

2 Corinthians 1:1-6

Sunday 12/4/2011

I. The Handbook of Ministry

Oh, not that you didn't already know that this is really formed for us a handbook of ministry. We talked about the contrast between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians and how invaluable they are.

Now, I gave you something last week that I want you to bring over this week, and I want to use it not only throughout this sermon this morning, but throughout our study. I talked about four things that Paul talks to us about as God's people that we ought to always keep this little basic formula in our lives to help us stay on track. We talked about how Paul said to examine yourself. We talked about how Paul said to take heed to thyself. He talked about knowing yourself and then proving yourself. We talked about how important it is for you to be able to do that, to keep those things in your life. Basically, you could solve every problem you have in life if you would just follow that little basic formula, but we don't. That is why God gave it to us.

So, Paul, when he starts to lay this out, there are a lot of principles that Paul has put out and given us before we ever got into this book that we want to talk about that we learned last week and learned in the book of 1 Corinthians. Now, 2 Corinthians is put together much like 1 Corinthians. By that, I mean chapter by chapter. Each chapter is devoted to a central theme. We remember when we came through 1 Corinthians, the theme was the problem they were dealing with, and many times there were multiple issues. But in 2 Corinthians, it's much the same way. This chapter is devoted to a central theme dealing with the aspect of ministry. Then, within that theme, there are great principles on ministry that are given to us, and it's all focused on how we are to deal with people.

Let me say this, and I say this a lot, but it's always good to remind ourselves: the ministry is people. It is one-on-one working with people in the Word of God and helping them through their troubles and through their trials. In this book, one of the things that I like about it is that it shows me Paul's true heart and his burden to carry out the plan that God had for him. It forms a great model for us. In this book, he bears his heart to the church at Corinth about ministry, which is what they were not doing. By doing so, he really, for us, peels back the layers of what it takes to have an effective ministry for Christ.

There are thirteen chapters in this book. There are thirteen main themes. Then, major principles or principles that break down, every chapter breaks down around those thirteen. It's quite incredible. What you're about to study, what we're about to get into through these chapters, is absolutely foreign today to most pastors, most teachers, most churches, and most laymen who call themselves ministry. We're going to look at something that is probably in the purest biblical form that it can be. Each chapter shows us what our attitude should be about certain aspects of the ministry. It forms for us a mindset of ministry.

I told you last week my whole life in ministry, as far as approaching it, dealing with people, everything the way that I do it, is based on what I've learned out of the book of 2 Corinthians. It's Paul describing his own ministry, really what it is, but he's describing it as he's dealing with

them. It's a testimony to what God has called him to do and what God was doing through him. What became apparent, what becomes apparent very quickly, is how Paul's ministry is so far removed from the picture that we get today of modern-day Christianity and the ministry and churches. If there's any one thing that convinces me that God's people today, Christianity, has lost its mind, it's the way and the aspect of what they think a real church is and what real ministry is compared to what Paul says it should be. But as I've said many, many times, when you discount the Bible and you lose the Bible, then you lose all that goes along with it.

Now, I'm going to begin reading in chapter 1 here, and let's read the first six verses, and then we'll come back and we'll talk about this. What we want to do today is define ministry for you. That's what we want to do. That's what he does in the first chapter. You're going to see by this definition that ministry is probably going to be defined unlike even many of you, if not most of you, if not all of you, have never seen it defined. But here's what he said:

2 Corinthians 1:1-6

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

Now, Father, we thank you and praise you for the Lord Jesus Christ today. We do love you. We thank you for those that have come out today. We thank you for the tremendous surge of growth that we've seen in men and women who have stepped up into the mode of leadership and have taken all the reins of so much that needs to be done. We thank you for the homeless ministry and the restart ministry, the thing that you've given to us that really fine-tunes and sharpens us and takes so many of these folks, Lord, and really makes them everything that God wants them to be. And Lord, as we approach this book, we pray, Father, that you'll take the men and women who have already committed themselves to serve you and now teach us how to serve you. Let us work out and work through all the attitudes that we have of what we think ministry is. Let us come to the end of ourselves that we might see from the Bible standpoint from this great book if we're going to have a successful ministry or if we're going to be successful ministers, and we now know that ministry is taking the Word of God and ministering to someone else. Father, we pray that you'll help us to see that. You'll help these men and women to grow and continue to grow as

this church grows and continues to grow. And we'll thank you and praise you in Jesus' name for His sake, we ask it. Amen.

II. The Key to Ministry: Suffering

Now, in chapter 1, He begins to really define what ministry is, and He teaches us that the key to ministry, believe it or not, is our suffering. That's about as foreign today as you could ever want to get from what people think ministry is. This book teaches, and chapter 1 in particular, it teaches that a pastor or a minister becomes one with his people as they suffer together. That's why throughout this book you find forty-three of the most negative words that you could think of. The words throughout this book suggest this very thing.

You find the word:

- anguish
- perplexity
- devour
- smite
- bondage
- weakness
- forsaken
- faint
- persecuted
- sorry
- grieved
- down
- perish
- burdened
- cast down
- groaning
- poor
- chastened
- hunger
- beaten
- perils
- pain
- infirmities
- stoned
- reproaches
- offended
- weariness
- mourning
- trembling
- fear

- poverty
- affliction
- despair
- necessities
- imprisonments
- distressed
- destruction
- tumult
- killed
- tribulation
- dying
- suffering
- terrified

These words are painted throughout this whole book. It lends to the idea, what Paul was trying to get across to us in chapter 1, that the ministry is based on your suffering and understanding how that suffering is going to help someone else. These are the words that Paul has chosen when he describes the Christian minister and the ministry.

Now, let me ask you a question: How does that line up with a mega-church concept today? How does that line up with most of what all churches follow as ministry? There are a lot of churches today, and I'm certainly not fighting this. I'm really not. I'm just making a statement. It's a mindset. You'll find that every time we have Christmas and every time we have Easter, the mega-churches in this city and across this country put on grand pageants about the birth of Christ or the crucifixion of Christ. In their mind, they actually think that that is ministry. The reality is, when we're done with the book of 2 Corinthians, hopefully when we're done with the message today, you will at least have the beginning of an understanding of what ministry really is.

I saw in the paper, I think it was last week or the week before last, about how they had to sell the Crystal Cathedral out there in California. Robert Schuller, who built that a number of years ago, went bankrupt and couldn't get any more money to maintain it and to have it. So now it went to the Catholic Church, and they bought it. You see things like that all the time. People think that when you build a gigantic building, that really puts you in a position to be a great minister. I suggest to you the truth of that is just the opposite because the more you have, the more you get disjointed from the people who don't have anything. The more you become self-sufficient in yourself.

I think of Jerry Falwell. I have no beef with Jerry Falwell. He's dead now and went home to be with the Lord. I have no problem with him. But I used to kind of laugh that the main magazine that he would send out was a magazine called Faith Magazine. That was his magazine for his ministry and for his church. It always amazed me that here's a guy who's probably making \$300,000 a year. He's probably living in a \$300,000 home. He's probably driving a \$65,000 car. I know he had a yacht that he liked to spend time on. Nothing wrong with that. I got one myself. I just can't find any water to put it in big enough. So I used to use dining in the bathtub. And yet, all of it's paid for by the church. This guy replaced a broken light or a broken toilet. Everything is

paid for. He's probably got a 401K that would put everybody to shame. And yet, this kind of guy or guys like him are going to write a magazine and tell you and me, who sweat out car payments and don't have enough money for your kids and don't have enough money for Christmas or don't have enough money for this, he's going to tell you and lecture you about faith. Ridiculous.

There's a vast difference, and you need to see and understand this. There's a vast difference between the mega-church concept today and the pastors and the way they run it and what they do in it to what the Bible says it's really supposed to be. Let me tell you something. The only stocks and bonds that Paul had when his death was the ones that were on his hands and his feet. But that's the world we live in today. That's the world we live in today.

Listen, the ministry is not some glamorous 5,000-seat cathedral with a \$100,000 sound system and 200-voice choir and praise singers and multi-media screens and a pastor who sits on a throne who is untouchable and intangible as far as his people are concerned. The ministry, as my old father in the Lord, Mel Subaca, used to say, is just one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread. That's all that it is.

III. Bearing His Reproach

One of the great defining verses of what your life and my life should be and getting a Bible perspective on it, it's a familiar verse. I'm sure you've heard it. If you've been around here much at all, I've talked about it quite often. It's found in Hebrews chapter 13, verses 12 through 13, where it talks about the comparison of Jesus's ministry and what he did in the cross and what you and I are to do for him.

Hebrews 13:12-13

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

It's one of the greatest verses in the Bible on ministry for a Christian. My one-by-one job as a Christian, my one-by-one job as a minister, and it should be yours too, is to bear the suffering for him and bearing his reproach. Now, if you want to take an easy study of that, you just go back in his life and find out what everybody hated against him and then match up till they hate you about the same thing. I don't put it and go back to what I said: examine yourself, take heed to yourself, know yourself, and prove yourself. It's real simple. It's all you got to do.

Somebody asked Mel one time years ago, I was standing there, and they asked him a question if he was enduring his salvation or he was enjoying his salvation. His answer came so fast, he made your head spin. He said, "Look back," and he said, "You know what? I'm enjoying my enduring." For the most part, Christians and Christianity today are so plastic. It's so plastic. Nothing or nobody's real. It's all a show. When I sat there and heard him say that, "I'm enduring my enduring," I can honestly say to you, it took me the next thirty years to figure out what he said in that statement. But I got it. I got it.

Christianity and Christians today are simply self-centered. They're self-serving. It's all about them, and they just give God what's left of their busy schedules and their busy lives. Last week, in dealing with the introduction to 2 Corinthians about ministry, I told you in Hebrews chapter 5, that great passage that says:

Hebrews 5:12

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

I told you in the first half again to teach you to be the first oracles and the principles of God. I showed you how that when he came down through that passage, it talked about the fact that milk belonged to the babies, but strong meat belonged to them that are of full age, by reason of use, who have exercised your senses to discern good and evil. I told you that back then, I made the statement that God's people, they want to... I told you that when you get the Bible, you have to have an exercise program to develop you into what God wants you to be. Otherwise, you just stay and never go anywhere. I told you, just as God's people want to eat, they never want to exercise. I told you that last week.

