Grace Group Study Guide

 Greater **>** Week 8

Colossians 1:24

Our verse from Sunday probably won’t be a favorite for many of you, but it’s one that we can certainly benefit from understanding better than most of us currently do. Believe me when I say that my desire for this week was to wrap up verses 24-29, and move on to chapter 2 – that obviously wasn’t in the cards. So, here we sit with an opportunity to further discuss one of the most taboo subjects in the Christian faith – suffering. Suffering takes on many different forms, but regardless of what it looks like in our lives, there is tremendous benefit.

First, let us address the idea that many pastors in the 21st century hold to- that suffering is punishment from God for sin, or not having enough faith, or some other manner of foolishness. This mentality is hogwash. Jesus made it quite clear that if the world hated Him, it would hate us. When the world ***hates*** you, that’s a pretty good indication that tough times are ahead. But, if you are still skeptical, let’s dig into the history books to see how the fathers of the church enjoyed the health and prosperity of faithful service.

Early church historians all agree that **Simon Peter** was crucified during the devastating reign of Nero. While they all agree that he was indeed crucified, some say that he felt unworthy of dying in the same way as his Lord, and therefore asked to be crucified upside down. **Andrew** was also crucified, but on an x-shaped cross in Greece. After being whipped severely, they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that when he was led toward the cross, Andrew proclaimed these words: “I have long desired and expected this happy hour...” His death took two long days and it is also reported that he never stopped preaching to his murderers. **Matthew** reportedly died a martyr’s death in Ethiopia by the sword. **Thomas** was reportedly martyred by the lance while taking the Gospel to Persia or India. **James (brother of Jesus)** was thrown down from the temple by the scribes and Pharisees; when they realized that he had survived the fall, he was then stoned, and his head beaten in with a club. **Matthias**, the apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot, was stoned, and then beheaded. **Bartholomew** was flayed to death by the whip. **Paul** was tortured and beheaded, also during the reign of Nero.

We could go on, but I know that you all can only soak in so much encouragement in one sitting. If you want to read more on those who have given all for the sake of the Gospel, consider “Foxe’s Book of Martyr’s”. You know what is incredible to see as you read about those whose lives have been taken from them? They all echo the same sentiment that Paul shares in Colossians 1:24 – they rejoiced in suffering for the sake of the church and were more than willing to offer up their fleshly bodies for the world to destroy.

I realize that all of this is a bit extreme to some of you, however, I want you to see an interview with a former Armenian pastor named Richard Wurmbrand. He was imprisoned for his ministry during the communist regime. I think that hearing his testimony helps us to see the joy that accompanies hardship for the sake of Christ. Go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and in the search bar enter: Richard Wurmbrand Solitary Confinement – the first video that comes up should be the right one. It’s 9:32 long. His accent makes him a little difficult to understand at times, so you might want to view the video more than once. I’ve watched it probably a half-dozen times this week and seem to benefit more from it each time I watch it.

What emotions did you feel as you watched this clip? Was joy one of them?

There are many different interviews available to watch, and I would encourage you to spend some time watching them. I’m going to leave some space at the bottom of this page, in hopes that you’ll make some notes as you listen to the words of his testimony. Perhaps you can share some of these thoughts with your group this week.

We may or may not ever see a time in this country where persecution rivals that of days past, but that doesn’t mean that we won’t endure trial or hardship. We have people in our fellowship that are enduring trial and hardship. Some are plagued with sickness and physical affliction; some are alienated from family because of their faith; others are mocked or made fun of because of their devotion to Christ. As I’ve had conversations with folks, I’ve seen a pattern. That pattern is that they identify with other believers who have traveled that road before them, and are encouraged and comforted by those relationships.

Not only that, but there is a tremendous thing to be seen in the Apostle Paul’s writing in 2 Cor. 12:7-10. He writes about not only physical affliction, but also weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, and difficulties pertaining to his service in the ministry. When we are weak, the power of Christ dwells even more richly in us. It is for that reason Paul says that he delights in those things. No wonder Richard Wurmbrand can recall 14 years of imprisonment and torture and smile. He, like many believers before him, knew that Christ’s power is made perfect in weakness and that His grace is sufficient for us in ALL situations.

Spurgeon said this in regards to the benefit of hardships in his own life: “*I am afraid that all the grace that I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable. What do I not owe to the crucible and the furnace, the bellows that have blown up the coals, and the hand which has thrust me into the heat? I am sure I have derived more real benefit and permanent strength and growth in grace, and every precious thing, from the furnace of affliction, than I have ever derived from prosperity.”*

“When you suffer for the Gospel with a rejoicing attitude in your heart, you can do so knowing that you are taking your turn, going through whatever you need to go through for the glory of God and that you are doing so on behalf of the body. This will in turn encourage other believers and adds integrity to the life changing message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The blood of all the martyrs that has been shed taking their stand for the Lord Jesus Christ has added just one more level of integrity to what we profess to believe. Next time you are called to suffer for His sake, don't retreat...rejoice because you know that "momentary, light affliction is producing...an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2Co 4:17-18) – Bruce Hurt

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