

Good morning, Moon Valley! And Happy Father's Day.

We are continuing our sermon series titled, □ “The Church that Changed the World.” It is a study through the New Testament book of Acts.

Our text for today is □ Acts 21:1-16. From this text, we are going to learn about suffering.

Suffering is something that afflicts us all to one degree or another. And we are often confused and discouraged by it because it can seem so senseless, so unfair, so unreasonably punishing that we begin to question the goodness of God.

Our text is going to help us put suffering into perspective. To be sure, it is not going to tell us everything we might want to know. But it is going to shed some light that can help us to better navigate suffering.

The story of our text begins in the city of Miletus, as shown on □ this map. The apostle Paul has just finished giving his farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus, and is now setting sail for Jerusalem.

What you may have suspected before is about to be confirmed: the author, Luke has a thing for providing geographical details. As shown on the map, □ here is the itinerary for Paul's journey to Jerusalem as charted by Luke, who is traveling with him.

The journey begins in □ Acts 21:1, where Luke says,

ESV Acts 21:1 And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.

- ESV Acts 21:2 And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.

- ESV Acts 21:3 When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo.

- ESV Acts 21:4 And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

In the city of Tyre, which is in the coastal region of Phoenicia, which is in the land of Syria, Paul seeks out the local followers of Jesus and hangs out with them for seven days.

These disciples in Tyre tell Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. And they do so □ “through the Spirit,” which indicates that the Holy Spirit of God has prompted them in some way.

But Paul goes on to Jerusalem anyway, which raises the question: Is Paul going against God?

The short answer is no. There are at least two plausible explanations for this.

First, the disciples may have been telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem *right away*. We know that Paul was anxious to get to Jerusalem. So, staying in Tyre for 7 days may reflect Paul’s obedience to delay when he would have otherwise departed sooner.¹

¹ Alberto S. Valdes, *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, p. 588.

A second possible explanation is that the Holy Spirit had revealed to the disciples in Tyre only that Paul was going to suffer in Jerusalem, which is true. Given the suffering revealed to them, the disciples may have then taken it upon themselves to warn Paul against going to Jerusalem out of concern for his welfare. If that is the case, the Spirit-revealed suffering is consistent with God's will, but the well-intentioned warning against going to Jerusalem is not.²

Either way, Paul is not going against God in proceeding to Jerusalem.

The journey continues in □ verse 5.

ESV Acts 21:5 When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. . . .

□ ESV Acts 21:5 . . . And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed 6 and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

□ ESV Acts 21:7 When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day.

□ ESV Acts 21:8 On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.

This man, □ Philip is first introduced in Acts 6, where he was among the seven people chosen to oversee the distribution to the poor in Jerusalem. Later in Acts 8, Philip goes on his own missionary journey to

² Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 3, pp. 3082-3084.

Samaria. Afterward, he leads Ethiopian eunuch to faith Christ and baptizes him. Then, in Acts 8:40, Philip travels to Caesarea, which is where Paul finds him in our text. Clearly, Philip is a person of influence.

And so are his daughters. □ Verse 9 says,

ESV Acts 21:9 He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.

Philip and his daughters aren't the only notables in Caesarea. □ Verse 10 says,

ESV Acts 21:10 While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

This man, □ Agabus is first mentioned back in Acts 11, as a prophet who foretold that there would be a famine. According to church tradition, not Scripture, Agabus was among the 72 disciples mentioned in Luke 10:1, who were sent out by Jesus himself to carry the message of Christ.³

Here in verse 10, Agabus comes down from Judea, which is the region containing Jerusalem. He comes with a prophetic message for Paul, recorded in □ verse 11.

ESV Acts 21:11 And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, □ "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

Agabus is yet another voice foretelling through the Spirit the suffering Paul is about to experience in Jerusalem. On the basis of this prophecy,

³ Lexham Bible Dictionary.

once again, Paul is warned against going on to Jerusalem. □ Verse 12 says,

ESV Acts 21:12 When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

This seems to be a decidedly more influential group than the unnamed disciples back in the city of Tyre, who also warned Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. Here in Caesarea, those warning Paul include Philip the evangelist, his four daughters who are prophetesses, Agabus the prophet, and Paul's traveling companion, Luke.

But Paul will not be dissuaded. □ Verses 13 through 16 chronicle Paul's response and journey to Jerusalem.

ESV Acts 21:13 Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

□ ESV Acts 21:14 And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

□ ESV Acts 21:15 After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.

□ ESV Acts 21:16 And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge.

At this point, it is fair to ask: Why is Paul so intent on going to Jerusalem against the advice of his friends?

After all, earlier in Acts 19, we saw that some friends were able to dissuade Paul from entering the theater in Ephesus, where a riotous mob had gathered. Back then, Paul took the advice of his friends to spare himself suffering. Why isn't he taking similar advice now?

It seems that Paul is absolutely convinced, presumably through the Spirit, that it is the Lord's will that he go to Jerusalem. This, coupled with the strong prophetic evidence given through the Spirit that he will suffer in Jerusalem leads to the inescapable conclusion that it is the Lord's will for Paul to suffer.