But to go along with that, and you can write this down too along with it, they want to minister. Yes, they do. They want to minister. You bet they do. They want to minister, but they just don't want the suffering that comes along with it. That's the problem. You see, it's okay that He suffered for you. That's all right. It's all right that He suffered for you. You appreciate that. You thank Him for that. You, I mean, and I believe you probably do. You understand that suffering was how you got saved. It's okay that He suffered for you. You just don't want to suffer for Him.

The Bible says in Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, that you and I are supposed to have our bodies to be a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, and to prove what is that good and acceptable, perfect will of God. The Bible says that which is our reasonable service. It's not reasonable to you. Most of God's people today, it's not reasonable that they should suffer for Him. Oh, it's reasonable that He should suffer for us. But it's just not reasonable for us to suffer for Him. That's why I personally believe that in my own personal life, and I just my own, you know, you have your opinions, I have mine. This is why I believe that 99% of God's people today, their relationship with God is nothing but a lie. Oh, I believe they're saved. Sure they are. Sure they are. But I believe they live in a fantasy world. There's no real fellowship in our lives.

Let me ask you a question, and don't say amen or raise your hand. Don't put yourself on the spot because the answer is probably not going to be what you think it is. But I ask you today, I ask God's people today, my people today, I ask you today, do you really have fellowship with Him? Do you really? And before you say amen, we had a great time in the Word of God this morning, or amen, we had a great time in that prayer group. Or, "You just wouldn't understand my devotions this morning. It was wonderful." I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the Bible's definition of fellowship found in Philippians because in Philippians chapter 3, verse 10, he says:

Philippians 3:10

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

If you're not suffering for Him today, you don't have any fellowship with Him. You're like a fantasy Christian with a fantasy relationship with God, and it's always a nice big bubble and a nice big cloud, and you never pay any price for anything. You never really do anything. One of these days you're going to run into the judgment seat of Christ like an out-of-control car into a bridge abutment.

Ministry is real simple in its breakdown. Chapter 1 lays it out. As the Lord suffered, we are to suffer. That through what Christ went through and you learning the fellowship of those sufferings and what we go through in our sufferings, that we can help others.

IV. The God of All Comfort

Look at verse 3 in our text. It says:

2 Corinthians 1:3

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Now, that in itself is a great verse. Let's talk about that for a moment. The God, the Father of all mercy and the God of all comfort. You know, you've heard me say it many, many times. I don't care what you've done in your life. I really don't. It doesn't concern me. It's really none of my business. We've all got skeletons in our closet, and we've all got problems. People who like to continually make reference to other Christians, they usually do that because they're afraid the ones in their closet are going to come out. So they always point the finger to somebody else. That's just a standard operational procedure of human nature.

God doesn't care where you've been. You hear me say it all the time. We get people come in here with all kinds of backgrounds. Some of you, you know, some of you come out of not so terrible backgrounds, and some of you come out of the sewer. God doesn't care. I don't care. The reason why I don't care and the reason why God doesn't care is because what that verse says right there in verse 3, it says:

2 Corinthians 1:3

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

God will take the struggles that you went through in your life and have gone through or maybe going through now in a life without God, and a life without God will produce exactly what those forty-three words we talked about when we started. But God is willing to take you and take all the suffering that the world has put you through because of your and my bad choices. I'm not talking about you being a martyr. I'm talking about you and me living a life without God, doing

our own thing, and then getting ourselves up to our eyeballs in problems. Even in that, the God of mercy and the God of comfort will take your sufferings and use it. He will. He will.

If that wasn't enough, the great principle in Galatians chapter 6, verse 7:

Galatians 6:7

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

Along with your bad choices, along with my bad choices, along with our stupid things that we have done, even after God forgives you and puts you under the blood, He doesn't take away the baggage. The baggage is still there. The things that you have to deal with, the things that you, the consequences that you have, your bad choosing and your bad choices that you have to deal with and work through, in some cases, maybe the rest of your life. Even in those things, the God of all mercy and comfort will take and through those will mold you into His suffering to use you. That's what He does.

But my dear friend, my dear friend this morning, it will never work for you or for God if God's people do not learn from their mistakes and their bad choices and to stop making bad mistakes and choices. You have to understand yourself. You have to know yourself. You have to identify your weaknesses. You have to understand what your problem is. The only way, the only way to change a life of bad choices, the only way to change a bad life, a life of bad choices and decisions, is to change the thinking process that got you into those bad choices. If you don't, it's one bad relationship after another. It's one bad marriage after another. You'll find, you'll go on a life trying to find your perfect soulmate, your perfect person. You'll look in every place except the right place. You'll go everywhere, get on every line with every dating service and try to find whatever you can, and you'll actually think that God will bless you, and you're not even smart enough to understand that the people that you're finding are people just like you. A lot of baggage. That's not how you do it. So you go from one bad relationship to another. One bad marriage to another. One financial problem disaster to another. One job from another. One bad decision to another. And you just simply trade one bad circumstance for another one.

Listen, the bad choices of life and the sufferings of those consequences are what God will take and God will use to make you. I'm going to say it again. The problems you go through, the sufferings, even your bad choices, even my bad choices, even my stupid things that I do, those things God will take, and in spite of me and in spite of my choices, God will take them, line them up with His sufferings, and God will use me. But God, yes, will use those to make you, but God will not use those to make you till you take those same things that you did wrong and God breaks you. There has to be a brokenness in God's people. You have to deal with your flesh and all of its issues, and you have to put an end to the bad choices that you make in your flesh.

