

Text: Heb. 13:23

Title: "The brotherhood of suffering"

Time: 10/16/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro – You have heard me mention that I believe that Luke wrote Hebrews from Rome shortly after the death of the apostle Paul. Our text this morning is one reason why I am led to that conclusion. You may remember that 2 Timothy was written by Paul to Timothy just before his execution at the hands of Nero. He had asked Timothy to come, to bring a coat, and to bring the parchments, the copies of the Word of God that they possessed. Luke was the only one still with Paul at that time.

Here we read that Timothy was released from prison. I believe that Timothy had complied with Paul's request, and as a result was himself imprisoned in Rome. Unlike his mentor in ministry, this servant of the Lord is released by the tyrant dictator, and so Luke, undoubtedly with some grateful relief, writes that Timothy has been released and that they had plans together to come visit these Hebrew Christian believers.

Understandably, much of that last letter Paul wrote to Timothy encourages him to be faithful in the face of persecution:

1:7, God has not give us the spirit of fear;

1:8, be not ashamed, but partake the affliction;

2:1, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;

2:3, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ;

2:9, Paul suffered for the gospel as an evil doer, but the gospel was not bound;

2:12, if we suffer, we shall reign with Him;

2:19, the Lord knoweth them that are His;
3:1, in the last days perilous times will come;
3:11, what persecutions I endured, but out of them all the Lord delivered me;
3:12, all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;
4:2, be instant out of season;
4:3, the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine;
4:7, I have fought a good fight;
4:10, Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world;
4:14, Alexander did me much evil;
4:16, all men forsook me;
4:17, but the Lord stood with me, and delivered me out of the mouth of the lion;
4:18, the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work.

This emphasis on the persecution of God's people can also be found in the letter to the Hebrews. The epistle finishes with this note that our brother Timothy has been released from prison. That simple fact was a powerful illustration of much of what our author sought to convey throughout this earnest and authoritative word of exhortation (v. 22). Our message title is "the brotherhood of suffering," and I want us to review five passages that describe the relationship of Christ to those who suffer.

I. Jesus is the elder brother in the brotherhood of suffering (Heb. 2:7-18).

III: I am the oldest brother among my siblings. Youngest siblings, like my wife, often claim that they have the most difficult position in the family. Middle children like to tell us how difficult it is to be stuck in the middle. And I can

remember as the oldest in our family thinking about how difficult it was to be the oldest. It seemed like when anything went wrong, the buck always stopped with me.

Appl: Well, the brotherhood of suffering has an elder brother who suffered for us more than any of us could ever bear for Him. As our elder brother, He is the captain of our salvation and the destroyer of our enemy (vv. 10, 14-15). This work required that, by the grace of God, he would taste death for every man (v. 9), even the death of the cross. He is not ashamed to call us brothers in the assembly of God's people (vv. 11-13). And as our elder brother He is like us, so that He can be a merciful and faithful high priest who meets our needs when we suffer as He did (vv. 16-18).

Are we willing to be His younger brother? He has made it so that we no longer have to fear death, but does that make us love Him? Or does it make us secure in our disrespect of Him? He is not ashamed to be called our brother, but have we been ashamed to let someone know that He is our brother? He became like us to help us when we suffer, but have we known that comfort by trusting Him and going to Him in prayer? Jesus is the elder brother in the brotherhood of suffering. Is He your elder brother?

II. Jesus is the helping high priest for the brotherhood of suffering (Heb. 4:14-5:10).

III: I came to a better appreciation for this truth while visiting with a mother who has said goodbye to a beloved daughter that had fallen victim to cancer. She could not understand how the God of heaven could take her daughter from her like that, nor could I. But then the Lord brought to my mind the truth that this God of heaven was One who suffered in the same way.

Appl: God the Father appointed His Son Jesus Christ as the helping priest for the brotherhood of suffering (5:5-6). In Gethsemane Jesus and God the Father experienced what family members experience at the loss of a loved one, and so much unimaginably more (v. 7). Have you ever cried with really strong crying? Jesus sweat drops of blood. And what this means for us is that He is touched with the feeling of our infirmity (4:15). It means that in the face of our suffering and infirmity, we can respond with grace to help in time of need, rather than with the sinful counsel of Job's wife, to curse God and die. We may face times of strong crying and tears, but Jesus's grace to help is more powerful than that hurt, because His crying and tears were stronger, and they were shed along with His own blood, for us.

Do we believe that this grace to help in time of need is available to us? Do we respond to times of suffering by finding that grace before the throne of grace in prayer? Or are we guilty of failing to remember the Savior's strong crying and tears? Do we add to His sorrows by responding only in the flesh like Job's wife?

