

Those Who Have Overcome

Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

"Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The Persecuted Church

Iran: Church Raided by Police

On May 21 five newly converted Christians were arrested in Karaj, Iran after plain clothes security officers raided a house church where they had gathered for a Bible study, according to Farsi Christian Network News (FCNN). FCNN reported that the leader of the house church, Javad Abtahi, was among those arrested and his house was searched during the raid. ... [He] was given no arrest warrant by the security officers and his house was searched without any court authorization," FCNN said. "In this search and seizure, several Bibles, New Testaments were confiscated and all the participants were handcuffed and taken to an unknown location." The families of the arrested believers have tried to ask the government where their loved ones are being held, without any success. FCNN added that the government has always refused to disclose where it holds arrested believers. This incident is the latest arrest of believers in Iran in recent months. On March 5, Marzieh Amirizadeh Esmaeilabad and Maryam Rustampoor were arrested by Iranian security forces and labeled "anti-government activists." Thirty year-old Marzieh and 27-year-old Maryam are being held at Evin Prison, which is notorious for treating women badly. Recently FCNN reported that both are ill, but their faith in Christ has not wavered. One of them recently said, "I've taken up my cross, I now have to bear it."

Indonesia: Muslims Evict Believers

Two families were driven from their villages in West Java, Indonesia, in March after they converted to Christianity from Islam, according to The Voice of the Martyrs contacts. When one family returned home from a mass baptism, their landlord asked them to vacate his property they were renting. He was angry because they were now Christians. "The Muslim leaders [in the village] supported the land owners to drive out the family," VOM contacts reported. "The husband and father [was] also fired from his job because they had converted to Christianity." Meanwhile, on March 19, another family in a different village in West Java was also evicted from their home after being baptized. "They were summoned by a Muslim leader [in the village] and told they should leave the village because Christians make the village unclean," VOM contacts added. The Voice of the Martyrs is helping these families relocate to safer areas in Indonesia. VOM actively supports persecuted believers in Indonesia by providing resources for training pastors and evangelists so they can lead Muslims to Christ. VOM encourages you to pray for these families and many believers in Indonesia who face persecution because of their faith.

Pakistan: Six Churches Attacked

On Feb. 22, the Taliban attacked six churches, burned several Christian homes and four Bibles and injured children in Karachi, Pakistan, according to The Voice of the Martyrs contacts. Eyewitnesses reported the Taliban shouting, "Accept Islam, Accept Islam, LA ILAHA ILL ALLAH MUHAMMADUR RASOOL ALLAH," meaning there is no god, only Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. The churches that were attacked are, Christ United Church, Philadelphia Pentecostal Church, ARP Church, Salvation Army Church and two public churches. The Voice of the Martyrs supports persecuted believers in Pakistan. Pray for the believers who were injured in this attack and those who lost their homes. Ask God to encourage and protect believers in Pakistan who continue to stand for Him despite persecution.

We Are Called to Suffer

Matthew 10:34-39

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

John 15:18-21

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

(See also John 16:33; 1 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 3:12; Acts 9:16; Acts 14:21-22; Mark 10:30; Luke 22:28, 29; Rom. 8:17; Phil. 1:20; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 5:10; Rev. 1:9)

What do you think when you hear Jesus speak this way?

Suffering conforms us into to the image of Christ and brings us to a greater trust in God

Romans 5:3-5

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Hebrews 12:7-11

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

(See also 1 Pet 1:6-8, 2 Cor 12:7-10; 1 Pet 4:1-2; James 1:2-3)

Can you relate to this sentiment? Have you experienced the sanctifying power of God’s grace during times of trial?

Suffering for the sake of the body

Colossians 1:24-26

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

(See also Philippians 1:12-14)

But the most amazing thing about Colossians 1:24 is how Paul completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. He says that it is his own sufferings that complete Christ's afflictions. "I rejoice in my sufferings for you and I complete in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ." This means, then, that Paul exhibits the sufferings of Christ by suffering himself for those he is trying to win. In his sufferings they see Christ's sufferings. Here is the astounding upshot: God intends for the afflictions of Christ to be presented to the world through the afflictions of his people. God really means for the body of Christ, the church, to experience some of the suffering he experienced so that when we proclaim the cross as the way to life, people will see the marks of the cross in us and feel the love of the cross from us. Our calling is to make the afflictions of Christ real for people by the afflictions we experience in bringing them the message of salvation. Since Christ is no longer on the earth, he wants his body, the church, to reveal his suffering in its suffering. Since we are his body, our sufferings are his sufferings. Romanian pastor Joseph Tson put it like this: "I am an extension of Jesus Christ. When I was beaten in Romania, He suffered in my body. It is not my suffering: I only had the honor to share His sufferings." Therefore our sufferings testify to the kind of love Christ has for the world. – John Piper, *Desiring God*, Ch 10

What lies at the heart of a faith that can suffer the loss of every earthly thing and do it joyfully?

"We are not a new philosophy but a divine revelation. That's why you can't just exterminate us; the more you kill the more we are. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. You praise those who endured pain and death - so long as they aren't Christians! Your cruelties merely prove our innocence of the crimes you charge against us. When you chose recently to hand a Christian girl over to a brothel-keeper rather than to the lions, you showed you knew we counted chastity dearer than life. And you frustrate your purpose. Because those who see us die, wonder why we do, for we die like the men you revere, not like slaves or criminals. And when they find out, they join us." – Tertullian, *Apology*

The Futility of Creation – A cosmic call to repentance

Romans 8:18-23

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Luke 13:1-5

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

What role do Christians play in helping the world to cope with pain and suffering? How can we help them to interpret it?

“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay” – Entrusting ourselves to God when mistreated

Hebrews 10:32-36

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

Romans 12:19-21

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1 Peter 4:17

Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

(See also Luke 6:27-31)

Have you ever been treated unjustly? What is our instinctive reaction? What should be our reaction?