Now, every man and woman on this planet has troubles. I understand that. I've got mine, you got yours. Job said it. You want a good perspective on it? Get what he said in Job chapter 5, verses 6 and 7:

Job 5:6-7

*Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground;
Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.*

You have sparks in your life because of contention. The Bible says you're not born into trouble, you're born unto trouble. And the sparks, the sparks fly upward. Oh, the sparks, ever dig a big, a commercial grinding and grind a piece of steel? I mean, it'll shoot out sparks. I mean, unbelievable. That's the way most of God's people's lives are at the moment they get born and they start to grow up. The sparks fly upward. But real ministry is God taking that trouble that we all have. But before God takes that trouble and makes you, God has to take that trouble and break you. You have to come to the place that you look at your stupid mistakes and what you've done and how you got into the stupid circumstances you got in, and you hate it. You despise it. I'm not saying you're going to walk away from it in five minutes, but I'm telling you what, you come to the point where you hate it. You despise it. And instead, we bring that right into our relationship with God. Oh, the sufferings of Christ that God wants to take and make you. Before He can make you, He has to break you. That's the problem today. That's our problem. That is our problem as God's people. There is no brokenness in God's people. There is not. There is not. There is not.

We brag about our filthy lifestyle. We wear our fornication and wear our stuff like a badge of honor. We dress immorally. We do all the things. We bring the world right into our relationship. We flaunt ourselves and walk around like we're something hot. We do all of these things, and we go all these places, and we get involved in all these things, and we actually, all we've done is brought our filthy, godless sufferings right into our Christian life. And I wonder why we have no victory. You have to come to the end of self. You have to no longer be self-serving, self-centered. Your flesh has to be dead to Christ. You have to come to the end by being broken. Then, when you get to that point in your life, God takes the old sufferings, adds the sufferings now of serving God, and through that fellowship of His suffering, God uses you.

V. The Bible Definition of Ministry

He says in verse 4, here's the Bible definition of ministry. Here it is right here. Mark it in your Bible. He says in verse 4:

2 Corinthians 1:4

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

Now there's the baseline of ministry. People get a stupid idea. I've heard it all my life. "Well, I'm really good to minister. I lived a terrible life, and I'll tell you, I can make your hair curl some of the things I did. Boy, I've been this and I've been there, and I'll be a great person for a minister." No, it doesn't matter what you've been through in life. The question is what you went through in life, did it break you? Or did you just walk around flashing it like a badge? "I'm a police officer. I'm a badge. I'm a Christian. I got a lot of baggage under my life here. I'll be able to help you." If you haven't been broken by it and you don't understand the fellowship of His suffering and

you're still acting and living and dressing and smelling like the world, you're kidding yourself. You're kidding yourself. You're kidding yourself.

You may have noticed, if you've heard many preachers preach, and maybe some of you haven't heard a lot, I have, the difference between a preacher who reaches out and affects you and hits you right between the eyes on a hard issue versus the preacher who just preaches over your head or gives you a great sermon but it doesn't move you. The difference is the fact that one guy has been through some things so he knows where it's at, and he's suffered through some things so he knows what you're going through. The latter preacher has not been through anything, and he has no way to what he says.

You know, there's a great story back in Genesis chapter 32. It's one of my favorites, and it's about Jacob, and it starts out in verse 24 with one little line, and it kind of puts the title on the whole passage. It simply says:

Genesis 32:24

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

I have a message on it that I've preached for many, many years, and that message is basically "The Day God Gets You Alone." Jacob was just like you and me. The word Jacob means "schemer," and if you study his life, he worked out and schemed to do everything he could the way he wanted to do it. He got everything he wanted the way he wanted. Boy, he is a mirrored image of you and me as a Christian. But one day God got him alone, and he's wrestling with God, and what he's wrestling with God with is over doing what God wants him to do versus what Jacob wants to do. Where a lot of you were at one point in your life, and maybe some of you are still there. The Bible says that God reached out and touched the hollow of his thigh, and his hip went out of joint. A very painful thing. The Bible says that's the point then when God changed his name from Jacob, which means "schemer," to Israel, which means "the father of the nation of Israel." But Jacob limped the rest of his life.

You know, sometimes God will leave you with a limp in life. Sometimes God will leave you with a limp in life just so you never forget the way you once were so you never go back to being that again. Jacob learned from that. Never trust a man who doesn't limp when it comes to ministry. For a message to bear any weight, the guy has to have been through some things. He has to have gone through the mill. You see, sermons come from your life. Sermons come from the disaster and the sufferings of things that you've been through then matching up with Christ's suffering. Not a book of sermons or getting it off the internet.

Now, this is why young guys, like we talked about a couple of weeks ago, you got to be careful how you preach and what you preach. Because you know what? You haven't been through anything. You don't know anything about life. Why somebody tried to tell you something, you think you know all the answers to it. You don't know anything. You won't take any advice from anybody. You know what you know, and this is the way you're going to be. That's the way young people are today. That's the way they've always been. I was that way. You come to that void, and

the problem is you haven't been through anything. You don't know anything. So there's no weight behind what you say. So you got to pick carefully what you talk about and what you say.

