

THE WAY *of* THE CROSS

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PREFACE

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, You will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze" Isaiah 43:2; NIV

Honestly, I wish the verse began with "If" and not "when". It could be a conditional thing; implying in the event that you pass through...., then I would be with you. However God knows that Christianity is not an easy thing, it is not meant to be a soft, smooth life [bread & butter]. He knows we are to face hardships, hardships are inevitable; you cannot avoid them. Paul point frankly told Timothy that *"Infact everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted..."*[2 Tim 3:12] and to the believers in Philippi he pointed out that they had been called not only to believe but also to suffer for Christ [1:29]. It is important to know then that furnaces and storms are an integral part of our faith. They are the two sides of the same coin. You cannot separate suffering from Christianity. That is the way God has purposed it. Suffering purifies us and brings the best out of us!

Christianity was born on a Cross. It was there that the Messiah paid the price for our sins as He hung between heaven and earth. He stood on our behalf before God as all our sins were heaped on Him. It was there where He cried *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? "* [Matt 27:42]. The cross is a place where people die. It is a place of suffering, rejection and shame. Death on the cross was deserved for the lowest of the low in society. It was the most humiliating death of all the deaths. If a man ended up on a cross, he was an undoubted failure. And yet that was the death Jesus Christ chose to die; as a failure in the eyes of the world yet His death has influenced billions of souls since then. No other death has received attention as His death. The cross has dominated the affairs of man since then and Jesus has more followers now than when He walked on earth. The cross is very central to Christianity. It is where

the Christian faith begins. The cross is not an elementary stage which we later grow out of. We never graduate from the school of Calvary. You do not understand Christ until you understand His cross. You cannot walk the Christian way unless you follow the way of the cross.

The purpose of this study series is to prepare us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ; encourage those who are going through hard times in their spiritual walk and equip us to face persecution should our Christian walk lead us through Calvary. In the world where focus is taken away from the cross to prosperity, God wants His faithful ones to cling to the old rugged cross so that they may exchange it for a crown someday. He assures us of His presence as we face the storms and the furnace. Have a fruitful study!

Patrick Kaudzu

February 2004.

{I am willing to take up the Cross and go forward, To follow the apostle down the road of sacrifice that tens of thousands of precious souls can be saved, I am willing to leave all and be a martyr for the Lord}
[A Chinese Christian song in "Lilies Amongst Thorns"]

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PART A:

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

*"And being found in appearance as a man,
He humbled himself and became obedient to death
even death on a Cross" Phil. 2: 8*

Study 1

**"UNLESS A KERNEL OF WHEAT FALLS TO THE GROUND
AND DIES..."**

Introduction

There is an avocado pear tree at our home that I planted when I was a young boy of about ten years old. The fruit had been eaten by someone else but he reserved the seed for us. He pierced it with two sharp sticks and suspended it in a glass of water. After a few weeks it started germinating. I took great care of it until it was ready for planting. I dug a hole, put manure in it and buried the seed and developing roots in it and left the shoot to continue growing. Today, after two decades, this tree has given birth to so many avocado pears -bearing fruit twice a year. What started like a

single seed has borne hundreds of other seeds and fed so many stomachs. The death of the initial seed has resulted in the birth of many fruits of its kind over the years.

Jesus Christ laid down His life on the altar so that many lives could be borne out of it. Today souls are being borne in the Kingdom of God because of His life, which He gave up on the cross. Without this painful experience, all of us could be groping in this world without God and without hope [Eph. 2:12]. As Jesus approached His death, he could see Himself drawing many souls to Himself through the Cross. He was having a vision for the lost world. [Envisioning]. He thus boldly talked about His humiliating death, He looked forward to it and rebuked those who wanted to persuade Him to change His mind [Matt 16:21-23]. His death was the only remedy for sin. He died so that we may live! Hallelujah!

Study Questions

A LIFE OUT OF DEATH: [John 12:20-36]

1. What prediction is Jesus making about Himself in this passage? Does such a prediction make His disciples happy? [Compare with Matt 16:21-22]
2. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be Glorified " vs. 23.
 - a) What do you think made Jesus to look at His approaching death as a source of glory and not a tragedy?
 - b) If Jesus focused on the pain of the cross rather than the glory it was to achieve, could He still have willingly talked about it?
3. What practical things did Jesus use to explain the importance of His death on the Cross? Did this help His listeners to understand what He was saying?

4. "But I, when I am lifted from the earth, will draw all men to myself" verse 32.
 - a) How would the death of Jesus draw all men to Himself, when many had rejected Him in His earthly life?
 - b) How would Christ's view of His suffering help or encourage us in our struggles as Christians?

