

Text: 1 Cor. 9:1-2 & 19-23

Title: Captured by Christ

Topic: Suffering for Christ

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Intro: During World War II, a young soldier named David Webster of Easy Company (the 101st Airborne division) wrote his mother the following words: “Mom, stop worrying about me. I joined the Army Airborne Division to fight. I intended to fight all along and if necessary, I’ll die fighting. But mom, please don’t worry because no war can be won without young men dying and the things which are most precious are saved only by sacrifice”. Jesus Christ gives freedom to whoever will receive it. John’s gospel reminds us that if the Son (that’s Jesus) sets us free, then freedom will indeed be ours. Another scriptural text declares that the truth shall set us free. That’s truth with a capital “T”. Only Jesus is the Truth. Jesus said of himself, I am the way, the truth and the life and no one can come to the father except by me. So, if truth is what you’re looking for, and if it’s God you want to see, then you’d better be looking in the vicinity of calvary. Here’s the deal, to have real freedom, to have a bonafide deliverance, it must come through truth. And truth, my friends, is not a concept — it’s a person. The Apostle Paul was set free on the road to Damascus. What an unusual place to find freedom. He was on his way to the city of Damascus with letters in hand to arrest believers. He had been given authority to bind them and bring them back to Jerusalem but as he approached the city, a great light from heaven flashed around him. Then, falling to the ground he heard the words of Jesus: Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me? That day, Saul became known as Paul, and the rest, as they say, is history. But on that day, Paul was set free. Free from the bondage of sin. Free from the burden of

Phariseeism. Free from the tedium of men's traditions. Free from the many works added to the law of God to adequately secure ones salvation. Also, he was set free from the frustrating rituals that defined Judaism. Even today, some 2,000 years later, we who place our faith in Jesus Christ have gained that certain freedom and like the great Apostle of old, we are free from sin, free from guilt, free from torment and traditions, free from an abstract religious agenda and free to worship the God who created us. Down through the course of human history, men have fought to gain this precious freedom. They have fought to preserve this freedom and furthermore, to provide this blood-purchased freedom for all future generations. Men and women have gone to war to guard the freedom they have sacrificed their lives to provide. They have given up their homes, they have fled their countries, they have left families, they have renounced governments and all of this in the fragile attempt to gain freedom. Yet the great Apostle Paul, this missionary to the gentile world, this God-called New Testament evangelist, had been given the most precious gift of all, the gift of eternal freedom, only to turn around and give it right back, and all for the high honor and privilege of being called, a slave to Christ. It just doesn't make sense, does it? We work our fingers to the bone for one ounce of freedom, yet we'll lay it all down at the feet of Jesus to become his slave.

1 Corinthians 9:1-2 & 19-23

*Am I not as free as anyone else? Am I not an apostle?
Haven't I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Isn't it
because of my work that you belong to the Lord?*

*Even though I am a free man with no master, I have
become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. When
I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to*

Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

When we arrive at that place of returning to Christ our freedoms, our emotions, our spirits, our egos, our attitudes and our desires; in other words, when we can give back to Christ everything we've fought a lifetime to acquire, only then can we truly understand what freedom really means.

First off, to be really free, we must learn to suffer. It's generally recognized that only 10% of health outcomes are attributed to medical care, while 70% are tied to social and environmental factors. Dr. Richard Cabot, a once noted Christian physician, frequently laid this question at the feet of his medical students. He would begin: "Gentlemen, would you like to know the cause of almost every illness?" Then, after a short dramatic pause he would proceed to answer his own question: "The cause of almost every illness is the wear and tear of the soul upon the body". Even the French atheist, Voltaire, realized this decades back when he wrote: "Doctors pour drugs of which they know little, into diseases of which they know less, upon human beings of whom they know nothing". Centuries earlier, Plato wrote: "The great error of our day

in the treatment of the human body is that physicians separate the soul from the body". Today, as in all ages, we reside in the throes of a suffering generation. This old world has suffered wars and pestilence, famine and flood, filth and poverty, and yes even epidemics and pandemics. The year 2020 will go down in history as the year the entire world changed. Folks, we never saw this coming and it was nowhere on the radar. Life was great. The stock markets were up. Jobs were plentiful. Social interaction reigned supreme, then two weeks later the world is thrown into fear and panic. We live in a suffering society and when this thing will end — only God knows. But suffering for Christ and suffering because we can't go to Starbucks and sit around with our Apple computers, are two entirely different things. Someone once asked the great C.S. Lewis: "Why do the righteous suffer?" His answer: "Why not?" Oswald Chambers wrote: "Suffering is the heritage of the bad, of the penitent, and of the Son of God and each one ends at the cross. The bad thief is crucified. The penitent thief is crucified and the Son of God is crucified, so by these signs we know the widespread heritage of suffering." Suffering is a part of the human experience but until we learn to suffer for the cause of Christ then we've really never known true sacrifice. Suffer for the lost to be found. Suffer for the heartbroken to be mended. Suffer for marriages to be reconciled. Suffer your time, your energies in the Word of God. Suffer like never before upon your knees and no matter how much it hurts — never give up!

