"Paul’s Foolish Boast in His Weakness"

2 Corinthians 11:16-27

I. Introduction

1. Interpreting Providence

In the life of genuine Christians there is within them an authentic desire to please God and walk in his will for our lives/We study God’s Word, we fellowship with God’s people, and we pray for his leading in our lives to show us what he wants for us/As we are doing this, one of the things that can blur our vision is our interpretation of God’s providence/What I mean is, when we start getting very serious about following God, sometimes all sorts of crazy things begin to happen in our lives/As these things happen, there are certain conclusions Satan and the world want you to draw from the crazy things that happen in life, and there are other conclusions that God wants you to draw from the circumstances of life.

How you interpret those things is going to have a massive impact on your joy, your confidence that you are following God, and the course of action that you take in pursuing him/Tonight, as we continue in 2 Corinthians and study Paul’s response to the false teachers who are trying to get him ousted from the church, we will see something wonderful in Paul and his mindset in relation to some very difficult life circumstances and events that he has gone through/As we consider this, it is my hope that our own thinking will be more in line with God’s will, that false burdens we are carrying will be lifted, that a false guilt we may have over things will evaporate, that we will lose our appetite for the pursuit of the world, and that our hearts and minds will be guarded in Christ as we go through the difficulties of life.

2. Brief Review

In verses 1-15 Paul exposed the false teachers in Corinth as those who proclaim another Jesus, a false Gospel, and who are under the power and influence of Satan as they masquerade as servants of light, just as the devil does/In addition to this Paul also exposed their love of money as well/We also know that these false teachers were braggarts and that they loved to boast in their natural giftedness and thereby demonstrated how foolish they really were/As Paul continues to expose them in our text tonight, we will see that Paul, for a moment, will use the same foolish tactics of boasting in the flesh/However, as he does so, Paul ends up highlighting things in his boasts that the false teachers would never highlight themselves/In so doing, Paul reveals that they do not really understand the true nature of how God works in his people through Christ/I found this study very edifying in my preparation, and it is my hope and prayer that God will bless you with it as well.

II. The Foolishness of Paul vs. 16-21

1. Joining in the foolishness vs. 16-18
III. Paul’s Foolish Boasting

(Read vs. 16-18)/This is essentially Paul’s prelude and disclaimer about what he calls his foolish boasting that will make up the rest of chapter 11/He says in verse 17 that this kind of boasting is the kind of boasting a fool (like the false teachers) would do, and that it is not the kind of boasting that the Lord would do/The reason why this boasting is foolish is because it is a boasting that verse 18 says is, “according to the flesh.”/In other words, it is a boasting in outward things or appearances/It is actually very similar to that which Paul said he would not boast in, in Philippians 3

At first this may seem crazy, even sinful, for Paul to engage this type of boasting in dealing with his opponents/However, by the end of the sermon we will see how Paul exposes, with their own methodology, how completely out of step they are with the true Gospel, the real way that God works, and what it means to really be his servant

2. Sarcastic Digression vs. 19-21

Before diving into his boasts, Paul takes a moment to deliver a sarcastic rebuke to the Corinthians for their toleration of these false teachers (read vs. 19-21a)/In verse 19 Paul is basically telling them that they need to indulge his foolish boasts because they are in the habit of bearing with fools since they are so wise themselves/This, of course, is sarcasm/Paul doesn’t really believe they are wise for putting up with fools and that is clearly seen by what he says in verse 20 (read)

Now when Paul says that they bear with this in verse 20, he is not commending them for having a longsuffering spirit/Instead, he is exposing their foolishness even though they think they are wise/Right in front of their faces the false teachers are devouring them and enslaving them with false teaching, and right in front of their faces the false teachers are bilking them for money, and these so-called “wise” Corinthians who follow them, are not even aware that it is happening/Not only are some of them not aware this is happening to them, but they are even proud of it

