... Supposing, for example, there's a fight going on in this church to be the leader of the church. It's never happened in 30 years, and I don't believe as long as we preach this message it'll ever happen, till Jesus comes.

But supposing in some church there's a fight as to who's going to be the leader, to turn to such a person and say, get behind me, Satan, is okay. Because that's the spirit of the devil, wanting to exalt himself. But what did Peter say? Peter said such words of consideration.

I mean, it's the one place in the New Testament where we would think, boy, how much Peter loved Jesus to say such a word. Because, notice the context. Jesus told them, from that time, verse 21, Jesus began to show his disciples how it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and suffer at the hands of the religious leaders and priests there, and be killed.

And the third day, he dries again, and Peter said, never, impossible, God forbid it, this will never happen to you as long as I'm around here, I'm going to make sure that doesn't happen to you. What do you say to such a man? I mean, if you one day announce, brothers, I think I'm going to be arrested tomorrow, and some brother gets up and says, brother Zach, that will never happen to you as long as I'm around here, I'll make sure it doesn't happen. What do I turn around to him and say? Get behind me, Satan.

Is that what I say to a guy who's trying to show me his loyalty? Who loves me so much? He'd get offended. Immediately, Jesus says, get behind me, Satan. You're a stumbling block to me.

What words. Oh, how he loved Peter. Oh, what light Peter had.

That was a green light God gave him. He was not colorblind. And the reason is, this is the point I want you to notice, because this affects you and me.

You are setting your mind on man's interest, not God's interest. Your mind is thinking in terms of human interest, not God's interest. Human interest is how to escape humiliation, how to escape suffering, how to escape difficulties, how to escape problems.

All human beings in the world, from the beggar to the king, their mind works like that. Show me a man on earth whose mind doesn't work like that, a man or a woman. How to escape humiliation, how to escape trials, how to escape suffering, how to escape any difficulty, financial difficulty, physical difficulty, how to escape sickness, how to escape poverty, how to escape... This is the thinking of man.

You don't have to be spiritual to think like that. All children of Adam think like that, and not only children of Adam, even animals. Why does a lizard run away when you try to catch it? It's thinking the same way like all human beings.

How to escape suffering? If this guy catches me, I'm finished. What's the difference between that lizard and a human being? Absolutely nothing. Snakes, dogs, they all... Have you seen how these dogs around here, when the truck comes to pick up these stray dogs, they know.

Amazing! They disappear. And once the trucks go away, they come back. I've been amazed at the intelligence of these dogs.

They know how to escape suffering. Their interests are on how to escape anything that's difficult, suffering, trial, confinement, and everything like that. And here Jesus was saying, I'm going to be killed, I'm going to be humiliated, they're going to spit on me, they're going to treat me badly, they're going to kill me.

And Peter says, rubbish, it's not going to happen. Not as long as I'm around here. And Jesus turns around and says, your mind is set on man's interests, God's interests.

So we need to find out what are God's interests. And that's where we understand the New Covenant Gospel. In the New Covenant Gospel, there is a major place for suffering, which is not there in the Old Covenant.

I looked up a concordance this morning, and looked for the word suffering in the Old Testament. It wasn't even there once. Did you know that? That was amazing to me.

The word suffering is not there in the Old Testament once. Suffering is there once in Exodus chapter 3, where the Israelites were having sufferings in Egypt, and God delivered them immediately from that. Otherwise, it just isn't there.

But in the New Testament, it occurs plenty of times. I thought, okay, let me look up another word, which is a very popular word nowadays in Gospel preaching. What is that word? Prosperity.

Okay. That occurs in the Old Testament, sure. I said, let me check how often it comes in the New Testament.

Paul says once in Philippians chapter 4, verse 11 to 13, he says, I know how to have little, and I know how to have prosperity. I said, that doesn't seem to fit in with what I hear. I mean, here we are hearing of a gospel which is only prosperity, and Paul seems to say, it doesn't make a difference to me.

Whether I'm prosperous or poor, it's all the same to me. I've learned to be content, and I just praise the Lord. I'm anxious for nothing.

I rejoice in the Lord always, all in the same chapter, Philippians 4. And then, I found that word prosperity occurring another time. That's very interesting. I told you once where Paul said, it doesn't make a difference to me whether I have prosperity or little.

