

Title: Start at the Throne and Walk back pt.2  
Text: 2 Timothy 2.8-13  
Theme: Enduring suffering for the gospel with joy  
Series: 2 Timothy  
Prop Stmtnt: Enduring suffering for the gospel with joy is hard, but it is worth it.

Jamie Freeman said, “God has a plan for suffering. It’s a good plan that attests to His unfathomable goodness.”

Do you believe that? If you knew Jamie and knew that he has Cerebral Palsy, would that statement carry a bit more weight? If you knew that Jamie has Cerebral Palsy and that he and his wife had a little boy who was born with an odd malformation known as esophageal tracheal fistula, where the esophagus does not connect with the stomach, and that after addressing that, they discovered that their little guy is affected by a condition called Oral Aparaxia, which is caused by a rare chromosome deletion that causes severe development delay, would these words carry even more weight?

Jamie said, “Though it offends the wisdom of man and hurt my own flesh, I knew that He (God) was in complete control. I began to tell God how right He was for allowing our baby boy to be born with such a condition and prayed that everything would be used to glorify Christ.”

“Satan didn’t cause me to be born with cerebral palsy; God did. Satan didn’t cause my son to have the problems he had; God did, and He did so in kindness, so that my son and Suerene and I could be used to glorify God in the unfolding of His purpose. I count all my suffering to be of the highest honor, because I see that the end purpose is the exaltation of God forever. As a Christian that is my ultimate goal; that my life glorifies Christ, in wellness or suffering. How easy it is to speak of honoring Christ when all is well. But what will we do and who will we show ourselves to be in the midnight hour, when it seems all of hell is raging against us? This is the test of true faith brought about by the Spirit of God.”

As I worked on this part of the sermon this week I wondered how what I just said would affect those of you who are here who have not yet come to genuine faith in Christ. This Jamie guy sounds delusional and if I am holding him up as an example, then I may be delusional too, or not. Maybe what you are hearing is a way to think about life that you never really have, yet. Hang in there. See where this leads. Our text this morning is a call to endure suffering for the gospel with joy. This call is from a man who sits as a criminal in a Roman prison surrounded by other criminals deemed to be such a danger to society that many of them are awaiting execution. That man is Paul a major leader in the early church and he is writing this final letter to his protégé, Timothy.

Read Text:

What is the difference between waiting that builds frustration and waiting that builds anticipation? Waiting that builds frustration is when the waiting seems needless and purposeless or when you weigh the inconvenience of waiting as being much greater than the weight of pleasure of the goal. For example, let’s say that you get caught in a traffic jam on the freeway

and you are stuck for 90 minutes. All you were trying to do was go to the store and now you are sitting there stuck for 90 minutes. That is rather maddening, isn't it? However imagine if a trusted and experienced friend recommended a restaurant to you and says, "Look, I know that when you get there, you can expect to wait for 90 minutes to two hours to get a table. But, I promise you; it is worth it. Just plan on waiting in line for a long time, but know this, that while you are waiting that the experienced will be worth every minute of your wait."

Your willingness to patiently endure the wait is determined by your anticipated value of the experience. Our text gives us 3 reasons why it is worth patiently enduring suffering for the gospel. And why this waiting should be the occasion for us to grow in anticipation and joy and not in frustration.

### 1. **Because of Christ** (and the gospel) (8)

Martin Luther said, "*They gave our Master a crown of thorns. Why do we hope for a crown of roses?*" And Christ is our example.

#### A. **The example**

Christ is our example. Christ is our pattern. Christ is our leader. If we follow a leader who is hated, then suffering should not really surprise us. By the way, notice that Paul refers to Christ as Jesus Christ, whereas every other time in 2 Timothy he refers to him as Christ Jesus. Is he just mixing it up? I don't think so.