B "...MAY THIS CUP BE TAKEN FROM ME" Mat 26:36-46

4. Did Jesus make light of the suffering he was going to undergo on the Cross?
5. "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." vs. 42.
 - a) What quality in Christ's life does his willingness to fulfill the will of the Father portrays to us? Compare with Phil 2:8?
 - b) What may have happened to the human race, if Christ's and not the Father's will was done?
6. What role were Peter and the Zebedee brothers expected to play in this moment when their Master was overwhelmed with sorrow? See vv38 &40.
7. In what ways would the boldness of Jesus in facing pain and His obedience to the will of the Father be a source of strength when we pass through storms?

Memory Verse

*"...I tell you the truth;
unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies,
it remains only a single seed.
But if it dies, it produces many seeds"
John 12:24*

The disciples doubted the genuineness of the Lord [Lk. 24:36-49]. They were not very sure if He really was the promised one [Luke 24:1-20]. Men continued to doubt even after His resurrection; Why should someone who has all power in heaven and on earth chose to suffer? Why not save Himself? Twenty-one centuries later, people still wonder why Jesus, If He really is the Son of God, could not walk down the Cross and prove [to His persecutors] that He was in control? Why should God allow His Beloved Son in whom He was pleased suffer like that? Yet it was by being lifted up on the Cross that He was going to draw all men to Himself [John 12:32]. It was by dying that He could give life to us all. It was by dying that He was to conquer death. He with stood the humiliation of the cross to turn the curse upon mankind into a blessing. He suffered that we may have life in its abundance. He identified with us in death so that we may enjoy eternity with Him. Oh, what a blessed hope we have in Him! Hallelujah, What a Saviour!!!

Study 2

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR!

Introduction

Many of us wonder why Jesus Christ chose to suffer on the Cross. If indeed He is God and Saviour of the World, why did He choose to suffer in the hands of the people He came to save? How could He accept such humiliation from His own creatures? If death was inevitable, could He not have chosen a noble death, a hounourable way of departing from this world? Born in a manger, a least likely birthplace even among the poor, could He not have chosen something less despised than the Cross? How can such a man be the Saviour of the world? Who could, in his right mind, want to be associated with such a "*failure*" of a leader?

Study Questions

A. BEHOLD YOUR SAVIOUR ON THE CROSS-!

Matt 27:27-44

1. Describe the events that took place from the moment Pilate handed Jesus over to His accusers to the time of His death.
2. "...and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head.." vs. 29a
 - a) What do you think was the significance of the crown of thorns the soldiers put on Jesus' head?
 - b) Is it possible for us to wear the crown of glory if we are unwilling to wear the crown of thorns?
3. The heavy weight of the wooden beam of the cross tied to

Christ's shoulders, coupled with sheer physical exhaustion caused Jesus to fall.

- a) What truth about the cross does this fact reveal to those who are determined to follow the footsteps of Christ?
 - b) Instead of Simeon of Cyrene, could it not have been sensible if it were one of the disciples who helped Jesus to carry the Cross? Where was Peter? Matt 16:33
4. The pain of the flogging [vs. 26], the heavy weight of the Cross and the continued verbal insults of the people were definitely too much on Christ!
- a) What did Jesus do in response to all this injustice done to Him? [Refer to Isaiah 53:7]
 - b) What could have happened to the human race if Jesus had decided to come down from the Cross as His mockers suggested [vs. 40, 42]?
5. In what way would the willingness of One who was innocent to suffer on behalf of those who were guilty encourage you in the event of suffering?

B SURELY HE WAS THE SON OF GOD
Matt 27:45-56.

6. a) What events took place between the sixth and ninth hours as the Saviour of the world hung on the Cross?
 - b) Is there any significance for these events?
7. What do you think was the reason why, having been silent for sometime, Jesus suddenly cried out to the Father?
8. "When the Centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that happened, they were terrified and

exclaimed "surely He was the Son of God" vs. 54.

- a) What, in your opinion, do you think appealed to these hard-core soldiers to make such a confession after all they had done to Him? Was this the beginning of repentance?
 - b) Has the death of Jesus Christ made any impact in your life?
9. Since Christ suffered so much for you, would you be willing to suffer for Him in return?

Memory Verse

*"But he was pierced for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him"
Isaiah 53:5*

*Thomas died in India as five horses pulled apart his body,
John the Baptist was beheaded by King Herod
Little James was cut up by a sharp saw
James the brother of the Lord was stoned to death,
Judas was bound to a pillar and died by arrows,
Mathias had his head cut off in Jerusalem
Paul was a martyr under Emperor Nero
Peter, Philip and Simon were crucified on a cross*

I am willing to take up the Cross and go forward To follow the apostles down the road of sacrifice that tens of thousands of precious souls can be saved, I am willing to leave all and be a martyr for the Lord. [Lilies Amongst Thorns; Danyun; Chapter 2 emphasis mine]

The Master made it clear that if anyone would like to follow Him, he must deny himself. He has never changed this condition.

Study 3

FOLLOWING THE MASTER'S FOOTSTEPS!

Introduction

The Chinese Christians have a song "*To be a martyr for the Lord*". It talks about how some of the early church leaders [apostles] died; viz.

*John was exiled to the lonely isle of Patmos
Stephen was crushed to death with stones by the crowd.
Matthew was cut to death in Persia by the people
Mark died as his two legs were pulled apart by horses,
Doctor Luke was cruelly hanged
Bartholomew was skinned alive by the heathen*

Study Questions

A. FOLLOW ME TO CALVARY:

Matt 16:21-28

1. What things did Jesus begin to explain to His disciples as His heart was set for Jerusalem? Did it go well with his disciples?
2. "Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke Him..." verse 22
 - a) What do you think prompted Peter to rebuke his Master in this way?
 - b) Is it common for a student to rebuke his Master? Where do you think Peter got the courage from?
3. What conditions does Jesus lay out for those who want to be His followers? Have you personally fulfilled them?

4. "Get behind me Satan... You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" vs. 23
 - a) To whom did Jesus direct this rebuke? Peter or the devil?
 - b) In what ways would Satan be a stumbling block to God's purposes in our lives?

B IN THIS WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLE
John 16:1-4, 17-33

5. What do you think was the reason why Jesus told the disciples the troubles they were going to experience for Him? Was He trying to scare them?
6. What lesson about pain and joy is Jesus teaching us using the analogy of a woman in labour? Is it possible to avoid spiritual labour pains and still expect to rejoice in the new life with the Lord?
7. "...In fact a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God vs2b
 - a) Have you ever experienced any persecution in your walk with Christ that was a fulfillment of this verse? How did you respond to it?
 - b) If those who were leading you to Christ were so frank as Jesus was in telling you about the possible persecutions you would face, would you feel encouraged or discouraged to follow Christ?
8. Contrary to the picture of Christianity that modern preachers paint [health and wealth; sweatless victory etc.] the Bible emphasises that Christianity and suffering [sacrifices] are inseparable. How does Jesus encourage His disciples in this text as He warns them of what lies ahead of them? Refer also

to Isaiah 43:1-5. Does this encourage you in any way?

Memory Verse

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.

In this world you will have trouble.

But take heart! I have overcome the world!"

John 16:33

PART B.

LESSONS FROM THE OLD: SUFFERING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

*"And after my skin has been destroyed yet in my flesh
I will see God" Job 19:26*

Study 4

JOSEPH: SENT AHEAD FOR A RESCUE MISSION

Introduction

"For some people it doesn't rain, it pours " is a common saying among those who experience one problem after the other. Don Williams has even sung in one of his songs; "It only rains on me" No one likes to suffer. We all want to be free from any form of pain or discomfort. Even those who hurt others do not want to suffer themselves. It pains therefore that while having a vision, one suffers terribly for it.

Despite the fact that Joseph had wonderful dreams, he suffered terribly. He paid dearly for his dreams. The jealousy of his brothers and the lust of Mrs. Potiphar led him from the cistern to the confinement of the prison walls. He suffered for being a dreamer. He may have wondered what on earth was happening to him. He might have cried, questioned the Lord and despaired for life.

Things might not have made sense to him at all. Sold by his own brothers, falsely accused by his master's wife and forgotten by the very colleague he helped interpret his dream, it was indeed pouring on Joseph. Yet through them, God was working an eternal glory that far outweighed them all! He was paving way for him to the top where not only his brothers, but the whole Egypt would bow before him. Joseph realised that God was at work in him when he was promoted. Had he succumbed to the seductions of Mrs. Potiphar, he could have shattered his dreams. There are some things we may not understand when they happen. We should not lose heart, we will surely understand them when their time is due. Joseph did and assured his brothers; "*... do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you*" Genesis 45:5

Study Questions

A. AWAY WITH THE DREAMER!

Gen. 37:1-24

1. What made Joseph unique among the children of Jacob? What do you think was the source of his dreams?
2.
 - a. How did his parents and brothers respond to the dreams of Joseph?
 - b. Did Joseph make a mistake by sharing his dreams with

them?

3. "Here comes the dreamer! Come now, let's kill him and throw him in one of the cistern then we'll see what comes of his dreams" verses 19, 20
 - a) What could be the source of this kind of hostility towards Joseph from his elder brothers?
 - b) Have you ever suffered persecution because of your vision? How did you handle it?