Paul and his companions, the ones being attacked and undermined by the false teachers and their followers, says in verse 21 that, “To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that.”/Is Paul really ashamed that he and his team were too weak to enslave, abuse, devour, and rob the Corinthians? Of course not, this is the use of sarcasm/Again, one of the criticisms of Paul by his opponents in 10:10 is that Paul’s letters are weighty but his presence is weak/Paul is making a play on that insult by claiming they are too weak to take advantage of the church and hurt it with false teaching and a lust for the world’s goods

Paul now will wrap up verse 21 by preparing his readers for his boasts (read vs. 21b)/Whatever the boasts in the flesh that the false teachers want to make are, they will fall short of the boasts that Paul can make/For the rest of the message we will examine Paul’s boasts and consider what they tell us about the Kingdom of God and how the Lord works in the lives of his true servants
1. The False Boast of Jewishness vs. 22

Apparently one of the boasts that the false teachers were making, was the boast that they were Jews (read vs. 22)/Many unconverted Jews in Paul’s day fell into the trap of misunderstanding the truth that God elected Israel, as Abraham’s seed, to be a light to the nations and to bring the blessing of the knowledge of God to the whole world/God told Israel In Dt. 7:7-11, that he elected them for these things, not because of anything in them, but because of his own promise and love/Despite this, many Jews took the truths that Israel was an elect nation and used that truth to become arrogant and self-righteous towards non-Jews, and they boasted in their Jewishness

Paul is telling the Corinthians here that if the false teachers are trying to wrongly puff themselves up over against Paul by claiming they are Hebrews, Israelites, and the offspring of Abraham, Paul can make the exact same claim and so this boast against Paul is nullified

2. Boasting in Christian Service vs. 23

The next boast the false teachers make that Paul will address, is the boast in how well they serve Christ/(read 23a)/Paul’s boasts are now a boast that he is a better servant of Christ than they are/This boast makes Paul very uncomfortable, and so he adds in, “I am talking like a madman...”/He doesn’t like using these tactics of boasting in the flesh that the false teachers use, that is why he keeps dropping these statements on us that indicate this is not what he wants to do/But now as we move forward and see how Paul describes his superiority as a servant of Christ in comparison to the false teachers, we see him boast in something that is very strange to the natural man, that actually doesn’t exalt Paul at all, and that gives God all of the glory

We already know that the false teachers in Corinth boast in their abilities as public speakers/We know from 1 Cor. 12-14 that this church was enamored with the spiritual gifts that were more outwardly visible and it is likely that the false teachers played on this/We know from 11:7-14 that the false teachers loved money and perhaps their possession of it was a boast they made to testify that God is with them/Paul’s superior boasts are very, very different than this, because he is a very, very different quality of minister/Let’s begin breaking down Paul’s boasts

3. Dangerous Labors vs. 23b-25

A. Far Greater Labors vs. 23b

Paul’s first boast over the false teachers is that in his service to Christ he has, “far greater labors.”/Paul was not a lazy and self-indulgent man, rather, he was a very hard worker in laboring for the Kingdom of God/It is in his great labors that he encounters the things he will now boast in

B. “Far More Imprisonments” vs. 23c
The next boast is the first of many boasts that appear very strange (read vs. 23c). Part of Paul’s boasting in his credentials is the fact that he has been to jail many more times than the false teachers have! Contrary to the self-indulgent, comfortable, lifestyle that accompanies so many false teachers, Paul was imprisoned multiple times for his faithfulness to proclaim Jesus. Rather than viewing this as a shameful thing, Paul declares it as a boast and puts it on his resume. So part of what he received as a result of his many labors, was a jail cell in response to his obedience to Jesus. To clarify, he is not boasting in being imprisoned for committing immoral crimes, that would be a shameful thing. Nor are any of the things he mentions in the rest of our text a result of his sin, rather, this whole text is about things that happened to him in obedience to God, not rebellion.

