

INTRO: Easter Sunday is that time when we reflect upon the sufferings of Jesus Christ and then His resurrection three days after that suffering, for because of that resurrection we are aware of our resurrection also. It also shows us that even through very difficult times, there comes an end to them and victory is just around the corner. Even though evil ones may have thought they have won a battle over us their victory is short-lived for as children of the Living God, we will come out the victors. Even though we may put this physical body in the grave, it is not over rather it is just the beginning. There is nothing that can destroy our witness for as children of God, there is victory, there is a resurrection and we do not fear those that can only destroy the body (Matthew 20:28). As a child of God, as a believer, we may go through some difficult times in this life, but there is a resurrection in our future and if we suffer a little here for the cause of Christ, it is good. Let us not fear suffering for doing what is good, just make sure we do not suffer for doing what is wrong. Maybe this Easter sermon will be a little different than the norm but because of His resurrection, we have nothing to fear.

- A.** If our Master Jesus Christ suffered for good, it should not come as any surprise if we, as His followers, may suffer a similar fate. Not that I think we will be crucified or anything of that sort, but if there are difficult times in our lives or if others do not think highly of us for our Christian walk do not be surprised for the world "hated" Jesus Christ and yet His whole life was one of doing good to others. For three years Jesus Christ walked upon this earth ministering to those that were in need, physically and spiritually. We read of miracle after miracle as He would heal the sick, as He would raise the dead, as He would deliver from demon possession or feed the multitudes with a little fish and bread. One would think He would have been loved by the populace of His time, but the religious leaders of His days did not like His teachings, which often condemned their actions and eventually they aroused the people to such a fervor against Jesus Christ that they were all in agreement that He must be crucified.
- a. No one had ever shown such love to a people, yet no one had ever received such hatred in return. He was despised in the eyes of the religious leaders of His day because He spoke the truth, He was maligned, He was lied against, He was even considered to be in league with Satan himself by those He came to help. He tried to correct the false teaching that had become so prevalent from the leaders of the people, He tried to show them a better way – He had done nothing wrong rather He suffered for doing what was right.
 - b. If we are followers of Jesus Christ, we too, may have to suffer some for the cause of Christ as we may be maligned as well for what we believe, we may be made "fun of" or mocked for standing up for what is right, we may have to endure some loss of material possessions or even position in the world or may even lose "respect" from those that we thought wished us well, some may even have to suffer verbal or physical abuse just because we stand for what is right.
 - c. As we know, there are Christians suffering around the world today for the cause of Christ and there has been more martyrs in the 20th century than all the other centuries combined and should the lord tarry, there will be many more in the 21st. We need to understand that the world hates those that demonstrate the evil of their ways, those that say we must live by a standard of righteousness will be hated by those that love unrighteousness but this is nothing new for Peter spoke often in his letters to those that were having to endure for the sake of Christ during his day. But he encouraged those that were suffering for the cause of Christ and in verse 14 he stated, **"...even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed..."** Rather he encouraged those that would suffer to make sure if they have to endure some suffering, make sure it is for doing what is right and not for doing what is wrong. If you have a clear conscience before God and if you can only be maligned for your good behavior in Christ, then there is nothing to be ashamed of. If God allows any of us to suffer some kind of persecution, whatever that may be, make sure it is for the right reasons.
 - d. If you are maligned for doing good, the Word of God says you will **"put to shame"** those that accuse you for they will have done what is wrong and the truth will eventually win out. So he says to patiently endure whatever you may face for there is nothing good about suffering for what you have done wrong, but if you suffer for doing what is good, then you are blessed for you are then suffering even as Jesus Christ suffered. One person (Guzik) wrote **FOR IT IS BETTER, IF IT IS THE WILL OF GOD, TO SUFFER FOR DOING GOOD THAN FOR DOING EVIL: NONE OF US WANT TO SUFFER. BUT IF WE MUST, MAY IT BE FOR DOING GOOD, NOT FOR DOING EVIL. SOMETIMES CHRISTIANS ARE OBNOXIOUS AND OFFENSIVE,**

AND ARE MADE TO SUFFER FOR IT. THEY MAY WISH IT WERE PERSECUTION FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL, BUT REALLY IT IS SIMPLY SUFFERING FOR DOING EVIL. So let us be careful that we live for Christ and do not fret over what others may say or do to us.

B. There are always reasons for suffering, there was in the case of our Savior, Jesus Christ and there are reasons for which we may have to endure a little suffering for the cause of Christ. Thomas Watson wrote, "**AFFLICTIONS WORK FOR GOOD, AS THEY MAKE WAY FOR GLORY.... NOT THAT THEY MERIT GLORY, BUT THEY PREPARE FOR IT. AS PLOWING PREPARES THE EARTH FOR A CROP, SO AFFLICTIONS PREPARE AND MAKE US [READY] FOR GLORY. THE PAINTER LAYS HIS GOLD UPON DARK COLORS, SO GOD FIRST LAYS THE DARK COLORS OF AFFLICTION, AND THEN HE LAYS THE GOLDEN COLOR OF GLORY. THE VESSEL IS FIRST SEASONED BEFORE WINE IS Poured INTO IT: THE VESSELS OF MERCY ARE FIRST SEASONED WITH AFFLICTION, AND THEN THE WINE OF GLORY IS Poured IN. Thus WE SEE AFFLICTIONS ARE NOT PREJUDICIAL, BUT BENEFICIAL, TO THE SAINTS.**"