B. THE TIME IN BETWEEN: REFINING PERIOD!

Gen. 37:25-38; 39:8-23

4. Summarise the events that took place between the time Joseph was thrown in the cistern to the time his dreams became a reality [Summary].
5.
 - a) Did the brothers realise that by selling Joseph they were setting in motion events that would lead him to fulfill his dreams?
 - b) Did Joseph, as the vision bearer, sense in any way that these hardships were stepping-stones to the attainment of his vision? Could such knowledge make a difference?
6.
 - a) What sustained Joseph during his time of uncertainty and suffering? Refer to verses 20-23?
 - b) Would the realisations that God is on your side make a difference when you are suffering despite being innocent?

C THOUGH THE VISION MAY TARRY

Gen. 41:37-57

7. What event led to the promotion of Joseph from being an abandoned prisoner to second in command to King Pharaoh? Was this kind of promotion common among slaves?
8. a) How long did it take for Joseph to realise his divinely inspired dreams? [Compare with Gen. 41:46]

b) What lesson about patience and perseverance does the life of Joseph teach us?
9. Because the mission that was ahead of Joseph was very crucial for the survival of multitudes of souls, the preparation period was tough and long. Discuss some of the qualities in Joseph you feel may enable you survive prolonged periods of hardships and uncertainties should the Lord so wish that you go that path.

Memory verse

"So then it was not you who sent me here, but God.

*He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household
and ruler of all Egypt"*

[Gen. 45:8, Underlining mine]

Study 5

**JOB: WHEN HE HATH TRIED ME I SHALL COME FORTH
AS GOLD**

Introduction

One day a few years ago a brother in the Lord seriously told me over the phone that I needed to assess myself and identify what sin I had committed because he believed the fever I was having was caused by sin and not plasmodium. Apparently he believed that all sickness is caused by sin. I disagreed. There are still a lot of people who believe that every sickness is caused by sin in your life. A lot more believe that any form of suffering is caused by sin. They teach that suffering for a Christian is a curse and needs deliverance. They overstretch the truth. In the Old Testament, times

too, suffering was connected to evil. But not all suffering is of evil origin.

Job went through terrible moments of suffering. His wife and close friends were convinced that this was a punishment from God. They tried to convince Job to accept the fact that God was punishing him for his sin. Though Job acknowledged the fact that it was indeed God who was responsible for his suffering, he denied the fact that it was due to sin: "*Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble*" Chapter 2:10. Yet many of us today really expect only good things from the Lord. We rejoice and boast that the Lord is blessing us. We are experiencing breakthroughs! But when suffering comes, we are quick to ask "Why me Lord? But why not you by the way? Must God not refine us? Does He need our consent to prune us and to purify us? Has He not said that when we pass through the fires and waters, he will be with us? Brother Job knew that the Lord has a hand in His suffering but declared;" *Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him, I will surely defend my ways to his face*" Chapter 12:15. This man was made of tough stuff?

Study Questions

A TESTED AND TRIED: WE OFTEN DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY *Job 1:1-22; 2:1-8*

1. Describe in your own words who Job was according to this passage. Do we have many likes of Job in our time?
2. "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him."
 - a) What excuse does Satan give to God for the uprightness of Job?
 - b) Did the removal of the things, which gave Job comfort make

him to change his spiritual stand as the devil had prophesied? What does the devil expect of us when he attacks?

3. "...The Lord said to Satan, very well, then, everything he has is in your hands..." [v1:12; 2:6]
 - a) What do you think was the reason why God deliberately let Satan to afflict a righteous man like Job? Was it a spiritual betting game?
 - b) "Skin for skin." A man will give all he has for his own life" (2:4) What do you think was the implication of this statement?
 - c) If brother Job did not have the potential to withstand the affliction would God have exposed him to the enemy that way? Any lesson for us? [Compare with I Cor 10:13]

B TORTURED AND TORMENTED: BEWARE OF UNGODLY COUNSEL! *Job 2:9-13, 4:1-21*

4. Apart from the loss of children and property [wealth] in what other ways did Job suffer?
5. "... Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" verse 9
 - a) What did those closest to him advise Job to do in the midst of his afflictions? Does such kind of counsel exist today?
 - b) What impact could Job's succumbing to the pressure from friends [wife] make to his integrity and in the spiritual world?
6. What lesson about choice of counselors during times of afflictions does the case of Job teach us today?

C PURIFIED AND PROMOTED: BEAUTY IN SUFFERING:
Job 23:10-17; 42:7-17

7. What sustained brother Job in his walk with the Lord even when the devil had afflicted him to the skin and those around him were advising him wrongly? On what did Job focus - God or pain?
8. In what ways did God bless brother Job once the suffering was over and he had overcome the testing? Compare with Chapter 1:2-3
9. Would the knowledge that God sometimes deliberately allows the devil to challenge our faith through suffering and loss prepare you to withstand any hardships that come in your life?

Memory verse

*"In all this Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.
In all this, Job did not sin in what he said"
Job 1:22; 2:10b*

Study 6

JEREMIAH: FROM A PRISON CELL TO A CISTERN!

