

That The World May Know: Walk As Jesus Walked - Session 4 – Why Christians Suffer – The Weight of Gethsemane

Take Up Your Cross

When Jesus said that anyone who would follow him must “take up his cross,” He knew the doing so would lead to suffering and even death. But when He called His disciples from the towns of Galilee, they did not suspect that following Jesus would lead them to walk by the way of the cross. They knew only that they had been called to follow their beloved Rabbi, and they eagerly accepted the opportunity.

- 1 To what extent did Jesus expect His disciples to follow Him and be like Him?
Luke 6:40
John 12:26
- 2 What will people do to be like Jesus?
John 8:31
John 13:12
1 Peter 2:4 – 6
- 3 What is the most amazing thing Jesus did for us? Why did He do it?
John 3:14 – 17
John 10:14 – 18
John 15:13
John 19:17 – 18
- 4 What does Scripture say about following Jesus in every way — even if it means suffering or death? How strongly did Jesus state this?
Matthew 10:37 – 39
Matthew 16:24 – 25
Luke 14:26 – 27
- 5 We would not accomplish the work of salvation if we died for our faith — only the sacrificial death of Jesus could accomplish that. What do we accomplish if we die because we walk as Jesus walked?
John 15:10 – 23

Persecution – The Disciples’ Gethsemane

Early Christian disciples of Jesus often were persecuted for their faith, although the persecution rarely affected the entire Roman Empire. Many thousands of believers died. Others experienced deep suffering because of their passionate commitment to Jesus and His teaching. Persecution came from the Jewish community, from local Roman authorities, and from Imperial Rome.

- 1 Sometimes Jewish authorities persecuted early Christians — usually on a local level. What were the local issues?
Acts 4:1 – 21
Acts 5:12 – 42
Acts 6:8 – 15
- 2 What had Jesus told His disciples about persecution from local Jewish authorities? Would His words have prepared His disciples?
Matthew 10:17 – 20
Matthew 23:13 – 36
- 3 Local Roman authorities persecuted Christians. A second-century riot in Smyrna resulted in the death of Polycarp, the local bishop.
Acts 12:1 – 19
Acts 16:16 – 40
- 4 How had Jesus encouraged and warned His disciples concerning the persecution they would face from local authorities?
Luke 12:1 – 12
- 5 Imperial Rome’s persecutions were far bloodier than others and rarely lasted very long. Most of these are known from history rather than the Bible.
Acts 18:1 – 28

The Fruit of Suffering

Looking at how Jesus suffered and the suffering of those who faithfully followed Him, we must ask, “Why did they suffer so much?” People have struggled to understand why the righteous suffer, and because God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, we may never fully comprehend the purpose of suffering as God reveals it.

- 1 It is painful to suffer for walking as Jesus walked and that suffering can be instrumental in our spiritual development. Paul and the disciples of Jesus knew this and they frequently shared this perspective with *their* disciples.
 - a. How did Paul view his suffering?
Colossians 1:24 – 29
 - b. In what eternal things can we hope when we suffer? What is some of the fruit of our suffering?
1 Peter 1:1 – 9
 - c. What is the joy of suffering for Christ? How does God view our suffering for him?
1 Peter 4:12 – 16
 - d. For what reasons can we be glad when we suffer for Jesus’ sake?
Matthew 5:10 – 12
 - e. What is the fruit of suffering? What is the hope of suffering?
Romans 5:1 – 5
 - f. What do trials develop in the believer? What should be our attitude toward them?
James 1:1 – 4

- 2 Describe the attitude of the early Christian disciples toward their suffering? How does their attitude differ from yours? How does their attitude differ from that of other believers you know?

Cappadocia: Hope in the Midst of Suffering

1. It is not known exactly how the message of Jesus arrived in Cappadocia. There is evidence that a community of Jesus' disciples lived there early in the first century. Peter's letters include references to persecution. When might the Christian movement in Cappadocia have started? What were the Jewish communities like?
Acts 2:5 – 12
Hebrews 11:37 - 38
2. Peter wrote to encourage believers who had faced, were facing, or could soon face persecution and suffering. What hope did Peter give?
1 Peter 1:1 – 9
1 Peter 2:11 – 12
1 Peter 2:18 – 25
1 Peter 3:13 – 22
1 Peter 5:6 – 11

Listen to the Echoes

This session has followed the ancient footsteps of our Christian brothers and sisters, some of whom lived in a remote valley of cave dwellings in Cappadocia. There, in a church carved by hand out of solid rock, we heard the echoes of ordinary disciples who took Jesus seriously. They took up their cross. There are no plaques, monuments, or modern signs that honor their faithfulness. There is no mistaking the echoes of their message!

- 1 Jesus' disciples took seriously their commitment to take up their cross and follow Him. They lived it, they taught it, and they died because of it.
What did Paul say about his walk?
2 Timothy 3:10 – 12
Philemon 3 - 12

What did Peter say about his walk?
1 Peter 4:12 – 19
- 2 What did those messages mean to early believers for whom ongoing persecution and suffering was a real possibility? How would those messages have encouraged them to endure persecution?
- 3 Why did so many early believers follow Jesus knowing that they would pay a high price for walking as He walked?
- 4 What do those verses mean to you today? To what extent are you willing "share" with Jesus in His suffering as many early believers did?

References

Psalm 75	Isaiah 11
Matthew 5	Matthew 7
Matthew 10	Matthew 16
Matthew 23	Matthew 26
Mark 8:34	Mark 14
Luke 6	Luke 12
Luke 14	Luke 22
John 3	John 8
John 10	John 12
John 13	John 15
John 19	Acts 2
Acts 4	Acts 5
Acts 6	Acts 7
Acts 12	Acts 16
Acts 17	Acts 18
Acts 19	Acts 21
Acts 22	Acts 23
Acts 24	Acts 25
Acts 26	Romans 5
Romans 11	Ephesians 1
Colossians 1	2 Timothy 3
Philemon 3	Hebrews 11
James 1	1 Peter 1
1 Peter 2	1 Peter 3
1 Peter 4	1 Peter 5
1 John 2	Revelation 1

2 Timothy 3:12 – In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted