

On Mission With Our Global God

The Cost of Missions (Philippians 1:27-30)

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on February 22, 2015

Introduction

- ❖ In the news this week we heard about twenty-one Coptic Christians who led in single-file procession along a beach in Libya by terrorists associated with the Islamic State. In front of cameras, a warning was given to “people of the cross” that they would share a similar fate, and then the twenty-one Christians were simultaneously brought to their knees and beheaded.
 - ▶ **Such brutality and blatant religious persecution seems like a relic of the ancient past.** The blood of martyrs being spilt on the sands of the shore? That sounds like something straight out of medieval times. Not the 21st-century. And yet this is headline news.

- ❖ As we read about it on our smartphones or watch it on CNN from the comfort of our couch, we’re shocked. We consider this strange, an abnormality. But according to 1 Peter 4, we’re told that we should “*not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.*”
 - ▶ No, these are regular occurrences. They just don't always show up in the headlines. **While we’re living out our faith in a fairly sanitized environment, we’re unaware that Christians are dying for their faith everyday.**¹ Martyrdom is not a thing of the past. It’s a reality of the present. This week was a stark reminder.

- ❖ I mention all of this because today we’re talking about the cost of missions. As this is Missions Month, we’ve been preaching on missions. We’ve seen already that the **task** of missions to establish a witness for the gospel wherever Christ is not presently named. The **end** of missions is the future worship of Christ by every people group in the world. The **motive** of missions is the present worship of God’s people igniting a passion to spread his glory. And today we’ll consider the **cost** of missions. Namely our comfort, our security, and perhaps even our lives.

- ❖ I want to start by introducing you to man you might not know but you really should. His name is **Adoniram Judson**.² He was a 19th-century American missionary to Burma (Myanmar). When he arrived in 1813 as a twenty-four year old, he had a new bride in his arms. Together they settled in a hostile and unreached land. For thirty-seven years, he proclaimed Christ and translated a Burmese Bible. He died on the field at the age of sixty-one. He made only one return trip home to New England and that was thirty-two years later. He survived two of his three wives who succumbed to tropical diseases, seven of his thirteen children, as well as many co-laborers who gave up their lives in the jungles of Burma.
 - ▶ Adoniram Judson understood the cost of missions. It cost him the comforts of being near family, being at home with friends. It took those who were most dear to him on earth – two wives and seven children. It cost Judson his health. He suffered with cholera, malaria, dysentery. And it cost him his safety. At one point, he was imprisoned and tortured by the Burmese for seventeen months.

¹ For more on present-day Christian persecution and martyrdom, see *Voice of the Martyrs* online at <http://www.persecution.com>

² His story is told by Courtney Anderson in the biography, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson*.

- ❖ These were the costs. **The 2nd-century church father, Tertullian of Carthage is noted for saying that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.** He meant that when Christians suffer and even lay down their lives for Christ, God is pleased to use that sacrifice to spring up new life in Christ within new converts, new disciples of Jesus.
 - ▶ When Adoniram Judson died in 1850, there were 74 Baptist churches planted with around eight thousand members. But Judson and his work was the catalyst for the Burma (Myanmar) Baptist Convention. And now, according to *Operation World*, there are over 4,500 Baptist churches with over 1.1 million members.³

- ❖ Adoniram Judson's story validates Tertullian's saying – **that the suffering experienced by God's servants as the cost of missions is truly the seed of the church.** It's not a senseless tragedy or a regrettable waste of life. No, Christians suffering for the cause of Christ only leads to a greater reaping of a more fruitful harvest of salvation among the nations.
 - ▶ This morning I want us to look at the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians focusing on chapter 1:27-30. Here in our passage he refers to *his* suffering and *their* suffering all for the sake of Christ. Paul is writing this letter from a prison cell in Rome (1:13). He's being guarded by the imperial guard, the personal bodyguards of Caesar himself. Paul's under trial likely for sedition, for urging others to give allegiance to King Jesus. It was a serious claim. He's in serious trouble.

- ❖ But in spite of his circumstances, Paul is not deterred. He's not discouraged. He's emboldened. **He sees how his suffering for Christ serves the cause of Christ.** Paul recognizes three truths that are a timely word for all those involved in the great global task of missions – for *goers* abroad and *senders* at home.

