

## The Blessedness of Suffering Luke 22:28-34

A question as we begin our study of these blessed scriptures . . . "How do you respond to suffering?" "Do you suffer well?"

Most people do not! That's because "suffering" by its very nature is most always difficult to endure. And every sensibility within our being screams loudly that our suffering is wrong, that we should never have to do it, that we should always avoid "suffering" at all costs. But is that true? Is that really true? Is "suffering" always a "bad" thing that must always be avoided at all costs?

Our scripture passage for today has much to say about suffering, a special "wisdom" from our Lord that we need to know about.

But first, may I share a current day circumstance with us? And from it consider the value that God places on "suffering".

The circumstance is, I have a dear friend whose children are at the present moment caught up in some of the worst kinds of rebellion, and are suffering terribly from the consequences of their behaviors.

Her children are in the early stages of their young adulthood and completely independent of her control and influence.

Most of their problems are the usual ones at that age, immoral behavior, drugs and alcohol. And their sufferings are coming from the consequences of those behaviors.

But true to form, they each come running back to Momma for help as they hit rock-bottom, needing a place to sleep, money for food, and yes money even to misuse on more of their bad habits.

And also, true to form, as for most all of us Moms and Dads, pity and compassion wells up within this dear friends heart and she gives in to their needs, They then leave, only to come back another day to beg for more help.

And as this dear friend shares her anguish of soul with me, I understand her suffering. That's because I'm a loving parent with children and grandchildren of my own.

But thankfully, not being the parent in this particular circumstance, I can be at least a little bit objective in my counsel to her.

And it is scripture truths like those we'll study today that provide some of the wisdom that she, and all of us need for these kinds of circumstances.

In particular, we will see in these special words of the Lord Jesus, that there will be times within our life occurrences when suffering will be a good and necessary provision from our Lord to help and to train us up in better ways, ways of righteousness.

And yes, our loving God can use any person and any circumstance to bring about His Will and His purposes for us. And as we will see in these words, sometimes the instrument of suffering might be satan himself as our Lord widens out our hedges of protection to allow satan access to us.

And dear Christian, though this kind of suffering be awful in most every way, we must keep reminding ourselves as we suffer that our God is "good", "always good" in all that He is and in all that He does.

Here in today's scripture passage, our Lord is Himself about to begin to suffer more and in ways that we aren't able to imagine. And here also, He is giving notice to the disciples that they too will suffer. And as we'll study in a moment, Jesus gives those disciples, and us, some of the most precious assurance He could possibly give. He tells Peter, to take comfort, that He has prayed for Him that his faith will not fail.

Listen to this precious truth given here in Luke chapter 22 beginning in verse 28. Jesus said to His disciples,

<sup>28</sup> "You are those who have continued with Me in My trials. <sup>29</sup> And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, <sup>30</sup> that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

<sup>31</sup> And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, that your faith

should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

<sup>33</sup> But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."

<sup>34</sup> Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me." (Luke 22:28-34)

The elements of success and of failure in our walk with our Lord are often so closely intertwined together that we can be hard-pressed and even confused to know the difference.

It is part of the struggle that Jesus spoke about when He exhorted us concerning the Narrow Gate. He said in Matthew chapter 7,

<sup>13</sup> "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matthew 7:13-14)

It is our basic nature to want the pathway to an eternal relationship with Christ to be both easy to receive and easy to hold onto.

And it really is "easy", at least in one sense of the word. We really don't have to do much for salvation to come into our souls and to remain ours. The Lord Jesus has done all of the really hard work for us. He suffered and died on the cross to free us from sin and from the power and the control of our sinful nature.

And we want to think that because all of that has already been done for us, the battle against our soul has been fully and completely won. And it has . . . but then again . . . sadly, it hasn't, at least not on our level of daily involvement.

The simple truth is that while you and I remain in this flesh, the battle for our soul will continue to rage on and on, every day.

Yes, as Jesus told His disciples here and in other places in these scriptures, our place in God's Kingdom has been firmly established, and eternally set. At that first moment that we received Christ into our heart and soul in salvation all things regarding our eternal life were set into place, never to change.

We were adopted as sons and daughters into the forever family of God. And that promise is clearly spoken to us in the words of Romans chapter 8 where we are told that,

<sup>14</sup> For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.  
(Romans 8:14-17)

Oh dear Christians, we really are children of God, "True Sons", and we can never be "un-adopted" from God's family.