Introduction

There is a false belief in many believers today that Christianity and suffering do not belong together. Even after spending many years in Bible Teaching institutions, some still come out without the clear understanding that service and suffering are two sides of the same coin. While the prophets of old and early Christians and church fathers were ready to meet the cost of involvement. Many today don't want anything to do with discomfort. While we sing that "*ndifuna kufanana ndi Yesu M'moyo wanga*" {I want to be like Jesus in my life} for many, it has been a lip service and

never from the heart, we want to identify with Him in glory and never in pain!

When Jeremiah responded to the call, "*here I am send me!*" He meant being sent to a hostile nation bent on doing evil. He knew he would be subjected to pain of various sorts. His ministry saw him through beatings, imprisonments and abandonments. It took him to palaces and streets. He was flogged and falsely accused by his own people as a traitor.

Forty years of preaching bore little fruit. Despite warnings of impending exile, the people got worse and treated him with contempt. He wished he could quit the service with feelings that God was unfair to him. Many Christians today have a tendency of backing off when the going gets tough. Woe to those that put their hands on the plough and look back.

Study Questions

A. CONTENDING WITH FALSE PROPHETS

Jer. 28:1-17

1. What kind of a prophet was Hananiah? What do you think made him popular among the people of Judah?
2. Jeremiah had the courage to challenge the message of the popular prophet and confront him with the word of the Lord besides assuring the people that exile awaits them.
 - a) What do you think was the source of this courage considering the fact that death threats had previously been made on Jeremiah's life [Refer to 26:7-11]?
 - b) Would you find it easy to relay a message that shatters the hopes of the people who are uncertain of their future against the popular "*men of God*" who say the opposite?

3. "... But the Prophet who prophesizes peace will be recognised as one truly sent by the Lord by the Lord only if predictions comes true" vs. 9
 - a) Is it possible for prophets to prophesy things which are not from God even in our time?
 - b) How then can we judge the authenticity of prophesies bearing in mind that some prophets can speak out of their minds?

B. THROWN IN A VAULTED CELL;

Jer 37:1-21

4. Did people of Judah believe the message of the prophet Jeremiah when he advised them to go to Babylon? What gave them the false hopes?
5. "Even if you were to defeat the entire Babylonian army that is attacking you and only wounded men were left in their tents, they would come out and burn this city down" vs. 1
 - a) How does such a prophecy describe the relationship that existed between God and His chosen people? Was there any hope for victory for the Jews in this war?
 - b) If you were in a similar situation, would you find it easy to accept such a message or you would reject it in Jesus name and bind the spirit behind it?
6. Despite languishing in the prison cell for a long time, Jeremiah did not change his mind on what he believed was the word of God for the people [vv17-20]. How would this stand for the truth encourage us in the face of persecution for the gospel?

C. DOWN IN THE MUDDY CISTERN YOU WALLOW!

Jer. 38:1-13

7. It seems Jeremiah could not help to speak about what he had heard and seen. What other form of persecution did he undergo this time?
8. When the church condemns the condom as a prevention measure for the spread of HIV/AIDS virus, the government and concerned NGO's react badly to our stand, in what way would their reaction be similar to that of Shephatiah, Gedaliah, Jehucal and Pashhur to Jeremiah's message [refer to v4].
9. What does the coming in of Ebed-Melech, a Cushite official in the palace, on the scene signify? Would God send a present day Ebed Melech to us today if we were to wallow through problems as Jeremiah did?

Memory verse

"So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Milkijah, the King's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern, it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sunk down into the mud.

Jer 38:6

Study 7

THE ANOINTED ON THE RUN!

Introduction

Many of us think that when you are anointed and used mightily, you become a 'no go area or no fly zone' for the devil and his diabolic agents. I wish that were the case. But the truth is the more anointed and mightily used you are, the more interested the devil will be in you. You become his primary target. Why should the devil spare the shepherd and only concentrate on the flock? Does the scripture not say that if you strike the shepherd, the flock will scatter [Matt 26:31]? Once the shepherd is dealt with the scattered flock becomes easy prey. It works. Men of

God too are targets of the devil. And there are times when these anointed one take to the heels and run for their lives despite all the exploits they have had and all the wonders they have witnessed in life. They are human after all. You will appreciate that it is one thing to sing. "*Kasatana; timangogwira ndikupondaponda ndikutayaila -uko*" as we are rolling home in Jesus Name and yet another to actually face him when he roars like a lion. There are times when the men of God chicken out when the deceiver roars! They are not immune you know. Suffering in Christianity is a reality all of us small and great alike must accept and prepare to undergo. It knows no position, person or anointing. It is no respecter of persons. Discovering the relationship between God's mercy and our pain then is crucial. It helps us to remain focus.

