

Sermon Title: Prosperity Gospel Not Included

Sermon Text: Revelation 1:9-11

Sermon Series: Walk Through the Bible - FBC AZ City - 12/2/18

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Introduction:

Strong leaders overcome their deficiencies and make little of their personal sufferings.

- George H.W. Bush was the youngest Navy pilot in WW2 and flew in over 58 combat missions and was shot down by the Japanese and was rescued by a submarine. He also experienced several political losses. He became the 41st president. (Slide # 2)
- Franklin D Roosevelt was the 32nd president and served 4 terms. He was diagnosed with polio at age 39. He lived in an age where buildings were not friendly to the disabled and yet he made his own kind of wheelchair using a dining room chair that allowed him to move around.

Both of these presidents didn't allow personal suffering to stop them from serving their country. Their lives had difficulty but they didn't live or expect comfort as a guarantee.

Revelation is a book that challenges each of us to get out of our normal, comfortable way of looking at Christ. Let's look together at Revelation 1:9-11.

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Read Revelation 1:9-11 (CSB)

"I, John, your brother and partner in the affliction, kingdom, and endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 - I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and I heard a loud voice behind me like a trumpet saying, 'Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.'"

1. Following Christ involves suffering and service

The apostle John labels himself a "brother and partner in the affliction" - this communicates two things:

- **He has suffered for the gospel of Christ** - in fact he goes on to give his actual location and the reason he is on this particular island is NOT for vacation it is because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.
- **He has partners in this suffering** - there are other believers that are experiencing suffering. Who are these others? The churches he is writing to. John says, I am "your" brother and partner.

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In today's American church we hear lots of talk about positive thinking and the fact that God wants you to have the nicer things in life. Popular preachers today like Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copeland, Jesse Duplantis, Joyce Meyer, Benny Hinn, Robert Tilton are all exciting in their delivering, passionate in their message, and yet they are leading many people astray from the truth of the word of God. They are preaching and teaching a "prosperity gospel."

Simply put, this "prosperity gospel" teaches that God wants believers to be physically healthy, materially wealthy, and personally happy. Listen to the words of Robert Tilton, one of its best-known spokesmen: "I believe that it is the will of God for all to prosper because I see it in the Word, not because it has worked mightily for someone else. I do not put my eyes on men, but on God who gives me the power to get wealth." Teachers

of the prosperity gospel encourage their followers to pray for and even demand material flourishing from God.

More than a century ago, speaking to the then-largest congregation in all Christendom, Charles Spurgeon said, "I believe that it is anti-Christian and unholy for any Christian to live with the object of accumulating wealth. You will say, 'Are we not to strive all we can to get all the money we can?' You may do so. I cannot doubt but what, in so doing, you may do service to the cause of God. But what I said was that to live with the object of accumulating wealth is anti-Christian."

John is an example of the many early apostles that did not die a wealthy man's death. Scripture only speaks specifically of two apostles and how they died:

- Judas, who betrayed Jesus, went out and hung himself in Matthew 27:4-5.
- James, the son of Zebedee, was executed by Herod by the sword in Acts 12:1-2.

The other apostles' deaths are referred to in extra-biblical historical writings.

- Peter and Paul were both martyred in Rome under the persecution of the Emperor Nero around 66 AD. Paul was beheaded and Peter was crucified upside down per his request.
- Thomas preached as far east as India and the claim is that he died there when he was pierced with spears from four soldiers.
- Matthis who was the apostle named to replace Judas. Tradition sends him preaching in Syria and he died there by burning to death.
- John is the only one of the apostles that is believed to have died simply from old age. However, early Latin tradition has him escaping unhurt after being cast into boiling oil at Rome. He was eventually exiled to the island of Patmos.

By the apostle John calling himself a "partner," he is acknowledging he is NO lone ranger. Jesus suffered on the cross. Jesus himself said that we would also suffer. John knew his fellow brothers in Christ were being martyred and had suffered. John could take heart and so could the other followers of Jesus to know that they were NOT alone. We suffer as a family.

Allow me to give you the three P's of suffering: (these come from the 3 words in vs. 9)

- ★ **PRESSED for Jesus.** The word my translation of the Bible used in verse 9 is "affliction." Other translations may use words like "tribulation", "pressure", "trouble." This Greek word means, "to crush, press, compress, squeeze." In other words, suffering is a normal part of the Christian life.

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Read 2 Timothy 3:12 (CSB)

"In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

This doesn't mean we go out looking for trouble, nor do we try to intentionally bring pain upon ourselves so that we can look like better Christians. We just know if we are following in the example of Jesus, we will experience some affliction, persecution.

The truth is we want to escape trouble. This is the first time the word, affliction, is mentioned here in Revelation but it is going to come up over and over again in this

book. Affliction is assumed to be the common experience of those who are in Jesus, rather than something that believers are to escape.

Have you experienced ridicule for talking to others about Christ? Have you experienced rejection because you don't live like the rest of your co-workers? Are you made fun of or mocked because you have Biblical viewpoints that don't line up with our current culture? Rest easy...this is a natural part of following Christ.

Following Christ is not easy, but it is well worth it. This leads to the next P.

★ **There is PRIVILEGE with Jesus.** John states that we are not only partners in the affliction, but we are also partners in the kingdom. Kingdom is the word that comes right after affliction.

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Jesus ushered in His kingdom as a suffering Savior. We enter the kingdom of God and serve as suffering saints. Here's the point: **Reigning and suffering are not mutually exclusive. They go hand in hand.** This is the way of Jesus and it is also to be our way.

We don't suffer and go through trouble to get a certain reward at the end of our life. We suffer because it is a privilege to be servants like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He modeled for us what it was to suffer and sacrifice for your own salvation. **Isn't it a real blessing to live the same kind of life?**

Read Philippians 1:29 (CSB)

"For it has been granted to you on Christ's behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him."

We have been granted or we have been given the privilege to trust and believe in Jesus. It is a gift to have the faith to believe in Jesus. **Faith is a gift from God. We have NO problem accepting that truth. But look what else that verse says is a gift:** it is also a gift to suffer for him.

This is a basic theological truth in Scripture that we must grasp. We must understand it and live it out. This is why I am so dogmatic about why "prosperity gospel" preaching is false teaching. You shouldn't listen to any of it!!!

Christ taught over and over again that servants are to be like their masters. Look at the context again in Philippians. Paul is going to teach in Philippians 2:5-11 about the mind and attitude of Jesus Christ. And he is teaching this to remind us that the servants of Christ follow in the footsteps of their master. A crucified Lord produces disciples who themselves take up their crosses and follow him. Just as for our Lord, the path to glorification leads through the suffering of the cross.

Read Philippians 2:8 (CSB)

"He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death - even to death on a cross."

That sure sounds like we follow a Savior who wants us to have everything we can in our American way of life, doesn't it? NO!!!

Here is the point: Our focus is always on the suffering...our focus should be on Christ. Prosperity gospel focuses on materialism. Plain and simple. Through “death on a cross” Jesus not only “saved us” but he modeled for us God’s way of dealing with the opposition, the affliction...you keep your eyes focused on loving people and following the will of the Father.

Are you more focused on suffering than pursuing Christ? Have you been misled or bought the lie about seeking materialism more than pursuing Christ?

★ **There is PURPOSE in Jesus.** The two words: affliction and kingdom is followed by the word endurance. **Endurance or perseverance means to abide under a heavy load, to stay with it, to hang in there,** not to throw in the towel or drop out of the race. Our trials and afflictions does have a purpose and many times that purpose is for our own spiritual growth.

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The problem is that our trials or suffering don’t usually come in such an obvious spiritual context. Often they are typical day-to-day struggles with circumstances, relationships, ill health, or some area of lacking or inability in our own lives.

Trials are not actually obstacles, they are ultimately the fuel to propel you to a destination - to more godly living. Look at what James says about it:

Read James 1:4 (CSB)

“And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”

III. - One of the most **powerful prayers in the midst of suffering was uncovered from the horrors of Ravensbruck** concentration camp. Ravensbruck was a concentration camp built in 1939 for women. Over 90,000 women and children perished in Ravensbruck, murdered by the Nazis. **Corrie Ten Boom, who wrote The Hiding Place, was imprisoned there too.** The prayer, found in the clothing of a dead child, says:

O Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all of the suffering they have inflicted upon us: **Instead remember the fruits we have borne because of this suffering, our fellowship, our loyalty to one another, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown from this trouble.** When our persecutors come to be judged by you, let all of these fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness.

- ***What greatness is God doing through your trials?***
- ***Are you praying this way through your trials?***
- ***Does this kind of prayer illustrate your own lack of maturity in how you view your circumstances?***

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Conclusion:

C. S. Lewis once said, “I didn’t go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don’t recommend Christianity.

Have you made following Christ a comfortable religion? If so, you are a hypocrite.