The only other occurrence of prosperity in the New Testament is in Acts chapter 19. In Acts chapter 19, Paul was preaching, and thousands and thousands of people were getting converted, and they were giving up their idols, and they stopped buying idols. So, when people stop buying idols, what happens? People who make idols run out of business.

Well, Paul was doing that, and he says here, there was a big confusion in the city, not against the gospel. They were not bothered about the gospel. The businessmen were concerned.

It says in Acts 19.23, there was a big disturbance concerning this way that Paul was preaching. And there was a man named Demetrius, verse 24, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, and was bringing no little business to the craftsmen, because a lot of people were buying this. He gathered all these people together with workmen of similar trades, and he said, men, you know that our prosperity, there's the word, depends upon this business.

But you see, this man, Paul, has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, verse 26, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. And I thought of it, how does this apply today? There are preachers who say, our prosperity depends upon whether we continue to preach that people must give us their tithes, and that people must give us their money, and only if we convince them that God will give you prosperity, only if you sow a seed to our ministry. But this man, we won't mention his name, he's going around preaching that this is not the gospel.

This is troubling us. What shall we do with this man who is going around preaching that that is not the gospel? Let's try and get rid of him. Stop him from preaching.

Don't let him come on television or any such thing, because our prosperity depends on this business that we are promoting. It's the same old story. Two thousand years go by and history is just being repeated.

Dear brothers and sisters, those are the only two occurrences of the word prosperity in the New Testament. Other preachers won't tell you that. I'll tell you that.

Even a concordance will tell you that. You don't need a preacher. What did Jesus say to Peter? Your mind is set on man's interests.

Man's interests are always what will help me, what will make me rich, and what will make me more comfortable, and a better car, and a better house, and a better this, and a better that. Whose interests are these? Do you think Jesus was always thinking, how can I get a better house, and can I get another better clothes? Was this what he was thinking of all the time on earth? He wasn't even thinking of his food most of the time. Once when he didn't eat at all and he got a soul saved, one soul saved, he said, I've already eaten, he said to his disciples in John chapter 4. I've eaten food which you fellows know nothing about.

My food is to do the will of Him who sent me. All the time his mind was revolving around, how can I do the Father's will, how can I do the Father's will. How did he know when that day that there's a needy soul in Samaria, there's a five times divorced woman there whom you got to go and help because nobody goes near divorced women.

You got to go and help, the Holy Spirit said, and Jesus heard it. How did he hear that voice? Because his mind was attuned always to thinking, what is the Father's will, what is the Father's will, what is the Father's will. His mind was not thinking of where can I buy some better clothes and where can I get some better food and which is the best restaurant in town and which is the best place to buy clothes and which is the better house I can move into.

His mind wasn't revolving around those things. His mind was not revolving around better bathroom fittings and better tiles for his floor. These things were all secondary.

I'm not saying he lived on the streets in Nazareth, but they were secondary. We read in Mark's Gospel how once in Jesus' house, you know Jesus moved his house from Nazareth to Capernaum when he started his ministry. We read that and in his house we read one day somebody broke open the roof and lured somebody to, did you know that was Jesus' house? Yeah, you read that.

It's in Mark chapter 2 I think. I can understand that because nobody would dare to break somebody else's house roof. But when they thought about getting into Jesus' house, these folks who were brought, this paralyzed man said, this is Jesus, he won't mind roof and all being broken up because he loves people, he doesn't love property.

So he won't mind, I tell you he won't mind. He said, are you sure? He said, I'm positive. He won't even ask us to pay for it, he'll pay for it himself.

Because he loves people so much. He loves to help people so much. And they broke it open.

They would not have dared to do it in anybody else's house. But Jesus' house, they broke it open. And then he wasn't concerned, hey all these fellows broken up, how much is that going to cost me? He wasn't even thinking about all that.

He saw this man who needed healing, he healed him. And then he saw him needing forgiveness, he said, okay you're forgiven. Then he walked away and he may have told one of his disciples, get somebody to fix that, here's the money.

Don't go and ask those people why they broke it up. His mind was, that shows me, you know you read these stories in the Gospels and you understand what was going on in Jesus' mind. And I say, Lord, you know all of us say, I want to be like Jesus.

You want to be like him? Set your mind on God's interests. Otherwise, get behind me, Satan is the word we'll hear. It's Satan who makes a man of God set his mind on earthly interests.

