

SUFFERING AND THE KINGDOM

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Jesus Died

John 12:24-26

We see in nature a wonderful example of multiplication. A farmer goes out in the spring to work his land. He does everything he can to make the ground ready for the seeds of corn. Those seeds are sown in the ground. There is life in the seeds. As the outside dies off, new life from the inside comes out. Many wonderful plants grow from those seeds.

Jesus is Himself the very example of this. He came to earth in order to save others. He did this by taking the punishment of all people upon Himself. For this reason He died on the cross. The great miracle is that He didn't stay dead but was raised back to life again. Everyone who believes also receives this life.

Losing Your Life

In the verses above we read that we are not to love our lives. Jesus links this to being like Him. In following Jesus we will be confronted with things we would rather choose not to be.

Charles Simpson said: "A crucified life is where your will and the will of Jesus cross." Losing your life does not mean doing what you want but doing what God wants.

It is important to seek God's will for your life. Following His will can bring much criticism from others. People laugh at you, make fun of you and even reject you.

Throughout the centuries the living Church has been the subject of great persecution and still is today. Jesus had already told His disciples that this would happen.

Matt 5:10-11

Suffering? How do we enter the Kingdom of God?

Acts 14:22

Jesus himself is the example of standing firm. His message brings many people great joy but there are those against Him who do not believe His words. They wanted to kill Him or stone Him. Eventually they achieved this and Jesus died on the cross.

In the book of Acts we see that the disciples are regularly persecuted. Some flee, others are captured.

What is the writer of the letter proud about?

2 Thess 1:4-5

The church in Thessalonica was growing well but in a short time they experienced opposition and suffering. Still the church grew. The disciples were willing to carry on by not following their own will. They would continue to seek God's will and carry it out. Suffering is not something you would gladly choose because it means losing a part of yourself.

Romania

In 1989 I met Brother Benjamin. He was living in Romania at a time in which the land was ruled with an iron hand by the dictator Ceausescu. This man unleashed a war against all Christians during his reign. Many Christians were killed and many others were imprisoned for a long time in atrocious circumstances.

After I had been pursued by the dangerous Securitate, the secret police, I met Brother Benjamin. I was still full of fear as I set foot in his house. I had never understood that persecution can bring people closer to God. Brother Benjamin started to pray and I immediately sensed God's presence in his house. The tears started to roll down my cheeks. It seemed like heaven for a moment. The sense of peace which came over me was so amazing that I shall never forget that day.

Saudi Arabia

In 2005 I had an encounter with a man in an Arabic country. He was very interested in the Christian faith. He came from Saudi Arabia. He had learned something of Jesus through the internet. Yet he still struggled to believe that Jesus was God. That night he had a vision of a man dressed in a white robe. This man said to him: "Follow me." During the conversation it suddenly fell silent. The man's eyes got bigger and bigger when he saw a little painting of Jesus. He turned pale and kneeled to the floor. The man in the painting looked like the person from his vision. Shortly after this he gave his life to Jesus and left for Saudi Arabia. Life was very difficult there. His wife quickly discovered his decision. Five months later somebody informed the authorities and he was sent to prison for a while. The price he has paid is very high. But he has remained a joyful Christian.

Jesus was willing to suffer. Are you?

John 15:18-20

What does Jesus say they will do to us?

These days you hear a message throughout the whole world. Give your life as a sacrifice for Islam; if you die in the holy war you will enter heaven. And yet this is something very different to what Jesus said and what some Muslims mean. Jesus never killed anyone. He gave His life in love without causing anyone to die. Jesus' apostles never killed anyone or forced anyone to follow them. But it is well known that all 12 sacrificed their lives for Christ.

Yet we must acknowledge that as the Christian faith spread through the centuries, Christians started using weapons in order to force others to accept the faith. Jesus and His disciples never did that. Jesus asked His disciples to give their life, not to start a war.



EXERCISE:

What Jesus asks of us is clear. It costs you everything. You can only do this if you really know the love of God. Just as a man who truly loves his wife or child would do anything within his power to protect his wife or child. He would do absolutely anything for the good of them.

Think deeply and honestly about what Jesus says and asks. What price are you willing to pay? Will you radically follow him?

Ask Jesus to walk with you and give you the strength you need. Ask for His help so you can be brave in the moments you need to be. Moments in which you must choose to be for or against Him.

Talk with your mentor about the price we have to pay in order to enter the Kingdom. Discuss what is difficult for you.

PRINCIPLE 17

To enter into the Kingdom we have to lay down our lives and sometimes this means we have to suffer for the King. "A crucified life is where your will and the will of Jesus cross."



John 12:24-26

24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Matt 5: 10-11

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Acts 14:22

²² Strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

2 Thess 1:4-5

4 Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. 5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.

John 15:18-20

18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.