

Christ, the suffering servant

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 & Matthew 16:21-28

Beloved, have you ever considered what some may consider the extreme differences between comfort and suffering? As human's we love our comforts ... we love our comfort zones. We consider them a place of safety. The Cambridge dictionary defines comfort as 'a pleasant feeling of being relaxed and free from pain', 'the state of having a pleasant life with enough money for everything that you need', 'something that makes your life easy and pleasant', 'the pleasant and satisfying feeling of being physically or mentally free from pain and suffering, or something that provides this feeling.' For many... we long for this feeling of comfort ... and we do not like anything that disturbs that feeling of comfort. Then we turn to the word suffering, and I found it interesting how instead of offering multiple definitions as was the case for comfort ... the Cambridge dictionary merely defines suffering as 'physical or mental pain'. Far less encouraging right ... and yet... we, as Christians, are told that just as Jesus suffered for us ... we are called to participate in His suffering. As R.C Sproul puts it, 'Though Jesus was uniquely the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, there is still an application of this vocation for us. We are given both the duty and the privilege to participate in the suffering of Christ.' Beloved, we are followers of Christ ... We follow Him to the Garden of Gethsemane ... We follow Him into the hall of judgement ... We follow Him along the path through Jerusalem to Calvary ... We follow Him unto death ... And then as the Gospels declare ... we follow Him through the gates of heaven ... Because we suffer with Him ... we shall be raised with Him ... If we are humiliated with Him ... we will also be exalted with Him... You see ... Because of Christ our suffering is not in vain ... and this is where we find our true comfort ... though we, as believers in Christ may not have the comforts as defined by the Cambridge dictionary ... we can trust that our suffering is part of the total plan of God... Who has chosen to redeem the world through the pathway of suffering.

And this is exactly what we see as we come to the Gospel of Matthew chapter 16 versus 21 to 28. And this morning we will be looking at these verses in two parts. Firstly, we will be looking at verses 21 to 23 'The Messiah will suffer', followed by verses 24 to 28 'The Messiah's followers will suffer'.

Matthew chapter 16 versus 21 to 23 says, 'From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."'

The Messiah will suffer. Beloved, though this is the first recorded account of Jesus prophesying His death and resurrection in a manner which the disciples understood, it was not the first time He had alluded to the events that would soon take place. In Matthew chapter 9 verse 15 Jesus is recorded saying, "'How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.'" And in Matthew chapter 12 verse 39 and 40 He says, "'A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'" However, now as Peter recognises Jesus as the Messiah, He reveals to His disciples in plain, unfigurative language, that He was preparing to lay down His life to take away the sins of the world. His divine purpose was about to be fulfilled ... Can you

imagine the scene, Jesus had just affirmed the fact that He was indeed the long-awaited Messiah ... and now He reveals a truth that must have seemed entirely unbelievable to those who were following Him... The Messiah must suffer and be killed ... and on the third day He will rise again ... can you imagine what must have been going through the disciples' minds ... it must have been a painful and somewhat inconceivable announcement ... and to add to it ... His suffering would be climaxed in Jerusalem ... the place known as the holy city ... the city of the Great King. And beloved, it is useful for us to note that Jesus had to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die ... He had to satisfy the demands of the law... He had to pay the penalty for His people's sins in perfect obedience to the Father's will and in fulfilment of all that had been prophesied. And it was in Jerusalem that a very sad reality would be realised ... The elders ... chief priests ... and the teachers of the law ... the very people who should recognise Him as the long-awaited Messiah ... would be the ones to afflict Him and put Him to death... and this should really cause us as believers to desire to know our Saviour that much more ... it should cause us to want to read our Bibles that much more... and the reason is simple ... would you recognise Christ if He were to walk into the room without the signs and symbols we desire? And please note that I am not denying the signs and symbols of Christ's triumphant return ... I just want you to think about your relationship with Him Who died on the cross for our salvation... But I digress. The words of Jesus had hardly fallen on the ears of the disciples ... and Peter ... I am sure with the best intentions in mind ... begins to rebuke the very Man Whose Messiahship he had just affirmed ... he simply could not fathom the fact that Jesus would suffer and die ... After all He was the Messiah ... was He not meant to lead the Jewish community in victory over the nations? Especially the Roman nation at whose hand they were currently being ruled over. And so, Jesus turns around to face Peter... and rebukes the disciples' rash, though well meant actions ... because Jesus recognises in Peter's rebuke Satan using him in an attempt to seduce Jesus to obtain the crown without enduring the cross. Peter was influenced by the prince of evil to distract Jesus from His purpose. But Jesus sees the trap ... and rejects the tricks of the tempter ... He does not even entertain the thought of turning away from what must take place ... and in very straight forward language says ... you are not thinking the things of God but the things of mankind ... You see beloved, from God's point of view it was necessary that the Messiah must suffer, die and rise from the dead for the sake of those who love Him and submit their lives to Him ... For if there were another way ... surely it would have been so ... Christ did not suffer and die without purpose ... He did not reject the comforts of this world without purpose ... He fulfilled what had been prophesied of Him ... So that we may find hope in the midst of our suffering on this earth. And beloved, we will suffer on this earth ...