a. This is not saying that as a believer, we should seek ways to suffer. Peter is not stating this in his letter, he is simply saying "**BELIEVERS SHOULD MAKE CERTAIN THAT WHEN THEY DO SUFFER IT IS BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL TO GOD RATHER THAN BECAUSE THEY HAVE DONE EVIL.**"

b. John MacArthur makes an interesting comment on this, "**A BELIEVER HAS TWO OPTIONS. THE FIRST IS TO DO RIGHT, EVEN IF IT RESULTS IN SUFFERING. A BELIEVER IS TO ACCEPT SUFFERING AS A PART OF GOD'S WISE AND SOVEREIGN PLAN FOR HIS OR HER LIFE. THE SECOND OPTION IS TO CHOOSE TO DO WRONG, WHICH WILL RESULT IN SUFFERING. BOTH OPTIONS ARE ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL. GOD WILL A BELIEVER TO SUFFER FOR DOING RIGHT SO THAT HE RECEIVES SPIRITUAL STRENGTH AND GLORIFIES GOD, AND GOD WILL THAT A BELIEVER SUFFER DIVINE CHASTISEMENT FOR DOING WRONG. SO DO GOOD AND AVOID BRINGING SUFFERING UPON YOURSELF FROM DOING WRONG.**"

C. But I want us to understand that even though in our life, we may have to go through some difficult times, they will not last forever and the reason I know this is because three days after Jesus Christ was laid in the grave, He Arose! The ultimate punishment of death had been enacted upon Jesus Christ, but it was not over for He had victory over death and the grave. And we, as His children, can look forward to that same resurrection day for as He lives so we shall also live!

a. Therefore let us live as children of the resurrected Lord with a hope that the rest of the world has no concept of. Many a person have placed their hope in this world that will soon be burnt up along with its immorality, greed and evil of all sorts; but the Christian cannot and should not be discouraged for we have a hope beyond all hopes – we have an assurance that in the end we will win! We may lose a battle here and there, but we will win the war.

b. One of the best proofs that Christ has risen is that he is still alive. And for the immense majority of our contemporaries, the only way of seeing him alive is for us Christians to act like it as we show our love for one another and even for those who "**despitefully use us**". (Matthew 5:44). Jesus Christ said, "**I am the resurrection and the life**" so why should we fear what any one may do to us for we will be the victors.

c. Maybe we tend to fear the tomorrows, maybe we have some fear of what may happen or what we may have to endure for the sake of Christ. Perhaps we fear the idea of death or even the idea that one day we may have to die for the sake of Christ in some way. Let me encourage you there is nothing to fear as a Christian, for Jesus Christ has taken away the "**sting of death**" (I Corinthians 15:22). **A LITTLE BOY AND HIS FATHER WERE DRIVING DOWN A COUNTRY ROAD ON A BEAUTIFUL SPRING AFTERNOON. SUDDENLY OUT OF NOWHERE A BUMBLEBEE FLEW IN THE CAR WINDOW. SINCE THE LITTLE BOY WAS DEATHLY ALLERGIC TO BEE STINGS, HE BECAME PETRIFIED. BUT THE FATHER QUICKLY REACHED OUT, GRABBED THE BEE, SQUEEZED IT IN HIS HAND, AND THEN RELEASED IT. BUT AS SOON AS HE LET IT GO, THE YOUNG SON BECAME FRANTIC ONCE AGAIN AS IT BUZZED BY THE LITTLE BOY. HIS FATHER SAW HIS PANIC-STRICKEN FACE. ONCE AGAIN THE FATHER REACHED OUT HIS HAND, BUT THIS TIME HE POINTED TO HIS HAND. THERE STILL STUCK IN HIS SKIN WAS THE STINGER OF THE BEE. "DO YOU SEE THIS?" HE SAID. "YOU DON'T NEED TO BE AFRAID ANYMORE. I'VE TAKEN THE STING FOR YOU." AND THIS IS THE MESSAGE OF EASTER. WE DO NOT NEED TO BE AFRAID OF DEATH ANYMORE. CHRIST FACED DEATH FOR US. AND BY HIS VICTORY, WE ARE SAVED FROM SIN. CHRIST HAS TAKEN THE STING!**

CONCLUSION: You see, Easter proves to us that Jesus Christ had not been defeated. Yes, they lied on Him; yes, they accused Him of blasphemy; yes, they crucified Him on a cross; yes, He died on the cross and was placed in a grave: BUT, THREE DAYS LATER HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD AND IS ALIVE FOREVERMORE! He claimed victory and as children of the Living God, we too can claim victory for there is no power in heaven or on earth that is "gonna hold this body down"! We are on the winning side and in our future there is nothing but victory so let us rejoice in the victory we have through the resurrection of Jesus Christ our LORD!