

# Light Affliction

## Taking Jesus to the World

April 11, 2021

*Today we're facing the painful fact that pain is part of the process of a good fight!*

But first, I've got a couple thoughts: **Why did us Gentiles have to wait for Jesus?**



On Easter we talked about the Centurion at attention at the cross; the first person – let alone a Gentile – let alone the guy in charge of Jesus' death – to declare Him as the Son of God after He died – let alone Roman, for which this was treason! Only Caesar could be hailed with *that* name. But this was also “the shot heard ‘round the world,” in that it unleashed a second wave of prophetic actions regarding us gentile “dogs”. (Mt 15:26; Mk 7:27) Because this was the launching of the One who *had been* sent only “to the lost sheep of the House of Israel” (Mt 15:24) to *now go* to the lost sheep of the house of the *rest* of the world!



[As Jesus had said] “Is it not written, [in Isaiah (56:7)] ‘My house shall be called a House of Prayer for *all* nations’? – Mark 11:17 NKJ



I am the good shepherd ... and I lay down My life for the sheep. And *other sheep* I have which are not of *this* [Jewish] fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; [we're the “other sheep”] and there will be one flock and one Shepherd. – John 10:14-16 NKJ

So why'd we have to wait? **Are we second class sheep?** No. Everyone in the world *was* and *is* in this *together*. One flock, because we all came over on the same boat (the one like the one outside). But **one side of the family kept a tight grip on God's truth** in order to confirm His Son.

For I tell you [writes the Apostle Paul to the *Romans*] that Christ has become a Servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy, [and Psalm 50:23 says, “Whoever offers *praise glorifies Me.*”] as it is written: [by David in Psalm 18:49] “Therefore I will praise You *among* the *Gentiles*; I will sing hymns to *Your name.*” Again, it says, [in Deuteronomy 32:43] “Rejoice, O Gentiles, *with* His people.” – Romans 15:8-10 NIV



The Jews were confused and refused to believe to a large degree; but once Jesus rose, tens of thousands embraced Him and brought Him to us heathen “dogs”. Raise your hand if you can trace your roots to South America, Africa, Australia, Asia, Scandinavia, or Europe? See? Heathens *all!*

So God begins with the Centurion in charge of Jesus' death, and then **enlists the guy in charge of killing Jesus' followers: Saul (a.k.a. Paul).**



Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. ... on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" – Acts 9:1-4 NIV



Guess who! Long story short: *Saul* changes the first letter of his name from "S" which, in Hebrew is "sin" (and symbolized gnashing teeth) to "P", or "pei" (the symbol for an open, declaring, mouth), (Acts 13:9) and *Paul* embarks on his first missionary journey to bring our ancestors into the fold. And at the same time all this is going on, Jesus – who was *very* busy after His death – is sending Peter to the house of an *Italian* Centurion (who may or may not be the one at the cross).



Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household ... [is visited by a reluctant Apostle Peter, who realizes what the Lord is doing] Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." – Acts 10:1-2, 34-35 NKJ

There's room for everyone. Plenty of suffering and affliction to go around! Because, **nobody gets out of this battle alive; not even God's own Son**, who said, the night before *His* crucifixion:



"In *this* world you *will* have trouble." – John 16:33 NIV

[And said, about *ours*] "Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me." – Matthew 16:24 NIV

And **if you're reflexive thought is "That's not what I signed up for," you better think again about what you *did* sign up for**; and is it what Jesus would call "following"? Later, Paul uses suffering to validate the sincerity of his faith, being a bit *miffed* when his motivations are maligned.

Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. ... Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) [But here goes!] I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. *Five* times I received from the Jews the *forty* lashes minus *one*. [For those doing the math, that's 195!] Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked ... in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; [that's *us*] – 2 Corinthians 11:18-26 NIV



To believe that faith in Christ brings health, wealth, and a happy retirement, or quick and easy answers to pain, requires a psychotic level of denial of what's recorded in the Bible! **Affliction is part of our process.** Look how Paul describes that horrendous list of *his* sufferings:

This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison ... For the things that are seen are transient, – 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 ESV

"Light momentary affliction"? *By comparison*. That's why *treason* couldn't silence the Centurion.

But, some of us wouldn't use those words to describe a bad *haircut*. You see, whenever I have a problem, I actually have **Two Problems**: 1) **the problem**; 2) **the way we perceive the problem**; which is often a much bigger problem than the actual problem ... which is problematic. Picture yourself holding a Mega-Millions ticket and watching them call out every number on it. Whatever financially related troubles you might've had a moment before ... are *still* there. They haven't gone away. But they might as well have, because **the blessing you're holding is vastly more valuable than the sum of all your debts, dues, and liabilities combined** ... once redeemed.



[Well, by comparison] This light momentary affliction is preparing for *us* an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, – 2 Corinthians 4:17 ESV



A sharpened sense of temporal vs. eternal is vital for the fruit of the Spirit, like peace and joy, to flourish in our lives. **How intensely would you grip that winning ticket?** Well the suffering Paul's describing, which leaves slow-healing wounds and lifelong scars, requires a strong grip on God's love, and rock solid hope in the Rock of our salvation. However catastrophic the crisis, when **viewed through the lens of the light of eternal glory, it weakens in its power to overpower**. On his very first missionary journey ...