Peter was a man of God. There was a time when his mind was set on fishing and how to make more money fishing. Okay, but one day God called him.

One day Jesus called him and said, come and be my disciple. Go and preach the Gospel, Peter. There was no time for him after that to set his mind on human interests.

Paul says that in 2 Timothy 2. He says in verse 3, suffer hardship with me. He said, I'm not telling you to suffer something I haven't suffered myself. Timothy, remember that suffering which is not found in the Old Testament is a major part of the New Testament Gospel.

And it's something which if you're a servant of God, you have to go through. What type of suffering? Leave it to God to decide that. One thing you can be sure, he'll never allow you to suffer more than you're able to bear.

I praise God for that. He'll never allow me to go through a trial or a suffering, which is too much for me to bear, but he will allow me to go through suffering. All the apostles were killed.

They did not die natural deaths. Perhaps John did. We don't know.

He lived up to a good old age of 95, but most of the others died in their 60s. As far as we know, many of them much younger. James, when he was 31 or so.

31 years old, just beginning to serve the Lord. And his head is chopped off. We read in Acts chapter 12.

Why? Was it because there were thousands of apostles that we didn't need one fellow like James? No. Those were days when there were hardly any apostles. Was it because God couldn't deliver him? A few days later, God delivered Peter.

Just a few days later from the same prison. You read in Acts chapter 12, the angel came and released Peter and took him out. Why didn't the angel come and release James a few days earlier? God wasn't asleep.

And I've thought about Peter going, it says in Acts chapter 12, he went to the house of Mary, where they were having a prayer meeting for him. They were all praying, oh God, release Peter, release Peter from prison. And he knocks at the door.

And the maid servant goes and opens the door and says, hey. And she runs back and says, hey, the prayer has been answered, Peter is here. No, they say, it can't be Peter.

They pray just like we pray. We don't expect an answer. It's like that old black preacher who once in a very dry area of the United States, he called everybody saying, we're going to have a prayer meeting for rain Sunday morning.

We're not going to have regular service. We're going to pray for rain because it's been so dry here. And then he got up and said, hey, you fellas come here to pray for rain and none of you brought an umbrella.

What type of faith is that? So it's like that. Most of our prayers are like that. We can't blame those people or we can't blame these people who prayed for Peter.

But he came out and I thought when he came in, it says he gave his testimony, how the angel came and knocked off his chains and opened one door after the other. And here he is. And who is sitting there? The mother of James.

I think her name was Salome. The mother of James and John. Their father, Zebedee.

He was sitting there. And amazed. Hey, two days ago, our son was killed.

Why did God allow that? And here, the same prison, same guards, the angel comes and delivers them. Sometimes we can't understand God's ways. I tell you, many things that happen in the world, people ask me, why do all these people suffer with starvation in Africa? And why are all these Christians in Sudan being persecuted and sold as slaves? And I say, brethren, I don't know.

Why does God allow His most faithful servants, just by the way, some of God's most faithful servants are not the ones you see on television or who stand on platforms today. They are in Chinese prisons. They never come on television, we don't even know their names.

I was reading of a man the other day in a Chinese prison recently, who was in prison for four or five years. And what I read was, out of 800 prisoners there, 600 got converted. Because this guy went in there.

The police didn't know what to do. So they put him in solitary confinement for three months in a room where there was no light. Four feet high, he couldn't stand.

Only four feet long, he couldn't sleep. All he could do is sit down there just two and a half feet wide for three months. Teach you a lesson.

These are some of God's greatest men. Make them your heroes. Not these people who stand under the spotlight and ask you for your money.

So, we wonder, why does God allow that? Why does God allow one of His faithful servants to sit in this little cell, four feet high and four feet long and two and a half feet wide for three months? Is it the same God who delivered Peter from prison? Doesn't He send angels today? Is it the same God who allowed James to be beheaded two or three days before Peter was released? All these things teach me one thing. Lord, your ways are not my ways. I bow and say, I'm a human being.

I don't understand your ways. And sometimes we try to use our logic and tell every sick person, you've got to be healed. Jesus wants to heal you.

I don't know what's the next thing they're going to say, whether they're going to tell every dead person, you shouldn't die, you should be raised from the dead. What all crazy things people will say, I don't know. It's

all because man tries to explain God by logic, instead of humbling himself and saying, Lord, your ways are not my ways.