C. “… With countless beatings and often near death…” vs. 23d

Paul’s next boast is that he was beaten so many times for the Gospel that he has lost count, and he almost died multiple times (read vs. 23d). Again, this is another strange boast! Most false teachers offer their people the easy life and fill them with promises of riches, healing, and worldly success. Paul on the other hand, says the boast he will make is that he gets beaten all the time and has almost died on many occasions. This is so contrary to the message of false teachers! In verses 24-25 Paul gives us some of the specifics as it pertains to these beatings and near death moments he has had in service to Christ.

D. Beaten by the Jews: 39 lashes 5 times vs. 24a (read 24)

In Deuteronomy 25:2-3 God prescribes the punishment of beatings under the Old Covenant for the violation of certain crimes that did not require the death penalty. In this text, God set a limit to the amount of lashes one was to receive, and that limit was 40. This didn’t mean that all beatings had to go this far, it just meant that the lashes couldn’t exceed 40. These beatings could be very severe and on 5 different occasions, Paul had to endure these beatings from his own fellow Jews. Just imagine having to sit there and take 39 lashes with a whip upon your body! Imagine getting hit in the same places repeatedly and having your flesh torn off by a leather whip! That has to be so incredibly painful and as of the writing of 2 Corinthians, Paul had already endured this 5 times and to make it even worse, it was his own people that were beating him!

Paul, like his master Jesus, was severely beaten by the very people who were to love and accept him. Paul’s practice in his missionary church planting efforts was to begin in each city by preaching Christ to the Jews in the synagogues, and these beatings and imprisonments were often the consequence of his obedience to Jesus.

E. Beaten by the Gentiles: vs. 25a

We know from the Book of Acts, and other places, that not only did Paul preach to Jews in his ministry, but also, he preached to Gentiles as well. As he labored long and hard among the Gentiles he was beaten by them too (read vs. 25a). Being beaten with rods was a Roman form of
punishment/In Acts 16:16-24 we read about one of these episodes Paul is talking about/After driving a demon out of a girl in Philippi, her owners drug Paul and Silas before the magistrates and accused them of disturbing the city/The magistrates then beat Paul and Silas, “with many blows,” with these rods and then proceeded to imprison them.

Can you imagine what that would have been like? I have never been beaten with a wooden rod, but I have had some plastic lightsaber fights with Levi and when he smacks me with his plastic lightsaber, it hurts/I can’t imagine how painful and difficult it must be to be dragged before magistrates and be beaten with many blows by wooden rods/This happened to Paul on at least 3 separate occasions!/Nevertheless, just as with the Jews, despite the constant rejection and beatings Paul took, he loved these people and he stayed faithful to Christ and he kept preaching the Gospel to them.

**F. Once I was Stoned (vs. 25b)**

Let’s look at Paul’s next boast in verse 25, “…once I was stoned.”/Again this is another episode of excruciating physical suffering/In Acts 14:19-22 Luke records an episode in Lystra wherein Paul was stoned so badly that his body was actually dragged outside of the city and everyone thought he was dead!/He was stoned because he would not accept the Gentile’s worship of him as a god, and then the unconverted Jews who hated Paul came in and stirred the crowds against him and convinced them to stone him!/This event is one of the times Paul almost died/Rather than deterring him from pressing on, Paul, knowing the way of the cross, knowing the way of Jesus, at peace with the price he has to pay in proclaiming Christ, and knowing the fellowship of Christ in his sufferings, actually gets up in Acts 14:22 and ministers to the church by reminding them that it is through many hardships they must enter the Kingdom of God!

How would that impact you if you saw that? What is able to make a man respond like that to suffering? It is only the unshakeable confidence that God is with him, that he is in God’s will, and he is experiencing a fellowship with Christ by sharing in his sufferings, that cannot be experienced in comfort/Not only is Paul surviving these things, but he is thriving!/This is one of his boasts!

**G. 3 times I was shipwrecked vs. 25c.**

As Paul continues his boasts, look at what he boasts in next, (read vs. 25c)/Have any of you ever been at sea during a storm, or have you even been out on a boat on a lake when it gets windy?/It can be incredibly frightening/One of the most dangerous things in the Ancient World was traveling through the Sea/As Paul traveled across the Sea in service to Christ, on 3 different occasions he was shipwrecked, and again, these episodes are times when he almost died.

So here is Paul on his way to minister the Gospel and traveling through the Sea/On the way there, surely he prayed for safe travel, and sometimes God’s answer to Paul’s prayers while he was serving the Lord, was, “No Paul. In my great wisdom and love I am going to cause your ship to crash!”/In fact, on one of these occasions the Lord chose to sustain him by having Paul cling
to some of the remains of the ship to keep himself afloat all day long and all through the night as he waited for his rescue!

**APPLICATION:** What do you think Paul’s thoughts towards God were as he floated all day and night in the sea while clinging to wreckage? What would you be thinking? How would you interpret 3 shipwrecks in service to Christ? What would your sense of calling to the Jews be after being beaten by them 5 times? How would you feel about preaching to the Gentiles after they beat you with rods 3 times and one time almost killed you by stoning! Would anybody be tempted to quit? Would you conclude, “I just don’t think God is in this?” If you did conclude that, what would be your basis for concluding that? It isn’t God’s Word! Really, the basis for such an abhorrent interpretation of these things is typically birthed from some form of American prosperity lies that have deluded your thinking and have caused you to think that God is in something if it is easy, smooth, and prosperous.

How zealous would you be to continue preaching after say, the 3rd beating you received from the Jews? Don’t you think you might re-think your methods and try a different approach? Not Paul/He had suffered greatly at the hands of the Jews for preaching the Word and rather than changing things up, he persevered in preaching Christ to such a violent people and he paid a steep price.

He knew Jesus promised this suffering (Jn. 15:18-21; 16:1-4)/ “I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.” (Jn. 16:4)/ These things happened to Paul, and when they did, he remembered the words of Christ and they proved to be the rock he was standing on that sustained him! In fact, Christ’s promises were such a reality for Paul that not only did he survive these things, he shined in them to the point that he could pick himself up after being nearly killed with stoning and proclaim to the church that it is through many hardships we must enter the Kingdom!!! Don’t you want to be like that?

Yes he suffered, yes he paid a steep price, but far from being tempted to quit, Paul is actually using these things as boasts against those who are trying to undermine his ministry in the biggest crisis moment in the life of his beloved Corinthian church!

You have to settle it in your thinking by the Word of God that you are going to be hated by the world in service to Jesus, because if you do not, you will faithfully preach Christ, the world will reject you or persecute you, and if you think that is a sign that you are not doing God’s will, or shouldn’t be sharing your faith, or God is against you when you are being rejected for his Word, what are your actions going to be as a result of this thinking? Your deeds will always flow from what you believe is true/If you let yourself be deceived into thinking you shouldn’t be sharing your faith when you are persecuted and rejected, you will have no joy, you will have no confidence in Christ, you will not stand on his promises, you will be weighted down with Satan’s lies and heavy burdens, you may even confess your faithful witness as sin, and you will sink into discouragement, and your witness will be silenced! Do not interpret rejection that way!

4. Dangerous Journeys vs. 26
Let’s keep looking through Paul’s boasts and considering his example of faith that he tells so many churches to imitate/(Read vs. 26)/Paul tells us here that he went on many journeys for Christ, which was one of the most dangerous things a person could do back then/While journeying, there was often the danger of rivers to deal with/Most roads and places of travel were near rivers and sometimes a traveler would be required to cross a river on their journey/When a river was running high this could be a dangerous thing, and there was also the issue of flash flooding that could occur, and in an instant you could be swept away and killed

A. Dangerous People vs. 26d (read robbers, Jews and Gentiles piece)

In addition to the danger of rivers, there was the danger of robbers, who would hide out along travel paths and attack those who were vulnerable and steal their goods/Sometimes these encounters could be violent and deadly and travelers had to be on constant lookout for these dangers

Robbers were not the only people who were a danger to Paul and his companions/He was also in danger from his own people and from the Gentiles/Paul saw many conversions among the Jews and Gentiles, and the price of that fruit, was the making of enemies from both of these people groups and he was constantly in danger from them and in the beatings and incarcerations, we previously considered, we learned what it was like when he fell into their hands

In addition to this, we see at the end of this verse that he was in danger of “false brothers,” also/Unfortunately it was not just the unbelievers he had to watch out for, but also, Paul was in danger against those who claimed to be Christians but were really wolves who were trying to harm and destroy Paul/This is even more difficult than enduring the hostility from outright unbelievers! Even when he was with those who professed Christ he was still in danger

In Php. 1 false brothers were preaching Christ while Paul was in prison, not to obey God and spread his Word, but for the very purpose of irritating the government and making things harder for Paul in his imprisonment! How would you feel about that if you were Paul? Despite these actions by those who profess to be Christians, the theme of Philippians is the joy Paul had in his suffering due to being anchored in Christ and having his mind stayed upon him!

Can you picture living like this? Have you ever had someone in your life whom you knew hated you and whom you feared would do you physical harm if they saw you? I have, especially in my teens and early twenties/I remember never feeling relaxed or at peace anywhere I went/I would never wear sandals because if I had to fight I wouldn’t be able to fight well in a pair of sandals! It was so exhausting all the time, constantly being on the lookout for those who might harm you, and this was Paul’s constant way of life/I felt exhausted and anxious, but Paul had the joy of the Lord/The difference between Paul and me, was that he knew Christ was with him and Christ was anchoring him, while I was an atheist and had nothing during those times!

B. Dangerous Places
In the rest of verse 26 Paul tells us that he was in danger “in the city, danger in the wilderness,
and danger at sea...”/In other words, there was no place he could go that was not
dangerous! He knew danger was everywhere and he courageously looked danger in the eye and
pressed on in love for Jesus! This is so different than how most Christians think today/We are
constantly trying to keep ourselves from dangerous places, but Paul knew that there was no
such thing in a cursed and fallen world/The city had its own peculiar dangers, the wilderness had
its dangers, and the sea presented its own dangers as well/But Paul was free in his heart and
mind because for him, “to live is Christ and to die is gain,” (Php. 1:21)/He trusted God with his
travels, he trusted God with his enemies, and he trusted God in the face of all danger and
pressed on IN danger and this is something he is boasting about, not repenting for!!!

How many of us would rebuke Paul for living like this? I bet the false teachers in Corinth would
do that! Amazingly, one of Paul’s boasts in his efforts to debunk false teachers, is the boast that
he is in constant danger as he carries out his ministry/If you are in the group that would rebuke
Paul for this, you are in very bad company and you desperately need to repent/May we honor
people such as these, for the world is not worthy of them!

3. Going Without vs. 27

In verse 27 Paul changes the emphasis of his boasts from boasting in things that harm him or put
him in danger, to boasting in having to go without in service to his King/Paul’s service to Christ is
a service that he describes as taking place, “in toil and hardship.”/What follows those words, is a
description of what the toils and hardships were

A. Without Sleep

He begins by telling us that he had to press on in his ministry, “through many a sleepless
night...”/How hard is this one? How well do you do when you have a horrible night of sleep?
Depending on how severe it is, I can sometimes struggle physically for an entire week if my sleep
is disrupted long enough/How many of us parents know intimately the intense difficulties of
sleepless nights/Sometimes you are just on survival mode during these seasons/Sleeplessness
was a way of life for Paul and he found God’s grace to strengthen him when he was exhausted

B. Without food and clothes

Paul continues his boasts and tells us what else he went without, “...in hunger and thirst, often
without food, in cold and exposure.”/Many times as he walked in obedience to God, Paul was
hungry and thirsty and was without food/He had enough food to keep him alive and to keep him
serving God, but he did not have as much food and water as he would have liked/Just as with
sleeplessness, it can be very difficult to press on when you are hungry and thirsty/Paul said this
happened to him “often.”

