

1Corinthians 4:8b-13 "Why Share In Christ's Sufferings?"

If you'll remember from last week Paul was exhorting the Corinthian believers to consider how their pride had got in the way of their ability to grow up in the faith. And that pride led them to believe that they had arrived, spiritually speaking. This is why Paul uses the expression he does in verse 8.

1CO 4:8 "Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings - and that without us!..."

However, this approach is not meant to praise these people, but rather to shame them into humbling themselves before God. What's interesting is that at the end of verse 8 Paul points out how he would also like to be a king with these Corinthians and reign with them in splendor and majesty under the Kingship of Jesus Christ.

But his intention is not to rule with them at the time of him writing this letter, unless of course, Christ were to come back at that time. But he does understand that one day every believer will reign with Christ forever, and in a sense he is also telling them that they actually possess that hope as this is their destiny as the Spirit of God has sealed them for the day of redemption.

2TI 2:11-12 "Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him."

REV 5:9-10 "And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Here John makes reference to the eternal reign of Christ on the new earth as we will reign with our Lord Jesus in service to Him and believers of every age.

REV 22:3-5 "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 There will be no more night. They will not need the

light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will *reign for ever and ever.*"

But, the point Paul makes back in our text is that though he expects to be a part of this reign with every other believer, it will be a reign which is not fulfilled in this current sin-filled and cursed world.

And so, when Paul says, "Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings - and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!", he's saying that if all of these things have actually come about, then we must be in the eternal reign of our Lord who's come back for us and I would be delighted to be a king with you under those circumstances.

But notice how Paul says, "how I wish that you really had become kings..." In other words, 'how I wish the reign of Christ were really upon us. How I wish we were now reigning with Him where we will truly be rich and in need of nothing because He will have fulfilled all things promised to us.'

'But Corinthians, you're living in a pipe-dream thinking that that day is upon us. Your pride has blinded your eyes to think that you can sit back and take an attitude that others ought to be serving you when in fact this is the time we ought to be serving others with the gospel of Jesus Christ.'

Their pride had brought them to the false conclusion that because they are "King's kids" that they deserve the best of everything in this present world. Yes, we are children of our great God and Savior, but this present age is not where our reign with Him will find its ultimate glory.

1PE 4:13 "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."

Unfortunately, there are many Christians, including these Corinthians, who are getting the cart in front of the horse. They want all of the good stuff now without having to go through the process of living life out in this sin-filled world with all its obstacles as we serve our Lord.

ROM 8:17 "Now if we are children, then we are heirs -heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

This doesn't mean that we can't anticipate blessings from God in this life. But to expect that God somehow owes us a reigning position here and now is to miss what God has planned. Yes, that day will come. But, until He comes for us, this world is not our friend, nor our home or throne.

And yet, I know of Christian groups who act just like these Corinthians in many ways. Just listen to some of these televangelists. How many times have we heard it said that being kids of the King we deserve the best houses and the best cars and the best of everything?

And the reasoning goes something like this. How can we show the world we belong to a kingdom with riches untold if they can't see how our heavenly Father lavishes those blessings on all who come to Him? We owe it to the world to show them how God blesses. And if we would just demonstrate a little faith in believing that God wants us to have these things then we could accomplish great acts for Him.

Is that what the kingdom of God is all about? Mercedes Benz's? Million dollar homes on the Riviera? 80 foot yachts? Look, I have nothing against people who own those things. But, for Christians to expect such things because they're "King's kids" just shows how much of the child is still ruling their lives.

There is a place for the believer to expect to be an heir with God, co-heirs with Christ, but Paul makes it clear that the fulfillment of that promise is future oriented.

ROM 8:18 " I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

How do we get on with the work of Christ in this world when we expect that trials and tribulations should not be a part of our experience in this world? Do you know how frustrating that would be for someone who is told that when you come to Christ all of your problems go away?

What is the motivation to reach out and serve others when you're busy wondering how something bad could be happening to you? Again, I would caution all of us not to think that God is some vindictive God waiting for just the right opportunity to pounce on us.

Nor should we take the attitude that, "well, life is going to be hard, so I guess I'll just expect it to dump on me for the rest of my life."

We're not called by God to be masochists. We're simply called by God to be realists. Life is hard at times whether you're a believer or not.

But the advantage we have as believers is that we do have a God who is with us in the valley of the shadow of death as well as on top of the mountain. But more important, we have a God who has sent His own Son to suffer and die for us that we might have eternal life with Him.

As we come back to our text we would have to wonder, if anybody seems to deserve a cushy job and a throne on this earth away from all of the problems of life, it would appear to be Paul and the other apostles. Their status alone would seem to dictate that.

