

Follow in His Steps

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung 4/21/2018

Christianity is more difficult than it appears. Why is the life of a Christian so challenging and difficult? Are we willing to forsake all that we have? Jesus said, "Whoever of you does not **forsake all** that he has cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:33)

There is no way that a novice in the faith can accurately evaluate the complexity of the trials and tribulations he will experience during his course of conversion. But for those of us who have been around a little while, it is good that from time to time we be reminded of what a Christian's life entails. Jesus said:

John 15:20 If they have persecuted me, they will also **persecute you**.

Acts 14:22 ... exhorting the disciples to continue in the faith, and that we must through **much tribulation** enter into the kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God does not come without a great price. Jesus tells us to contemplate the difficulty of the Christian challenge before we even get started.

It is God's intention that we fully realize that the **life of a Christian** is not a piece of cake – nor is it a surprisingly easy task. In other words the price a Christian is going to pay is far in excess of what can be imagined when one is first called – called by God – called to the truth.

1 Peter 2:20 What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and **suffer for it**, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

It is when we are chastised for doing rightly, and are chastised and condemned for it, that it is most difficult. God tells us that a Christian is to accept that reprimand patiently, because this is acceptable to God. Peter tells us that this is the reason that God has called us – so that we are able to learn to deal with suffering and persecution. It is the example that Christ left for us to experience:

1 Peter 2:21 Hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should **follow His steps**.

Have you considered what it means to **follow in His steps**?

As we approach Passover each year we reflect on the tremendous Sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. His suffering and torment were greater than any of us can imagine.

Movies like "The Passion" are gruesome – but they are unable to capture the full dimension of Christ's sufferings.

Isaiah 52:14 As many were astonished at thee; His visage was so marred **more than any man**, and His form was more [disfigured] than the sons of men:

Jesus did **not** only suffer physical pain. The pain of betrayal and desertion are not often thought of – and the **emotional** and **psychological** aspects of His sacrifice were greater than the physical pain and torture that Jesus underwent. Add to Christ's suffering the fact that He was totally abandoned by His Father when He was on the cross because of the principle in Isaiah 59:2.

Jesus Cried out in Matthew 27:46 Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?... My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

That abandonment by His Father was extremely difficult for Jesus to deal with. But Jesus had become "Sin in our stead" and **sin** cannot come into the presence of the Father.

No man ever experienced that intense anguish that Jesus faced. We never come close to that loss, pain or suffering.

We do not know what the future holds – only God knows.

We are aware that God gives us the head-up about the **life of a Christian** being full of many trials and tests. Even the apostles did not fully realize what they were getting into, and how demanding their future would be.

Matthew 20:23 [Jesus told] them, Ye shall indeed drink of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with.

That meant that their lives would be **plunged into affliction**, persecution and even martyrdom in the end – just as Christ's life was.

Before one makes the greatest commitment of their live by surrendering to God and being baptized, it is important to try to realize the severity and critical nature of the course which is about to be embarked upon. Each person must make an extraordinary pledge to **stay the course** – not deviating from the true worship of God – no matter what impediments, tests, difficulties, trials and obstacles are encountered in the quest for the Kingdom of God.

Living the **Christian life** is more difficult than an unconverted person is able to imagine. As a matter of fact it is **impossible to overcome the world** without God's Holy Spirit. God's Spirit is a powerful resource to help us **recognize** and **deal** with our shortcomings.

John 16:1 These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.

John 16:2 They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever kills you will think that he doeth God service.

John 16:3 And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.

John 16:4 But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.

In John 16 Jesus tells the Disciples about the coming of the **Holy Spirit** to aid, comfort and guide.

John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. **In the world ye shall have tribulation:** but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

And Christ's example is for us to **also** overcome the world. God the Father made the greatest sacrifice. He was willing to lose His Son to save us!

We are told in:

John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave [up] His only begotten Son."

