



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: August 9th - 15th

Sermon: August 8th



August 9

1 Peter 5:10

Why would anyone willfully choose to take a stand that would put them in harm's way when a simple compromise would allow them to be comfortable, accepted, safe, or free? The decision to stand when you know it is going to put you in a place of suffering or persecution must be based on a conviction that runs deep. That was certainly true of the disciples as we find them facing the heat in Acts 4. The question or thought to ponder today is what will be the source of our strength when you and I come under pressure? What in God's Word can we find that would be cause for endurance under trial? I hope that the Scripture for today will be one such verse.

Peter, being intimately acquainted with suffering, wrote, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." Brothers and sisters, this carries the same meaning that Romans 5:3-5, James 1:2, and a passage like 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 does. In each of these passages, Peter, Paul, and James are teaching us that suffering is actually working and producing priceless and timeless benefits for us. Peter says that at the end of the time of suffering, God Himself is going to perfect, confirm, and strengthen us. That truth is intended to be the long view hope that holds us in the storms. You don't quit or let go because you know that what is coming or being produced in you is worth anything and everything that happens to you. Yes of course that takes faith but everything in the Christian's life does for now.

Do you believe that God actually knows exactly what you need to get you to be what you are meant to be? Tom Landry, the late coach of the Dallas Cowboys, once said, "My job as your coach is to get you to do the things you don't want to do so that you will become all that you want to be." It is not easy to practice twice a day in the scorching heat. Surely all that exercise and weightlifting is hard. I suppose that when a team wins the Super Bowl though, they look back on the suffering of the long summertime practices and realize that it was worth it. I could imagine a coach saying, "Fellas, if you suffer with me for a little while there will be great reward for us all when it is finally finished." How much more does that mean to us when God makes that statement to us? He has said, "If you suffer with me for a little while, I'm going to do some really awesome and amazing things in your life."

Now, this is why the Apostle Paul was able to say, as I wrote last week, that he was well content with weakness for it was then that he was made strong (2 Cor. 12:10). As the evil one attacks us in this life, at the same time, the Lord is perfecting us. As the devil is trying to tear us down, the Lord is establishing us. As the enemy is trying to cause us to doubt, the Lord is confirming our faith which leads us to even greater faith and hope (Romans 5:5). In a real sense, we could live with this attitude if we are strengthened in our faith – Bring it on because I know My God, who has called me, is doing a great work in me for my own good and so I am willing to pay the price to be the man or woman that He desires for me to be.

August 10

Hebrews 11:6

Our verse for today says, “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). In order for a person to have the faith that will hold when the persecution starts, he/she must first of all believe that God exists. But dear friends, I know human nature and I know that is not enough. Oh yes, it should be, but it is not. The motivation behind faith, trust, and obedience is a deep-rooted belief that He, the God who exists, will reward my obedience to His Lordship. I know that some of you who think that you are so pious and can stand on your sheer faith will disagree, but you are wrong. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:4, “For by these He has granted to us His precious promises, so that **by them** you may become partakers of the divine nature.” You see, the promises of what will be, become a source of encouragement, strength, and endurance. The Bible says Jesus endured the cross at least in part by looking to the joy set beyond it. He had his eyes on something past the pain and suffering of His moment and it helped Him hold on.

Think for a moment as to why faith is so important. The verse says that without faith it is impossible to please God. It does not say it is hard, or difficult, or challenging. It says it is impossible. Why impossible? The answer lies in the character and attributes of God’s nature. You see, to trust someone you must first consider them trustworthy. To depend upon them you must first consider them dependable. To base your whole life on them, you must wholeheartedly consider them worth everything you would pay because of your following. What this means is that when you fail to trust Him, you are saying He is not trustworthy. When you choose not to obey Him, you are saying He does not know best and is not deserving of your confidence in His ways. Thinking of it this way should make it quite simple to see why you cannot please God without having genuine faith in Him.

The application for endurance in suffering or in the face of persecution is that we must already be anchored by faith in Him and His Word. Are you willing to face the flames of a culture gone bad when you stand proclaiming that Jesus is the Only Way to heaven? Are you ready to say that there is no other name under all of heaven given among men by which a person can be saved? Will you stand in say that there is salvation in no other name? Would you hold your ground with gentleness and compassion in the debate over abortion, same sex marriage, and gender identity? The only way that you will be able to do that is to have deep faith in God and that He will bless you for standing for His Truth.

