

A Meditation on the Sufferings of the Lord

Part 1

Speaker	Michael Johnson
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[00:00:01] You needn't turn to them, but I would like to read three brief couplets from the New Testament, the first one being in the Philippians, Epistles, chapter 3, and verses 10 and 11.

Philippians, chapter 3, verses 10 and 11.

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. The second is in the Epistles to the Hebrews, chapter 2, verses 17 and 18.

[00:01:08] Hebrews, chapter 2, verse 17.

Wherefore, in all things it behoves him to be made light unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

For in that he himself has suffered being censured, he is able to suffer then without censure. And the last couplet is in the second epistle of Peter, chapter 2, verses 7 and 8. 2 Peter 2, verse 7.

And delivered just lost, Vex was a filthy conversation of the wicked.

[00:02:06] For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing Vex's righteous soul from day to day, should bear unlawful deeds.

I think it will be clear from the scriptures that we've read together and the hymns that we've sung that I want to speak a little about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus.

It's not instruction. It may be that there are some things which are new. There are certainly many things which will be very familiar and precious to us all. It's not intended to be an instruction. It's intended to be a meditation on the sufferings of the Lord Jesus with this object.

[00:03:08] Firstly, that he might become increasingly precious to us. The only thing in the day in which we live, which will hold us, is nearness to the Lord himself.

And there's nothing really calculated to bind our hearts to him like the suffering that he's been through. And secondly, that it might deepen our appreciation of him.

Somebody was saying recently that if in the experience of our souls we tread the path of the Colossian epistle, we'll reach a position down here when he becomes everything to us. We certainly are moving to a world where he will be everything and there will be nothing to buy for our affection. But down here in this world, it's God's desire that he should become everything to us. [00:04:03] And so I trust the Lord will also use the word to make him increasingly precious to us, to make him everything to us. Now, Psalm 22 speaks about the atoning sufferings of the Lord Jesus and the results that flow from it.

Psalm 69 speaks of the sufferings from the Lord at the hand of men and the results that flow from that are significantly different. I read the second chapter of Hebrews because there is another path of suffering that the Lord trod, that he might in priestly grace meet every saint of God in whatever situation they're found in this world tonight. And our brother in his prayer has reminded us that whilst we have it very easy in this land, it makes little demand on us by way of sacrifice to be true to the Lord. [00:05:03] There are many saints tonight who go through the mill. The verse I read in the second epistle of Peter, simply to show that the matter of the Lord's suffering like himself is infinite. And the verse in Philippians 3, because it evidently opens out a path which ought to be normal to us as Christians, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.

Our brother omitted to read, but they're important, the headings to the Psalms. And Psalm 22 reads, the heading, to the chief musician, And I can't help but think that like every other part of scripture, whatever we may read in them, [00:06:04] there's value in the headings which God has given by inspiration. Certainly, I don't think there's any shadow of doubt that what is taken up in Psalm 22, those sufferings which the Lord alone could pass through atoning sufferings as we speak of them, will be the source of endless praise to God until that song of response to him fills the universe. It's to the chief musician. And it's upon Eid al-Shahar, which most of our margins read, as the hind of the morning. And I understand some years ago, looking at the background to this, that couched in the lands where the psalm was read, the hind during the evening comes down, through the dark it comes, but when the first faint streaks of grey and the light of a coming day dawn, it gets back to the hind, the hind of the morning. [00:07:02] And what we read about here was the precursor to that joy and light and glory into which the Lord Jesus has entered. Now it's not easy to speak on these things.

They lie at the very heart of what we hold here, our faith. I think there are one or two things that we can do which make it perfectly apparent what lies in the cry with which this psalm begins. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

And twice in the courses of the verses that we read, in verse 11, the Lord's cry, Be not far from me, for help is near, for there is none to help.

And in verse 19, but be not thou far from me, O Lord, O my strength, haste thee to deliver me.

If we can contrast by going through the scriptures, that nearness in which the Lord Jesus ever moved, [00:08:10] and down here in this world there's no shadow of doubt from the scriptures, that he moved in the complacency of cloudless communion. Then, by contrast, think what it must have been for him to be abandoned by God, and from out of the darkness the cry, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And I think it's fairly straightforward and easily done. Verses of scripture may be few, but they never are found with anything but perfect fullness.