Your thoughts are not my thoughts. I've got a teaspoon of wisdom. You've got an ocean.

Where is a teaspoon and where is an ocean? As the heavens are high above the earth, so higher are God's ways than mine, and they are better. And like we sing in that song, one day when I stand in glory, I will say, above the rest, this note shall swell. My Jesus has done all things well.

We may not be able to understand it now, but we'll be able to understand it then. And we'll be in many things of suffering and trial and discipline and even sickness that God permits, like he permitted a thorn in the flesh for Paul, which he never removed despite Paul praying a number of times. I don't know.

I've seen a lot of godly people in the world suffer. I can't explain it. I wouldn't tell them like Job's comforters, hey, that must be because of some sin in your life.

There are preachers today who say Paul didn't have enough faith, that's why he couldn't come out of prison. Thank God he stayed in prison, otherwise we wouldn't have got some of these episodes. God's ways are not our ways.

Don't be fooled by all these preachers who talk about a faith which has only got to do with physical comfort, physical healing, financial prosperity. And there are multitudes of people around the world who are being deceived, being told, if you want to get out of debt, give money to God, to our ministry or something like that. Pay your tithes and you'll get out of debt.

And there are people who do business with God, like commercial street business. You give me this, I'll give you this. You want to buy this suitcase, pay so much.

The Lord says, you want to get out of debt, give me so much. And these stupid believers who don't read the New Testament go and do that, what is the end result? What they deserve. They'll get more into debt.

Don't be foolish. I believe we must give to God. I don't believe if you're in debt, you should give to God.

I'll tell you why. Because if you owe Mr. X some money, and you give God money, you're actually stealing from X what you could have given him to clear your debt. You're giving to God.

God says, I don't want Mr. X's money. I want your money if you want to give it. And if you don't have any, don't give it.

Go and clear that fellow's debt. Supposing you have to pay Caesar and you have to pay God, who should come first? Tell me. God first or Caesar first? That's a tricky one, isn't it? If you don't know the answer to that, read in Matthew 22.

Jesus himself said, first, render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and then render to God what is God's. Why didn't he put God first? Because it's so sensible. If I owe Caesar money, and I give to God, how can I give Caesar's money to God? God says, I don't want Caesar's money.

You first clear your debt to Caesar, and then give to God. Supposing I cheat the government of income tax, and I say, Lord, I'm going to give this to you. Do you think he'll take it? No.

And here you are expecting me to repay my debt to you, and I tell you, hey, korban, I've given that to God. Say, God or not God, you better pay up my money. And supposing when Jesus comes to rapture us, and he's going to take us, and you say, hey, wait, Lord, this fellow hasn't paid his debt.

He gave all his money to you. You deserve to be left behind in that day to pay your debt. So don't be fooled by all this.

God is a good God. Paul says here, suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No soldier in active service.

Entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please him who's enlisted him to be a soldier. You know that. Here's a man who's fighting for India in Kashmir.

He's not thinking about, hey, that roof is leaking in my house in South India. How am I going to fix that? I tell you, he'll get shot if he keeps thinking about those things. He's thinking about the enemy coming over this side and that side, and he's got no time to think about his leaking roof, or whether he's going to get a new pair of clothes, which shop he should go to tomorrow in Kashmir.

He's got no time if he thinks that he won't be going to a shop tomorrow, because he'll be finished before he gets there. He's got to keep his mind concentrated on the enemy. And he says, no man entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life.

Now supposing you do see a soldier who's entangling himself in leaky roofs and buying clothes and all that. You say, ah, this guy's a retired soldier. He's not a soldier like it says in active service.

Retired soldiers can do anything, and lot of Christians are like retired soldiers. I mean, they haven't finished their full service. They retire as soon as they join.

This is amazing. As soon as they join, they're retired. I mean, if you spend 40 years in the military serving God and then retire, okay.

But these guys, as soon as they're born again, they retire. As soon as their mind is immediately on affairs of everyday life. And Paul says to Timothy, are you going to be an active soldier? Paul says, I'm 65, 67.

I'm not retiring. I don't plan to retire at all. I'm going to go straight from here to heaven, and I'm not even going to retire there.

I'm going to go straight to hell. I'm not going to serve God there. I'm not going to retire.