Christ means "anointed One" or Messiah and is considered to be His divine name. Jesus, means salvation and is his earthly name. Gabriel told Joseph that he was to call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. Christ Jesus is, I think a subtle way to emphasize the deity of Christ, and Jesus Christ is a way to draw attention to the humanity of Christ, which I think Paul is doing here. Jesus Christ, was a man who endured suffering for us. He was the God-man; that is, he was God who became man. As God, who became man, He relates to us in our weakness and as it has been said, "he shouts to us in our pain." We look at what he experienced. We see the example of his life. Suffering was the path that he took as the means to glory and bringing honor to the Father. He walked a path and calls us to follow. But here is the difference. Christ suffered in order for our sins to be forgiven. We do not suffer to pay for our sins because Christ already did that. Let me break that down because this is important to understand.

When God created the world and put Adam and Eve in it, everything was perfect. There was no suffering. When Adam chose to rebel against God, he sinned. His sin not only brought a curse upon him, but upon the world and everyone who was born. We live, therefore, in a sin-cursed world. We live in a world that is under the effects of its original leader (Adam) who rebelled against his Creator. That means that things are out of whack. That means that children, like Jamie will have their umbilical cord get wrapped around their foot during delivery and have oxygen cut off. It means that cells will go rouge and corrupt others until cancer spreads too far. It means that equipment will fail, and cause fires that burn down houses and destroy things we have spent a life treasuring. It means that people will be selfish, self-righteous, proud, hypocritical, violent and angry. It means that we will sin and will be sinned against. And as a

result, we suffer, though in the strictest sense, none of us suffers as one who is perfectly innocent. We are all sinners who all participate in this rebellion called the human race by our own sin. So, suffering happens on a general level to all people. But, some suffering happens as the direct result of our own decisions. That is not always the case, but it is sometimes the case. And sometimes suffering happens because of the direct result of someone else's decision and we suffer what appears to be the collateral damage.

So far, I have given you 3 categories for suffering: 1) General 2) Result of my decisions 3) Result of the decisions of others. There is a fourth and that is the result of being a follower of Christ. This world is in rebellion against God and as a general rule expects everyone to join in the rebellion and seeks to marginalize or even punish those who do not join them. This fourth category of suffering is what Paul is referring to. But, all suffering is under the Sovereignty of God, and all suffering is designed to drive you to trust in God. God used suffering as the means for his Son to pay for our redemption. Therefore, when developing a theology of suffering, we need to embrace the fact that God uses suffering as a means to put his grace on display. He did so through Christ. He did so through Paul. He does through others as well.

Suffering is a means that God uses to help us trust in Jesus more. Now, we may suffer as a consequence of our sin, or we may suffer as the result of others. Or we may suffer as a means to showcase God's grace or it may be a combination of things. But our suffering does not pay for our sins. Only Christ's death is sufficient for that.

Interview Andrew

How is the example of Christ an encouragement? Christ is more than an encouragement. The call to endurance is carried out by remembering not only what happened to Christ, but by remembering what Christ accomplished. Here is the reality.

## **B. The reality**

Look at what Paul focuses on. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead! The resurrection of Christ is evidence that Christ paid off our debt. Christ secured our pardon. Christ purchased our salvation. He owns it and nothing can thwart it. At the moment when you trust in Christ, you are placed into a relationship with Christ that the Bible calls your union with Christ. You get credit for his life and death.

Have you ever heard David Platt tell the story of getting married? He was a poor single seminary guy living on Rama noodles when he married a girl who had a good job with a good income. He says, "Do you know what this means?" No more Rama noodles!" When you get married, what is yours is now ours and what is his or hers is now ours. The same thing is true when you come to faith in Christ. You are married to Christ. You are part of the bride of Christ. You get what is his (life and death) and he takes what is yours (sin and guilt). But there is more. You get his resurrection. That is the reality. It's guaranteed which is why whatever suffering you experience, whatever difficult you are called to endure, you can do so with patience that increases your anticipation and joy because it is worth it.