But notice what Paul conveys to these Corinthians about himself in light of the fact that they seemed to be trying to live that life of luxury, free from the problems of this world, as they took somewhat of a prideful attitude in their relationship with Christ.

1CO 4:9 "For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men."

What a sharp contrast this is to these Corinthians who have apparently arrived, in their own minds, and are in need of nothing.

What does Paul mean by verse 9? First, we notice that it is God who has put a specific group of people on display at the end of the procession. It's not Satan, nor other people in this world, but God Himself, who is using the apostles as an example to the world; not dressed in royal robes in an earthly sense, but those who are being paraded before the world as condemned men.

This is interesting language in the Greek because it conveys the idea that, though the "church in Corinth had a very high opinion of themselves, Paul and the other apostles looked like failures. The church there had promoted itself to first place, but God had set forth the apostles last." (Robert G. Gromacki)

The phrase, "God has put us apostles on display", or as the NASB renders it, "God has exhibited us apostles" is a phrase in the Greek which was used of conquering generals who would take the spoils of war, including prisoners, and parade them through the streets.

It was meant to be a humiliating experience for these prisoners. They were captives. But their captivity was meant to be used to entertain their conquerors. They would be led through the streets to the Coliseum where they were forced to fight wild animals. It was not a fair fight and they were expected to be torn to pieces.

This is the imagery Paul paints here for us. "God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena." (verse 9)

"To the Corinthians the Christian life meant flaunting their privileges and reckoning up their achievement; to Paul it meant humble service and a readiness to die for Christ." (William Barclay)

And if that isn't enough Paul says at the end of verse 9, "We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men."

The apostles were chosen by God Himself. And we might expect them to be on top of the list when it came to privileges. Not so. They were servants, not unlike any servant of Christ who had to suffer in this world, in many ways much worse than most people because of their position in Christ.

Everyone was a spectator of their fate. When Paul says that "we have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men", the word used for spectacle in the Greek is *theatron* which is where we get our English word theater.

But a theater in those days was a place in which games as well as dramatic events were exhibited. In a sense, Paul is saying that we have been put on display to play out our role as apostles, servants who are doomed to die for the cause of Christ.

And so, he states quite clearly that instead of being viewed as ruling monarchs in this world, he and the other apostles are one's who are at the other end of the spectrum.

But, what does it mean to have been made spectacles to angels as well as to men? Keep in mind that all of redemption history involves both men and angels. Men are the ones for whom Christ came to die and redeem by His death and resurrection. And therefore, men will certainly have a personal stake in this redemption.

But, angels too, are part of God's redemptive plan in that they minister to God's elect. And so, in a sense, Paul is saying that on the one hand there will be many men in this world who will actually take pleasure in seeing Paul and others being persecuted for their faith, while other men, who have the same Savior, will take strength from their faith as they see Paul in this theater of life for Christ.

But angels will be there to observe and minister to such servants. And since they are sent from God, it shows us that God is aware of everything that goes on in the life of a believer, even the hardships, and He will be there to comfort and strengthen.

And in the process angels will glorify God, not only in their personal involvement in the lives of God's servants, but also as they observe the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ in action and marvel at such love for people who deserve nothing from God.

You see, angels are not all-knowing. They continually learn about their God through the way in which He deals with us. Like the prophets of old who tried to understand the deep things of their salvation as they revealed God's word to His people, angels also delight into pondering this salvation for us.

1PE 1:12 "It was revealed to them [the prophets] that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. ***Even angels long to look into these things.***"

By the way, Paul confirms this purpose of God when he wrote to the Ephesians.

EPH 3:10 [God's] "intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made ***known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms***, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If angels long to look into the redemption God has for men, how much more should we, the recipients, long to look into the things God has for us, now and forever, as we come to His word and seek His face and presence in our lives.

And as we seek God we will find that He has much in store for us. But to have a wrong view of God and His plan for us in this world, can actually take away from what He's trying to accomplish in our lives. This is what Paul is saying to these Corinthian believers.

Their wrong view of God's will for them in this world ended up making them a prideful people who were thwarting the advancement of the kingdom of God. Instead, they were to look to those who would be considered the leaders in the church, the apostles, who were anything but a privileged few with no problems in their service to Christ.

And then Paul continues with a barrage of sobering truths as he contrasts his life with the lives of these people who felt they had arrived.

1CO 4:10-13 "We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! 11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world."

Does this sound like a position anyone in their right mind would seek after? No. But, for the person Christ chooses to this privileged position He also gives the grace to be that spectacle to the world as they show the world to whom they belong and are willing to die for.