And just as these disciples were promised, many of us will actually sit on thrones near to Christ, ruling with Him in His kingdom. Listen to this promise given to His disciples . . . Verse 28 . . .

<sup>28</sup> "You are those who have continued with Me in My trials. <sup>29</sup> And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed *one* upon Me, <sup>30</sup> that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:28-30)

While perhaps you and I might not be given thrones as majestic as those promised to these disciples, we surely will be given wonderful positions within God's kingdom.

In the Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Minas, it is said that some of us will be appointed to "rule" over many cities in the soon-coming Kingdom of God.

And so we will! But those special awards are given only to those of us who remain faithful in our love and in our service to Christ while we yet remain here in this wretched flesh of ours, this flesh that is so easily tempted and drawn away from the purposes of God.

Does this mean that if we ever fail in keeping a close and loving relationship with Christ that we will lose out on some or all of those rewards? Perhaps, but not necessarily. Because thanks be to God, He has also given us the blessed provision of "repentance". And repentance has the miraculous ability to

cleanse and to wipe away sinful conduct to such a completeness that it will be just as if our sin had never taken place. Isn't that amazing!

And that is what Jesus spoke to Peter about here in this text. He said,

<sup>31</sup> "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." <sup>33</sup> Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death."

<sup>34</sup> Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me." (Luke 22:31-34)

These first words of Jesus telling Simon Peter that satan had demanded to have him that he might "sift" him like wheat are not nearly as simple and benign as they might sound. They are in fact more ominous than we could ever imagine.

Consider first, that although we might not understand why, satan has been granted a position of high authority and power here on the earth. In one place he is called a "prince" and in another, he is said to have a "kingdom" here among us. Jesus Himself, in His other capacity as part of the Holy Trinity of God, granted to satan that very strong power and position. And, at least for the present time, satan will be allowed to have his way.

And so, when Jesus told Peter here in verse 31 that satan had demanded to have him that he might "sift him like wheat", satan really can "sift" people. And yes, satan can "sift" even you and me in ways that can cause great suffering to us.

But thankfully, as these words imply, satan must first ask permission to do such things.

But also, and unfortunately so for us, God might often give him permission to do that.

Oh dear Christian, unfortunately for us, too often, that "sifting" can be some of the most awful of suffering. We get a full view of that kind of sifting in satan's mistreatment of the old man Job. When satan "sifted" Job, Job lost all his children, all of his wealth and earthly goods, his health, his closest of friends, and even for a while, the love of his wife. And the "sifting" became so bad that he even wished that he could die.

That is the kind of “sifting” that satan does. And woe be unto us when he gets permission to sift us.

But thanks be to God, we have the next words of Jesus here in verse 32 to reassure us and to comfort us. Jesus said,

<sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. (Luke 22:32)

Note these words carefully, that Jesus did not say that He had shielded Peter and kept him from the sifting and the suffering. No, Peter still needed to go through that sifting and that suffering.

But here, the all-powerful Lord Jesus has done the better thing, the “much, much better thing”. He has prayed for Peter that Peter’s faith would not fail.

A question comes to mind as I read these words. In my desire to never suffer, I would want Jesus to simply stop satan from his evil sifting. But it’s clear from the decision that the Lord Jesus made concerning Peter that while the lack of suffering might be most comfortable for Peter, and also for you and me when we are in similar circumstances, it sometimes will not be the very best thing.

As difficult as it will always be for us, suffering to bring us into a better condition of righteousness, will always be a better thing. It will bring us to a place in our relationship with Christ that we would not have known had we not have suffered.

And may I say that it is on this particular pitfall that many Christians fail. We are unwilling to suffer for the plans and purposes of Christ, so we do whatever it takes to shield and protect ourselves and our loved ones from that suffering. We grow bigger savings accounts and retirement funds. We build more comfortable houses and buy more expensive cars and trucks. We take medication and we drink alcohol, all to fend off the possibility of suffering.

And that really can work. But it will often be to our detriment, and great loss. We are shielded from satan’s sifting but we miss out on some of the greatest blessings that God could ever pour out upon us.

One such possibility of suffering would lay just ahead for Jesus and His disciples, those moments in the Garden of Gethsemane when the disciples would be

asked to “tarry” with the Lord Jesus and pray with Him. Jesus suffered, but the disciples did not. They slept.

What a great loss for those men. They had been invited to take part in one of the most profound events that man could ever experience, the salvation of all mankind, but the disciples did not. They instead fell asleep. They chose to slumber instead of suffering and they missed out.

Here, as Jesus spoke these words to Peter about the particular “sifting” He would experience, His words were clear. Peter would not be permitted to avoid the suffering.

But again, thanks be to God, Jesus offered a better thing. He would pray for Peter that Peter’s faith would not fail. Yes, over the hours ahead Peter’s faith would falter, and terribly so, but it would not fail completely.

But in his foolishness, Peter was unable to recognize His own human weaknesses. He protested so strongly to Jesus that he would go anywhere and do anything with Him, to prison and even to his death. And yes, we all think and hope such things before a crisis comes.

But Jesus knew Peter well. And he knew the limitations of human commitment. He knew that Peter would stumble in his faith. And He warned him, saying

<sup>34</sup> . . . “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” (Luke 22:34)

Folks, human commitment can really only go so far. And yes, for some their behaviors might be better than for others, but it does always have its limitations. And it cannot, of its own strength, withstand the powerful temptations of satan.

But Jesus can! And His “prayers” are powerful and are able to help us and to enable us to, by faith, withstand anything that comes our way!

And here, Jesus reassured Peter that the sifting would at some point be finished and that with the help of His prayer, Peter would be able to “turn back”, to “repent” and be restored. And thankfully, not just for himself, but he would also be able to strengthen his fellow disciples. Listen!

<sup>31</sup> “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.(Luke22:31-32)

The thin line between success and failure is more narrow than we can ever realize until we are given the privilege of suffering for the sake of Christ.

As I have considered the exhortation of Jesus about the “narrow path’ and the ‘broad path”, I have come to understand that those two paths are not widely separated as we would hope them to be, but rather are often intertwined with each other, and with only one misstep we can get off the narrow path and onto the broad path that leads to destruction.

And sometimes, we even manage to walk with one foot on each of those paths.

But as I have found for myself, and want you to know, that kind of “stumbling walk” never works out well. The broad path will always pull us further and further into its ways.

But again, as Peter is assured here, if we truly do have a saving relationship with Christ, nothing can fully separate us from our Lord’s hand. Listen also to that promise given in Romans chapter 8.

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39)

And also in John chapter 10 we are assured that,

<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one. John 10:27-30)

We have full assurance that once we do make our “calling and election” sure, once we have surrendered our heart over to the Lord Jesus, our salvation is sure, it is complete and it is eternal.



All we have to do is endure and not give up when the suffering, the “sifting”, reaches into our daily lives and begins to take its toll on our faith. We are assured that if we endure to the end, we will receive a “crown of righteousness”.

Folks, my deepest desire is that I will be able to endure to the end and not be ashamed as I stand before Christ in His Kingdom. I truly want too! And I want that for you also.

And I am convinced that our hope for a successful endurance lies firmly within those few simple words of the Lord Jesus where He assures us that He has prayed for us that our faith will not fail!

And right now Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father and He “ever-lives to make intercession for us, praying that prayer that “our faith will not fail”!

And if we will only keep focusing our eyes, our hearts, our hopes and our desires upon the Lord Jesus, then we will endure through our times of “sifting”.

One final thought, considering again the words that I spoke to us at the beginning of this study today, may I again encourage us to not always try to avoid the sufferings that come to us within the circumstances of our day! And especially, may we not turn to the remedies supplied to us by the world, the flesh and the devil, the pills, the drugs, the alcohol, or more money, or secular entertainment. Those “fixes” will only cause us to stumble and fall.

We need to remind ourselves that some of those sufferings, perhaps most of them are coming to us from the hand of our Lord and they are intended for our good. As a loving Father, He wants to grow us up in ways of righteousness.

He tells us clearly in Hebrews chapter 12 . . .

<sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup> And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? Saying, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

And there in verse 11 He tells us

<sup>11</sup> For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:4-11)

And then in Romans 5 He assures us that,

<sup>3</sup> Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:3-5)

So then dear Christian,

<sup>1</sup> let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Pray with me.