Did a good job last mission last week. Even told them I kicked your butt, you know, get it back online. Didn't have to do that, but at least you learned. I guarantee you there'll be guys down there preaching in the future that are chatting at sermons that will just go on like a bull in a china shop. You know why? They don't learn anything. They don't learn anything.

Listen. Listen to me. When the Lord makes a diamond, He takes a lump of that old dirty ugly coal and puts it through intense heat and pressure. And then someplace along the line, a jeweler takes it and with precision cuts that diamond to a perfection. And then after that, someplace along the line, another man takes it and he polishes it to a brilliant splendor, and what comes forth is the most desired gem on this planet, a beautiful diamond.

Listen to me. I have no doubt in my mind that the Lord's going to take some of you men and women sitting here under the sound of my voice today and make you a wonderful gem for His crown. I have no doubt about it. I have no doubt that God's going to take some of you young men and some of you young ladies and He's going to make you a wonderful jewel and a gem in His crown. But my dear friend, before He does that, you're going to have to go through the fire and the pressure of being broken. You're going to have to go through that to get all the rough edges knocked off, and then someplace along the line, God's going to put somebody in your life to polish you, and God's going to polish you up, cut you to perfection, and then He's going to make something useful out of you. You make a good soldier by persecuting him. That's how you also make good Christians. The problem is in either case, there's no persecution today, and that's the problems we have.

VI. Consolation Through Suffering

Verse 5 says:

2 Corinthians 1:5

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

He says, "For the sufferings of Christ abound in us." That means you know what hurt is. You know what pain is. You know what anxiety is. You know what fear is. Not because you just went through it on your own, because you went through it on your own and then you matched it up with the fear and anxiety of what Christ went through on the cross. I gave the Old Testament passages probably a hundred times, and I bet you most of you still don't have them in your Bible. This is why you'll never be an effective minister. This is why you'll never be an effective minister. You can only minister to others in their suffering as you get broken by your own suffering and tragedies and then come to the end of self and then enter into the life of enjoying your enduring. Bearing his cross first and then bearing the cross of others.

He says, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation," that's consoling people. Your consoling will be as empty as a five-gallon bucket if it isn't filled with the sufferings that you've been through and the sufferings that you've learned by your bad choices

and then the sufferings of Christ, letting God through those adversities make you what He wants you to be. See how phony Christianity is today.

Now, this is why I tell you all the time, I would have rather been born any time in history than when I was born. I would have loved to have been born back in the 1800s and the 70s. You say, "Yeah, but the life expectancy wasn't very long back." Who gives a flip about that? There you go again. I would have liked to have been where Christianity still had some steel in its backbone. Where there were men who took a stand. Where there were women who took stands. That when issues came to push and shove, that the church, a Christian, stood up and stood behind and did everything they were supposed to do. I'm telling you. I'd rather have been born any time than in this milk toast piece of trash period that we're living in right now where you can't find anybody. I mean, even the good men and women who love God and love the book and believe the book. In most cases, they're lacking the steel in their spine that it takes to be very good ministers. Consoling others and helping others through their suffering is based on what you've went through and then matching it up to the sufferings of Christ.

You know, talking about the sufferings of Christ, there are different aspects. We've talked about how that, you know, the God of all mercy and the God of all consolation, how He'll take you and all that you did wrong. That's why I tell you all the time that I don't care where you've been and what you've done. God will take you wherever you're at, and if you will come to the end of self and you'll learn by your mistakes and you'll let it break you to the place where God wants to make you, then He'll take those sufferings and He'll add to the sufferings that you're going to suffer when you start serving for God. I want to talk to you about that for a moment. I've defined for you how He takes the sufferings that we have done because of stupid things, because He's the God of all mercy and grace. He's the God who will take us that way, and praise God for that.

But you know what, when you come to the end of self and you want to get into fellowship with His sufferings, it'll be the suffering that you suffer by taking a stand in the ministry. You'll suffer because you stand for the book most of you are holding in your hand and your stubborn mindset not to compromise the principles of the Word of God. You know, and I know how that sounds, and it shows you the stupidity of where I'm talking about. I've actually preached out before, and thank you for not doing it today, but I've gotten, I've got, you know, four or five men out there yelling "Amen" and, you know, "The Lord God, like I'm going to stand for everything," you know, and all of this stuff. You know what, kid, you don't even know what you're talking about. We talk about, let me tell you something, after forty years plus in this business, brother, you haven't got a clue what I'm talking about this morning. You haven't got a clue. You talk about, "Oh, I'll stand and I'll do this and I'll go here and I'll be tough and I'll do this and all that." Let me tell you something, Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, in Ecclesiastes chapter 1, verse 18, he says:

Ecclesiastes 1:18

For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

You want to learn the book, you want to come up the ladder, you want to really want to do some things well, with that comes a lot of suffering, a lot comes a lot of despair, a lot of things that

you've got to deal with. All you ever see out of it is the exciting part of it. You don't see, because you haven't learned from your own mistakes, you don't see what you've got to bear and what you've got to go. You'll suffer because you stand for the book. You'll suffer because you stand for the book and the principles of the Word of God, and I'll tell you something else. You'll suffer, you'll suffer because people get jealous of you. You'll suffer because there'll be people in the ministry with you that see you and God's using you and not using them, or they want what you have.