Study Questions

ELIJAH: I AM NO BETTER THAN MY ANCESTORS AFTER ALL! ***I Kings 19:4***

1. Describe the showdown that took place on Mount Carmel between prophets of Baal & Elijah.
2. What two extra ordinary miracles took place when Elijah took his turn? How might have Elijah felt after these, extraordinary exploits against the idol worshippers?
3. A defeated enemy is the most dangerous enemy. While you are celebrating your victory, he is planning for how best to revenge.
 - a) How did Elijah react when word got him that Jezebel was after his life? Was this what he expected?
 - b) Did the victory experienced at Mount Carmel help Elijah in any way when his life was threatened by the wicked *'first*

- lady*?"
4. ".He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die." verse 4
 - a) Is death the best way of dealing with the storms that roll against us in life?
 - b) Did God rebuke Elijah when in his frustration flee from death in the hands of Jezebel and yet prayed that he might die?

DAVID: THE KING WHO ACTED LIKE A MADMAN ***I Sam 21:10-15; 22:1-5***

5. Discuss the events that led to David's flight from King Saul? Is this the best he could get after conquering the mighty Goliath?
 - a) How did David act when he fled to Achish King of Gath?
 - b) What do you think must have reduced this mighty man of valour and anointed King of Israel to such a state? Is it normal for leaders to act this way?
6. "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord almighty the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied I Sam 17: 45
 - a) What do you think caused David whose battle slogan is quoted above to act insanely in the presence of Achish and flee from Saul?
 - b) Is it possible that after witnessing a breakthrough in our lives we could experience moments of spiritual lowliness like David did?
7. All those who were in distress, or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader I Sam 22:2
 - a) What influenced these groups of people to identify with David in his moment of persecution?

- b) Could it be possible that God can allow some of us to undergo painful experiences in life for the sake of others? [Refer to Luke 22:31-32]
8. But David thought to himself; “One of these days I shall be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel. And I will slip of his hand” I Samuel 27:1
- a) What do you think made David to seek refuge among the Philistines who were long time enemies of Israel?
- b) Is it possible that God could use those we regard as enemies to shield us from the hands of those that want to destroy us from within? Explain your answer?
9. Despite the fact that both Elijah and David had witnessed the power of God at work in their lives, a time came when they had to free for their dear lives:
- a) What does this reveal about our human nature in the midst of threats?
- b) How does God respond to our emotional reactions in the time of trials?

Memory verse

*"David took these words to heart
and was very much afraid of Achish King of Gath,
so he pretended to be insane in their presence"
I Sam 21:12-13a*

PART C.

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME

"Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Hebrews 12:3

chosen to identify with Him despite the opposition He faced from religious leaders. Yet He had the guts to bluntly tell them that there was more He expected from them. They must have been stung by His words.

I once made a commitment to the Lord that whatever it takes I am ready to be used of the Lord until a certain gentleman accepts Jesus as His Lord. I thought it was going to be easy but a few days later I found my self complaining that this gentleman was demanding too much of my time, comfort and resources. I almost gave up yet everytime such temptation came the Lord would remind me of my commitment. This gentleman has been giving me testimonies of how he has been blessed by the Lord and how his faith is growing. There are times when while thinking that you have given the Lord the best, He comes back and required more from you. *"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded..."* Luke 12:48. The Lord does not reap when he does not sow!

Study 8

DIE AND RESSURECT: THE BLESSED INCONVENIENCES

Introduction

An inconvenience is an inconvenience; how can it be a blessed one? Pain is pain how can one willingly look forward to it? These are some of the arguments that people make. They sound logical, humanly speaking that is. But somehow, in life we discover that things do not always happen the way we would want them to happen. Challenging those people who had left everything to rally behind Him [His followers], Jesus said, *"You must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me."* For one thing these people had already left everything behind and had

Study Questions

A. **THE CROSS IS WHERE PEOPLE DIE:**

Luke 9:18-27

1. What did people say about the identity of Jesus?
2. Does Jesus mean anything to you personally? Would this make you willing to suffer for Him?
3. Accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour demands not only believing the truth of the gospel, but also committing ourselves to sacrificially follow him.
 - a) Mention some of the people who contributed to the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ? Would such people be a source of suffering for His followers in our time?

b) What should be our attitude towards suffering that is caused by religious leaders?

4. The choice between denying ourselves or living for ourselves must be made daily. That choice will determine our eternal destiny.
- a) What does "*take up his cross*" mean as used by Jesus in this context?
 - b) When Jesus took up the cross, He went to Calvary to be crucified, Is this what He meant when He said, "*follow me?*"
5. To save your life, lose it for Christ. In what practical ways can this be done?

B NO LONGER SLAVES TO SIN!