Again, I invite you to think for a moment. Why else would you be willing to sacrifice your position, status, or place at the table in this lost world if you don’t believe there is something far better? The reason I want to remain true to the Lord Jesus, to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is because I know They will look after me and the transforming work that They are doing in me to prepare me for heaven is a priceless pearl that I would trade for nothing. I could put it this way – I am giving up little when I forsake the things and ways of this world, but I am gaining much when I cling to Christ and the cross. To live in Christ and to die is gain. To obey Him is also gain!

August 11

Philippians 1:29-30

Yesterday I wrote about the benefits of suffering for godly living that we as the sufferer's gain. Today I want us to ponder the fact that there is benefit to the work and person of Christ too. Paul writes in Philippians 1:29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." I wonder if you've ever stopped to consider that when you suffer well because you are living a Christian life in a fallen world, that you are serving Christ and advancing His cause and Kingdom. For me, that adds another dimension to suffering and gives me strength and purpose in the midst of my trial.

I want to point out an important truth from this text that involves yet another benefit to you and me before I move on to Christ. Paul writes that it has been "granted" to us that we suffer. That sounds like a strange word to use there. He makes it sound like it is a good thing, almost as if it was a privilege or a blessing. Well, as I look into the meaning of the word, here translated as granted, I find that it comes from the word for *grace*. Imagine that – to suffer for the sake of Christ is considered as part of the gift of grace in a believer's life. Remember what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:10 about God perfecting, affirming, strengthening, and establishing us as a result of suffering for Him? Here it is again! The grace of suffering that is granted to us as a gift brings strength and eternal reward that would otherwise be missed. How does our suffering benefit Christ?

The benefit to Christ is, as I have written in other devotions previously, not that His work on, or the efficacy of, the cross needed any help. What Jesus did on the cross was completely sufficient to pay the debt of mankind's sin and to satisfy the Father's requirements for justice because of His holiness. My mind goes to what I wrote concerning obedience, faith, and trust as it relates to another's character. Our faith and obedience towards and in Christ are due to His attributes that are worthy of trusts and obedience. The same thing is true here. Our willingness to suffer for Christ reveals his worth to us. Imagine the movie scene where a man makes a huge sacrifice for his woman and the onlookers say, "Man, she must really be something special to you." That is the idea here.

Again, what do people think of our Lord when they see our dedication or lack thereof to Him? The question that needs to be asked here is, just how important and valuable is He to you? Not only do we portray His worth to us, but we also give the world a living example of what His suffering looked like when He walked this earth and suffered and died. I need you to think again. People today do not get an actual look at what His suffering looked like and the depth of His love for humanity until they see it in us. Oh, I know that the Bible contains the historical account but most unregenerate people are not reading the Bible, so you become the "story" for them. When people ask you why you are living in such a way enduring the trials of your life with such grace and strength, "for His sake" you get to point them to Jesus and tell the amazing story of God's plan of redemption to save us through Jesus Christ.

August 12

1 Peter 2:13-17

The big question that many Christians face today is at what point do we rightfully disobey the government or civil authorities? For some, the answer seems to be whenever they do something that an individual does not like. This is certainly not true. For others, the answer would be never to disobey the government. That too is equally wrong. Where do we as conservative, Bible believing followers of Christ land regarding this dilemma?

Peter writes in the passage for today that we are to submit ourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution. He goes on to say, "For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15). To submit is to arrange yourself under a commander. We, as God's people, are to live in a humble, submissive way on this foreign soil even as our nation becomes increasingly more hostile, godless, and antagonistic towards us. Similar to what I wrote yesterday, it is for God's sake so that He will be honored and glorified as we represent Him rightly in the face of persecution and tribulation. An extremely poor example is the person who responds and conducts himself in a manner that would communicate there is no God sovereignly in control of all things. For some people, it appears that they believe if they do not defend themselves and protect "theirs" at all costs, then all will be lost. Now, listen to me friends, I own guns and have no problem defending my wife and family against intruders or those who would seek to harm them. I am not a passivist. But that is not what we are talking about here. The question on the table today is at what point do we disobey our governing authorities for the cause of Christ.