God the Father could have lost Jesus Christ forever! If Jesus Christ had failed, if Jesus Christ had sinned even once – He would have died for His own sin. He would not have lived again! He would have been eternally dead, and God the Father would have been **forever alone**. The earth would have ceased to exist (Hebrews 1:3 because it is Jesus who is... upholding all things by the word of His power).

So, when we read John 3:16, let's understand to whatever degree we are able, the **magnitude** of the sacrifice that **God the Father** made.

Yes, Brethren, we are called on to **suffer** in our Christian walk – but never think that what we are experiencing is unfair or unique.

Jesus Christ – the Word of God – though He was eternal – His earthly trek was **existential**. He could have lost it all – that is how great His sacrifice for us was. Jesus Christ, put everything on the line for our redemption and our salvation.

Coming from heaven, Jesus **set aside** His glory – divested His divinity – so that He might endure the shameful, ignominious death on the cross for my sins and yours.

Philippians 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Many do not believe it, but Jesus could have lost it all, had He sinned. The spiritual penalty for sin is death, and Jesus would have died the second death, eternal death, had He sinned. Jesus endured until the end.

Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him **endured the cross**, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

That is our example of sacrifice! Jesus endured the cross, and so will we – with the help of God. It is this certainty, and the realization of the great reward of the better resurrection to eternal life that is being offered to us, that convinces us to go the extra mile.

Romans 8:18 For I reckon that the **sufferings** of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the **glory** which shall be revealed in us.

Satan did everything to cause Jesus to fail. Satan has tried to obliterate Jesus Christ and the Plan of God to bring many sons and daughters to Glory – from the very beginning.

Keep in mind that Satan is the **most powerful** being God ever created. Overcoming the world as Jesus did was more difficult than anyone in the entire history of the world will ever experience.

God's Spirit does not fight our temptations for us - nor does it make it easier for us to live a Godly life. God's Spirit does tell us what is **right** and what is **wrong**. Without God's Spirit it is impossible to please God. With God's Holy Spirit it is possible to **please God** - but it does not make it easier.

In fact, it is so challenging that without God's continuous support through His Holy Spirit, it is impossible to succeed.

2Timothy 3:12 All who will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall **suffer persecution**.

Jesus tells us to decide whether or not we are able and willing to **bear our cross** and endure unto the very end (Mark 13:13).

God expects our firm determination to never depart from His Way, knowing that He will by no means **forsake us** (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus said the demands of Christianity are immense, "Whoever of you does not **forsake all** that he has cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:33)

God's way **comes first** and foremost, above all things. That is not semantics – it is the Truth. The Christian life **demands** that we enter into a total commitment to **battle** to the end, knowing the tremendous personal sacrifices that must be made.

The Christian **battle** is spoken of in 1Timothy 6:12: "Fight the good fight of faith." In our Christian battle we **forcefully** lay hold on the Kingdom of God (Matthew 11:12)

God's Way is more important than family or **security** because it involves our eternal life. While on earth, Jesus did not seek riches, fame or security – but with all His might He sought the Will of His Father. "Thy will be done, Oh Father!" (John 4:34)

Jesus tells us to **be sure** that we are able to finish what we begin. This is exactly where the Church of God is in the Plan of God right now.

Luke 14:23 And the **lord said** unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house **may be filled**.

God has a number – and that number of overcomers **will be filled** – and **then** Jesus will return! Brethren – **many are called** – but they want life to be a cakewalk – not the difficult test that is the Christian's lot – and **few are chosen**. Those should be **scary** words for us to contemplate.

Luke 14:24 For I say unto you, That **none** of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

Luke 14:25 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

Luke 14:26 If any man come to me, and [**love me less than he does**] his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he **cannot** be my disciple.

God demands the **preeminence** in our thoughts, actions and being.

Luke 14:27 And whosoever doth not **bear his cross**, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14:33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsakes not **all that he has**, he cannot be my disciple.

We must relegate everything to Christ and God's way. Absolutely everything in our lives must come a distant second – to God – and the things of God. "Whosoever doth not **bear his cross**, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." What is **your** cross, brethren? Do you know what it is - it is different for everyone. What is your weakness? Where is it that you let down? What is your **secret sin** – that one that you are unwilling to face?