III. Jesus is the rewarded forerunner for the brotherhood of suffering (Heb. 6:9-20).

Ill: Investment advice is abundant in today's media. I probably hear a score of commercials each month urging me to invest in gold. What makes me suspicious of those sales pitches is that those encouraging me to buy gold are the ones selling it to me. If I need to buy it, why are they selling it? If actions speak louder than words, and they do, it seems that those commercials actually mean that I should be selling gold.

Appl: The passage before us tells us that God has asked us to make an investment with our lives. That investment re-

quires work, a labor of love, and ministry to the saints (v. 10). It means that we must be diligent and not lazy (vv. 11-12). The investment opportunity God is selling has a return on it that is guaranteed by His own oath and His own good name, the unchangeable One who cannot lie (vv. 13-18). The return is that we shall be heirs of the promise of eternal reward from the God who does not forget our labors (v. 17). But perhaps best of all, the One selling us this investment plan has bought the investment Himself (v. 20). Jesus made the investment of obedience to God's will, and He has begun to enjoy the return on that investment within the veil as our exalted High Priest. In this sense He is the rewarded forerunner for the brotherhood of suffering.

So are you buying what the Lord is selling? Is the promise of that reward someday the anchor for your soul and the reason for your faithful work, labor of love, and ministry to the saints? Or are you living for yourself, investing your time and energy and work in what you can obtain for yourself in this life? There is no guarantee for return on that kind of investment; nor an anchor for the soul. Satan made that investment long ago, and his doom is sure. We need to let Jesus, not Satan, be our forerunner. We need to follow Him in the way we invest our lives.

IV. Jesus is the victorious confidence of the brotherhood of suffering (Heb. 10:12-25, 32-39).

Ill: Real confidence is a powerful force. Overconfidence and misplaced confidence can be dangerous, but real valid confidence strengthens one for the task at hand. When the Ohio State Buckeyes play football against their Northern Ohio neighbors, the Kent State Golden Flashes, they do so with appropriate confidence, and the results demonstrate that this confidence is well-placed. The last time the teams met, the Buckeyes won 66-0. Ohio State's all-time winning per-

centage of 73% is the 4th highest in the nation; Kent State's percentage of 39% is 124th. This confidence alone gives the Buckeyes a great advantage long before the first kickoff.

Appl: In the spiritual warfare between good and evil, right and wrong, heaven and hell, it often seems as though the sides are far more evenly matched, or perhaps as though our side has more in common with the Golden Flashes than the Buckeyes. This passage reminds us that when we begin to think like that, we have forgotten Who is on our side, the Lord Jesus. His enemies shall be made His footstool - it is just a matter of time (v. 13). Through Jesus we have confidence that our sins are forgiven (vv. 12-18), confidence to enter the holy of holies (vv. 19-21), confidence that heaven will make the suffering of this worldly existence worthwhile (vv. 32-35), and confidence that the Lord will not tarry but soon come (vv. 36-37). Our enemy simply does not stand a chance.

Do we live with that confidence in Christ that our enemy is a defeated foe? Does that confidence cause us to draw near, or are we far away from the Lord (v. 22)? Does it cause us to hold fast our profession, or do we deny that we know Him like Peter did when he lost confidence (v. 23)? Does it make us unselfishly concerned for one another and faithful to assembly times, or do we cower back looking out only for ourselves (vv. 24-25)? It would be tragic if OSU lost to Kent State because they lacked confidence and simply forfeited the game. How much more tragic it is when we concede victories to the enemy of our soul when Jesus is on our side.

V. Jesus is the inspiring example of the brotherhood of suffering (Heb. 11:24-27, 11:35-12:3).

III: On Wednesday evenings we have read the testimonies of persecuted believers all over the world, and we have found their stories inspiring and instructive.

Appl: Hebrews is filled with the inspiring examples of the faithful. But the book is careful to call the suffering of people like Moses the reproach of Christ. We must face suffering by looking to Him, and when we do we find something we should never suffer without. We find that He suffered with the anticipation of joy (12:2). God had a purpose for His suffering that ends in joy. He has promised that our suffering will end that way as well. Let's look to Him as we suffer, that we might suffer patiently, and that we might do so for the joy that is set before us.

Conclusion: We are a brotherhood, and suffering is a part of our calling. But we are not called to suffer alone. We suffer as those for whom Christ suffered, as those helped by His priestly ministry, as those awaiting an award He has guaranteed, as those confident in His victory, and as those inspired by His example. May we determine in our suffering to suffer for Him.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching