

***Sabbath School Today***  
**With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

***“Feed My Sheep”*: *First and Second Peter***  
**Lesson 6. Suffering for Christ**

Have you ever been persecuted for Christ? If honesty forces you to say No, then you have never been fully “blessed.” You are deprived! The word “persecution” has come to mean primarily suffering unjust opposition or affliction from religious authorities. When people who are openly godless attack you, it is easier to bear than when those who profess to be servants of God do it. Jesus says, “Blessed are ye, when [people] shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad ... for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:11, 12).

Why is such persecution so painful for sincere people to endure? Church fellowship is like family fellowship, often more intimately so. It’s like yanking a plant out of the ground by its roots; it soon withers. Where is Jesus when that happens to you? We can find the answer in John 9: Jesus had healed the man born blind; the Jewish clergy harassed him, persecuted him, finally “cast him out” of his “church fellowship,” the synagogue. “Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and ... He ... found him” (vs. 35). For Jesus to find him and be with him was part of the “blessing” that He promised to those who are persecuted for His sake.

Often in sacred history, God’s faithful servants have labored unselfishly and yet have either been rejected outright or have suffered at the hands of God’s true people being unappreciated. An example is the story of the message brought by two young men (A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner) at a great General Conference Session in 1888 when Ellen White was almost the only person present who expressed appreciation for their work and their message. Solomon said, “The poor man’s wisdom is despised” (Eccl. 9:16), the very word Ellen White used repeatedly to describe the reception this heaven-sent message received among “us” well over a century ago.

But there’s another way to look at “suffering for Christ.” There’s a reverse to this “coin”—instead of our downtrodden suffering it can be a cause for rejoicing.

When Jesus said that those who mourn are happy people (Matt. 5:4), He shocked everybody. As Luke reports the statement, he has Jesus saying, “Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh” (Luke 6:21).

It may not appear on the surface to be true, but like many things that Jesus says, there is a profound reality involved. When you shed tears in morning, if you believe the gospel, you are in fact realizing a point of intimate contact with Christ, the Son of God. The secret is revealed in 1 Peter 4:13 which says, “Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are

partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

Have you ever felt that your life has been a failure? Some who have lost a love or suffered divorce feel pained to their roots; some have suffered the loss of good health and pray and nothing happens. In sober moments they think of the final Judgment and wonder how they will fare. Burdens can be heavy. And it's not just those far along in life who wrestle thus; teenagers can know what depression is. You are overwhelmed that there is nobody anywhere who really understands you. You are alone.

And then the Holy Spirit reminds you of Jesus. Did He sail through life laughing, always on top? Did He ever wake up at night unable to sleep, feeling a failure? Yes! There is a passage in Isaiah that can be authored by no one else than Jesus: "Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent My strength for nought, and in vain" (49:4). Isaiah actually wrote the words but he did so as a prophecy of Jesus (see verses 1-3). You'd think such a person would never be tempted to feel His life is a failure! But He was "in all points tempted like as we are" (Heb. 4:15).

He took all that is ours upon Himself, carrying the burden of feeling a failure further than we could: He felt that even His Father had "forsaken" Him in the darkest moment any human has ever known. The very thing your whole soul longs for—to live for a purpose—requires that you get acquainted with Jesus, to "taste" His experience, to know at least a little something of what it means to be "despised and rejected of men" (53:3). True, you'll be different forever after. You can't join in the laughter of the social scene; you'll feel driven to "pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:6).

It will be a rich experience. You'll find you can't live without praying to Him "in secret." You'll forget about setting your alarm clock to wake up and "have your devotions"; the Father will wake you up because He is hungry for fellowship with you! You'll know the Savior as Someone you never dreamed of—who loves you differently than how you pity your dog: He actually honors you as one of the princes or princesses in His realm, He even invites you to "sit down with [Him] in His throne" (Rev. 3:21). Don't despise being "a partaker of Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:12, 13). Life is not ending; it's just begun.

What does it mean to be "a partaker of Christ's sufferings," and how is it cause for rejoicing?

Paul's (and Christ's) oft-repeated theme is "identity." As the "second" or "last Adam" Christ entered the stream of our fallen humanity, became one with us so truly that as we are all "in Adam" by birth, so we "all" are "in Christ" by virtue of His redemption of the entire human race (1 Cor. 15:22). So truly does He identify with us that Isaiah says, "In all their affliction He was afflicted" (Isa. 63:9). This is why He tells everybody at last, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren [good or ill], ye have done it unto Me" (Matt. 25:40). He truly *feels* the woe of the world!

This identity is reciprocated when we appreciate how He has identified with us—we believe, “abide, remain in Him.” Our appreciation of His suffering now ennobles and sanctifies our suffering so that, as Peter says, we become “partakers of His sufferings.” The principle is all-inclusive: “If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim. 2:11, 12).

The resulting comfort is enormous. The believer sees how important he or she is in the infrastructure of God’s universe: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ [we do something *for* Him!], not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil. 1:29), and (amazing thought!) we make a contribution to the great controversy between Christ and Satan in that we “fill up that which is behind [something is lacking which must be supplied!] of the afflictions of Christ in [our] flesh for His body’s sake, which is the church” (Col. 1:24).

This “partaking” in no way contributes to our salvation, but it enables us to be happy when we meet Him at last, knowing that we have something intimate in common with Him! He actually invites those who suffer in these last days to “sup with Him,” inasmuch as they have “overcome even as [He] overcame.”

Therefore don’t be surprised if He permits a little suffering to come your way! These thoughts only scratch the surface of glorious Good News.

—*From the writings of Robert J. Wieland*

**Notes:**

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/R4JsLX80jBE>

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