Rom. 6:1-14

1. How would you describe your spiritual life in relation to the temptation of sin? Has it been easy to lead a righteous life?
2. Sin has the tendency of mastering its subjects [enslaves]
 - a) Would you say that you have successfully disentangled yourself from any sin and appearance of sin in your life? If yes what has been your secret?
 - b) How would you reconcile what Paul is saying here and his struggle with sin in chapter 7:7-25?
3. "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires verse12. Is it possible for sin to reign in the lives of those who have committed themselves to the Lord? Does salvation make us a no go area for sin?
4. Would Christianity be more exciting were devoid of temptations

and suffering we face?

Memory verse

"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."]

Rom. 6:6-7

Study 9

WE REJOICE IN SUFFERING

Introduction

What makes Christians appear crazy in this world is their tendency to do things contrary to the "normal acceptable ways" They love their enemies, bless those who persecute them, pray for those who mistreat them etc. They seem to be out of this world. When they undergo suffering, instead of complaining or revenging, they rejoice. Some have even prayed that God must pardon their persecutors while burning on the stakes! What kind of people are these Christians? What is it that makes them willing to suffer so much and die just for a mere belief? Don't they value life? Yet Christians value life more than anyone else, they have

discovered that to give up this life which they cannot keep is the wisest way of attaining that eternal life they dare not lose.

It is by dying that we live and if death is the gateway to that eternal life which far much outweighs this temporal life then, whatever will lead us to this life is acceptable. And suffering has this ability of squeezing the best out of us. Pruning produces best quality fruit, it promotes production. Rejoicing in pain also strikes a blow in the face of the devil. He expects that you will complain and sin or chicken out and miss the promotion. When you glory in it then, he knows he has lost. Next time you undergo through suffering then, smile amidst the pain!

Study Questions

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROMOTION: *Romans 5:1-5, Hebrews 10:35-39*

1. In what things are we supposed to rejoice? [verses 2:3]
2. What things result from suffering? Would the same be possible if we were to look at suffering as a burden, curse and something to be bound and cast away in the name of Jesus?
3. How does perseverance help us in our spiritual walk? What would happen to us in times of suffering if this virtue was missing?
4. Is God pleased when His children shrink back in times of suffering? How could we ensure that we do not chicken out [shrink back] in times of hardships?
5. If every trial and hardships that comes in our way is seen as an opportunity for spiritual promotion and development of our character, would it be difficult for us to rejoice?

B WORTHY OF SUFFERING DISGRACE FOR HIS NAME!

Acts 5:17-42

6. What events led to the persecution of the apostles? Is this common in our time?
7. In what ways did God intervene in the case of the persecuted apostles? Can He do the same today?
8. Flogging was a cruel form of punishment done with a whip [shambok] having pieces of sharp metals or bones attached to it which cut the flesh. A victim could receive 39 lashes of these.
 - a) How did the apostles respond to the flogging they received from the Sanhedrin?
 - b) What made them behave in such an "*abnormal*" way to pain?
9. Suffering without hope is very painful. What message of hope and encouragement can we give to those who are suffering for the Lord in our time?

Memory verse

"The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name!"

Acts 5:41

Study 10

THESE LIGHT AND MOMENTARY TROUBLES...

Introduction

Pearls are precious things. But they are a product of pain. It is said that when a sea snail has a wound, the pus that oozes out of it mixes with water and sand and hardens to make one of the most precious treasures in the world-pearls. Beauty out of pain! We may say. I have personally said time and again that if the devil had known that the troubles he exposes us to are working for our good-make us better Christians, he could have left us alone. Thank God he doesn't know this fact and so he keeps on opening doors for our promotion! Paul describes his sufferings [and he suffered much!] as light in nature and momentary in duration as compared to the glory that

they work out for him [2 Cor 4:17]. This is the secret of facing troubles in this world. They are working for our own good. Giving up does not help us at all. It helps the devil achieve his purpose. We must be patient in affliction knowing that in a little while, he who is coming will do so and give reward to all those who hold on to the very end!

Study Questions

A. OUTWARDLY WASTING AWAY YET INWARDLY RENEWED

2 Cor. 4: 1-18

1. What is this treasure that Paul says we possess in jars of clay?
2. In what ways would losing heart affect this treasure?
3. "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed.." vs. 8
What do you think is the secret that keeps such clay breakable jars from being crushed and destroyed despite the pressure?
4. Does the fact that Paul and companions survived the persecution mean that they were not feeling the pain in their bodies [verse 16]?
5. How does focusing on what is unseen in times of trouble help to bring the much needed inner renewal?

B BOASTING IN WEAKNESS ***2 Cor 11:16-33***

6. Mention some of the hardships that Paul had to withstand in his ministry among the gentiles.
7. What do you think is the reason why Paul describes them as

things showing his weakness? How many of us would be willing to boast in our weakness to our disciples?