In addition to this, Paul also boasts that he was cold and exposed in his service to Christ/again,
he had enough clothing and shelter to keep him alive, but he did not have enough to keep him
comfortable/Sleeping in the woods without enough clothing and in a shelter without much heat, or sometimes no shelter at all, he felt the discomfort of not being as warm as he would have preferred to be, but he was kept warm enough by God to survive go on serving him

If you had planted Corinth and saw how desperate the hour was in that church and you were trying so hard to protect this church from wolves, and one of the ways you had to do this was to boast about your service to Christ, how many of you would boast in the fact that you don’t have as much food, water, clothing, or shelter as you would like when you are serving the King?/I fear greatly that we would come to much different conclusions than Paul if we went through these things!

IV. Application

1. What is your Interpretation of difficult providences?

If you resolve that you are going to plant yourself in the ways of God, that you are going to commit to seriously worshipping him in the Word every day, that you are going to make disciplined efforts to connect with the church throughout the week, that you are going to cut out worldly influences and habits in your life, that you are going to invite accountability into your life, that you are going to press into God and beg him to draw near, to make you holy, and to use you in his Kingdom as you willingly embrace suffering, should it be any surprise to you if your circumstances start falling apart?

Commit yourself to these things and I wouldn’t be one bit surprised if your kids keep you up at night because of bad dreams, I wouldn’t be one bit surprised if you fall on financial hardships as you try to walk in him in faithfulness, I wouldn’t be one bit surprised if you develop health problems, I wouldn’t be one bit surprised if your car breaks down, I wouldn’t be one bit surprised if relational friction rises up, and on and on we could go/The absolutely critical question to this is, “How do you interpret these things?”/Your beliefs about what these things mean in your life will govern the decisions you make in response to them and will therefore drive your actions

2. Satan’s Interpretation and Temptation

Satan will tempt you into thinking it is not worth it, that God is giving you a sign that you should not make these God-centered decisions, that he doesn’t really want you to be in his Word because the kids didn’t have a perfect 14 hour night of sleep; Satan wants to convince you that you shouldn’t be so committed to his Word, his people, and the cause of his Kingdom because you might not have the money to live as comfortably as you want/Look at all of the difficulties!! You need to give up on that serious private worship time in the Word, give up on plugging your life into the body of Christ and growing in fellowship, give up on sharing the Gospel, Give up on pruning away worldly things to center yourself on God’s priorities because these difficulties prove that God is not in it!!!! Just watch TV and go back to sleep!!
False teachers will tell you these things, because a false teacher’s number one priority is not the way of the cross, it is gaining the comforts, acclaim, and treasures of this world and they will steer all of their disciples towards these same things, and they will do it in the name of Jesus!! Don’t buy it!! Following the world, whether it be pursuing money, possessions, popularity, entertainment, sports, or hobbies, at the expense of God’s priorities in your life, will always harm you spiritually/The interpretation of difficulties as a sign from God that you are to lower his Kingdom priorities in your life, and elevate worldly priorities, is a false interpretation/That isn’t God, it’s Satan!!

3. God’s Interpretation and Testing

God is allowing these difficult things in your life to test you! He is allowing these things in your life to weaken you, to crush you, and to make you despair of self-reliance/Why? Because he wants you to have more of him and learn what Paul learned/Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10 that he got so low in his trials that he despaired of life, but that this taught him to rely not on himself but on God who raises the dead!

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:7-18 that he rejoiced in being a jar of clay who carried the treasure of the Gospel and that God had called him to carry around the dying and suffering of Jesus in his body/God did this so that when he sustained Paul in it, everyone would know that Paul was sustained by the power of God and not the sturdiness of the clay pot!

