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## Partakers of Christ's Sufferings

*"Beloved do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified." 1Peter 4:12-14*

In the night of his betrayal, Jesus spoke these words to the Apostles whom he had chosen, "Remember the word that I spoke to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me" (John 15:20-21). All over the world Christians are persecuted because of their faith and the truth of the gospel that they preach. The Apostles were warned that this is the way it would be and Jesus' words to them were to prepare and strengthen and encourage them. Things have not changed in the world because the Lord has a message of redemption that the world does not want to hear.

I read a story about a Dr. Helen Roseveare who was an English missionary to the Congo from 1953 to 1973. In 1964, during the civil war in the Congo, rebels took her prisoner and repeatedly beat and raped her. She later recalled that she survived the horrors of that ordeal through prayer. She talked to God and she sensed his answer within her. One night the rebels savagely kicked and beat her in her own home. She recalled, "The Lord seemed to whisper to me: 'They are not beating you, but Me-in-you. These are not your sufferings, but Mine.' She said she sensed "the consciousness of His loving arms around me and His peace in my heart, even in the midst of wickedness and suffering---the sense of being privileged to share in the fellowship of His sufferings." After five months of captivity, Dr. Roseveare was rescued by soldiers.

This story reminds us of at least two things. For one, we should not think it strange when we are persecuted even though we are doing our level best to serve the Lord and our fellowman. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (1Tim. 3:12-13). It is evident that evil men and the sin that accompanies them still abound in the world. Life "under the sun" can be extremely difficult at times, even for the righteous.

The second thing is that prayer is a powerful weapon to use in our defense against the evil that attacks us and threatens to overwhelm us. Surely it can be a comfort to us when we consider our suffering as a part of our fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. When Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into jail in Philippi, they engaged in a prayer service that erupted into singing hymns. Their reaction to suffering with Christ resulted in the conversion of the Jailer and his whole family (Acts 16). Our sufferings with Christ may not prove to be as dramatic as some of these about which we have read; however, there is certainly strength and encouragement to be derived from this kind of approach to the persecutions and sufferings that will come our way in life under the sun.

*"But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which have happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard..." Phil. 1:12-13*