8. Paul went through a lot of hardships as an apostle [above], what do you think kept him going despite all these?
9. "Who is weak and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin and I do not burn inwardly?" verse 29.
 - a) What does this statement tell us about the man of God, Paul?
 - b) How would such honesty of an apostle encourage his converts and us today?

Memory verse

*"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen,
but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary,
but what is unseen is eternal"*
2 Cor 4:18

should not move us a bit. We must declare in the hearing of both heavens and hell, the divine and the demonic that we are soldiers in the army of the Lord and if we have to die, let us die in the army of the Lord!

We must establish in our hearts that Christianity is offensive to some and that godliness is costly. We may be required if God wills, to seal our faith by our blood. We must thus be willing to give all for Him should our path takes us to Golgotha. Sounds scaring, ain't it! It gives me goose pimples, yet it remains a fact! Lord helps us to be faithful to you even unto death!

Study 11

BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH: THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYRS

Introduction

It has been said that the blood of the martyrs is fuel for revival. Yes where the blood has been shed for the sake of Christ, revival has spread. It is a spiritual formula! God chooses in His own way that while some are rescued from suffering, others must lay their lives on the altar for Him. That is what the cross is all about; the place of suffering and death. Knowing this truth, Arthur Bless it declared; *"I would rather suffer or even die in God's will other than enjoy outside it?"* such statements are risky because they are pronounced in the hearing of the devil and he ensures that you pay for it. But that

Study Questions

A. HEROES OF THE FAITH *Hebrews 11:32—40*

1. Describe the heroic exploits of these men and women of God as outlines in this rarely touched portion on the chapter.
2. What do you think is the reason why the popular faith preachers rarely touch this text?
3. Is it possible to have genuine faith and still fail to obtain the things one hopes for in this world. [Compare with verse 39]
4. Failure, poverty and suffering among other things are usually associated with lack of faith by health and wealth gospel preachers. How would you restore those who have been wounded by such distorted presentation of the gospel in the fellowship?
5. Others were tortured and refused to be released so that they might gain a better resurrection verse 35b. How would this text encourage you in your afflictions? Is physical deliverance always a divine solution to persecution?

B **RESIST TO THE POINT OF SHEDDING BLOOD**
Hebrews 12:1-12

6. What do you think is the composition of this cloud of witnesses that surrounds us? Why are they interested in us?
7. What things are we requested to throw off and why?
8. What should be our focus as we race through this battle arena?
9. What encouragement does this text give you in your struggles against sin, and hardships?

Memory verse

*"God has planned something better for us
so that only together with us would they be made perfect.
Heb 11:40*

Study 12

THE CROWN AND THE CROSS

Introduction

A story is told of a man of God who after witnessing great things in his ministry stood on a line before the Lord waiting to receive his crown. In front of the throne were crowns of different sizes and remembering what he had done on earth, this preacher assured himself that the biggest crown was his. He was wrong! It was given to an old lady-a nobody down on earth. As it was being laid her head this anointed one of the Lord could not hold his disappointment. He protested and told the Lord that He had made a mistake because that crown was his. But the Lord informed him that behind his powerful ministry was this lady who

everytime she read in the papers or saw on TV that this man was holding a crusade, she would lock herself up and intercede for him. The miracles were answers to her prayers! The man of God went away with a crown, the size of a bottle top; maybe like a SCOM badge [pardon me!]. There is a lesson for all of us here!

Study Questions

Read 2 Tim 4:6-8 & 1 Peter 4:12-19

1. What made Paul confident that he would receive crown of righteousness from the Lord? Was the crown the motivation for his service?
2. Had Paul not successfully accomplished his ministry, could he still expect this heavenly reward?
3. Paul's desire in life was to know more of the crucified Christ and identify with His suffering [1 Cor 2:2 Phil 3:10]
 - a) What connection is there between the crucified Christ and the Crown of righteousness?
 - b) What hope does this give to those who are suffering for Christ?
4. How should we view suffering according to Peter [the one who first denied the Lord and then rejoiced after being flogged]?
5. What warning does Peter sound for those looking for trouble? Can these two expect the crown for their suffering?
6. Pain and suffering are the inevitable accompaniments of being a man. To be human is to face the issue of suffering?
 - a) How should Christians handle suffering? Is there the solution?

- b) How can Christians assist those who are undergoing suffering?
7. A race well run, a faith well kept and a task well accomplished are the things that occupied Paul's mind as he approached the end:
 - a) What reward does Paul expect to receive from his Master as he finally meets Him?
 - b) Is it possible for us to expect the same rewards at the end of this journey? What conditions must we fulfill for that?
8. Many Christians define happiness, joy and blessings in the absence of suffering and pain. How would you prove to them that these things belong together based in this study?

Memory verse

"Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will grow weary and lose heart"

Heb. 12:3