Paul knew that when suffering and hardships were at work in him, that God used these things to work life into those whom he was ministering to (2 Cor. 4:10)/For Paul, he knew his sufferings didn’t destroy his ministry, they empowered it!/Paul knew that the sufferings he was enduring in obedience to God were working for him, “an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,” (2 Cor. 4:17) and he kept his eyes, not on what he could see, but on the unseen God and his precious promises!/Paul knew, which we will spend more time on in the next few weeks, that when he was weakened that was when God’s power rested upon him (2 Cor. 12:9-10)

Perhaps more preciously than anything, Paul knew that when he suffered for Christ, there was a special fellowship with Christ IN the suffering, that cannot be had any other way/Writing from prison, Paul said in Philippians 3:10 that his deepest desire was, “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...”/There is a knowledge of Christ in sharing his sufferings that is the deepest intimacy with him there is/In fact, the word translated “share,” in Greek, is actually the Word, “koinonia,” which is the word used for fellowship/That means that to “share in his sufferings,” is to have a koinonia, or unique fellowship with him in his sufferings/There is a depth of sharing intimacy with Jesus that is unique to suffering, and suffering is the only way to have it with him, much like the way to have the deepest intimacy with a war veteran is to be able to share stories about the same types of things you endured when you went to war

Read Paton quote
4. How Different Would Your Life Look?

I am trying hard to labor for your soul here/I love you all and I want you and I to have more of Christ than we are currently having/One of the keys to this is how we interpret suffering/How different would your life be if you were firmly planted in God’s priorities for your life, and when the storms of life hit, you were not shaken, you were not afraid, but you trusted God?

You knew, like Paul, that afflictions constantly await you but you resolved to complete your course of testifying to the grace of God (Acts 20:22-24)/What if you were convinced that when you were at the end of your abilities and could taste how weak you are, that this was a blessing, rather than a cause for anxiety, because the power of resurrection and the strength of God will rest on you in his grace as you look away from yourself? What if your heart was convinced that your sufferings were the way that God would strengthen believers in your life and convert unbelievers? What if your heart was convinced that there was an eternal weight of glory waiting for you in heaven that your suffering was producing? And, most importantly, what if you consistently drank of the deepened fellowship that there is with Jesus in your sufferings and got to know him better? How different would your joy, peace, holiness, and commitment to God be if your mind was armed with these things?

Paul lived a fruitful, joyful, and blessed life not because he didn't suffer, but because his heart and mind was stayed on God’s truth in his suffering/This is available to you/He is not unique, he is an example of the kind of life all sinners can have in Christ/Christ and the power of his Word, not Paul, is the cause of such an abundant life/I hunger for you to have it, I hunger myself to have it/Let us commit to praying for each other and exhorting one another to grow in this

Jesus lived into even worse sufferings than Paul, and like Paul, Jesus knew how to understand God in his sufferings and as a result he was the happiest person who has ever lived, even though, ironically, he suffered more than everyone who has ever lived/Jesus has told us that a servant is not above his master and that all genuine Christians will follow him in suffering and taking up a cross/However, in doing this, we will also all follow him into glory, follow him into life, and he even said himself, that he will give us His joy and peace as we follow him in his way (John 14:27, 15:11, 17:13)/The sufferings of Christ culminating in his death and resurrection resulted in his glorious exaltation, and in our salvation in him! You need only to look at the cross and see that there is great beauty and glory that emerges from suffering!

Stop worrying and fretting in your difficulties, instead, renew your mind with his Word and seek out the special fellowship that he is offering you in these times/He loves you, and he loves to show how great he is in the lives of weak and broken people who find his grace in their calamities and hardships/If you are not a Christian, stop trying to avoid suffering, it is always going to be present in your life and you know it/Instead, you must look to the one who suffered on the cross in paying for sins/Believe in him, trust that his death is enough for God to forgive you if you repent and believe/Find life in his sufferings/From there you will begin a journey of finding joy in him while you suffer, which is much richer than a life of comfort and ease