



A new creation focus through Colossians ...

## Rejoicing in Suffering

The distribution of the word of God is accompanied by suffering. Even those in the Old Testament who proclaimed the message of God paid the price of preaching to a rebellious people, as Stephen noted in his defense before the blood-thirsty Sanhedrin, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" (Acts 7:51). John the Immerser had his head chopped off for calling Herod and Herodias to account because of their violation of God's commands concerning marriage. The ultimate exhibition of suffering on behalf of the gospel was Jesus Himself. Facing continual conspiracies against His life, having to wend His way through tricky conversations and hostile encounters, and having to handle betrayal by Judas, the Lord allowed Himself eventually to be scourged and executed. For our benefit, and to demonstrate how to make suffering joyously a part of the abundant life which He promised, the scripture states: "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). The author of that epistle also refocuses our attention on Jesus, "the author and perfecter of faith, *who for the joy set before Him* endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

- ▼ **Paul's rejoicing** — The apostle Paul had commented on occasion about how he handled the suffering which is guaranteed to those who will walk godly in Christ Jesus. In his second recorded epistle to the Corinthian brethren, he called what he and his fellow first century saints were experiencing "momentary, light affliction" (2 Corinthians 4:17). "I consider that the sufferings of this present time," he explained, helping the brethren in Rome adjust their attitudes, "are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). Hence, as he addresses the congregation in Colossae, his perspective is going to be the same. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake," says he (Colossians 1:24). The apostle was not only willing to suffer to get the gospel and follow up edification to them, but he also was willing to be happy in suffering in order to do so.
- ▼ **Filling in the gaps** — When Jesus cried out during His last living moments on the cross, "It is finished!" He did not mean that all of His work was accomplished. He did complete what was necessary on earth as far as He could while living as a human being, but there was much more work to be done, including all the great things He accomplished in connection with His ascension. Furthermore, part of the continuing work of Christ on earth is to be carried out by His loyal and faithful disciples. "And in my flesh," remarks the apostle, "I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions (Colossians 1:24). This is an amazing and, to some degree, an unexpected comment. The "passion of the Christ" was not enough, that there were still some gaps that had to be filled in? Apparently so, for the apostle clearly stated that he was willing to do his share!

**WILL WE  
LEARN TO RUN  
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The church of the living Lord moves forward through a sea of suffering. "If they persecuted Me," affirmed Jesus Himself, "they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20). As Paul and the other apostles did their part in suffering for the sake of the body of Christ, so also must all others who believe through the word of those apostles. In a period of time when "evil men and imposters proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13), modern Christians also need to step forward and be willing to do their share in filling up that which is still lacking in Christ's afflictions. Will we learn to run toward such suffering, or will we "shrink back to destruction" (Hebrews 10:39)? ???

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