

# [ christians' suffrage ]

## :: philippians 2.17-18 ::

We're continuing our verse by verse study through Paul's letter to the Philippians and we're seeking to find how a Christian can discover the life of fullness and abundance that we see promised and demonstrated in the Bible.

Paul, as an Apostle, is not only an example to us, how he lived, what he did, those sorts of things, but he is a teacher to us, speaking God's inspired words through his writings. His admonitions and exhortations and commandments come directly from heaven and we should recognize and apply them that way.

Throughout these first 2 chapters, he's been very instructive about how we live the Christian life practically and personally. Now we get to a set of verses that deal with a couple of the most difficult aspects of our faith: **denying self** and **receiving suffering**.

Beginning in verse 17 we read:

**Philippians 2.17-18 - Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.**

This Epistle is really great for cleaning house in our hearts. Hopefully we've felt that work of the Spirit over the course of our study. As we evaluate our pride, as we evaluate our unity, as we think about our witness to the people around us. Those examinations are encouraging because, despite our imperfections, God is present to accomplish great things in our hearts. He's purposed to do something in our lives that is wonderful and powerful and Godly.

And this morning, we get a fresh reminder that number 1: Life is not all about you. And number 2: Suffering is going to be a part of your walk with the Lord.

First, tackling our bent toward self-centeredness, Paul points out that God's work is not exclusively about you.

**Philippians 2.17 - Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.**

He knew that God was working in his life, but he also knew that God was in the business of *using* his life for others.

Despite what has developed in some areas of American Pop-Christianity, the entirety of God's will is *not* simply that you feel happy and good about yourself. You don't find that teaching in God's word. We, generally, are a culture that is concerned with upward-mobility. Bigger and better. The Christian life *IS* about upward-mobility, but not in the sense that our material wealth

should always increase or our comfort should always increase, or the ease of our life should increase. The only upward-mobility we are worried about is our entrance into heaven. It's about being elevated above the cares and concerns of this world. It's about building up *others* rather than ourselves. And those values are contradictory to what we desire in our natural hearts.

Christian life in *eternity* is about rest and perfection. Christian life on the *earth* is about denying self, following Jesus and serving others. And part of that plan will include God using your life to accomplish His will for the sake of the Church or the lost. It's not just about what is going to make us feel better.

Our God does ask us to be humbled. He asks us to forgive. He asks us to sacrifice our lives in a variety of ways so that other people can be brought nearer to Him and so that He can be glorified.

If you analyze what Paul is saying, he's pointing out that perhaps God is allowing him to be executed for His own glory and for the benefit of the Church.

This isn't the first time in the Scriptures that we see something like this.

Joseph was delivered by God into slavery, imprisonment and exile so that God could demonstrate His sovereignty, His love and so that He could deliver His people from a famine.

The crippled man who was laid daily at the Temple Gate called Beautiful was again and again passed by Jesus while He was on the earth, not healed, so that later in Acts chapter 3, the Apostles could work a miracle in his life, glorifying God and giving a great proof of God's power in the Church that had just been born.

Paul looked at his circumstances and rejoiced in the fact that God was using him as a tool to accomplish His will. That God used the sacrifice of Paul's life to glorify Himself and to embolden and mature the Church.

God's will to use you and to bring people into repentance is more important than your comfort or your wealth or what you think would make your life more enjoyable. Because the universe doesn't revolve around you, it doesn't revolve around me. It revolves around Jesus Christ who asks His disciples to deny themselves. To place others above themselves. To sacrifice their entire lives to His service, so that they might receive what is better and fuller and more heavenly in life.

But, in our flesh, we don't really want to rejoice in that plan. Because we're self-centered people. The sin nature tries to convince us that we'd rather have worldly things than spiritual things. Naturally speaking, we want to edify ourselves and not others. Even as Christians, we don't always like it when awesome things happen to other people. In fact, we have these huge stores of jealousy and covetousness in our hearts that well up when someone else is recognized or someone else is blessed or someone else is used in a dramatic way for God.

