

Sweet affliction! Sweet affliction!

John 11:14, 15. "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there."

The more beloved by God you are the more of the rod you shall have! Jesus is glad that your husband is taken away, that your child is buried; glad that your business does not prosper. He is glad that you have those pains and aches, and that you have so weak a body, to the intent that you may believe. You would never have possessed the precious faith which now supports you, if the trial of your faith had not been like unto fire. Faith untried may be true faith, but it is sure to be little faith. Our Lord in his infinite wisdom and superabundant love, sets so high a value upon his people's faith, that he will not screen them from those trials by which faith is strengthened.

While the wheat sleeps comfortably in the husk it is useless to man- it must be threshed out of its resting-place before its value can be known. He blasts the gourds under which we sat in ample shade, in order that we may lift up our cry to him, and trust in him alone. The emptiness of the creature is a lesson we are so slow to learn, and we must have it whipped into us by the rod of affliction; but learned it must be, or else faith can never attain to eminence.

The only wise God does not put his servants in 'hothouses' and rear them delicately, but he exposes them to trial that they may know how to bear it when it comes.

There is no fellowship with Christ so near and sweet, as that which comes to us when we are in deep trials! Then the master unbosoms himself, and takes his child, not upon his knee, but to his very heart, and bids him lay his head upon his beating bosom.

Christ will reveal his secrets to you when the world is against you, and trials surround you. There are then special loves, special visits, and special fellowship.

"sweet affliction! Sweet affliction!"

Thus to bring my savior near."



- selected

for details contact

Good Samaritan Fellowship

H2 / 22, Mahavir Enclave,

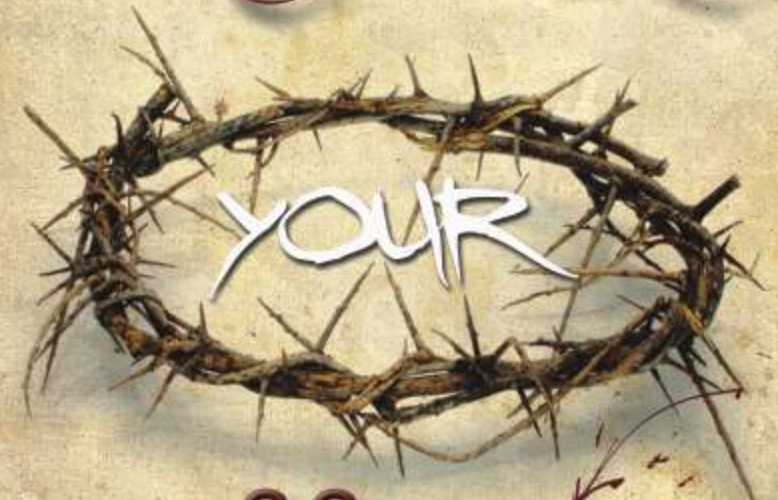
New Delhi - 110045, India

Tel : 91-11-25032928 / 25034946

www.oilnwine.net



Embracing



suffering

Joy Thomas

The Lord Keeps His Own from Evil

One of the things that Jesus said to those who forsook all to follow him was that they would have to face greater tribulation and suffering than others who chose to go their own way. He never told the disciples that if they escaped the tribulation they would be rewarded for their faithfulness. Unfortunately, that is what some preachers teach today. False teachers emphasize that to escape the days of the coming tribulation in the world would accrue as blessing. But the Lord made it very clear to His disciples that they would face tribulation if they kept the word of God and held His testimony. He told them that though they forsook everything to follow Him, they would face more tribulations than those who didn't follow Him! This makes it abundantly clear that in the midst of suffering many tribulations and persecutions we are to focus, not upon escaping and seeking some blessing, but upon maintaining His testimony wherever we may be.

Jesus in His high priestly prayer to the Father (John 17) prayed that the Father would not take the disciples out of the world, but that He would keep them from evil. The Lord never wanted them to be taken or 'raptured' out of the world at that time just because of the suffering they would experience, but He wanted them to be kept from every kind of evil.