There are few glimpses into that eternity past, but how full and precious they are. Think of the Lord's own words, he said, I came forth from with the Father and am coming to the world. [00:09:01] In the same gospel, a little further on, chapter 17, on the very night in which he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus said to the Father, for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world. Proverbs 8 adds another little glimpse of that time when it says, Then was I by him, as one brought up with him, ever his delight.

But what was true in eternity was found in exactly the same in this world. After 30 years in this world, where to a greater or lesser degree every man is found pursuing his own will, for 30 years in this world there was one found who ever did that which was delightful to the heart of the Father. And the heavens were opened upon him, and the Father's voice was heard, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight. [00:10:02] That which constantly delighted the heart of God, found in him perfectly and held in perfect divine balance.

Moving a little on in his path of public ministry in this world, there came a time when the mind of the nation was made clear they were about to refuse him. And the scripture says, in that same hour Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, I praise thee, Lord of heaven and earth. Move on a little bit further, on to the very night in which the Lord was betrayed. And he spoke to the disciples and he said to them, Judas already having gone out, he shall be scattered, each to his own, and leave me alone.

And yet I am not alone, but the Father is with me. Move a little further into the garden, and the Lord's words to Peter, [00:11:01] when by force he desired to deliver him, he said, The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not take it?

But the words that we've read at the beginning of Psalm 22 are not the words of the complacency of cloudless communion. They're not that which constantly flowed from the heart of the Son and was reciprocated by the Father. They're words that were cried in abandonment in the darkness, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Look again at the words of Luke in the garden, when the Lord went forward from the three disciples who had taken with him, as it were, a stone throw.

And the scripture records that there appeared to him an angel from heaven strengthening him.

[00:12:04] Now that cannot be without immense import.

A little earlier he'd said to the disciples, When I sent ye out, lacked ye anything? As far as protection was concerned, as far as provision was concerned, they lacked nothing, because the very Lord of life and glory, the El Shaddai of the Old Testament was there, he who never slumbers nor sleeps, in whose hand is almighty power. But the scripture records that because of that which he passed through only in anticipation, there appeared to him an angel from heaven strengthening him. It follows with these words, being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly.

Now, I cannot ever think but that the prayers of the Lord Jesus [00:13:04] were never wanting in earnestness.

The Lord's prayers, like ours, never fluctuated, never one time on the mountaintop and the next time

in the valley and perhaps wanting in earnestness. I cannot but think that whenever the Lord Jesus prayed, his prayers would be marked by perfect earnestness. But the scripture says, being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly.

And words which have written themselves into our hearts by the Spirit follow. And his sweat became, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground. I can only think that if that was what it cost the Lord Jesus in anticipation, what must it have been when no longer in anticipation, but all that he feared came upon his holy head [00:14:04] and out of the darkness he cried, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Or, taking up the individual words of scripture, three times, I think, in the second chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, it says that the Lord Jesus came down into this world as a man that he might die. On the first occasion, the words of scripture say, he was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for everything.

Now I cannot understand what it must have been like for him in whom life inherently rests and who alone has the power of life to savour all that death entailed. [00:15:03] The one who in the garden said to Adam, In the day that thou eatest thereof, dying thou shalt die, himself at the end of the day, in love for you and me, gave himself. He tasted death for every man.

Think again of the verse in the epistle to the Galatians which says, he was made a curse for us, as it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on the tree.

There's a psalm, I think, and the New Testament rendering of which reads, I think it's Psalm 21, Thou hast made him to be blessings forever, the one in whom all blessing inherently rests, the whole fountain of blessing the psalm declares him to be. But there was a time when he was no longer the blessing as he was in the power of his grace in this world, [00:16:03] a time when he was made a curse, and at that time the cry arose from his blessed lips, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Now, I can't say a lot more about those words.

I feel that they're matters really more for meditation than for exposition, and trust that God would write them upon our hearts because that lies at the very foundation of the glory of God, of the blessing for us now both collectively and individually, and the blessing for Israel in a coming day, and in this the Lord Jesus is absolutely alone. And he said to the disciples, Whither I go now, ye cannot follow.

The disciples, no more than the Jews to whom he repeated the same words, there was one alone could move on that path, [00:17:03] and absolutely unique and alone, the Lord Jesus suffered at the hand of God, and in the very emboliment of all that he went through in his holy soul, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

He cried in abandonment.