It's worth it! For Christ his suffering was worth it because of what he accomplished through his death and by the fact that he arose from the dead. That is our hope. Paul identifies so well with Christ. Like Christ he suffered. Like Christ he was considered to be a criminal and was treated as one. Like Christ he will be executed, AND like Christ, he will rise again. Therefore, like Christ, it will be worth it! The resurrection of Christ changes everything! Another reason why it is worth enduring, even if it is enduring suffering for the gospel is ...

## **2. Because of Paul (9-10)**

### **A. He knows the Word is not bound.**

Paul is bound up in prison, but the Word is not bound. Paul is limited on where he can go, but you cannot stop the Word. Leaders of a country may ban the Bible, but God will give people dreams if he has to. No one can stop this. You either get on board with God's plan or run over by it, but you will never stop it. The word is not bound. God's Word caused the universe to be. Who can understand power like that?

A number of years ago I was at the Clovis, NM air force base. I listened to some of the pilots talk about training and maneuvers in jets that could fly so fast they would break the sound barrier. When you are flying at those speeds and you decide to make a turn, you end up covering 4 different states when you are doing it. At times I would hear the sonic boom when one of the jets broke the barrier, or feel the roar when the afterburners would kick in and a plane would go straight up into the air. It's impressive. But, that power, as amazing as it is, is no match for God's Word. One day, the armies of this world will gather for war and they will aim every warhead on Christ. The display of the military might of this world is impressive, but with one single word, one single word, all of the armies and arsenals of this world will be destroyed. That is how powerful his Word is. Do you see the point? If you are in Christ, you cannot lose. Start at the throne and walk back.

Paul was probably 61 or 62 when he was executed. I have no doubt that Timothy and so much of the early church felt his loss deeply.

When I was coming out of college (almost 35 years ago), expositional preaching was rare. One of the men who influenced me to see the wisdom and necessity to preach like this was James Montgomery Boice, pastor of 10<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. James spearheaded a movement to help recover the doctrine of inerrancy, a movement that bore fruit in major seminaries around the country. I began to preach expositorially to my youth group and saw the fruit. Years later after seeing the fruit of preaching verse by verse in your life, I wanted to expose you to the preaching ministry of James Boice and I wanted for him to see some fruit of his life in you. So, I invited him to come here and preach. He agreed to come. He agreed to come but then had to decline. He was diagnosed with cancer and passed away, in my estimation, too soon. I thought of him this week, and Patrick and my dad and others whom it seemed still had so much to offer when I read the news that Nabeel Queresh was dying of cancer. This man in his 30's author of "Seeking Allah and finding Jesus" whom the Lord has used so effectively in bringing so many Muslims to faith in Christ, was told that medicine has done all it can. His time on this earth is short. Some of these losses we feel on a personal level, but in terms of the gospel, it is

easy to wonder about the holes that are left. Beloved, the Word of God is not bound, and neither does it die. Paul could endure suffering with contentment because he knew the Word would go on. But there is another reason why Paul's example speaks to us.

### **B. He knows that the Elect are worth it (10)**

Paul was willing to suffer because he considered the elect to be worth it. The elect refers to those who put their faith in Christ. By using the term, the elect, Paul is drawing attention to and therefore, emphasizing the plan of God from before the creation of the world to call a people to himself from every tribe, language and nation who will love him, trust him, live with him and enjoy him and one another forever and ever. The redeemed of the ages are called, the elect. Paul's willingness to endure suffering ("everything") for the sake of the elect is driven by his desire and confidence that the elect will obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. In other words, what the elect will experience will be so glorious and eternally glorious that whatever Paul endures for now, will be worth it.

Have you ever tried to get friends and family together for a vacation or for a celebration? It can be a challenge, right? Trying to get people to coordinate their schedules so that everyone can be together is difficult. But, when it all comes together and everyone is able to be there, if you were responsible for making it happen, it is extremely rewarding isn't it? The noise of the conversations, the punctuation of laughter, the hugs, the smiles, the joy is a beautiful reward for all of the headaches that you endured to make it come together.