I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.

John 17:15

Jesus saw what was about to come upon His disciples soon after He left. He knew that His disciples would be persecuted after His departure. He was able to perceive that they would face all kinds of trials and tribulations in His name.



That is why He prayed to the Father to keep them from evil. He did not pray that they may escape tribulation and suffering but that they may be kept from evil.

We read in history that all the early apostles died a cruel and violent death. Later the Emperor of Rome hunted down Christians and burned them at the stake. In the third century, Christians were thrown to the lions; they were forced to fight one another to the death as gladiators in amphitheaters to entertain the public. Have you wondered why the Lord did not save them from suffering, humiliation and death? The God who could shut the mouths of the lions in the days of Daniel, the same God let the lions tear the disciples of Jesus to pieces. The same God who saved the young men from the fiery furnace in the days of Daniel did not perform such miracles when His holy servants were being burnt at the stakes in the Roman Empire. Sometimes one wonders why the Lord stayed His hand. It is very difficult for the natural man to understand this, but the Spirit of God would reveal the wisdom of God to the spiritual man. In the light of Jesus' prayer to His Father it is possible to understand why the Lord did not save His disciples from

dying as martyrs.

When the disciples of Jesus were persecuted by the Jews we see that Peter was delivered from prison but not James, the brother of John. We know that Peter also died later at the hands of the Romans for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. It is difficult to understand the wisdom of God. The Lord allowed Daniel and the Hebrew children to experience the miraculous hand of God in saving them from horrible death; but the Lord did not perform the same kind of miracles for His people in the New Testament. We know that though the Apostle Paul was saved many a time from the Jews who sought to kill him, yet he was not saved by the Lord when the Romans subjected him to Caesar's sword. We see that the New Testament believers neither asked for nor expected a legion of angels to save them from their enemies! How come the New Testament believers were called to glorify God through their death? What kind of wisdom is this? Truly, it is a great mystery. Who can understand such wisdom of our great God?

There are many church leaders who cannot understand how the

Lord can ever allow His church to go through tribulations at the end of the age. "How can the Lord just watch the antichrist come against His church to persecute her?" they argue. Such arguments flow out from a carnal love for the self, because they do not want to suffer for the Lord! The truth is that they do not know God's principle in this regard and they do not take notice of the history of God's people. The reality and the truth that we read of, both in the word and in the history of His people, is that the Father watched from heaven when the Bride of His Son was being torn to pieces by the Romans in the same way as the Father saw the Son being ripped apart at the hands of men.

When I meditated upon these thoughts, I broke down and the Lord opened my eyes to have a small glimpse of His wisdom in this regard. I was able to see that the Father watched His Son die the cruelest of deaths upon the Cross. The Father allowed His precious Son to be cruelly torn apart in the flesh at the hands of men. This wisdom of the Father is nothing but foolishness to this world. Nevertheless, the Father was securing and laying an eternal foundation in those terrible moments. The Lord opened my

eyes to see that this was not defeat but victory, it was not the weakness of God but the power of God!

How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son,
To make a wretch His treasure.

How great the pain of searing loss,
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the chosen One,
Bring many sons to glory.

History tells us about the terrible persecution and suffering the church went through in the early years. Yes, the Father from heaven watched when the Bride of the Son was being torn to pieces by lions and their bodies were burned to ashes. In their death, God was glorified and His testimony was maintained. The Son of God was their supreme example. They followed the Lamb wherever He went (Rev 14:4), even unto a violent physical death!