Opposition Creates Opportunity

- ❖ The first truth can be put like this: **1) Opposition to the gospel can be an opportunity to advance the gospel.** This was proven true over and over again in Adoniram Judson's life and ministry, as was the case for the Apostle Paul.
 - ▶ This was Paul's whole point in chapter 1:12-26, the section right prior to our passage. Making reference to his imprisonment, he says in v12, "¹²*I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*"

- ❖ The opposition he faced because of his commitment to the gospel – being imprisoned in Rome – was used by God as an opportunity to advance the gospel, penetrating even into Caesar's own household (cf. 4:22). And what's more, other believers were encouraged to preach the gospel more boldly.

³ Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, 7th Edition, pf. 610.

- ❖ *Can you believe that?* Other Christians see Paul incarcerated under imperial guard. And instead of being discouraged and disillusioned, they're emboldened along with Paul. They think to themselves, "Man, why was I afraid of imprisonment? Why did I fear being locked up under armed guard? Look at Paul. His arrest and imprisonment was God's plan all along to get the gospel to armed guards!"
 - ▶ **No matter what the world intends for evil, God intends for good – to accomplish his good which really is our good even though it may not feel good at the time.**

- ❖ The Philippians could also recall the first time they ever met Paul. Back in Acts 16, we read of Paul's first visit to Philippi. And there it recounts the time a mob attacked Paul and Silas and dragged them before the city magistrates accusing them of disturbing the peace. They were taken into custody, beaten with rods, and thrown in prison to await trial next morning.
 - ▶ Listen to **Acts 16:25-33**, "²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³²And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.

- ❖ **That's another example from Paul's life demonstrating that opposition to the gospel is not a deterrence to the gospel but an opportunity to advance it.** We see this playing out in Adoniram Judson's life as well. His seventeen-month imprisonment was promoted by an attack against the capital city of Rangoon at the start of the First Anglo-Burmese War. All Westerners were viewed as spies, so Judson was rounded up with other missionaries.
 - ▶ His feet were bound, and his captives used a long bamboo pole to pick him up by his feet, so that each night he remained upside down where only his head and shoulders touched the ground. It was torture.
 - And yet listen to his encouragement to a fellow prisoner as he considered how all of this would lead to the gospel's advancement, "***It is possible my life will be spared; if so, with what ardor shall I pursue my work! If not – his will be done. The door will be open for others who would do the work better.***"⁴

⁴ Anderson, *To the Golden Shore*, pg. 334.

- ❖ That sounds just like Paul, who earlier in Philippians 1:20 said that he longs for Christ to be honored in his body “*whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*” If I live through this, then that means more fruitful ministry before me. But if I die through this, then that means I gain Christ, and the God’s mission among the Burmese will not be deterred. It will continue on without me.
- ❖ That’s the kind of attitude that sustains missionary efforts through the long haul. I know missions is exciting. The idea of going to exotic lands and sharing the gospel to curious natives who sit at your feet soaking up your stories about Jesus – sounds so inspiring, so worthwhile. Better than sitting behind a desk all day in a cubicle, right?
 - ▶ But let’s not be naive. **Let’s put aside all romanticized views of global missions.** The task of missions today – getting the gospel to the unreached peoples of the world – will require you going into hostile lands where no one is welcoming you with open arms. It’s more likely going to be the point of a sword or the barrel of a gun.
- ❖ **I’m aware that to call you to the mission field, to pray for God to send you out as a laborer into the harvest (Lk. 10:2), is to ask you to embark on a road of suffering.** I understand this is one of the very reasons we’re hesitant to go. It’s the biggest reason we don’t want our children to go. We’re concerned for their safety, their security, their very lives.
 - ▶ I totally get it. I have those same fears. But I’ve come to realize where those fears are coming from. It sounds harsh but they’re coming from false teaching and false ideas about salvation in Christ. It’s a false idea we’re all susceptible to here in the comfortable West. We may be sharp enough to reject an outright prosperity gospel. **But I think many of us have bought into a soft version of the prosperity gospel where we’re convinced that God doesn't want his people to suffer.** That God has a wonderful plan for our lives, and it doesn't include suffering.

Salvation Includes You in Suffering

- ❖ This is where Paul's words in v29 are the hardest for American Christians to swallow. Let me read it to you, “²⁹*For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,* ³⁰*engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*”
 - ▶ This leads the second truth we find in our passage. It goes like this **2) Salvation doesn’t exclude you from suffering. Salvation includes you in suffering for the sake of Christ.**
- ❖ Read what Paul says again. “It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.” That word *granted* is the word *charizomai*. In that word, you can hear the Greek word for grace, *charis*. **So Paul's not just talking about something granted to you but something graciously granted, freely given.**
 - ▶ Now he has two things in mind. He starts off by saying that your *faith in Christ* was graciously granted to you. That's a concept all Christians are familiar with. We're saved by grace. Not by our works, our efforts, our performance.