Never. There's no retirement age for me now or in eternity. The joy of the Lord keeps us going.

Nothing like serving the Lord. It gets better and better every day. So he says, no soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life because his one goal is to please the one who has enlisted him as a soldier.

And all those soldiers fighting in Kashmir may not be so interested in pleasing their general, but we are interested in pleasing our general. And he says, if you want to please your general, Jesus Christ, the captain of your salvation, you better make sure that your mind is not all the time revolving around better clothes and better houses and better this and better that and life on earth. And he doesn't think about how to promote God's interest.

That's what the Lord told Peter. You want to serve me, Peter? And you want your mind to be on man's interest? You're a stumbling block to me. You better get out of my service if you want to be like that.

And I tell you a lot of people who are doing Christian work today, God's word to them is, get out of my service. You're a stumbling block to me. You don't allow people to come into God's kingdom.

You're a stumbling block. You're lying on the roads, making them all stumble by your life. I tell you a lot of preachers are causing sincere people to stumble over them instead of showing them the way into God's kingdom because of the way they live.

Also he says, if anyone competes as an athlete, verse 5, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. Then he goes on to say in verse 7, consider what I'm saying. Just think about what I'm saying.

God will give you understanding. God will remove your color blindness if you just meditate a little on what I'm trying to tell you. And I want to encourage you, my brothers and sisters, meditate on what you're hearing now.

God has to give you understanding. Do you think Paul could not give Timothy understanding? He could not. If you're color blind, do you think man can make you healed of color blindness? No, only God can do that.

It's the same here. Paul says to Timothy, I've been gripped by this truth, but I can't explain it to you. And I say to you, brothers and sisters, I cannot explain it to you.

I want to, but I cannot. But if you think about it and meditate on it, God will give you understanding about what I'm going to say. Verse 8, remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead seed of David.

He's emphasizing the fact that Jesus Christ came in the flesh of David, the seed of David. Tempted like us in all points, yet did not sin. Remember him according to my gospel.

My gospel concerns a Jesus who became a man and was tempted like us in every way and did not sin. That is my gospel. That's what gives us hope that we can also walk as Jesus walked in overcoming life.

But that gospel is not being preached much today. It's another gospel that is being preached. He said, this is my gospel.

And because I preach this gospel, what happens to me? I suffer. You won't suffer if you don't preach this gospel. I suffer.

At the age of 67, probably 35 years of serving the Lord, he says, I'm still suffering. I'm locked up in jail like a criminal. They've locked me up in jail.

I'm sitting in jail right now because I preach this gospel. And why? He says, but the word of God is not in jail. Praise God.

I'm in jail, but the word of God is not in prison. That keeps going. He says, for this reason, I endure everything.

I stick it out so that everyone God calls will get in on the salvation of Christ with eternal glory. He says, I don't want people just to be saved. I want them to get eternal glory.

And if that, for them to get eternal glory, if it means I have to go through suffering, I'll do it. Now, he didn't realize fully what a tremendous glory millions of people were going to get because he was in prison. In prison, he wrote some of these finest epistles which have brought eternal glory to millions of people.

He didn't know that. He didn't even know that what he wrote would be preserved beyond the church he sent it to. He didn't know that for 2,000 years, people would be studying it and meditating on it and coming into eternal glory.

He never knew that. And sometimes the suffering we go through, we don't realize what God is going to bring out of it. I'll never forget.

Many years ago, more than 20 years ago, I had to go into hospital for a little minor surgery. I had prayed many times concerning that minor problem that God would heal me, but he didn't. Anyway, he didn't do it miraculously.

So I finally went to the hospital. And as I was lying there in bed for 10 days, I still have it written down what the Lord spoke to me at that time. I read it the other day.

The Lord said to me so clearly, I could have healed you in a moment, but I didn't. You're running around so much that I don't get time to talk to you. Now you have to lie down with your head up all the time, looking at me, and I'll talk to you.

And he did. For 10 days, he spoke to me among all the articles I ever wrote in my life, and I've written perhaps hundreds of them, the closest to dictation, writing down exactly word for word what God spoke, was only one article of mine. A lot of articles are messages like this that I speak.

It's not dictation. I mean, I'm not speaking every word that God gives it to me. It's not true.

I'm just speaking what's in my heart, in my own thoughts. But that one article was different. I sat and I wrote, lying in the bed, I wrote what God said to me.