I'm happy to say that having used the new hymn book for but a month, many of the hymns, and particularly those that are written with the supper in view, have twined themselves round our hearts, and I've more than once read in an evening a verse of a hymn that I had not known nor sung hitherto.

I'm not sure who the writer of it is, but it's 46 in the new hymn book, and the last verse reads, Thou didst measure then sin's distance, curse and death and wrath were thine, [00:18:04] man betrayed by God forsaken, thus we learn thy love divine.

And that's the kind of thing that the Lord Jesus passed through. When at the hand of God he suffered for sin, the only begotten Son, the very cherished object of the heart of the Father, was forsaken by God, and thus atonement was made.

Now the response from that is remarkable in the psalm. When it's a question of God afflicting him, smitten by God, the results of that are nothing but never-ending blessing. It's like consequent waves of blessing from him suffering at the hand of God. I want briefly to refer to them in verse 22, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. [00:19:01] In verse 25, my praise shall be of thee in the great congregation. Verse 27, all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord.

From the Son of God being smitten by God himself, the only thing that will flow from that is unparalleled blessing. And having said the words thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorn, in verse 22 the Lord says, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the assembly, rather, in the midst of the congregation will I sing praise unto thee. That first wave of blessing by the grace of God has touched you and me and the evidence of it, the very first words that the Lord spoke in resurrection. He had said to his own a little earlier that he had many things to say unto them and they were not able to bear it. [00:20:01] And on another occasion he had spoken of being straightened, I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straightened until it be accomplished.

And the moment the Lord has passed through these sufferings and comes out on the other side, the very fountain of his heart opens up and to one weeping woman who evidently found all in him and whose world had crumbled about her when the Son of God lay down his holy head in death. He said, Mary.

And her world again set up.

He said to her what I suppose must have been the finest words that have ever fallen on mortal ears.

Go unto my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father and to my God and your God.

And the Lord here in verse 22 says, I will declare thy name unto my brethren. [00:21:03] In the midst of the assembly will I sing praise unto thee. And that first wave of blessing which has flowed out from him being smitten of God has engulfed us.

And in the words I ascend unto my Father and your Father lies the very cherished thing of that nearest circle to him, that which is ever near and dear to him.

I've often said that if all the verses which we use as foundational verses for the deity of the Lord Jesus were taken away, we still would have no difficulty in proving that he's overall God-blessed forevermore. And in John 3 he said something which no one else could say. He said we speak the things that we do know and testify that we have seen.

And when he said to Mary, Go unto my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father.

[00:22:03] It was for the Lord the beginning of that day when that joy which had been his from eternity, the joys of the Father's house and the Father's glory, will be unfolded to a people touched by that grace and engulfed by that wave of blessing and contained in the words, I will declare thy name unto my brethren in the midst of the assembly will I sing praise unto thee. But in verse 25, My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation.

It's a very challenging thing that we're living in a day when there's been a tremendous upsurge in the literature of the Puritans.

Now there's much in the Puritan literature for which we ought to thank God. As to what pertains to the foundations of the faith, it does your heart good to read it. [00:23:01] But they certainly wouldn't move one inch along the road with us in believing that there are different dispensations, nor do they believe that there is a millennium. But in the words, verse 25, My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation lies that second circle which this wave of unparalleled blessing which has flowed out from the cross of Christ will touch the nation of Israel.

Often words that we take to ourselves, for example the words in Zephaniah where the Lord says, The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty, he will save. He will rejoice over his own with singing. He will rest in his love. Those words, very precious, and often we use them as illustrative of the joy that the Lord finds in the assembly. Now I wouldn't wish for one moment to diminish anyone's appreciation of verses like that. [00:24:02] But firstly and foremost, by way of interpretation, that verse in Zephaniah chapter 3 is not directed to the church of God, the assembly, it's directed to Israel.

And he whose heart now finds joy in having us near him so that he can unfold those things which are ever his, being his joy, will find joy in a coming day when the nation of Israel, no longer the tail but the head, in nearness to him who gave himself for them, he will rest in his love.

And verse 25 speaks of them. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation.

I can't recall all of it, but there's a delightful poem by Edward Denny who has written many of our hymns, many of the hymns.

And it's entitled Zion, and there's a piece comes to my mind, [00:25:02] it says something like this. He sprang, referring to the Lord, he sprang from thy chosen of daughters.

His star o'er thy hills arose.