Paul understood that satisfaction comes not from things or recognition but from a Person. And that's what we're after, isn't it? Satisfaction and meaning and fullness in life. Paul was content to be anywhere, in any situation, because he knew he was with Jesus and that in just a few moments, really, he would be face to face with Him in eternity.

This is why he kept saying throughout the opening of this letter, “Stop thinking about yourself. Stop trying to out-do other people. Stop dividing and demanding your own opinion and just dive into Jesus.”

We’re called to rejoice when God uses other people for His glory, not be jealous of them.

A few verses ago, Paul said, “I even rejoice that Christ is preached by the people who hate me and are preaching out of spite.”

Jealousy is a very dangerous thing. And it’s an attribute that the natural man has within. When we see someone else being blessed or being recognized or being used, we need to root out the jealousy and be excited for them. Because God’s desire is that we labor together. Each of us serving as a part of His Body, with specific tasks and specific purposes. He desires that we each bear fruit in our season, as He accomplishes the whole of His will here on the earth.

When we are jealous, when we are self-centered, then we start thinking that the Christian life is about us being as physically happy or materially blessed as we want and having as prominent or easy of a ministry as we want. This is contradictory to the message of the Bible, which explains that sometimes God sends His people into *suffering* in order to glorify Himself and benefit others.

Which brings us to the second issue, that Believers should expect and endure suffering.

**Philippians 2.18 - For the same reason, you also be glad and rejoice with me.**

In this text, Paul reminds us that we are drink offerings, poured out before the Lord.

The drink offering was a symbol of voluntary surrender to God. An act of willing submission and acceptance of God’s control. It was poured on top of the burnt offering, an animal slain and given to God on behalf of sins. It is a symbol to us of what Jesus has done and then following in like manner, our pouring out of ourselves to be consumed by God. Not holding back portions or hordes or being self-centered, but being emptied before God in worship for His pleasure.

When we surrender our lives to God, we must expect suffering. The world is fallen, it is at enmity with Christ, it hates His people. Our adversary the Devil seeks to destroy God’s people. Men love darkness rather than light, so it is natural and to be expected that a person devoted to God will experience blow back here on the earth.

**James 5.10-11 - My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.**

Charles Spurgeon once wrote: “Mark then, Christian, Jesus does not suffer so as to exclude your suffering. He bears a cross, not that you may escape it, but that you may endure it. Christ exempts you from sin, but not from sorrow. Remember that, and expect to suffer.”

C.S. Lewis said: "We were promised sufferings. They were part of the program. We were even told, "Blessed are they that mourn.""

We are not very accustomed to suffering compared to much of history and most places in the world. We are culturally conditioned to try to avoid suffering. To escape it.

Paul, like the beaten apostles in Acts chapter 5, reveals the joy of suffering when it comes to the Christian life.

Remember, back in verse 29 of chapter 1 of this book:

**Philippians 1.29 - For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.**

God uses our suffering to spread His power on the earth. He uses our living sacrifice to accomplish His will in the lives of others. And when we try to escape suffering, we are kicking against the direction of the Lord. We're being self-centered, not God-centered or others-centered.

When we try to avoid suffering we invariably end up compromising. Think of Esther and Mordecai. Their desire to avoid suffering almost led to the slaughter of many of God's people. Think of Elijah. He wanted to avoid the hardship presented by Queen Jezebel and it made him focus on only himself. And in a selfish tantrum he put himself up for early retirement. Maybe God's greatest prophet in some senses, but he shortened his usefulness because he didn't want to suffer and he didn't trust God's will.

We are called to sacrificial living. If we're not willing to pour ourselves out before the Lord, if we're not willing to surrender ourselves and our futures to Him, then we need to do some serious business. Because our calling is this. To follow Jesus with a cross on our shoulders. That is where Jesus saved us and that is where He uses us. And if we want what God is offering, then we must remove self from the center, offer our lives as a continual sacrifice and rejoice in the ways that God uses us and others to bring light and love into the world.