- ❖ **We're saved freely by grace alone through faith alone.** And even that faith we have in Christ Jesus is not something we were able to generate by our own autonomous will and self-determination. Even your faith – your ability and desire to believe in Jesus – is a gift. **Your belief in Christ was granted to you as a gift of grace.**
 - ▶ And the same goes for suffering. *Suffering for the sake of Christ* is a gift of grace. **The same grace that saves you is the same grace that grants you the privilege to suffer for the cause of Christ.**

- ❖ I know that runs so counter to what we naturally think. We instinctively treat suffering, affliction, and persecution as something gone wrong, as if God has abandoned us. **And we think becoming a Christian, getting saved, having God on our side means we're excluded from ever having to go through such things.**
 - ▶ *Didn't Christ die for us so that we don't have to? Didn't he suffer for us so that we can escape suffering?* Well yes, if we're talking about the suffering of an eternal hell for the punishment of our sins. By grace, we're excluded from that kind of suffering. Jesus died for us so that we don't have to die *for our sins*. That's the good news.
 - But that doesn't exclude us from possibly dying for the cause of getting that good news the lost from every nation, tribe, and tongue. That's Paul's point. **Having God on your side doesn't exclude you but rather includes you in suffering for the sake of Christ.** That's his gift to you. *"It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake."*

- ❖ This means opposition to the gospel is not just a consequence of missionary work that God can somehow turn into an opportunity for the gospel. It goes much further than that. **The point is that opposition for the sake of the gospel is part of God's design for missions.**
 - ▶ **Suffering is not just what you can expect out of missions. It's what it takes for missions to be carried out.** Missions is about making much of God among the nations. And suffering faithfully for the sake of God makes much of him. It's a powerful way to glorify him among the nations.

- ❖ Think about it: You can enter a village and tell everyone day by day how Jesus is great and greatly to be praised. How he is all-satisfying and all-sufficient and all-powerful. You can preach that message over and over again and perhaps win some to Christ.
 - ▶ But imagine if a tribal warlord came one day and threatened your life with the sword. He's going to behead you if you don't stop preaching Christ. Now imagine if all the villagers witnessed you – on your knees, sword at your neck – and they hear from your lips, *"For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain."*
 - Whether you're spared or your slaughtered, to those villagers your message of Christ being great and greatly to be praised is no longer a quaint saying. It's a blood-earnest reality. **They just witnessed someone let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also, because this man Jesus is apparently so great that even death is considered gain if it means gaining him.**

- ❖ If you're spared, imagine the fruitful labor awaiting you back in the village. By including you in suffering for the sake of Christ, you magnified Christ and now the field will be ripe for harvest. And even if you're killed, the fruitful labor will still be there for those who come after. Like our Lord said, "*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*" (Jn. 12:24) Either way gospel good is accomplished.
 - ▶ **Suffering is not just something you should expect if you plan to get involved in missions. Suffering is what it takes to do the work of missions.** It's part of God's good design to fulfill the Great Commission.

Your Response to Suffering is a Signal to the World

- ❖ And it really does come down to the world seeing how Christians respond to that suffering. If you cave in and renounce Christ the moment your comfort, your safety, or your life is threatened, then Christ must not be as great as you say he is. How you respond matters.
 - ▶ This leads to the third truth we can draw from our passage. **3) A faithful response to suffering for Christ will be a clear signal to the world that salvation is found in Christ alone.**
- ❖ I get this from vv27-28. Let me read that for you, "²⁷*Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,* ²⁸*and not frightened in anything by your opponents.*"
- ❖ Paul is cognizant of his own suffering for the gospel and the suffering he's certain the Philippians will share in, and so he charges them to live their lives in a certain manner.
 - ▶ Live in a manner *worthy* of the gospel of Christ. And Paul says, if you're living like that, if you're responding to suffering in a manner worthy of the gospel, then even if I don't get a chance to visit you, I'll hear about you. And I'll hear three things. **If we're living worthy of the gospel in the face of suffering for the gospel, our lives will be characterized by three things.**
- ❖ **First, we'll be standing firm together in unity against whatever opposition comes our way.** Paul says in v27, "*so that ... I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit*". It's likely that Paul's referring to the one Holy Spirit who indwells and unifies all believers. By the power of the Spirit, stand firm. Don't give an inch to those who oppose the gospel of Christ, even though you know that a little compromise or concession will certainly ease up the pressure you're facing. Stand firm.
 - ▶ **Second, we'll be striving together in unity to spread the faith of the gospel.** I think that's what Paul meant when he said, "*with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel*". The members of a church won't be contending against each other but contending for their common faith and mission. We'll be striving to see the Christian faith spread to every nation.