He bathed in thy soft flowing waters and wept o'er thy coming woes.

He wept who in secret yet lingers with yearnings of heart o'er thee, he whom thy blood-sprinkled fingers once nailed to the accursed tree. The Lord's heart yearns over Israel and in that day yet to come those yearnings will be satisfied and that wave of blessing which has flowed from him, being smitten of God, now having reached us and blessed us, will reach Israel.

And if Isaiah 53 is the song that they will take up, then you have in the plainest possible manner

pointed out that that which is foundational for us [00:26:03] and will be our joy for eternity, the death of the Lord Jesus, suffering at the hands of God, will become the joy and foundation of the remnant of Israel and thus Israel restored on the renewed earth.

But it doesn't stop at them. In verse 27, all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord and the hundreds of the nations shall worship before thee. That wave of blessing that flows out and it is absolutely unmingled, there's no mention of judgment at all in Psalm 22, that unmingled wave of blessing flowing out will reach the nations and the kind of words that we read in Revelation 21, the kings of the earth walking in the light of that city and in Zechariah 13 where it speaks of the nations [00:27:01] going up to Jerusalem to worship before the Lord are indications that that wave of blessing which has now flowed out and touched us, soon to touch the nation of Israel, will engulf the very ends of the earth and an earth basking in the beneficence of God's dear Son will yet testify again of what has flowed out from Him, suffering at the hands of God.

Now, Psalm 69, again I think if we read the words early on, and again I wouldn't wish for one moment to diminish anyone's appreciation of what the Lord has passed through. It's right at the very center of the things that we hold dear. But it was not over many years ago when reading an article on the Lord's suffering by JND, I suppose eight or nine years ago, that reading these words, [00:28:03] Save me, O God, for the waters are coming unto my soul. The words that we read later in the psalm, verse 14 and 15, Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink. Let me be delivered from them that take me and out of the deep waters. Let not the water flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon thee. Though they are the cries of the Lord Jesus, at the same time as what occurred in Psalm 22, do not refer to what He received from the hands of God. And there are two things which make this perfectly plain. Verse 20, Reproach hath broken my heart. Later in the verse, I looked for some to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. And in verse 26, they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded.

[00:29:06] The Lord Jesus suffered at the hands of man for righteousness' sake, and in the extent to which they hounded Him and took Him to the cross.

There are words which are parallel, but not the same as Psalm 22.

And the results of this are quite different. Verse 24, Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. What the Lord has received at the hands of man for righteousness' sake, ultimately will have, in a coming day, this result, that judgment, unsparing judgment, will be poured out upon His enemies. When it's a question of the hand of God upon Him, the only thing that results, and bless God for it, is unmingled blessing, which already has reached and blessed us. [00:30:03] When it's a question of suffering from the hand of man for righteousness' sake, what follows is unsparing judgment. Now I read to you the verse in Hebrews chapter 2 because it opens up yet another path of suffering which the Lord Jesus has trodden. Someone gave me a pamphlet to read recently. I don't read them regularly. I've had two or three, I suppose, over the last two years. One of them I remember reading.

The pamphlet's put out by, I think it's called either the Radio Bible Hour or the Radio Bible Class.

But certainly two years ago, someone gave me one called Charismatic Confusion, which was very good.

I found it thoroughly scripturally based and certainly a tremendous help for many young people in looking fairly and squarely [00:31:02] at the scriptural issue of the charismatic movement. Coming to the end with this conclusion, it's certainly one that I heartily endorsed on both counts, that the movement has got many things which make it very doubtful from scripture. But the second one I would gladly re-echo, oh, that the life and devotion that flows there flows through some of our meetings and the same kind of response to God would result. I was recently given another pamphlet. It said, could Christ have sinned?

Very sadly, it said yes. I think the scripture is perfectly plain that he could not. However, I refer to that for this reason because one of the main planks of this man's argument was the fact that the Lord Jesus was a man exactly as we are. Now that the Lord is a man, body, soul and spirit, scripture is clear and I hold dearer than life. [00:32:03] But there were things about the Lord which were absolutely unique and we read one of them in Hebrews chapter 2. It says, Wherefore it became him in all things to be made like unto his brethren that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God.

For in that he suffered, being tempted, he is able to suffer them that are tempted.