In a moment we will look at what King David called his secret sin – his hidden fault... We will see that it is not so much a sin that we try to hide from everyone else – but the sin that we **hide from ourselves**. It is devastating when we do not recognize in ourselves where we miss the mark.

Hebrews 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and **the sin which doth so easily beset us**, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

We are not murderers or adulterers. We do not take God's name in vain or covet our neighbor's goods. We go through all Ten Commandments and say to ourselves, "Check I'm OK."

So what is the sin which doth so easily beset us? We need to know. We need to deal with it. We need to recognize it and overcome it – with God's help.

Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, **converting the soul**: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

We are being converted from what we were when we were first called, to be just like Jesus and His Father.

Psalm 19:8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

Psalm 19:9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

Psalm 19:10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

There is nothing better than God's way, God's life, God's law, God's desire for us, and God's truth.

Psalm 19:11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is **great reward**.

Yes a great reward – being the Children of God in His eternal Kingdom!

What is expected of us **now**? How can we be made righteous, pure and pleasing to God?

Psalm 19:12 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from **secret faults**.

What are our **secret faults**, our secret sins – the ones we are not even able to admit to ourselves? What is the sin which doth so easily beset us?

Psalm 19:13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the **great transgression**.

“The great transgression,” – David is saying, “Don’t let me commit the unpardonable sin.”

Do I believe that I am doing everything perfectly – could I have a **presumptuous** sin – of which I am not even aware?

Psalm 19:14 **Let** the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, **be acceptable** in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

This is why we are chastised by God – so that like Christ we are able to learn obedience through the things we suffer. Testings and trials are specifically designed by God to bring us along our path of conversion.

Hebrews 5:8 Though He were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which He suffered;

Jesus was perfect in the flesh – even though He was tempted and tried throughout His life – so that He could experience – firsthand – all the situations we find ourselves in. As a result, we can be absolutely positive that He understands everything we are going through – and **He knows what we need** by way of trials and tests to come to that point of perfection He expects in us.

Hebrews 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was **in all points** tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

When we think that what we have to endure is just **too much** – we are told to remember what Jesus experienced.

Hebrews 12:3 For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

Hebrews 12:4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

Hebrews 12:5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

In fact, welcome the chastening of the Lord – count it all joy as James says. Why?

Hebrews 12:6 For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.

If we expect our lives to be easy – we need to consider these Scriptures.

Hebrews 12:7 If ye endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not?

Godly chastisement is given in love and for our own good. What if our entire lives were to go **smoothly**?

Hebrews 12:8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye illegitimate children, and not sons [of God].

Knowing that our goal is eternal life; do we have the spirit and resilience it takes to stick it out to the end? Out trials and tests can come from all walks of life. Family; Job; Self; Satan.

Acts 5:29 ... We ought to **obey** God rather than men.

Act 5:32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit, which God hath given to them that **obey Him**.

As we come closer to the return of Jesus Christ, the world and society will persecute every Godly principle.

For example:

We are hearing more and more about the **government** and the **state** persecuting individuals who obey God.

As our Godless government officials promote perversions and abortions - ministers are being sent to jail by those zealous government prosecutors.

A judge recently ruled that a florist who refused to sell flower arrangements for an openly homosexual couple's state sanctioned wedding violated state anti-discrimination law. God says in:

2Corinthians 6:17 Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and **touch not the unclean thing**; and I will receive you.

Our government says "You shall **wallow in their filth** - or face **persecution** by the courts."

The flower store owner maintained that their Christian beliefs prevented them from selling flowers for the same-sex wedding, "because of the relationship a Christian has with Jesus Christ," according to court documents.

The attorney representing the flower store owner, said in a statement, "You put your home, your family business, and **your life** savings at risk by daring to defy a government mandate that forces you to promote views you believe are **wrong**." That kind of injustice - the law of the land - is going to grow worse and worse.