Do you see that there are two different lanes here that we must be clear we delineate in our thinking? I am talking about when do we disobey the laws and mandates of the land? The answer is simply when those requirements cause us to disobey the clear teaching of God's Word. When we are asked to disobey an explicit law of God stated in Scripture, then we must be civilly disobedient. Even then we are to disobey in a manner that honors God. For He is the reason that we are to disobey. It is for His honor and glory and not our own that we are to stand against the government. Our thought process should be like this, "God's Word requires that I make this decision and since your (government) request is trying to force me to disobey God, then I must disobey you. That is what Peter and John were dealing with in Acts 4. Remember, they said, "We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." Christ had given them a mandate to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. To become silent or to obey the authorities would have been direct disobedience to the Great Commission.

You must also understand that when we choose to disobey the governing authorities, we must then be willing to accept the consequence of our decision. If that means jail time, then so be it. If that means we lose certain rights, then so be it. For example, if I decide to shoot somebody breaking into my house, I understand that I must be tried for shooting a man according to the laws of the land. Now, I hope that they would decide it was self-defense and I go unpunished. But I cannot demand that they leave me alone as I stand there with the gun in my hand. We must act in a way that honors God! We must also work to bring change in ways that honor God.

August 13

Exodus 1:15-20

Today I want to provide an example of what civil disobedience looks like. There are many such examples in the Bible, but we will go with a familiar one involving the Hebrew midwives who courageously disobeyed the Pharaoh's order to kill male Hebrew babies at birth. We are told that they chose not to obey his order because, "they feared God." The women decided that obedience to God was more important and more beneficial than obeying the Pharaoh. The question to ask is from where did this strong conviction come?

Dear ones, we must not base our decisions to obey or disobey authorities based solely on our likes or dislikes. We must not base them on our feelings of right and wrong. You see, what if one person believes it is perfectly okay for two people of the same gender to be married and someone else believes it is wrong? Who is right and on what is that based? Now keep in mind, as crazy as you may think someone would have to be to think that is okay, there are many who believe not only is it okay but that they are in perfect step with God when they hold that conviction. In other words, they consider themselves Christians in good standing with God. So, who is right?

I hope that for most of us reading this, the answer is obvious. Our convictions must be based on what the Bible teaches. This means that we must believe the Bible is true and authoritative. There is no room for arguing that certain parts of it are true while other parts are culturally outdated and therefore no longer applicable or even true for our day. That leaves you in the same place as the person who doesn't believe the Bible at all in my opinion. That leaves you all the wiggle room you need to simply disregard what you do not like or are not comfortable with as no longer applicable. That leaves you as the final authority over the Bible with your magic "get out from under a hard verse" card to be used anytime you need it for your comfort and convenience.

My point is that when we accept the Bible as God breathed and inspired and as profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, then we will place ourselves under all of it and it becomes our basis for our convictions. So, the Hebrew women based their conviction on the Word and Laws of God as they had received them to date. They knew that God was creator of humanity and that those children were created in His image for His glory. They knew they did not, nor did Pharaoh have the right to take their lives. They knew it would be sinful and dishonoring to God to obey the Pharaoh's command at that point. So, they disobeyed him!

Do you see that their civil disobedience had nothing to do with their preferences? It had nothing to do with hating the Pharaoh. It had everything to do with simple obedience to God. I would like to add here that we must understand that when we choose to disobey those who are in power, we must be willing to accept the consequences of our disobedience. Here is a hard statement that I am going to make: If you choose not to be vaccinated and the law of the land is that you cannot enter into certain establishments, then that is the result of your decision. You are not then allowed to force your way in and demand to be fed. Either obey the law or disobey and accept the consequences. Breaking the law and acting a fool is not honoring to God. Being allowed to eat in a restaurant has nothing to do with God!

August 14

Acts 4:18-20; Jeremiah 20:9

Peter and John were commanded by the priestly rulers to stop preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus. Now it had happened - they were face-to-face with the moment in which their faith would be tested. It was not that they would know just how dedicated they were to Jesus Christ and His mission assigned to them. Reader, I want you to know that I am imagining myself in their shoes today and I have often wondered what I will do when my time comes. Here they are, after spending a night in jail, being threatened to stop talking about Jesus. I believe they had already decided. Maybe through prayer and discussion through the night in jail they decided to remain faithful to Jesus. Peter already knew what it was like to deny Him and to be forgiven and he was not about to do it again. The statement they make almost sounds like they did not have a choice. Peter says, "For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard;" Even if he wanted to, he could not.