Which raises questions.

Like, why would God allow such suffering?

And how is it that Paul can choose to embrace the suffering God is going to allow, even when respected friends are pleading with him to avoid it?

A key lies back in □ verse 13, where Paul says,

ESV Acts 21:13 “. . . For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Paul says he is “ready” to suffer. And his readiness is inextricably tied to a specific purpose. And that purpose is captured by the phrase, □ “for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

This relates back to Paul's conversion, when the Lord himself had explained that Paul was going to suffer for the Lord's name. In □ Acts 9:15-16, the Lord said of Paul,

ESV Acts 9:15 “. . . he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

Here, the Lord □ connects Paul’s suffering for the name with his being chosen to carry the name. Suffering is an integral part of carrying the name. Suffering and carrying go hand in hand.

Do you see the connection?

Suffering is essential to carrying the name. In fact, this is □ the first premise in a logical syllogism that is going to lead us to the big idea of this sermon. Suffering is essential to carrying his name.

The □ second premise has to do with what it means to carry his name. The name of the Lord stands for who he is and what he is all about. His name signifies his person and work. His name is his life.

So, to carry the name of the Lord is to represent who he is and what he is all about. To carry his name is to embody his person and work. Carrying the name of the Lord is the functional equivalent of bringing the life of Jesus to the world. To carry his name is to bring his life.

So, here is the □ second premise: Carrying his name is essentially bringing life.

We are now ready to complete the syllogism. If, according to premise 1, suffering is essential to carrying his name, and if, according to premise 2, carrying his name is essentially bringing life, then the logical □ conclusion is this: Suffering is essential to bringing life.

This conclusion is the □ big idea of this sermon. It is the thing I want you to remember: Suffering is essential to bringing life.

If you have been around Moon Valley Bible Church for a while, you may be beginning to realize the significance of this. Our mission is to bring the life of Jesus to our world. Our motto is “bring life.” Bringing life is what we’re all about.

This means that suffering is an essential part of what we’re all about. If we are going to bring the life of Jesus to our world, we can expect to suffer. And the suffering can come in at least □ three ways. Suffering can come in preparation for bringing life, or in the act of bringing life, or as a result of bringing life. Or some combination of these.

You may be wondering, “Bob, how can this be true? And if it is true, why would anybody in their right mind want to come to Moon Valley?”

I’m glad you asked. Let me explain.

At Moon Valley, we have argued previously and repeatedly from Scripture that we □ bring the life of Jesus to our world when we do four interrelated things:

1. Reflect his character.
2. Share his message.
3. Do his work.
4. Enjoy his abundance.

I want to show you that suffering is a part of every one of these ways of bringing life.

And—spoiler alert—the best part is at the end. But we are going to have to first suffer through the suffering.

Let's take the first one: □ to reflect his character. We bring the life of Jesus to our world when we are Christlike—when our character resembles that of our Lord and Savior.

Let me ask you. As believers, how do we become Christlike?

One of the primary ways we become Christlike is through suffering. James 1:2-4 explains,

ESV James 1:2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. □ 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Here, the end game of suffering through various trials is that we “may be perfect and complete.” This phrase “perfect and complete” is a description of Christlikeness. Therefore, God allows suffering to produce Christlikeness in us, equipping us to reflect his character.

Without suffering, our capacity to reflect his character would be diminished. So, suffering is essential to bringing life.

Now, let's consider the □ second way to bring life: to share his message. At the center of this message is the good news that Jesus died and rose again to pay for our sins so that he can offer eternal life to all who will believe in him for it. That is the heart of the gospel.

If we are committed to sharing that message, we will suffer.

First, we will suffer because Satan and his demonic emissaries will do everything they can to make it difficult for us to share the gospel.

And also, we can expect to suffer because some people who hear our message will not receive it well; some will reject us. In □ 1 Corinthians 1:23, Paul says,

NLT 1 Corinthians 1:23 So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

Nobody likes to be rejected. But if we are committed to sharing his message, we will be rejected, just as he was.

Suffering is essential to bringing life.

Now, let's consider the □ third way to bring life: to do his work. To be sure, a primary part of doing the work of Jesus is to love others. Jesus's new, preeminent command to his followers comes in John 13:34, where he says, "just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

Surely, a part of loving one another is to provide comfort and encouragement when others are hurting and in need.

Let me ask you. How does a believer get good at being a comforter?

One of the primary ways God equips us to comfort others is to allow us to suffer affliction ourselves. Our suffering prepares us to love others. Paul explains this in □ 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, where he says,

ESV 2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, □ 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Our own suffering equips us to love and comfort others.

Suffering not only prepares us to love others, but also, the very act of loving others can be painful. Christlike love frequently involves suffering. Serving the best interests of others often involves sacrificing our own interests. It often involves loving those who are difficult to love. Christ is our role model here in loving on the cross the very ones who put him there.

Suffering is essential to bringing life.

Now, let's consider the □ fourth and final way to bring life: to enjoy his abundance.