Now that's quite different, isn't it? We don't suffer, do we, when we're tempted. Often temptation is a matter of pleasure to us, isn't it? But not to the Lord Jesus. He who was absolutely sinless, scripture says, chapter 4 of Hebrews, tempted in all things like as we are, sin apart, he suffered when he was tempted and when he suffered, being tempted, it made him able to suffer them that are tempted. [00:33:03] Now there isn't time to refer and I suppose we're the time. I would not be able to fill out this. But I don't believe there's one experience through which any saint of God will go but that the Lord himself has not first been in that experience and having tasted it by experience, he's able to meet those who are tempted and to help them and to sustain them. I refer very briefly to two.

I recall, I suppose it would be a year ago, talking with a friend, a believer who is in the charismatic movement and we spent the evening together looking at the scriptures and he was saying that there are present-day apostles and I said, I don't think there can be present-day apostles for two reasons. One, the apostles' work was absolutely foundational [00:34:03] because what they said was divinely inspired and by the grace of God in all our weakness and difficulty, we are on the foundations, apostles. The second is this, that an apostle had to see the Lord and at the end of the evening, it left us far apart, not just in a doctrinal view but far apart in heart. I came away from that man's home that evening feeling downhearted and thinking, well, I only tried to say what the scripture said and for a little I thought, that must have been just what the Lord passed through in isolation. Our brother today prayed for Georgi Vins who was released. That man spent months in solitary confinement. Who could meet him in solitary confinement? The one who when he was tempted has suffered and is thus able to succor them that are tempted. [00:35:02] Second thing is the question of sickness. Personally sinless, the Lord Jesus would not experience sickness at all. I don't suppose there's a prayer meeting you go to, is there? That one saint of God or another is not prayed for as experiencing ill health. Who's going to meet them in those kind of circumstances? There's a priceless verse from Isaiah 53 quoted in Matthew chapter 8 when the Lord was healing by his own divine power and the scripture says of this time that he healed them all that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet saying himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.

When the Lord by his own divine power healed he first went through in his own spirit in suffering the very things which by his power he was about to relieve them of. [00:36:01] And there's not a saint of

God who passes through sickness but cannot find one to sustain and to succor them in that he suffered being tempted he is able to succor them that are tempted. Two remarks and I'm finished.

I read to you that verse about Lot, tragic Lot because it illustrates yet another character of sufferings and I hope it would say to every one of us that the fountain of suffering at which the Lord Jesus is deeply drunk is as infinite as his own person. Lot corrupted in his spiritual fiber affected by the drift into Sodom I think what the name Sodomy involves and yet Peter says of him we would never have suspected it from the historical record in Genesis it says that just man in seeing and hearing vexed his righteous soul from day to day [00:37:02] with the filthy conversation of the wicked corrupted as he was within his spiritual fiber Lot was tormented by the things that he saw and the things that he heard in the licentiousness of Sodom what must it have been like passing through this world for the son of God whose senses were nothing but divinely attuned according to God no blunting there how he must have suffered from what he saw and what he heard as he passed through I read Philippians 3 because it opens out something for every one of us I think every one of us when we think of the suffering of the Lord Jesus for us would own his uniqueness and eternity alone will fill out our song of praise to him for what he passed through when he cried my God my God [00:38:02] why hast thou forsaken me and however we might mix things up I'm quite sure every one of us every true believer here however young or however old would be quite clear about this that when it was a question of our sins and the wrath of God there was one alone who could tread that path but Peter opens out that there is a path for us through this world he says Christ also suffered for us leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps and Paul not as an apostle he doesn't write as an apostle in the Philippian epistle he writes as a servant of God normal Christianity and dominated by that one who had first made himself known from the glory he says that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings very often say don't we that there are things that we enjoy here [00:39:02] that will expand to their fullness at the call of the Lord's voice when we're with him and like him I came across a remark about ten years ago browsing through a volume of John Alfred Trench's which I think sums up in words far better than I'm able to frame what I think this verse is saying and he said something like this there is a fellowship which if it were possible is sweeter than the fellowship of his glory it is the fellowship of his sufferings and he asked the question what if we should miss it one thing that we are able to enter on here that we'll not be able to enter on and enjoy in the glory may the Lord so draw out our hearts that the servant of God who says that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings may so entwine his sufferings and his love round our hearts [00:40:04] that what was normal Christianity for Paul becomes normal Christianity for us and thus in the measure in which we respond and keep near him we shall live for his glory and be maintained down here in this world for his name's sake