Hey, I've had people be jealous of what God has given me in my life. I've had people go out of their way to try to hurt me and to try to destroy my character and do everything about me. You know what a reason why they did it? Because they wanted to be like me and couldn't be. I wouldn't tell you who they are. We've got three or four idiot sticks that were in this church at one time and left this church and caused all kinds of problems because of that very thing, jealousy. They were going to go out and show everybody how they were going to start their own church, and their little implants in their church come back and tell our implants in our church talk to the fact that I guarantee you, I guarantee you, they didn't like me, didn't like our church, didn't like the way I ran things, and they thought they could do a better job and crash my character. And right now, at some point this week, they get online and listen to my sermon here and then rework it and then teach the same stuff down the line. Nice to hack to you today. Hope you're having a good day, brother.

Jealousy, envy. If you don't believe that's true, you go back into your Bible back there in the book of Genesis, and you go back and you study the life of Joseph and his twelve brethren. What a perfect picture that is of Christianity today. God, his father, gave him a coat of many colors. That's the best blessings of God in his life, and the other brethren didn't like that. They didn't like the fact that the father was doing something for him they weren't doing for them. Now, truth of the matter is, the father would have done it for any of them, but they got transfixed on Joseph. See, and Joseph became their problem, and through their jealousy and their envy, they wound up doing what? Putting him in a pit, wound up selling him to the Midianites. He wound up down in Egypt, and they shook their hands and thought everything was done, but you know what? It wasn't done, was it? Joseph gives one of the greatest verses in all the Bible, with my life verse when I go through tough times, is simply this. He says to his brethren:

Genesis 50:20

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

You see, God will take those things and make you if you let Him. He'll take those things and mold you because those kind of sufferings will make you draw close to Him. Those kind of sufferings will hang you out to dry, brother, and you think you ain't got a friend in the world, and it'll drive you right to Him. You know why some of you don't have the relationship with God you need to have? You know why some of you will never have that relationship with God you need to have? Because you'll never let yourself get into anything that's going to drive you to God. It's always going to be on your terms with God, and I feel sorry for you. I feel sorry for you.

You'll suffer because you take a stand against people, saved or lost, whose only goal in life is to destroy what God is trying to do. You'll suffer because you take a stand and do what Paul said: mark them that cause division. Paul says, "Have no fellowship," and John said, "Don't wish them Godspeed." Paul says, "Rebuke them." I don't know where we got the idea we're supposed to kiss their rear end.

Let me tell you something, boys and girls too. If you ever get to the place that you get into the ministry and you have your own work, I'm going to tell you a dying truth, and this is the absolute God's honest truth. The ministry can and will be the loneliest thing you ever do, even though you're in the midst of four or five hundred people. You better get the mindset and keep before you who you're working for, who you're doing what you're doing for, and you better develop the mindset, brother, that it's only at the end of the day, it's just God and you, because probably in reality, that's what it's going to be. My years in the ministry, I found a whole new understanding of the phrase, "I've got your back," and I see the knife you got in your hand too.

Listen, friends will betray you, try to hurt you, and just like Christ, Paul, and all the rest of the men God used throughout history, you have to stand alone like it's just you and God, and those are the things God will build you with. Through it, He'll build you. It'll keep your focus to Him. It'll bring you to the point where you are transfixed on what God wants you to do, and you'll get the idea as it really, really is, that it's just you and Him.

I have one terrible weakness in my life, well, many, but the one I will talk about this morning is this one. I don't think, and I wish it was true, but I do not think, and this is my own problem, I won't let myself believe what I know is probably true. I don't really know if you can build a Philadelphia church today in a Laodicean church period. And yet, I won't accept that, and it's been my undoing. It's been something that has been a problem in my world for so long because I expect things from people. I still am in the mindset that I can build leadership that will take a stand, and not just in saying "Amen," but I mean when push comes to shove, when you have to stand up, maybe by yourself, and protect what God has given us here, and you'll take a stand, and instead of just folding up, and when you know that somebody has hurt this work and hurt this church and hurt what has done, that you'd have the whatever, I can't say the word I want to say, but you know the word I'm trying to not say. See, to me, it's an illusion. It's an illusion. I want to believe it, but deep down inside, I know God's people are just not going to stand and do what they need to do. They're good people. They love God. They love the book. But Christianity today does not have the guts to be able to take somebody by the collar and say, "Don't say hi to me. You did this and you did this. The Lord rebuke you."

So God every once in a while puts his arm around me and walks out on a beautiful sunset and says, "Kid, I told you, you got to get over this. It's going to be your undoing. You got a lot of good things going, but I'm telling you, this is your weakness. The reality is, you're not going to be able to do it because it can't be done, and kid, you better get it." Say, "Bob, when push comes to shove, and it really comes to shove, and people need to take a stand against something or somebody, Bob, understand it, pal, you're on your own. It's me and you." These are the sufferings. You see, we want to minister, we don't want to suffer. We don't want to make people think bad of us, even though deep down inside they despise us. You want to be their friend.