Overcoming the self, society and Satan are extremely difficult - we never get to coast downhill - it will always be an uphill battle - but with God's Spirit it becomes possible. As we saw, eventually, "*...all who will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall **suffer persecution***." (2Timothy 3:12)

2Corinthians 4:8 We are **troubled** on every side, yet not distressed; we are **perplexed**, but not in despair;

2Corinthians 4:9 **Persecuted**, but not forsaken; **cast down**, but not destroyed;

2Corinthians 4:10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus,

Colossians 1:25 ...To fulfill the word of God;

Colossians 1:26 Even the **mystery** which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

Why has the world been blinded? Blinded to what? What is the veil that has been pulled over everyone's eyes? The world does not know the True God. Jesus is the Word of God – He speaks for God the Father.

The Faith of Christ and the principles that Jesus taught and lived by must be assimilated by us – become a part of us.

Colossians 1:27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory:

The high standard of Godliness exhibited by Jesus must be **replicated** in our character.

Colossians 1:28 Whom [Jesus Christ] we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

In writing to the Colossians Paul was warning them then, and subsequently **us** today, that Jesus **Christ must be in us** – in our thoughts, actions, feelings, and every part of our being.

Turn over a page to Colossians 3 and we'll see examples of what a **high goal** this is to attain to.

Colossians 3:8 But now ye also put off all these; **anger**, wrath, **malice**, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

Colossians 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

We must become like God Himself:

Colossians 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is **renewed** in knowledge after the **image of Him** that created him:

We are being transformed by renewing our mind – through correction.

We invariably experience a transformation of **character** (who and what we are) through this process.

Colossians 3:12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of **mercies**, kindness, **humbleness** of mind, meekness, **longsuffering**;

What if we possess a degree of arrogance and pride – and we cannot see it in ourselves.

Thankfully, God sees us as we are – and He is faithful to correct us.

Colossians 3:13 **Forbearing** one another, and **forgiving** one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, **so also do ye**.

We have all been abused, violated, hurt, and injured. Sometimes by our superiors, relatives and ministers in God's Church. How do we find it in our heart to forgive those who are so dangerous to God's people? Jesus gave us the example:

Luke 23:34 Jesus said Father forgive them **for they know not what they do**.

Sometimes, that is what we have to say also. But we must have an attitude of forgiveness.

Colossians 3:14 And above all these things put on the [love of God], which is the bond of perfectness.

Colossians 3:15 And let the peacefulness [and richness] of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

And then Paul comes back to reiterate the importance of **Christ living in us**.

Colossians 3:16 Let the **word** of Christ **dwell in you** richly in all wisdom.

Paul – who penned these words - was relentlessly persecuted. Let's realize as Paul did that human life is worthless and spiritual life is priceless.

He said:

Acts 20:23 "...Bonds and **afflictions** abide me,

Acts 20:24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy.

Have we thought it out? Have we made the commitment in our **mind** and **heart** that we will seek God's Will and Way above everything else in life – regardless of the consequences we must endure? How many of us signed on to Christianity for the long haul – through suffering, persecution and to death if necessary?

We are warned over and over that the life of every Christian is a very difficult pursuit. The easy part of our calling comes in the next life:

Matthew 5:11 Blessed are ye, when men shall **revile** you, **and persecute you**, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Matthew 5:12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven (God holds our reward): for so **persecuted** they the prophets which were before you.

The prophets and apostles were martyred. We are only asked to be **living** sacrifices.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a **living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your **reasonable** service.

God says, "That is not asking too much of us." Jesus did not promise us that life as a Christian would be easy. He promised that it would be possible and that it would be rewarding.

As Christians we covenanted with God to accept the changes in us that come with conversion, though we may be **tried by fire**, and faithfully accept the consequences with joy that come our way, knowing:

1Peter 1:7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be **tried with fire**, might be found unto **praise** and **honor** and **glory** at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Do we have the faith to say: "I am willing to accept the guidance, help, **trials**, direction and correction that a loving God will give to me?"

End: **Follow in His Steps**