Beloved, we need to understand what it means to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Many would like to follow the Lamb so that they may receive spiritual and

natural blessings. Many wish to stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion, but the majority of such believers are not willing to suffer with Him and even to die for Him and His testimony. The men of God, of whom we read, were men who followed the Lamb even to the very end, even to a violent and awful death. The only word the Lord spoke to them in their hearts as they laid down their lives was, "be thou faithful unto death". We read of this being spoken to the suffering church in Smyrna in Revelation 2:10

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

That is the word they heard in their ears! Saints, the Lord is far more interested in saving us from evil than in saving us from tribulation in these end times when His testimony will be at stake. He is far more interested in saving us from evil than from suffering, difficulties and persecutions. We ought to be a people who are willing to suffer for His word and His testimony.

Suffering For The Testimony Of The Lord

Reading about the on-going persecution of Christians in the Book of Acts by the enemies of the Lord, it seems that the thirst of the enemy for the blood of God's people was not even satisfied by the crucifixion of Christ upon the Cross, a death in the most horrible of ways. The enemy's hatred and loathing for the things of God did not end with Christ's crucifixion. They

continued in relentless persecution. The enemy continued to harbour enmity against His followers wherever they were. The enemy was ever hostile toward the disciples of Christ. However, the remarkable thing is that we see a tremendous change taking place in the disciples and followers, themselves.

Acts 2:46-47

(46) And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

(47) Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The disciples gathered together unmindful of all that was happening around them. They were filled with gladness, praising God whenever they could. And when they were brought before magistrates they rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Acts 5:40-42

(40) And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

(41) And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

(42) And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

The disciples counted themselves worthy to suffer for the Lord's testimony. What is your attitude when you have to suffer for His name's sake? Do

you ever count yourself worthy when you suffer for Him and His testimony?

When Jesus was in the upper room with the disciples, on the night on which He was betrayed, He took the cup in His hands. At that moment He saw what lay ahead; He saw all that was lined up for Him; He realized afresh what lay in the walk ahead. He took the cup of suffering and He gave thanks to the Father. There is something here that we have to learn from Him who in the midst of suffering gave thanks to the Father. May we learn to give thanks to the Lord in the midst of our affliction. Today we have a Christianity that teaches us to run away from suffering and to seek glory in comfort.

Here Paul recounts some of his sufferings, of which we hardly know anything. It is a short-list of intense sufferings, but let us not miss the sound of victory! The eleventh chapter of Hebrews too, does not conclude with a dirge, lament or sadness, but in wholesale triumph. As one reads through this chapter, verse after verse, one cannot fail to see that herein is strength, here is triumph, here is ascendancy and there is nothing mournful here at all. The Spirit trumpets a call of triumph at the end of the suffering of the saints for they do not end with a lament; they end with a triumphant note. The tragedy of being sawn asunder is terrible to the natural man but to the spiritual it is a song of His ascendancy; a triumph and victory for His people.

Hebrews 11:39-40

(39) And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

(40) God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Saints, we could take the lives of any of the early apostles, but if

there was one man in all the circle who ought never to have sung or rejoiced again, never to have gone about the world with his head lifted up again, who ought to have had the most melancholy voice and look, always trying to let people know what a miserable mess had made of things, it was Peter. He, amongst all the disciples, was one who had every reason to be ashamed, dejected and discouraged. He had denied the Lord thrice, as was predicted, and to top it all he went fishing after that!

However, beloved saints, listen to the same Peter who said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". The word blessed there is the Greek word which means 'praised'. So it should be read "Praised be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His great mercy (Peter knew what he was talking about) begat us again (not unto the most awful despair! No!) unto a lively hope". It is not a "living" hope but a "lively" hope. This word is much more emphatic than meets the eye. You can be

living without being lively. There are quite a lot of people who are living, but are not a bit lively. So Peter says "unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" and there is something of tremendous hopefulness and optimism in that. And this was true of all the other apostles as well.

Ultimately Peter was able to give himself to the Spirit and go through suffering for Jesus' sake. He was able to praise and glorify the Lord through all his suffering and death. The very one who ran away and denied the Lord, was able to go through many sufferings and persecutions for Christ.