This is the type of man I need. It's a little six-page tract called God Needs Men. And I wrote point by point by point, about 50 of them, and I saw why God put me in bed.

Sometimes it's in our times of suffering and difficulty that God gives us the maximum revelation and the maximum blessing to others in the days to come. And that little tract's gone all around the world now, published in various magazines and different places. I remember Lynard Ravenhill, who was a very godly man, wrote Why Revival Tarries.

I got a letter from him once when he was alive, many years ago that was, I think about a year after I wrote this. And he said, Dear Brother Poonen, in his own handwriting, simple man, he said, I've just read this article of yours. And he said, I've been so blessed by it.

Can I use it somewhere? I was so humbled that this great man of God should write to me and ask me whether he could use that article. But it's amazing how God allowed it to get into his hands more than 20 years ago. So, I don't know how he used it, he probably did in some way.

I said, Sure, Brother. You are welcome to use it. I consider it a great honor.

Because I have a lot of respect for you. Yeah, he was one of those rare prophetic voices. But brothers and sisters, what I want to say is, when Paul was in prison, God was accomplishing far more than he himself thought.

With these Chinese believers in prison, and think of men like Richard Wembrandt who were in prison in Romania, and many others who've gone into prison. I tell you, those are my heroes today in the 20th century, more than these people who stand on platforms and appear on television. Watchman Lee who spent 22 years in prison, he's my hero.

These are the people who suffered for the gospel. Suffering is a major part. Peter understood that.

You know, after the Lord told him, Get behind me Satan, your mind is set on human interests, not God's interests. Peter understood it, because later on, you read in John chapter 12, Jesus saying these words concerning his own suffering, in John chapter 12 verse 27, 28, and the disciples heard that, and they understood what God's interests are. John chapter 12, verse 27.

You know, he was approaching the cross, and he said, verse 27 of John 12, Now my soul has become troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No. See, this is man's interest. The way man thinks is when you're in trial, Oh Father, save me from this! But shall I say that? No.

What shall I say then? Father, glorify your name. In those two sentences, you see man's interests and God's interests. What is the way human beings think? Father, save me from this problem, save me from this difficulty, save me from this trial, save me from this suffering, save me from this imprisonment, save me from this sickness, save me from this, save me from that, save me from the other thing.

And what is God's interest? Father, glorify your name. Our Father who art in heaven, save me from this trial now. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us bread enough to eat, even if we don't have much, enough for the day, so that I can live to serve you, to do your will on earth as it is in heaven. And Lord, forgive me all the sins I've committed, because we sin every day.

My brothers and sisters, whether you know it or not, unconsciously anyway, we are sinning. There are 90% of our life we don't see. There's unchrist-likeness in our actions, words, we hurt people without knowing it.

We sin. We've got to ask God to forgive us. We can get victory only over conscious sin.

This is only 10% of our life. We need to say, forgive us, as we have forgiven all the people who have hurt us, perhaps unconsciously. Assume it is unconsciously.

Please assume that they don't know what they do. So say, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. That's how it is to follow Jesus.

And Lord, once you've done that, also please deliver me, not from trial, but from evil. Deliver us from evil. And Lord, this is not a prayer only for me.

I'm saying, give us our daily bread, me and my brothers and sisters. Forgive us our sins. Forgive that person his sins.

And deliver all of us from evil. What shall I say then? Father, save me from this hour? No. Father, glorify your name.

And a voice came from heaven, I have glorified it and will glorify it again. I'll tell you something. If you want to hear a voice from heaven, pray this prayer.

Father, glorify your name. You'll hear it in your heart. Many of us don't hear a voice from heaven to encourage us in life's battles, because we're always praying, Father, save me from this.

From this problem, this sickness, this poverty, this thing, that thing. I'll tell you this. Pray, Father, hallowed be your name.

Glorify your name. That's to follow Jesus. He will never allow you to suffer beyond your ability.

Don't believe the lie of the devil, who tells you that God is a spoiled sport. He hates you. That's what the devil says.

If you say, oh no, I'll only pray, Father, glorify your name. He will send me to the most difficult place on earth to live. And if I've got three jobs open to me, he'll tell me to take the one with the lowest salary.