Earlier I said that your willingness to patiently endure the wait is determined by your anticipated value of the experience. Let me rephrase that a bit. Your willingness to suffer is determined by your anticipation of reward. Now, sometimes what you think or what you are told is a reason for suffering or reward is simply not true. Think of the parents who sent their sons to join with Hitler in "fighting for Germany", who were in reality fighting for Hitler's hatred of the Jews and his massive insecurities. In the end, was it worth your son suffering and dying for that? No! But, if something is truly glorious then it is truly worth suffering and even dying for. Think of this, Christ suffered more than anyone and his death was the ultimate sacrifice. If Christ was willing to sacrifice that much, then how glorious will it be for life together with him? It was worth the life and death of Christ. It was worth the sacrifice, suffering and death of Paul. It is worth your patient endurance as well.

### **3. Because of his promises (11-13)**

Verses 11-13 are possibly a song, a creed or a saying that was well known by the early believers. Paul quotes this in order to conclude his appeal to be faithful and endure suffering. This saying has three promises of encouragement and one warning.

The first promise is an encouragement based on our conversion. "If we died with him, we will also live with him. About 8 years or so before this Paul wrote to the believers in Rome and said, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6.5) What does it mean to die with Christ? To die with Christ is different than dying for Christ. The phrase, "to die with Christ" is speaking of the point in time

when you choose to follow Christ. When you repent of your sin and turn around and follow Christ by trusting in him as your Savior and Lord, you die. You die in the sense that you die to what you used to be. The old Bob died when I became a follower of Christ. I am a new person in creation. I died to what I used to be. I am crucified with Christ, meaning I am so permanently united with Christ that I get credit for his life and death and in that sense I died. So, what this line is saying is that if you have genuinely been converted, you will live with Christ forever.

The second is an encouragement to persevere. If we endure, we will also reign with him. We not only live with Christ, but because he is the King and we are his bride, we will reign with him. We do not have the mental nor experiential bandwidth to absorb all that this means. Reigning with Christ is a magnificent reality that will be glorious in ways we cannot begin to imagine. Look at how far Christ went to secure our salvation. Look at what he endured. It must be incredible! And look at how patient he is waiting to bring this all about. If he determines that it is worth waiting this long for, it must be (again) incredible. If I have truly believed, I will endure and those who endure, reign with Christ.

The third line is a warning. If we deny him, he will deny us. This is not talking about faltering in the moment and repenting, like Peter did. This is talking about being exposed to the gospel, and making a deliberate and willful decision to turn and walk away from the gospel that you heard and never come back. This is describing what we call apostasy. An apostate is a person who professed at one time, to be a believer, but who never was truly converted. And in the end, their exposure to the gospel inoculated and hardened them to it and they became deaf to it and even antagonistic to it. I would guess that Paul has Phygelus and Hermogenes in view.

A person who truly believes Christ will not deny him because he truly believes. A person who denies Christ does not believe Christ. And here is the benefit of suffering. Suffering exposes what you really believe. If as the result of suffering you or someone turns and walks away from Christ, suffering exposed the fact that your profession of faith in Christ was for all of the wrong reasons. You believed in Christ in order to get the life that you wanted, not because you truly believed in Christ. And when you did not get the life that you wanted, you determined that Christ was not worth believing in anymore.

The fourth line is a line of encouragement because we all falter at times. We are all faithless at times. Even when we are faithless, he remains faithful. There are times when we do some stinkin thinkin and we feel like walking away, but we don't. We don't because God is faithful to keep that which has been given to him.

The conclusion is the grounding of it all: "for he cannot deny himself." This is the final word. There are some things that God cannot do and one of them is this. He cannot deny himself. He keeps his Word. That means that if you have truly come to faith in Christ that you are going to get home. Even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, even though you may sit in a Roman prison, even though you may suffer, if you are in Christ, you will get to the throne. So, start at the throne and walk back and realize this, you will get home.