- ❖ **And third, we'll be fearless together in the face of any opposition to the gospel.** Look at v28, *“and not frightened in anything by your opponents.”* That word for *frightened* is commonly used in Greek literature to describe horses who are startled in battle. So those who are living lives worthy of the gospel are like battle-tested warhorses who are unflinching when it comes to advancing the gospel on the front lines.
- ❖ And v28 goes on to say, *“This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”* **In other words, all of your standing firm and striving together and fearlessness in the face of opposition is a clear sign, a clear signal, that Christ is Savior and Lord.**
 - ▶ For you as a Christian, any suffering that you endure for the cause of Christ is a strong means of assurance because you know you're sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that you might attain to the resurrection of the dead (cf. 3:10-11).
 - **And for your oppressor, your faithful endurance of suffering is a clear sign to them that they're on the wrong side of the Living God.** When they witness Christians endure suffering for the joy set before them, when they see believers facing down death as if it were gain, that's a clear signal that they're on a path of destruction. That they're in great need of salvation.
- ❖ This was certainly the case for Adoniram Judson. Eighteen long years of suffering had to pass before Judson saw the firstfruits of a spiritual harvest. In that span, he was imprisoned and tortured. He buried his first wife and infant daughter. He went through a three-year bout of depression. **But all of that suffering and affliction was all part of God's design to bring about a great outpouring of spiritual interest and hunger across the land.**
 - ▶ In the year 1831, Judson describes this outpouring of the Spirit, *“The spirit of inquiry . . . is spreading everywhere, through the whole length and breadth of the land. [We have distributed] nearly 10,000 tracts, giving to none but those who ask. I presume there have been 6000 [seekers] at the house. Some come two or three months' journey, from the borders of Siam and China – “Sir, we hear that there is an eternal hell. We are afraid of it. Do give us a writing that will tell us how to escape it.” Others, from the frontiers of Kathay . . . “Sir, we have seen a writing that tells about an eternal God. Are you the man that gives away such writings? If so, pray give us one, for we want to know the truth before we die.” Others, from the interior of the country, where the name of Jesus Christ is a little known – “Are you Jesus Christ's man? Give us a writing that tells us about Jesus Christ.”*⁵
- ❖ Was this just a coincidence? Was it just by chance that the Burmese became receptive to the gospel Judson was preaching? Or was it by God's sovereign design through the suffering of his servants for the cause of Christ? *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”*

⁵ Ibid., pgs. 398-399.

- ❖ **When we suffer for Jesus, when we're oppressed for the sake of the gospel, that never takes place in a vacuum. It takes place in the public eye.** And whether you're in an unreached land or in a classroom, whether you're on the field or on the job, the world will take notice of how you react and how you respond.
 - ▶ So let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel and may your life be a clear signal to those who don't know Jesus that he is Savior and he is Lord.

Conclusion

- ❖ As we're concluding Missions Month, I want to issue a call to every Christian here. All of us are called to active engagement in global missions. To be on mission with our global God. We all have a part to play and each part has its own cost.
 - ▶ You've might of heard about the six ways of involvement. Learn. Pray. Go. Send. Welcome. Mobilize. If you look in your bulletin you'll see a response card that mentions all six. Considering the various ways God has been teaching you and convicting you to respond, we hope you can complete that card and give to an usher on your way out.
- ❖ But as we close I want to highlight one of those ways: *the going*. Going with the gospel to the nations on either a short-term or long-term basis. **I emphasize the going because that's the one way of involvement that we usually think someone else is better qualified to do.** We're all for learning and praying. We have no issue sending and supporting. We're even open to welcoming and mobilizing. But going myself? I don't think I'm the right person.
 - ▶ Are you a Christian? Is Jesus your Savior, your Lord? Did he grant you the ability and the opportunity to believe in him and suffer for him? Did he fill you with his Spirit and promise to be with you always to the end of the age (Mt. 28:20)?
- ❖ Yes? Then you're the right person to go. You're qualified. That doesn't mean every Christian is called to uproot with their family and settle down in a foreign land to bring the gospel to unreached peoples.
 - ▶ But I'll dare to say that every Christian is called – at some point, with some regularity – to visit missionaries to strengthen their hands and to go on short-term trips that expose you to what our global God is doing among the nations. Out in the lobby there's a missions fair taking place where you can talk to representatives of missions agencies about all the various ways and various opportunities for you to go.