You'll suffer. I'm moving on to the next one now. You may breathe easy. You'll suffer persecution because you want to live right and raise your family right. Boy, where do we ever see this? What's the Denver's quarterback's name? I don't follow football. Obviously, you don't follow it either. They hate him. Do you know why they hate him? Because he's a Christian. That's all. In my day, Roger Staubach played with the Dallas Cowboys. He was a committed Christian. He was a real Christian. He was a Baptist. Not that all Baptists are real Christians, but if you do want to know when you get a charismatic and a Baptist together, what happens? The charismatic probably will get saved. I'm still getting my red sheet on that one, but I don't care. I remember an interview that they were getting on Roger Staubach because he didn't fornicate with other ladies. All the other team guys were bringing the girls up to their rooms and all that, and he was such a... and I never forget it, he never, he never flinched. He just says, "You guys don't understand. I like having sex as much as anybody. I just like having it with my wife." But they were after him all the time. This young kid from Denver, all the time.

You'll suffer persecution because you want to live right. You'll suffer persecution because you want to raise your children right. But then that's what the Bible says in 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 12:

2 Timothy 3:12

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

It's just the way to go, just part of the fellowship of His suffering. You'll suffer persecution from your family. You'll suffer because they reject your new life in Christ. They reject the fact that you're now happy and they're still unhappy. They'll do everything they can to bring you down, and you fall for it. Do you know why you fall for it? Does anybody want to raise their hand here and tell me why you fall for it and think it through? Don't give me some stupid answer. Does anybody want to really take a stab at why, why you'll never get past that? Why? John, I'm sorry, what now? Well, that's true, but that's not the answer what I'm looking for. We're talking about the fellowship of His sufferings. You know why? Because the Bible tells you in John chapter 7 that Jesus, His own brothers and sisters, rejected who He was. Now you snivel, you little brat, why are you better than Him? Why are you better than Jesus? The only one out of Jesus's family that ever did what was right was James, and he became one of the apostles. But the Bible clearly tells you in the Gospel of John chapter 7, it clearly tells you in John chapter 7, verse 5, that His brothers and sisters rejected who He was and wanted nothing to do with it. And then you snivel about your family dumping you. You're not in tune with the fellowship of His suffering. Maybe if you understood what He went through, what you're going through, and you get the two together, gee, I don't know, maybe you might figure it out. But we're not. We're not.

You'll suffer persecution because the devil wants to stop you. He wants you to get you to quit through suffering and persecution. He'll try to get you to do that. We see that in the devil in Christ when Christ was on the cross from the sixth and the ninth hour. The devil brought all of the hell had to try to get Him to quit. We saw in the book of Job through his suffering where the first time that God says, the devil says, "I'll take all he has," and the second time he comes back,

he says, "Now I'm going to touch his body," and the devil said, "When I do those things, he'll curse you to your face." One time Jesus said to Simon Peter in Luke chapter 22, verse 31:

Luke 22:31

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

I want to say to you this morning, that's exactly what the devil wants to do with you. If you ever sifted anything, not a pleasant experience for the sifted. He wants to sift you and me. You see, the sufferings of this world can certainly destroy you, and in most cases, ladies and gentlemen, talking about God's people now, it does. Many of God's people are saved to go to church all their life. They're just never going to step out of their comfort zone and let God ever do anything with their life. They're never going to get made. They're never going to get broken. They're never going to do anything because at the end of the day, they want to minister, but they don't want to suffer. They want to minister with a Bible in one hand, a cigarette in another. They want to minister with a Bible in one hand and a beer in the other. They want a cigarette with a Bible in his hand. Yeah, I want a cigarette. They want to, they want to minister with this in one hand and the Bible something else. Let me tell you something, it doesn't work that way. The only way you minister is to get broken, and then God takes your sufferings, lines it up to His sufferings, and then molds you through the sufferings and the pressure. But you're not going to do that. God's people are not going to do that. I can tell you right now, you know why? Because we live in a Laodicean church age that is so absolutely milk toast and so shot through and rotten that they don't have the, if brains were gunpowder, they wouldn't have enough to blow their nose. They cannot understand what it takes. They're not willing to do it. They want to have their friends. They don't want to cause any problems. They don't want anybody to hate them. You would die if somebody's writing about you on Facebook or the internet. You would have a cardiac arrest. Make friends with it. They didn't have the internet back in Jesus' time, but if there was, I guarantee you there'd been more pages on Him than there is on Peter S. Ruckman today.

The sufferings of this world can certainly destroy you, and in most cases, it does. But God takes that suffering through the fellowship of His suffering and then teaches you how to help others in their suffering. But listen to me, listen to me very carefully. You want to minister to people, do you? You want to disciple somebody, do you? You want to teach somebody the Bible, do you? You want to be involved in people's lives and help them, do you really? Well, let me tell you something, kid, and you listen to me, you will only be able to minister to the proportion that God has ministered to you. I'm going to say it again. You will only be able to minister to the proportion that God has ministered to you, and God only will minister to you in proportion to your need, and your need will be in proportion to the trouble and the suffering that you go through for Him. That suffering and trouble then becomes one with His sufferings and trouble, and now you can help others. But before God can take our suffering and use us, He has to take that suffering and break us, and we're not just going to let that happen. No true ministry without suffering. It's the suffering that makes you.

