**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 9-3-2023
Suffer for the Savior**

On this Labor Day Weekend, America as a nation celebrates the gift of work and the gift of rest. Both are important. We should thank God for both.

As Christians, we are called to view both work and rest as sacred gifts of God. From a theological perspective, we remember that Jesus labored so that we can enter God’s rest through faith in Him.

And as we rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ, Scripture tells us that God has good works prepared for us.

Today we will begin this time by highlighting a man who labored for the Lord. And he also wrote the hymn that we just sang, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. So, pop quiz, without looking, how many of you know who wrote that hymn? It was Martin Luther, one of the great reformers in the history of the church.

Luther’s life was not easy. But because of their labors for the Lord and their willingness to suffer for doing what was right, we are better able today to rest in all that Jesus has done for us.

Friends, I recently began reading a book about Martin Luther. I would highly recommend this book, which was written by a man named Eric Metaxas. But it has been very fascinating learning more about Luther’s life.

And Church, we owe a big thank you to godly reformers like Martin Luther. Luther wanted to get the Bible into the hands of the people, rather than just the religious leaders in the church. And not only that, he wanted the Bible translated into the vernacular languages that people spoke and read.

Luther also sought to reform the Roman Catholic Church, which had sadly drifted rather far from what God intended for His Church. He famously posted what became known as his Ninety-Five Thesis on the doors of the Wittenburg Church in Germany. He did this on October 31, 1517, effectively launching the Protestant Reformation. This was basically 95 reasons why the Roman Catholic Church was so badly in need of reform.

With all the power of the Roman Catholic Church at the time, you can imagine how much courage it took for Luther to criticize it. For many, to critique or offer constructive criticism of the church was the same as criticizing God.

So as you may know, Luther’s constructive criticism was not well received by the Catholic Church. His life was now in danger. He was persecuted in a variety of ways. Eventually Luther, who was a monk within the Catholic Church, was put on the hot seat at a big church gathering known as *The Diet of Worms*. What a name, I know. Hopefully they were gummy worms.

But it was there, on April 18th, 1521, that Luther was told that he needed to repent or he would face severe consequences.

And Luther gives his speech and explains why the church is in need of reform. And he does this in German, which was his native language. But the Roman Catholic Church wanted everything done in Latin and so they demanded that he give his speech again in Latin. After Luther does this, they demanded that he give a simple answer to their question on whether or not he recants his claims. And this was his conclusion.

**Since your most serene majesty and your lordships require of me a simple, clear and direct answer, I will give one, and it is this: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures and by clear reason (for I do not trust in the pope or councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.**

Friends, we are to be very grateful for heroes of the faith, such as Luther, that courageously stood for God and His Word. It was not easy. Luther was excommunicated, which was basically kicked out of the Roman Catholic Church. And he was labeled as a heretic, a teacher of false doctrine.

Luther was not alone. Before Luther there were others that called for reform and who were persecuted even more than Luther was. But Luther and the others were willing to suffer as they faithfully followed their savior, Jesus Christ.

Brothers and Sisters, no matter the generation, our Lord always calls His people to faithfulness. And living a faithful life of obedience to the Lord will undoubtedly lead to some form of pushback or persecution. There will be suffering. Sometimes, the pushback even comes from those within the Church.

This was true in the Old Testament. It was often against the grain even in Israel, to follow the One true God, instead of following all the idols of the nations.

It was true on the life of Jesus. It was the religious leaders that were mostly rejecting Jesus and persecuting Him. And it was true in the days of the earth church as well. Christians often suffered for their allegiance to Jesus Christ.

And this leads us back to Paul’s letter to the Philippians. As we continue our journey through this powerful epistle of Paul, we are going to take a closer look at two sections found in chapter 1 of Philippians.

Let us first turn to Philippians 1:12-20.

**12Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.**

**15It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.**

**Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19for I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.**

Now we noted in an earlier week that Paul was actually writing this letter while he was under house arrest in Rome. It was for two years that Paul was chained to Romans guards while he awaited facing trail. Most likely, this trial never came and Paul was released, which was the standard Roman practice for the accuser who does not arrive within 2 years.

But incarceration does not slow down Paul. While his body was confined to a certain place, Paul continued to speak the Name of Jesus and share the good news of Jesus offered to anyone who will listen. Think about all the Roman guards that got to learn of Jesus. They were a captive audience. And of course, Paul is always writing letters to the churches, such as the letter to the Philippians.

Paul’s devotion to Jesus was stronger than the natural fear of being punished. In these verses Paul mentioned that the whole palace guard – all these Romans assigned to guard Paul – they all have heard the good news of Jesus.

Paul goes on to say that because of his chains, other Christians have become more confident to keep sharing the good news of Jesus. Fear would not hold them back from sharing Jesus.

He also mentions that there are people out there that are proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, but with impure motives. These people are doing it just to make a buck or to make a name for themselves.