To see the connection between suffering and enjoying the Lord's abundance, we need to build another logical syllogism.

Here is the □ first premise: We enjoy his abundance as we bring life. As we fulfill our God-given assignment to bring the life of Jesus to our world, we get to enjoy his abundance.

This idea is thoroughly grounded in Scripture. For example, Paul says in □ 1 Timothy 4:8,

ESV 1 Timothy 4:8 “. . . godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

To be godly is to bring life. The ways to be godly are the very same ways to bring life. We are godly when we reflect his character and share his message and do his work. Godliness is bringing life.

As such, we can say with Paul in 1 Timothy 4:8 that □ **“to bring life** is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for

the life to come.” That is to say, bringing life pays. Bringing life is worth it. We will be rewarded for bringing life, both in this life and the life to come.

You say, “How so?”

Here’s □ a sampling. As we bring life, we can experience . . .

- a growing faith;
- a learned contentment;
- an underlying joy;
- an overriding sense of purpose;
- a settled conviction that we are a big part of something bigger;
- an abiding closeness with our Lord in which we get to experience being fully known and fully loved;
- a hope-filled expectation that we will be richly rewarded in heaven for faithfully following Jesus on earth;
- and a full assurance that, in following the Lord, no suffering will be wasted, no sacrifice will go unnoticed, and no truly good thing will be withheld.

This is the good news of □ premise 1: We enjoy his abundance as we bring life.

Now, here’s the more sobering news of □ premise 2: As we bring life, we will suffer.

We don’t need to spend much time on this idea because I have already provided plenty of evidence for it in discussing how suffering is essential to reflecting his character and sharing his message and doing his work.

But I do want to briefly address a question you may have. Aren't enjoyment and suffering incompatible? How can we suffer and enjoy his abundance at the same time?

Good question. Let's □ look back at the sampling of things we can enjoy as we bring life.

Is suffering incompatible with any of these?

Does suffering negate any of these?

Can suffering cancel a single one of them?

No.

We can suffer and still enjoy . . .

- a growing faith;
- a learned contentment;
- an underlying joy;
- an overriding sense of purpose;
- a settled conviction;
- an abiding closeness;
- a hope-filled expectation;
- and a full assurance.

Suffering and enjoying his abundance are not incompatible.

On the contrary, suffering is *indispensable* to such enjoyment. It is through suffering that we can enjoy these things. It is through suffering that our faith grows. It is through suffering that we learn contentment. And so on.

We can now complete our □ syllogism. If premise 1 is true, that we enjoy his abundance as we bring life; and if premise 2 is true, that as we bring life, we will suffer; then we must embrace the following conclusion: □ Suffering is essential to enjoying his abundance.

In God's economy, a scar is a score.

As long as we are suffering for bringing life and not for our own stupidity, suffering is the path to joy and abundance. Choosing to suffer now in bringing life is a highly leveraged investment in our eternal future. We are not masochists who enjoy suffering for the sake of suffering; we are pragmatists—and some might go so far as to say Christian hedonists—who understand that the very best way to maximize our joy in this life and the life to come is by enduring the suffering that comes with bringing life.

This is how Paul can say in □ Acts 21:13 of our text,

ESV Acts 21:13 “. . . For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

I am ready. If bringing life brings prison and death, bring it on. As I carry his name, he will carry me to glory, where it will all be worth it. In this I rejoice. That is Paul's perspective

And Paul is not alone. The apostle Peter reflects the same point of view in □ 1 Peter 4:13, where he says,

ESV 1 Peter 4:13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

This brings us right back to the big idea: □ Suffering is essential to bringing life.

Sometimes we can see this in our own experience.

Perhaps you are suffering to love someone who is hard to love or has made hurtful choices.

Perhaps you are suffering in struggling to keep up with parenting.

Perhaps you are suffering at work because they know you are a Christian and are stereotyping and marginalizing you as one of those bigoted, hateful people.

But I can imagine some of you may be bothered and are wondering, “Bob, you and your logical syllo-whatevers sound nice, but I can’t trace my suffering to any good reason. I can’t see how it relates to bringing life at all. It is just miserable and senseless.”

I can sympathize. Sometimes suffering seems senseless to me, too.

But we don’t have the panoramic view of all things in all eternity as God does. Suffering that seems senseless to us may be preparation for something we can’t see. Remember, we can suffer not only *in the act* of bringing life, not only *as a result* of bringing life, but also *in preparation* for bringing life.

And that preparation can include refining Christlikeness in the crucible of trials. If we find ourselves becoming bitter and resentful and angry toward God and others in our suffering, perhaps these are the very impurities that need to rise to the surface and be skimmed off so we can better bring life.

When suffering seems senseless, we are left to trust that suffering is essential to bringing life—that God redeems suffering for his good purposes, even when we can't see it.

Sometimes the greatest Father's Day gift God can give to the man who seems to have everything is refining trials.

Because suffering is essential to bringing life.

Let's pray. Lord, in our suffering, help us to cling to the truth that suffering is essential to bringing life and is our path to enjoying your abundance. Amen.