As far as the world is concerned, and to some extent other Christians, Paul is a fool. He had enough education and enough contacts to be very successful in this world. And yet, he has given it all up for a promise which he won't see fulfilled until after he's dead. And he is certain his death is imminent at the writing of this letter.

These Corinthians evidently boasted in their wisdom to be able to manage this Christian life while still having a foot in this world. "Why not have the best of both worlds?", was their reasoning.

And yet, just earlier in this letter, Paul touched on that kind of wisdom that considered the things of this world as a viable option from the Corinthians stand-point. But Paul makes it clear that the only thing the wisdom of this world can produce is more of the same which takes us further from God, while the foolishness of the cross saves men eternally.

1CO 1:20-21 "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish

the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."

Paul goes on to say in our text, "We are weak, but you are strong!"

It's a wise man who knows his limitations and can understand where his real strength comes from. It's a foolish man who thinks himself to be strong only to find out that his strength will never suffice in trying to live a spiritual life.

If anyone was spiritual it was the apostle Paul. And yet, what does he say about his weakness as it relates to his ability to serve the risen Christ? He talks about it in his second letter to the Corinthians.

2CO 12:9-10 [Jesus] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

The Corinthians needed to understand their weaknesses in light of how God alone could give the true strength they needed to love and serve Him to His glory, not theirs. Paul points this same truth out later in this letter.

1CO 10:12 "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"

Paul continues: "You are honored, we are dishonored!" In what sense are they honored and by whom? Well, in their seeking to be wise and to be spiritually superior, they seek an honor from either other Christians or the world. In that sense, they are the ones who want to take center stage.

But in trying to receive honor from men, they dishonor God. Why? Because they have placed themselves first, when Jesus tell us that those who would be first will be last, while those who would be last will be first. In other words, they were still thinking like the world.

What we find is that Paul, who appears to be dishonored according to the world and certain segments of the church, is in fact honoring God with his life as he gets out of the way of trying to bring

attention to himself and is content to just serve the Lord faithfully. He may not get honor from men, but he will get honor from God. And that's who ultimately counts.

And then Paul continues with a list of things no one would volunteer for, unless they knew that what lies beyond is of greater worth.

1CO 4:11-13 "To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world."

These are all the things, which evidently, the Corinthians were not willing to participate in, not that they had to, but that they were not even willing to place themselves in a position of having to.

How many times in our lives does God ask us to consider giving up some of the creature comforts of this life, even for a short time, so that we might be better equipped, spiritually speaking, to serve Him?

I don't know how God does that in your life and I'm not so certain that He may ever do that in our lives as He did with Paul; but would we be willing if He did ask us?, is the point Paul is making. Paul had nothing against the Corinthians for being in a position of not having to endure ill treatment, or being homeless or poor. Only, don't place your confidence in the things of this world, is what Paul says.

Because if we do, and God does take them away, will we then be able to trust Him and know that He has not left us or forsaken us? You see, this is all about kingdoms. What kingdom do we belong to? And if this present world is not our kingdom, are we willing to let the things of this world go in favor of those things we can't see which belong to our heavenly kingdom?

I'm not saying any of this is easy to contend with, even as Christians. I'm just trying to convey what Paul lived, not just something about which he theorized. He knew what it was to have wealth and to have nothing. He knew what it was to be well fed and yet to go hungry.

But, in all of those situations of life he learned to be content because Christ was his all in all. Again, he isn't saying that to be

spiritual we must live his life, and experience everything he experienced. He's only saying that we must keep a proper perspective of what it means to follow Christ wherever He may lead and not assume that we can do the leading.

If the Lord wants to use us in a way where we may have to give something up, then we must not think ourselves so wise as to second guess Him, or to think that we are so spiritually mature that nothing of this world can touch us in any negative way.

Yes, we are children of the King of kings and Lord of lords, just as Paul was and is. And because of that we are assured that our Lord has every intention of using us in this life to His glory in one form or another.

And if that means being considered a fool for Christ by the world's standards, then so be it. But it also means not being ashamed to be His fool, knowing that we are still heirs and co-heirs with Christ in a kingdom which will never spoil or fade, reserved in heaven for us who believe.

It all comes down to a proper understanding of the God we serve and His will revealed to us in His word, and a willingness to follow wherever He leads by the strength which only He can supply.

Paul may have been considered the scum of the earth and the refuse of the world, and sometimes we might feel like that also; but we know one thing, our Lord considers us His beloved.

Let me close with this encouragement.

2TH 3:3-5 "But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 4 We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."