

Sermon Draft for October 12, 2-25

Text: 2 Timothy 2:1–13

Sermon: “Suffering Here, Glory There”

The widows Naomi and Ruth (Old Testament Reading) and the lepers (Gospel) were forced to face what Paul describes to Timothy in our Epistle text and Luther confesses so well: ***“The holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross. They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh”*** (AE 41:164). Scripture thus on this day present God’s people with the cloud of witnesses, examples whose faith and life we are to emulate as we suffer.

Martin Luther: **“The holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross. They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh.”** Let me say that again so you catch it all. **Repeat.**

That suffering isn't just what's inevitable in a sin-filled world. No, because it is in Christ, it's a mark of our redemption. It's the pattern of Christ's life. So, if our life is in Christ, it must be the pattern of ours too: first suffering, then glory. For in the sufferings of Christ are all sufferings overcome.

The Christian life is one marked by suffering. Paul's sufferings were many. He writes his epistle to Timothy from a prison in Rome (v 9a). This wasn't the relatively tolerable house arrest of his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30--31) but a real and lonely prison. In so many ways and so many times Paul had suffered before (2 Corinthians 11:23--33; 12:7--10).

And this imprisonment, Paul knew, would likely end in his death; almost surely 2 Timothy was the last letter he wrote before being executed.

Paul anticipated the same for Timothy (v 3). Not only from his own experiences but also from the words of Christ, Paul knew that he and likely all pastors could expect sufferings (Acts 9:10–16; Matthew 16:24–25). Timothy, we know, was imprisoned, as we hear about his release (Hebrews 13:23).

According to tradition, Timothy, as an old man and bishop of Ephesus, a seat of worship of the pagan goddess Diana, was stoned to death for preaching the Gospel in opposition to a procession in her honor.

We should not expect anything less than suffering ourselves. Jesus' words on carrying crosses apply not only to pastors and apostles but also to all Christians. Note the “we” throughout verses 11–13.

Christian suffering comes in one's vocation. Paul and Timothy's sufferings were specifically because of their callings as apostle and pastor.

It was the “gospel, for which [Paul was] suffering”; he “endure[d] everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus” (vs 8–9). Paul could almost surely have gained release from prison by abandoning the faith, as others had done (1:15; 4:10a). Timothy’s suffering, too, is explicitly by sharing in the work of the Gospel with Paul (v 3).

Paul also gives three illustrations in our text that describe how we will suffer in our vocations: A soldier risks his life because he trusts that his needs will be provided (v 4). Whether under an officer in the military or a boss in the office, we in the Lord’s service accept suffering by trusting that he will not forsake us. An athlete wishing to win a prize must submit to the rules (v 5). As a star player doing a postgame interview or a student asked to help his fraternity brothers cheat, if we won’t follow Christ’s Word to take up our crosses, our faith is not genuine. But the farmer will indeed enjoy his crops (v 6).

And Christians whose words and lives as parents and children, citizens, employees testify to Jesus will suffer but will finally reap God's blessing.

Christian suffering is always "in Christ," and therefore it is the suffering of faith. Paul associated his sufferings with Christ's and now exhorts Timothy and us to do the same. Being chained as a criminal (v 9) Paul sees as a blessed identification with Jesus. Jesus is the one who was bound and led away to his execution.

Paul calls Timothy to "remember" what Jesus went through (v 8). A man may look pitiful, disgraced, in chains, but Timothy can rather see Christ when he looks at Paul. As we suffer, see Christ Jesus chained, beaten, crucified, dead, buried.

In the midst of his trials, Paul therefore confidently confessed his faith in Christ and directs Timothy and us likewise to confess. Paul boldly announces, ***"But the word of God is not bound!"*** (v 9b).

Timothy can and will continue to preach Christ! Our suffering does not silence us or discredit our faith. Bearing up bears witness to the one in whom we trust. We know this is Christ's pattern: first suffering.

And because Christian suffering is in Christ, who was raised from the dead, it is also hopeful. Yes, remember that Jesus Christ, after suffering, was raised from the dead (v 8). Even the chains of death and the prison of a tomb gave way to God, who could not stay bound! This is the rest of Christ's pattern: first suffering, then glory.

Because Christ was raised from the dead, we, too, look forward in hope to our own resurrection and the end of all suffering. Those who are baptized into Jesus' death are also baptized into his resurrection.

Thus, Jesus' resurrection is our resurrection (v 10). The hard-working farmer will indeed have the first share of the crops (v 6). The saying is absolutely trustworthy (vs 11–13).

In Paul, the prisoner, the Lord gave Timothy an excellent example of suffering in hope. We, too, ***“must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh.”*** But because Christ first endured the great suffering for us, then for us also is first suffering, then glory.

The Bible is full of suffering. Think of the anguish of Abraham, the trials of Joseph, Job, and Jacob. In each of these instances, though, the Lord acted mightily and raised the patriarchs to glory Abraham to the fatherhood of a nation, Joseph to be his own betrayer-brothers’ savior. To Job the Lord restored wealth and family. And he restored to Jacob his rightful wife, Rachel, after he had been deceived by his own uncle. By these reversals worked by the Lord for his people, God teaches us to rely upon him in all suffering and to know that whether we see it or not in this life, nothing can be compared to the glory that is to be revealed for us in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 2:8–10).

Amen