Right in the middle of our circumstances we have a lively hope in the resurrection of Christ. If we live with the 'lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead", we will be able to suffer, endure trials, experience tribulations and endure all kinds of difficulties and reproaches in our lives for the word of God and the testimony of the Lord. Saints, we are not to run away from them. The Holy Spirit wants to

do something in us through the sufferings we come across. Most of the time, we are concerned and occupied with the cost we have to pay. However, let us rather look at the fruit, or the end of our sufferings, which is our conformity to our Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God is doing a wonderful work of conforming us to the image and likeness of the Son, so that we come into the praise and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is what these saints-of-old looked for. Today, too many people have an eye upon the cost but not upon what we shall become in Him. They counted themselves worthy to suffer and be conformed to His likeness.

The Father watched from
heaven
when the Bride of His Son
was being torn to pieces by
the Romans
in the same way as
the Father saw the
Son being ripped apart
at the hands of men.

Accepting the Fellowship of His Sufferings

Saints, first of all, we must face the fact that we are called to tread a path of suffering, if we are in His purpose and in fellowship with Him. And we need to seek help from the Lord always to bear this in mind. That is one side of the coin. Perhaps we have such a long drawn-out period of joylessness, sorrow, discouragement and defeat, because we have not, at the outset, carefully considered what this calling demands. There has to come a point when we sit down and do some reckoning and come to a definite conclusion on this matter that although very often we may not be able to see that our suffering is because of His purpose and our relationship with Him, whether we can discern it or not; the fact remains that the pathway of the child of God, of the follower of Jesus Christ, is the pathway of suffering. Beloved, the sufferings we are called to undergo are manifold and diverse, and very often they may look as though they have no relationship at all with our calling and life in the Lord, but nevertheless, the reality is that our pathway is the way of suffering and trials.

I would say, with deep convictions, that any postponement or delay in settling this matter of our walk along the pathway of suffering would be detrimental to our life. The delay will keep us in a state of hoping and waiting for our walk to change. And when that change doesn't happen as we had expected, then we would become discouraged and downcast. We would begin to feel that we are on the wrong path, that the Lord is against us, and many other negative thoughts would bind us. In this way we will give the enemy all the ground he wants to destroy the testimony of the Lord.

The very first thing to remember when we take this cup is that, while we are taking it as the cup of salvation, while we are remembering the atonement which is in the Blood, and all the wonderful redemption which is ours because of that Blood, the cup also speaks to us of the fellowship with His suffering for it is His cup; it is filling up that which is lacking the remainder of the afflictions of Christ for His Body's sake which is the Church. We are

Experiencing Deliverance Without Deliverance

not able to see the values of that in ourselves because we are far too occupied with the cost, with the suffering and with the trial we are undergoing. However, we must look beyond, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and see the marvelous spiritual growth, the wonderful refinement of spirit and maturity of life that will come upon us. We must know that as Christ is being formed in us through the fires of adversity and suffering, there is something which is adding to His praise and glory. It is fellowship with Him in His sufferings after all that will bring about more Christ-likeness. So the first thing we must do, as His true remnant in these terrible days, is to reckon with this and get this settled in our hearts. Let me ask:

What are you expecting?

What are you waiting for?

What are you concerned about?

What are you pleading and praying for?

If you are praying for full and final deliverance from adversity and suffering and difficulty and all that sort of thing, let me tell you, your prayer will never be

answered. Sometimes, your type or forms of suffering may change, but if you are going on to the end in the way of adversity, then it will surely appear in some form or another. Satan is not going to rally to our support while we belong to the Kingdom of God for that is diametrically opposed to his kingdom. Let us settle this in our minds. It will free us from Satan's entanglements.

Are you praying to escape from your adversities, difficulties and sufferings?

Are you seeking to get out of the trials that beset you?

Are you frustrated because your prayers for healing or deliverance have not been answered by the Lord?

The Lord who loves you will not send you an angel to remove you from the midst of your sufferings which He has permitted for a far greater end. Such is His great wisdom.