That's why I mean, that's why I put it in perspective. That's why in the time of the first century, second century Christianity, compared to what we've got today, they didn't have laser printing. They didn't have telecommunications. They didn't have jets where they could travel around the world. They didn't have all the things that we've got that you can get word out, internet, MyFace, MySpace, all those things that go along. They didn't have any of that stuff. They didn't have any of it, and yet they got more done, and the cause of Christ went farther faster than it's going today because it ain't going nowhere today. You know what the one thing they had that we didn't have? Persecution and suffering, and we don't want it. We don't want it.

VII. The Effect of Enduring Suffering

Verse 6 says:

2 Corinthians 1:6

And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

Let me explain that. "And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation." You'll learn how to console somebody else through what you go through. "And salvation." That's not salvation to be saved. That's salvation that you get saved from being swallowed up by your problems. That is the salvation of you having some tremendous trial in your life and being completely swallowed up and defeated by it. You get saved from that by other God's people who have been through things and understand the suffering of Christ and have been broken and come to the end of self and how God takes their suffering, adds to it His suffering when you stand for the ministry and become what God wants you to be, then God can use you. Then God can use you.

He says, "Which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer." You see, there's an effect by your enduring something. There's a cause and effect to it. No matter what the cause, whether it's your stupidity or you came to the end of the self and now you're suffering for Him, the effect is it helps somebody else. "Or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation." My affliction, my comfort that I get, goes to you. We go through what we do, learning the lessons, enduring it. Once we come to the end of self and get broken, show that the peace and comfort of God and all His mercy getting us through can be given to somebody else to get them through. Welcome to the ministry. The ministry is simply nothing more than that.

Boy, with that one sermon today, we just wiped out 99.9999 percent of all the ministers across this country. We just wiped out everything everybody ever thought about it. That's how far we are from the Bible today, and I really don't care that nobody else in the world believes it. I still believe the book, and I believe that what the book teaches, and that's what the ministry is. How you and I as a child of God can look God in the face, even pray, even get up in a group of people, churches that pass across this country, and get up there with a straight face and talk to something about ministry when you don't even understand the first thing of suffering for Him or what He suffered for you. And on top of that, blatantly don't want to know because of your friends,

because of your circumstances, because of what you do. Examine yourself, take heed to yourself, better know yourself, and then you can prove yourself.

VIII. Ministry in Action: The Homeless and Restart Ministry

Now, I told you last week we're going to put the connection with what we're doing to the homeless ministry and the restart ministry. I don't know of a better place to start to learn about somebody's suffering than what we're doing. I don't know of a better place to learn of the agonies that people are going through. I mean, you got to be, you got to have, you got to be brain dead to go down there and watch those people living in tents when it's 29 degrees at night and you go home to your nice warm house and your comfortable comforter and your blanket with all the things you've got and not make the correlation of what God has done for you. You got to be out of your mind. And yet, you know what? As sure as I'm standing here, there are some of you that are right there. I guarantee you, I guarantee you, to you it's just a hot dog ministry. That's all it'll ever be. That's all it'll ever be.

Yes, some of you are getting to know those people. You're getting to know their names. They're getting to know you. That's the key: going down there, the longevity of being there. I suggest that instead of just being in a hurry getting the hot dogs out and the things out, from this point on, now that we've had this message, we're into this, stop and talk to them. You guys going down by the riverbank today, I don't care if you only pass out ten hot dogs, you get down there, those guys, and you take those sleeping bags and blankets down, and you just sit down and talk to them. You just tell them how glad you are to be able to help them. Here's a little food, here's some bagels, here's a sleeping bag, here's some blankets, here's whatever you need. Quit being in a hurry. Talk with them. There's enough people down there at 16th and Cherry. You can just go out and talk to those guys. Find out what they're going through. Find out their sufferings. Understand this is how you learn. You become one with them. You share their suffering. You begin to understand this is what the whole Christmas party is about. You think it's about a Christmas party? You think it's about going down and buying presents? No, it's going down and getting into somebody else's world that we have no idea, and the Christmas party is just the door that we go through to get there.

They talk to us. They tell us what their needs are. Every time we go down and we talk to the staff, we talk to the people, we find out how desperate they are. The fact that they already have the trust that they can email us through the week and say, "Hey, we're out of diapers and we're out of this." Not to say that you have to, but if you can, we make one little email, we get enough diapers to last them for two weeks. That's what I'm talking about: building that relationship in trust, letting them know that we really care, letting them know that their suffering is our suffering. We're not just, we're not just there because we want to, you know, we want to feel good about this. We'll be there. I told somebody this morning, you know, our motto is, "When everybody else is going home, we're going out." And we'll be there when it's 20 below zero. We'll be there when it's 110 degrees. It doesn't matter. If you notice, the little church that used to come when the weather was nice has not been there since the weather turned bad. That's what I'm talking about: fair-weather Christians.

I'm telling you, brother, the key to effective ministry is suffering, letting God take our stupid mistakes, letting Him break us with them, leave the world behind, and start being the Christian man or the woman that God wants you to be, and then through that, let Him add the sufferings and become a minister for Him. You be that lump of coal, but remember, before that perfect diamond comes out, brother, I didn't tell you that the duration to make a diamond is a million years. I don't know. You haven't got a million years, but I want to tell you something, folks, when you get into ministry and you start going through it, they start coming after you, you start paying the price. It may only be a day or two weeks or a month, but it feels like a million years, but that's how God makes you. But He can only make you after He breaks you. Father, we thank you and praise you for the Lord Jesus.