

POWER AND SUFFERING

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,” (Phil 3:10)

From the human point of view, this is indeed a strange request. Normally we think of “power” in association with the ability to avoid suffering. We normally think of powerful people as being clothed in soft raiment and hiring others to do the jobs that are difficult and dangerous. Paul, however, prayed for power and also for the privilege of becoming like Christ in His suffering and death.

THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION. The day we call “Good Friday” provides powerful insight into the “Power of His Resurrection. From the human point of view, there was nothing “good” about that Friday. It was on that day that Jesus was betrayed by a friend, arrested by soldiers, abandoned by His disciples, denied by Peter, dragged before corrupt leaders, blindfolded and beaten, lied about and humiliated, harassed and tormented, spat upon and flogged. Ultimately, as you know, a crown of thorns was placed upon his brow and He was crucified. In the light of the resurrection, however, it was a “good” day.

What kind of a day did you have today? We can venture a guess that whatever insults and suffering you have experienced pale into insignificance by comparison with what Jesus experienced. If His day can be made good by the power of the resurrection, so can ours.

This great power was not just for Paul, it is also for us. Paul prayed that our eyes would be opened to this fact. He wanted us to see the incomparably great power that is available to us in Christ (Eph. 1:19 - 23). It is precisely like the power that raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to the right hand of God. No wonder Paul wanted to know the power of His resurrection;

THE FELLOWSHIP OF SHARING IN HIS SUFFERING. The sufferings of Christ provide a portrait of His love. John wrote: **“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” (1 Jn 3:16)** Note the connection between what Jesus did and what we ought to do. In some mysterious way, Paul’s suffering was connected with the sufferings of Christ for the church (Col. 1:24). Paul did not suffer as a murderer, thief, criminal, or meddler, he suffered as a Christian (1 Pet. 4:15 - 16). His sufferings were not in vain, however, for they formed an indispensable link with Jesus. Many would never have known of Jesus if Paul did not tell them. It was his suffering that made it possible for them to hear the Gospel. The privilege of preaching, as you know, is the exclusive right and responsibility of mankind (1 Cor. 1:21). When the people of Macedonia needed to hear the Gospel, the call to preach was not given to angels, it was given to Paul (Acts 16:9). In the process of answering this call Paul had to suffer. At Philippi, as you know, he was unjustly beaten and imprisoned (Acts 16:22 ff.) It was precisely this suffering, however, that enabled the Philippian Jailer and his household to become Christians.

APPLICATION TO US. Depression has been called the “common cold of mental health”. In any given year it affects 9.5% of the population (about 20.9 million American adults). Depression is often triggered by “Good Friday” circumstances. When everything in your life seems to be going wrong do not forget the power of His resurrection.

When you are riding high in victorious Christian living, do not forget the fellowship of His suffering. Crosses are not just to sing about, they are to die upon. And as painful as it is to say, without a cross there will be no crown. Jesus said it like this: **“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.” (Matt 16:24-25)**