*"No cross,
no crown!"*

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

Many believers have misinterpreted this precious verse and say, "God is faithful and He will make a way of escape for us. He will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear: He will bring about our escape from any suffering." Let us not pay heed to such advice. This Scripture has often puzzled many believers. Let us be open to the Holy Spirit for a true understanding of this Scripture.

Quoting this again we read, "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able (to endure it)". What do you make of that? What is the true way of escape that God has made for you and me? "But will

with the temptation make also a way of escape, that you may endure it". This means that the way of escape is by way of enduring it. This Scripture does not speak of getting away from suffering. Our escape lies in remaining in the will of God, in going through suffering, enduring it, and not in trying to get away from it. We are called not to go under the temptation, of escaping it, but to rise above it and triumph over it. In other words we see that there is deliverance while there is no deliverance.

Apostle Paul had a thorn in the flesh and he asked the Lord to remove it three times, but the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for thee for My power is made perfect in weakness." What was Paul's reaction to this? Paul's reaction was, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me..... for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor 12:8,10). Apostle Paul was not delivered from that "messenger of Satan". Many a time people quote these verses

but miss its reality in their lives. May we come to the point and say "the devils aim is to use it against my undoing and for the ruination of God's purpose, but the Lord has definitely and deliberately permitted that in His wisdom towards His end purpose". As you know Paul was not delivered from that stake in the flesh, that messenger of Satan, that constantly buffeted him; and yet he was delivered! This is God's wisdom!

Today many believers refuse to accept sufferings and afflictions. They argue with the Lord; they feel that they can glorify the Lord in some other way. They say they will work for the Lord all the more and bring Him greater glory through their hard work and labor. But the Apostle Paul never argued with God. He said, "Most gladly, therefore, I would rather glory in my weakness for when I am weak then I am strong." How precious that is!

We need to understand the meaning of deliverance. Sometimes we come across situations in our lives that are akin to that experienced by Paul. The enemy worked untiringly to hamper and hinder the Apostle

so that he may not be effective in his ministry. Satan came against the testimony of the Lord time and time again. But the Apostle was very sensitive to the Spirit. He was able to be at rest in the middle of his suffering in the flesh. He was able to experience deliverance without being delivered. Saints, there is a deliverance that we need to experience in the inner man. Many times we experience deliverance, but it is only in the outward situations we face. However, God wants us to experience deliverance in the inner recesses of our being. Often God wants to deliver our inner man from the situation that is troubling us. God wants to equip us with strength in our inward man. Let us not be drowned under the difficulties we face; let us not go under, but go over and above them. The Apostle Paul said, "I would rather glory in my weakness".

Recalling a servant of God in the Old Testament, we are reminded that Caleb went to Joshua and said, "Give me this mount." He did not ask Joshua to give him his portion in the wonderful plains of Jordan, where there was plenty of water for his

cattle, and where he could become rich in a short time. He said, "Give me that mountain." In other words Caleb said, 'Do not remove this mountain, do not get it out of the way; give it to me, give me a chance to master it, to bring it under, to gain ascendancy!' He asked for that which challenged him. He asked for that which was difficult to overcome. He said that he wanted to conquer the mountain and overcome every difficulty that came in his way.

How often we say, "Lord I suffered for you, I paid the cost, I went all the way for the gospel, so give me an easy time now." We need to be strengthened in our inner man as regards this calling. Don't indulge in self-pity; look for the tears of other people. Avoid the sympathy of the ones who love you and the temptation of ease at the end of a hard day of work. Be strong in the Lord. We are called to suffer for the word and the testimony of the Lord. This calls for the strengthening of our inner man.

Caleb was a man given to ascendancy. He was a true overcomer. He was willing to work hard, though he was 85 years old. He asked Joshua for the mountain so that he could subdue

it. Let us be like him and say, "Lord, I do not ask for an easy path. I am willing to suffer for the sake of the word and the testimony of Jesus. I know that you will save me from evil, but not from hard work, adverse situations and sufferings." This is no easy, glib talk. This word is going to cost all of us. It is not an easy path; we are called to walk in a narrow, difficult way.

In the biographies of men like Wesley and Whitefield, as well as several other men of God, we read how greatly they suffered for the Lord. Wesley traveled thousands of miles on a horse to bring the Gospel to the villages in England. Physical weakness often made him very sick. He was persecuted, mocked, stoned many a time, dragged by the hair and thrown out. What a time that man of God had! Even Charles Wesley his brother shared in the suffering. There were many other saints who went without food, clothing; they lived in caves and were hunted down like dogs.

How often we pray that our lot of suffering ought to be less and very much easier?

What a triumph Wesley experienced in his suffering! We

often sing that famous song, "Oh for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise". Do you know that Wesley did not mean what we usually think he meant when he wrote those words? We often think that he meant, "Oh, if only I had a thousand tongues!" but that is not quite what he meant, as is borne out by this incident. Once, John Wesley and his brother held a meeting in some town in England. There were only a few people who attended the meeting but they poured out their hearts to the Lord. When the meeting was over, they came out of the meeting hall and saw a large number of people on the road, returning from some sporting event. Wave after wave, throng after throng, of people walked past them. When John Wesley saw what a multitude of people were given to the entertainment of the flesh and godless sporting activities, he said to his brother with much pain and sorrow, "Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise!" What he meant was, 'Oh, for thousands of them that are out there; if only they could sing of my great Redeemer's praise!' Those were their sentiments!

That is triumph! These men went through situations and they encouraged themselves and triumphed over their situations.

Beloved, let us rededicate ourselves to the narrow way we are called to walk. Let us shun the broad way of ecumenicalism, the broad way of pastor's conferences, and the outsized way of committees organized for evangelistic effort. These are activities we see all around us. We are not to be found in those 'exalted' paths that men tread. Rather, let us give ourselves to suffering for the word and the testimony of Christ. Let us be found in that company!

Beloved, the Lord's Table is a blend of joy and suffering. The joy is that we are counted worthy to suffer. The suffering lies in the situation and circumstances we are called to go through. God is not going to take us out of suffering and misunderstanding which is for the word and His testimony. I do not believe that the Lord will bring any changes in our circumstances until we get on top of them. Whatever change of situation and conditions may be in His will, actual deliverance will wait until we are delivered in this inward way. Therefore let us not

stipulate that we are not able to go on unless the Lord provides better conditions for us. Such a spirit of stipulation is a denial of His grace; it is a denial of His sufficiency, for the word says "My grace is sufficient for thee...Most gladly therefore....."

Saints of God, the way out is to go up or above it (the suffering or trial); the way of victory is over it, not away from it. So before asking for any changes to our situations and circumstances, we have somehow to find the grace that will result in our being filled with joy. Sometimes, like Peter, we are "put to grief in manifold trials", sometimes like Paul, we are "smitten down", but if we will give the grace of God a chance, the old joy shall come back again. I would say to God's people, "Give His grace a chance to work in your life!" The real thing about God's true disciples is that they will find something bubbling up within; that is not the self, it is the Lord.

Saints, the next time you come to the Lord's Table and take the cup in your hands, be aware of the

two sides to it. On one side there is a reckoning, "I take the cup knowing that this means the fellowship of His sufferings; to take my share of hardness, sufferings and reproaches with the apostles and the prophets, by the grace of God." There is also the other side of the cup wherein we rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer for His name, realizing that through His Blood there is the begetting again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! Amen!

May we have grace to seek the Lord, resolving that by His grace we are not going to capitulate, but we are going to triumph, even in the time of trial and suffering. We shall find our deliverance by taking the way of suffering. "God will make....the way of escape, that ye may be able to stay in His will and overcome it or endure it": yes, to suffer for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ! God's desire is to deliver you from evil and make you men and women of character for His Kingdom!