But Paul makes it clear that even those that are proclaiming Christ for selfish reasons are still preaching the message that is worth living for and worth dying for. And the more people that hear it, the better.

And this then leads specifically to the Christians of Philippi. Please turn to Philippians 1:27-30, where we will find one of the main reasons for Paul’s letter. Paul writes:

**27Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel 28without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 29For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, 30since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.**

So what is going on here? Verse 27 is the key. Again, Paul states, **“whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”**

The word for conduct here refers to how they were to behave in the public square. Paul is telling these believers that how they behave in public in relation to their faith in Christ is very important.

Typically, the Romans didn’t care what people believed in the privacy of their own homes. What they did care about was allegiance to Rome and to the emperor. For the first couple hundred years in Christian history, there was a threat that loomed over Christians within the Roman Empire. And this threat involved Romans wanting sworn allegiance to the Empire.

This threat appears to be a real possibility for these Philippians. And so Paul says, **“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”**

In other words, be open about your faith in Christ in public, no matter the consequences.

Paul himself was persecuted 10 years earlier in Philippi, as we read about from the book of Acts. And now, it seems like the believers there were facing a similar struggle. We do not know if anyone had been imprisoned or not, but the threat of beatings and imprisonment would have been very clear.

One of the ways that the Romans would test people’s allegiance was for them to be asked to bend their knee to Caesar and to confess with their mouth that Caesar is Lord. This would have been something that Christians just could not do with a clear conscience. This is because Jesus is Lord, not Caesar.

This does not mean that the Christians were lawless or bad citizens, but that their ultimate allegiance was not to a Roman Emperor or the nation of Rome, but to God and Jesus Christ.

And Paul tells them that they must be willing to suffer for their savior. In verse 29, Paul writes, **“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.”**

Paul is telling them that suffering for Jesus is not something to be avoided, but rather to be received as par and parcel for living the Christian life.

Eventually, God will vindicate his faithful people, whether in this life or in the next.

It can be startling to consider Paul’s words **29For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.**

Friends, this does not mean that people should seek out suffering in some twisted way or that they should have a martyr complex.

But these words of Paul should remind Christians that faithfully following Jesus Christ will likely result in some form of suffering or persecution.

And the thing to remember above all today is that suffering for the savior is more than worth it. Suffering for Jesus is a sign to others that the good news of Jesus is so good that it is worth suffering for. It is a testimony to others that a life of surrender and submission to Jesus Christ is worth it. It will cause them to explore the claims of Christianity.

And it has been suffering for Christ that has led, perhaps more than anything, to the spread of the good news of Jesus around the world.

As we consider this passage and its main takeaway for us today, what is the main thing for us to remember?

And I believe that it is this. It is that no matter the cost, we must choose to follow Jesus the Christ. He is more than worth it.

In many places today, this truth is made very clear before someone comes to faith in Jesus. The cost is clear. They will be kicked out of their family. They will be disowned. They may be imprisoned. They know that they are putting their physical life on the line by saying yes to Jesus.

That is not often made clear in the American Church. Instead, Jesus is often presented as a self-help plan. Jesus will make your life easier. Saying you follow Jesus will open doors for advancement.

We must remember that suffering for Jesus is something that we must expect to experience as believers. Again, this does not mean that we should pursue suffering. That would be stupid.

But it does mean that we are to pursue Jesus and to follow Him as He leads us? Essentially, it means that we are to conduct ourselves in the public square as believers in Jesus Christ. We are to be open about our faith in the Lord.

Specifically, for us here at Chestnut Grove, a couple ways that we have suffered recently both relate to our choice to disaffiliate from the UMC and to join the GMC. One is the financial cost that came with this. We have our big thermometer in the back of the sanctuary to remind us of where things stand with this. There has been a considerable financial cost for choosing faithfulness to God and His Word.

The other cost or aspect of suffering for Christ is that some people will misunderstand us. They may see us as being against certain people and not being loving and welcoming. But this cannot be further from the truth.

We are not against anyone. Rather, we are for God and for God’s Word and we love and welcome everyone. We can welcome everyone without affirming everything.

But not everyone in the public square may understand or agree. In fact, even many Christians may accuse us of these things.

But we must follow God. As Martin Luther stated, **My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.**

We also open ourselves up to suffering of one degree or another when we are open about our faith. Inviting people to church for worship or events is politically incorrect today. But people need Jesus today as much as ever. Let’s keep shining the light of Christ around us.

Finally, the Lord calls us to be salt and light in this world for Him. That may look different for every one of us. But God calls us to behave and to act Christianly in everything that we do. This will leave no part of our lives untouched by God.

As we invite God to minister through us in every part of our lives, we will undoubtedly experience suffering for the Savior in some way. In everything that we do, let us as God’s people today conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Let us pray…

Resources: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

<https://davidbahn-reflections.com/2017/10/31/martin-luthers-here-i-stand-speech/>

Martin Luther by Eric Metaxas