Matthew chapter 16 verses 24 to 28 says, 'Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."'

The Messiah's followers will suffer. Jesus now turns His attention towards the disciples ... and in no uncertain terms begins to teach them that the inevitable law of the Christian life is that the servant is not above the master ... though the suffering of Christ was unique in that it brought about our redemption ... as His followers His suffering will be reflected in our lives. Beloved ... as a believer our hearts and minds have been turned from the things of this world ... and for the people of this world ... this does not make sense ... and so as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ

the world will treat you differently ... you will be mocked ... you will be shunned ... you will undergo persecutions and struggles that do not make sense ... but ... and this is a huge but ... remember satan has to fight for what he does not have ... and so through suffering he tries to turn our hearts away from our Sovereign Lord... He offers us the comforts of this world ... he tells us we need to live our best life now ... forgetting that this life leads us to our eternity ... either in the presence of God ... or in the firey lake of hell ... And this is why Jesus tells us we need to deny ourselves and turn away from our sins ... we need to rely less on our own feelings and focus on how we can glorify Christ even if it means taking the road less travelled. And this will be difficult ... it will challenge you in ways that you have never been challenged before. But as Paul says in Romans, 'consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.' And this is exactly the kind of attitude Jesus wants us to adopt. For what use is there in ensuring a lavish life now that steals from your dependants on God ... and ultimately leads you to an eternity separated from Him! No matter your titles on this earth ... your accomplishments ... the riches you have built up ... No matter what you have done in this life ... if it has not been for the glory of God ... and Him alone ... it is meaningless. As believers in Christ, we need to submit ourselves to Him fully ... for it is only by Him and through that we have access into the Kingdom of our Father in heaven. And yes this will mean giving up many of the comforts of this world ... it will mean enduring hardships and trials ... it will mean standing for truth when the world preaches tolerance ... it will even mean stepping out of our comfort zones to preach Christ crucified in the face of those who deny God's holy Word ... and though, in the eyes of the world, we will be put to shame ... there awaits a great reward for us in eternity ... an eternity in the presence of the only true and loving God. For His reward of the upward call is far greater than any reward we will receive on this earth ... as the Father welcomes us home in perfection with words 'well done my good and faithful servant'!

And satan will be there trying to cause you stumble trust me he will ... he will cause you to doubt Christ in struggles ... he will tempt you to turn to the comforts of this world and only turn to Christ when it suits you ... he will tempt you into being a lukewarm believer... but beloved I challenge you this morning ... cling to Christ and His promises ... cling to the assurance of eternity in His presence found only in Him Who suffered, bleed and died ... and on the third day rose again for the sake of all those who love and submit their lives to Him alone. I recently listened to a podcast in which they played a speech by Paul Harvey which he delivered in 1965... and I conclude with this... "If I were the devil ... If I were the Prince of Darkness, I'd want to engulf the whole world in darkness. And I'd have a third of its real estate, and four-fifths of its population, but I wouldn't be happy until I had seized the ripest apple on the tree — Thee. So I'd set about however necessary to take over the United States. I'd subvert the churches first — I'd begin with a campaign of whispers. With the wisdom of a serpent, I would whisper to you as I whispered to Eve: 'Do as you please. To the young, I would whisper that 'The Bible is a myth.' I would convince them that man created God instead of the other way around. I would confide that what's bad is good, and what's good is 'square.' And the old, I would teach to pray, after me, 'Our Father, which art in Washington... And then I'd get organized. I'd educate authors in how to make lurid literature exciting, so that anything else would appear dull and uninteresting. I'd threaten TV with dirtier movies and vice versa. I'd pedal narcotics to whom I could. I'd sell alcohol to ladies and gentlemen of distinction. I'd tranquilize the rest with pills. If I were the devil I'd soon have families at war with themselves, churches at war with themselves, and nations at war with themselves; until each in its turn was consumed. And with promises of higher ratings, I'd have mesmerizing media fanning the flames. If I were the devil, I would encourage schools to refine young intellects, but neglect to discipline emotions — just let those run wild, until before you knew it, you'd have to have drug sniffing dogs and metal detectors at every schoolhouse

door. Within a decade I'd have prisons overflowing, I'd have judges promoting pornography — soon I could evict God from the courthouse, then from the schoolhouse, and then from the houses of Congress. And in His own churches I would substitute psychology for religion, and deify science. I would lure priests and pastors into misusing boys and girls, and church money. If I were the devil I'd make the symbols of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle. If I were the devil I'd take from those who have, and give to those who want until I had killed the incentive of the ambitious. And what do you bet I could get whole states to promote gambling as the way to get rich? I would caution against extremes and hard work in Patriotism, in moral conduct. I would convince the young that marriage is old-fashioned, that swinging is more fun, that what you see on the TV is the way to be. And thus, I could undress you in public, and I could lure you into bed with diseases for which there is no cure. In other words, if I were the devil I'd just keep right on doing what he's doing.”

Beloved... Flee from the comforts and lies of this world ... find hope in your suffering ... trust the Lord always ... For He is sovereign, and His grace is sufficient.

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