Saul, who also is called Paul ... came to Antioch in Pisidia, [(1st photo) with Barnabas] and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath ... [and after summing up everything from Moses to John the Baptist to Jesus, says] "Sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the Word of this salvation has been sent. ... [and then, after explaining how Jesus was rejected, says] Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: [like Habakkuk 1:5] 'Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, [the years between the crucifixion and Jerusalem's destruction in 70<sup>AD</sup>] a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.'" So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the *Gentiles* begged that these words might be preached to *them* the next Sabbath. ... On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us [in Isaiah 49:6]: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" Now when the *Gentiles* heard *this*, they were glad and *glorified* [i.e. *praised*] the Word of the Lord. [Yay ancestors!] ... But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. [(2nd photo)] ... [where] they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the *Jews* and of the *Greeks* believed. But the *unbelieving* Jews stirred up the *Gentiles* [Boo ancestors!] and poisoned their minds ... And when a violent attempt was made by *both* the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled to Lystra ... And they were preaching the Gospel there. [Among the Lystrians or, as I prefer: Lystra-ines] – Acts 13:9-14:7 NKJ

That's where Lystra was. And it's never been excavated; so the secrets of the Lystrians are just waiting to be discovered ... though I think we *all* know what they'd find.



And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother’s womb, who had never walked. This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, “Stand up straight on your feet!” And he leaped and walked. Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian *language*, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” – Acts 14:8-11 NKJ

And when they say “gods” they mean Hermes the messenger of the gods (I gave him the shorts; Hermes was needin’ some modesty. And it’s not like he’s not holding a blanket!) and Zeus the father of the gods. (*He* knows how to use a blanket; guess that’s why *he’s* Zeus. Hermes is the messenger; but he obviously didn’t get the message about the blanket!) All that to say, **the Lystrians were really big into Zeus and Hermes!**

And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Zeus ... brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they *tore* their *clothes* [now they *are* gonna think you’re *Hermes!*] and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? [Don’t you hate when your relatives embarrass you?] We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the *living* God ... who in bygone generations *allowed* all nations to walk in their *own* ways. ... And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them. [And *that’s* why Jesus couldn’t first come to the hose of the rest of the world! Plus] Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul *and* dragged *him* out of the city, supposing him to be dead. [We’re nothin’ if not fickle!] However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and [get this] went into the city. [“As I was saying ...”] And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra ... exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” – Acts 14:12-22 NKJ



Things don’t get better for Paul. **At the end of it all he’s in a dungeon**, probably this one, the Mamertine, writing his last letter, “2nd Timothy”, while awaiting execution, to encourage his “beloved son”, Timothy, a Lystrian, **at a time when Nero is tossing Christians to the lions, and tarring and lighting them up as literal torches.** Here’s the gist:

<sup>1:7</sup> God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. [What’s he mean by “power”?] <sup>1:8</sup> Join with me in suffering for the Gospel, by the power of God, <sup>1:9</sup> who has saved us and called us to a holy life [i.e. set apart and dedicated] ... <sup>3:12</sup> everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus *will* be persecuted ... <sup>4:7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ... <sup>4:16</sup> At my first defense, *no* one came to my support, but *everyone* deserted me. May it not be held against them. <sup>4:17</sup> But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and *all* the *Gentiles* might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. [So there’s *that*] – 2 Timothy (selections) NIV

**We're not really persecuted;** I mean, compared to being thrown to lions, locked up, lit up, or otherwise executed. **And we can let this blessing warp our thinking.** We can get so comfy in our somewhat-Christian frog-kettle culture that **we confuse trust with entitlement,** and begin to *expect* the Lord to attend to our desires on our timetable over *His* eternal plans and purpose.

But that's so *Zeus* and *Hermes*. **We're called to a holy life not an easy life.** Set apart and dedicated and depending on our Father's power to stay faithful to *His* purpose no matter what.

There'll be moments in your uniquely 21st century future when you'll have to decide whether you're staying the course or abandoning ship. And **you need to make that decision now, and prepare yourself on a daily basis.** Otherwise it might overtake you when it comes.



The enemy loves to whisper in your ear, that the fight's been fought and you *lost* ... but, that's a *lie*. **If you can hear it or fear it you can fight it!** Don't lay down like a dog and whimper. That's for those who don't prepare. Fight the good fight to your last breath (fresh or otherwise). You know, **even the champion ends up battered and bruised – if it was a good fight.**

Rocky knows. Know what else he knows? Shorts.

I've made *my* decision about my *decision*, and I'm preparing, so whether my finances tank, a blood test is devastating, or I'm betrayed or abandoned, I'll be ready and steady to stay the course, and to live in a way, on that day, that will allow *me* to say with *my* final words:

I *have* fought the good fight, I *have* finished the race, [and I'm going out in a blaze of *eternal* glory because] I have kept the faith. – 2 Timothy 4:7 NIV

I can't imagine any better last thought to have.