And if I've got three places to go to, he'll tell me to go to Timbuktu or some place where there's not much civilization. He'll tell you to marry the ugliest girl you can ever find on earth. Who tells you all these stories? The devil.

What a fool you are to believe that. All the demons whispering all this in your ear. And you believe it? No, my Father is a good Father.

He loves me a million times more than my earthly father loved me. He loves me a million times more than any human being loves me. More than my wife, more than your husband, more than anyone.

He's a loving Father and if he allows you to go through some difficulty and trial, it is for your good. If he does not allow you to marry Miss Universe, it's to save you from umpteen headaches that you will have marrying a woman who's always used to attention. Thank God you didn't marry Miss Universe.

If he doesn't make you a millionaire, it's so that he saves you from all the problems that they have. God is a good God. He's a loving Father.

He saves us from many things. He doesn't answer many of our prayers because it's not good for us. He gives us what is best for us.

And Peter understood that. He understood it. He heard, get behind me, Satan.

He accepted it and said, those are the words of eternal life. And then he wrote his letters. Now listen to his letters.

1 Peter chapter 2. He's really gripped. Now he's straightened out and he says, 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 20. What credit is there if when you sin, you are harshly treated? I mean, if you get punishment that you deserve, there's no marks for that.

But if you are treated badly, even though you did what was right or it was a mistake, it was not deliberate evil and you still suffer and you suffer patiently, endure it. This finds favor with God. Because you have been called for this purpose.

Which purpose? To suffer when you do what is right. Please read verse 20 and 21 and tell me what does it mean when it says you are called for this purpose. Read it.

It's plain English. This is why you have been called to suffer for doing what is right. That's your calling.

How many people have understood it? Peter understood it because he accepted that rebuke. Because Christ also suffered and he has left you an example to follow in his steps. I have to follow in the steps of a Christ who did not become wealthy or healthy, but who suffered.

Now a lot of people say he suffered so that I can be wealthy. But read what it says here. Christ suffered leaving you an example to follow in his steps.

Peter understood that. Don't be deceived by all these Demetriuses going around saying this man's preaching is ruining our business. Our prosperity is dependent on preaching this gospel.

Don't be deceived by these Demetriuses of today. Listen to the word of God. Christ suffered for us and he did not sin.

When he was reviled, verse 23, he did not utter, he did not revile again. When he suffered, he did not utter any threats. He did not call them names back.

And so he says later on in chapter 3 and verse 13, if you do what is good, who can harm you? But even if you suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. Don't be afraid. Don't be intimidated by people trying to intimidate you.

Oh, if you preach the gospel here, you stand up for Christ, you won't get any promotion. We'll sack you from your job. Okay.

Don't be intimidated. Don't be troubled. Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart.

Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you. I'm not asking you to go and give tracts to everybody in the office and use their office time to do such things. But when somebody asks you a question, give an answer with gentleness and respect.

And if you suffer because of that, well that's okay. It is better, verse 17, if God's will is that you should suffer because you did what is right than doing what is wrong. Because Christ also died.

Again he says, Christ is the example. Or you go to chapter 4 and he says in the last few verses of chapter 4, he says in verse 19, if you find life difficult, it's because you're doing what God said. Take it in your stride.

Trust the Lord. Commit your soul to Him. Don't suffer, verse 15, as a busybody in other people's matters.

But if you suffer as a Christian, don't be ashamed. Because, chapter 4, verse 1, Christ also suffered. That's the point.

Right through, Peter has been gripped by that message. I follow a Jesus who suffered. Okay, in conclusion, let's look at the last book of the Bible and see what Jesus has to say to a church there.

One of the two faithful churches, Revelation chapter 2, verse 8, to the church in Smyrna which is suffering, he says in verse 9, I know your tribulation, your pain and your poverty. The most faithful church in the seven churches in Revelation had suffering and poverty. And the unfaithful, backslidden church of Laodicea in chapter 3 had prosperity and health.

You got an idea which is the true gospel? I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews. Don't fear what you're about to suffer. The devil will cast some of you into prison.

And you will be tested, but I will make sure it's only for ten days. He's the one who decides how many days the judge writes on the verdict. Who put that thought in his head? God.

He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability. Whether it's your boss in your work, who gives you extra work, or the judge who writes something down. It's God who decides.

Praise God, we serve such a wonderful Father. There's a spirit of triumph in us all the time. Bow our heads before God in prayer.

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