Beloved, His relationship with Jesus was so real and personal, so life transforming and valuable that to stop talking about Jesus would have been akin to trying not to breathe. This is what it looks like when your heart and mind are captured by the love of Christ and the truth of the Gospel. His statement was another way of emphatically saying, "I would rather die than to stop telling you about my Jesus." For Peter and John, remaining silent about Jesus was not an option. That conviction flowed from a place of complete surrender and confidence in the truth claims of Christ. It seems to me that it will take nothing less when our time to shine should come.

Let me show you another example of being so overcome by the Spirit of God that you simply cannot help but speaking. In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet known as the weeping prophet, was often downtrodden and discouraged by the evil and disobedience in the world. He lamented often over the wickedness and apparent misfortune of the godly. At one point in his life, he decided that he was not going to talk about God anymore because it seemed that it brought him so much suffering. Jeremiah was thrown into prison, he was dropped in a well, and was threatened repeatedly. He concluded that his best bet was to stop prophesying and landing in trouble. Here is how that went for him: "But if I say, 'I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,' then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it" (Jeremiah 20:9). Do you really think that a person who is filled with the Spirit could possibly put Him in a corner somewhere and force Him to be silent? Jeremiah said it was like a fire blazing inside of Him that had to come out. It should be that way for all of God's children.

Listen to what David wrote in Psalm 39:3, "My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned; Then I spoke with my tongue." Paul said, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). Pray with me dear friends that we may love Jesus because we know Him so intimately that nothing or no one could ever stop us from proclaiming His truths. You will have to believe that obedience to Him is worth whatever it may cost. May we, like Martin Luther standing in a courtroom, declare, "Here I stand, I can do no less." We will get there later but it is important that you know, Peter and John took this stand and soon ended up back in jail, imprisoned, exiled (John), and murdered (Peter). They knew when they said, "We cannot stop speaking about Jesus" what it would cost, and they took that stand anyway. Oh, that we may be that strong in our faith for the days that are coming.

August 15

Hebrews 11:24-27

Brothers and sisters, I hope I have not sounded like a broken record this week but here I go again. The author of the book of Hebrews writes a beautiful passage about the faith and hope of Moses. This faith caused him to be able to walk away from the pleasures and easy living in Egypt for something that which He could not see but believed would someday be. Verse 27 says, "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen." This is a great example of being obedient in a moment because you are convinced that the blessings will come in the future. Moses was willing to make the sacrifice of temporal, although pleasurable, riches for the eternal favor of God. It is written, "Considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt" (v. 26). That must seem crazy to unbelievers and indeed it would be if the promises were not true.

I want you to notice that his decisions brought "ill-treatment" into his life. Again, I highlight that because I want you to be keenly aware that I have been telling you all week that you must be willing to stand in disobedience to civil government when they are pressing you to disobey clear teachings of Scripture AND that it will likely bring unpleasant consequences into your life. It is clearly stated here that Moses CHOSE to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. I wonder if you realize that the biblical mandate to obey God rather than men carries with it the understanding that we choose our path and the consequences. For Moses the choice was clear because, with eyes of faith, saw far greater riches in obedience to Christ than the passing pleasure of a sinful season in his life. His strength to endure was a direct result of seeing God. The Bible says that Moses was looking to the reward.

Brothers and sisters, are you willing to suffer because of the reproach of Christ? I want us to consider today what is the reproach of Christ. As we encourage you to take your stands for Jesus in this increasingly hostile society, that answer will become crystal clear. To be faithful and true to Jesus is going to eventually bring you some disgrace in this life. The reproach of Christ of the disgrace that comes upon us because of Christ will come as a result of us claiming that He is the only way, the only mediator, and the only name in which there is salvation. When people malign you, make fun of you, or even get angry with you, you are suffering the reproach of Christ. Like Moses, we must believe that He is worth it, and that great reward will be given to us as we endure for His sake. Peter put it this way, "But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God" (1 Pet.2:20). The question is do you believe it?

Let me close this week of points to ponder by reminding you of how our passage for Sunday started. Luke wrote, "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Please do not allow yourself to think you are not enough to live the way I am asking you to live. Peter and John were not highly educated men. They were not sophisticated or high class. They found the strength to be extraordinary in the hands of God simply because they spent time with Jesus. One of my most favorite memories about Pastor Roland Powell was him saying to me, "I can tell when you've been with Jesus." Beloved, all it will take is time with the Master. At His feet you will discover that He is worthy of worship and praise and that knowing Him intimately is more valuable than anything and everything in this world. You will have the strength to stand if you know Him and are captured by His beauty, grace, majesty, and love.