To be completely free we must suffer for Christ, but also, we must be strengthened in Christ. One of the greatest needs in a believers life is to remain strong, even in the face of heartache and tragedy. The New Testament reminds us to be strong and vigilant, to be of good courage, and to be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Through Christ Jesus we must endure every illness, face every

difficulty, walk through every fiery trial, hurdle every obstacle and we must do so in the all sufficient strength of the Lord. Once again, it was Paul who said: I've been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. There have been times in the ministry when I felt I could hardly bear it any longer. The pain was too great, the heartache was surreal, and the betrayal had cut clear to the marrow. At times, I've been poured out like water on a stone. I have wept with those who weep. I have lost sleep over church problems. I have stood at the casket of babies, and have preached my own granddaughters funeral; searching desperately for words of comfort when all along my soul would have gladly welcomed a room of silence. I have, at times, been drained of all emotional strength only to discover that the barrel which I thought was empty had been supernaturally refilled. In 1998, Dr. P.P. Job, spoke at a Christian rally in New Delhi, India. After the rally, he received multiple death threats against him and his family. At the same time, his son, Michael, was training at the university to become a medical missionary. One evening, a white Fiat with New Delhi registration plates, and traveling at a high rate of speed, changed lanes, rammed into Michael's car, then sped away without stopping. Michael died from the injuries. Dr. Job was inconsolable. He said: "It happened because I am a preacher of the Word of God! I was shattered." There were no words to describe the pain this father went through, but as he read his Bible, God had him stumble upon Philippians 1:12: "The things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel." Dr. Job said: "Losing my son was like having my right arm cut off, therefore, I'll just have to serve God with my left arm. At times, and when your need is most desperate, there is abounding strength in the precious words of God. Remember, dear ones, we are more than conquerors through him that loves us.

To be completely free we must be willing to trade our supposed freedom for that true freedom found only in Christ Jesus. We must be willing to suffer for Christ. We must find our all sustaining strength in Christ and lastly, we must somehow, someway, see some saved. The world says, I want to be free! I want to do what I want, when I want, how I want and I don't want anyone telling me different. But if you truly desire to follow Jesus then you must trade your freedom in for chains. Chain me to the cross! Fix my gaze upon him! Bind me to his every word and forever let me cling to the hem of his blessed garment. I'm sick of me! I want Jesus. I tried the me thing for years and folks, it ain't near what it's cracked up to be. Give me Jesus. Let me live for him or let me die trying.

A world-famous violinist named Fritz Kreisler earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, but he was so extremely generous that he gave most of his money away. So, when he discovered an exquisite violin on one of his journeys, he discovered he did not have sufficient funds to purchase the instrument. After a few more concerts, Fritz was finally able to raise enough money to meet the asking price. He returned to the seller, hoping to purchase the beautiful violin, but to it was too late, the instrument had been sold to a collector. Kreisler, then made his way to the new owner's home and offered to purchase the violin from him. The collector said: "Obtaining this particular instrument has completed my collection and it has become my prized possession. So sir, I'll never sell it." Greatly disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when, in deep humility, he asked if he would be allowed to play the instrument, once more, before it was consigned to a lifetime of silence? Permission was gladly granted and immediately the maestro filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's emotions were overwhelmed. The collector exclaimed: "I have no right to keep that to myself — here, it's

yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it from me and take it into the world. Let people, everywhere, hear the beautiful music it produces.”

If you ever want to be free, I mean really free, then realize that you have no rights of ownership to the Good News of Jesus Christ. It's been given to you — to take to the world. It's yours, not to do with as you please, rather it's yours to give away.

Chained that I may suffer with him and for him. Chained that I may be strengthened through him and by him, and finally, chained that I may somehow, someday, see some saved. Paul gave up his identity and took on the identity of Christ. He surrendered his mind for the mind of Christ. He swapped his prejudices for the absence of prejudice. He abandoned his traditions for the compassion of Christ. Paul literally became a picture of Jesus for all the world to see. Become like Paul, a living picture of Jesus, a living translation of his Word. We may think we're suffering now, not by a long shot. One day we may be called upon to give up everything for Christ — so why not just do it today and save yourself tomorrow's worry.