

Wilderness Wandering (Part 5)

The Purpose of Suffering

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The analogy upon which this sermon is based is by far and away the longest in the Bible that parallels Christian living. It occupies most of four books: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Its information spans forty years of life, and in principle, the examples touch on virtually every major aspect of Christian living.

When I first spoke on this, it was actually in the general area of Southern California in the early 1970s, and it consisted at that time of only one sermon which I titled "Wilderness Wandering." It has grown into five sermons in its present configuration. I believe that we have actually just barely scratched the surface of all the instruction that can be mined from the biblical record. I believe that if I put it all together, all the information that I have collected that fits in this subject, I would have at least 12 sermons that I could put into a series and give one just right after the other.

There were many trials of faith for the Israelites during their trek across the wilderness. Idolatry reared its head within months after their beginning. Sexual sins arose at the end, just about the time they were to go into the land. They did so much murmuring over God's provision of food and water, which they considered to be boring and to be inadequate despite the fact that it is called "angels' food" in the New Testament.

Government was always an issue because they failed to look beyond Moses to God, who was in reality their real government. Fear, envy, and jealousy of Moses and his extended family were present, and death occurred because of people's sins.

It is a fact that the most stable period of time shown in the Scriptures by these people occurred when they were all concentrating on building the Tabernacle.

One of the major lessons we are to glean from the Days of Unleavened Bread is that Christ did not do it all for us. I do not mean to demean the difficulties that the Israelites faced. They were very real. Crossing the wilderness was not a Sunday stroll in a garden, and that should help us to understand that neither is Christian life. There are difficulties in Christianity.

Part of the reason I decided to make this subject of wilderness wandering this time around is that it provides us with an understanding of the reason for suffering in Christian life. Why does it even exist? And since it clearly does, what is its focus? I did

not want suffering to be a major part of the series, but I did feel that it should be a large enough part to provide a clear overview of suffering in Christian life.

We all know that Jesus warned the apostles that they would suffer persecution. Now for the most part, we have not, but it does now appear to be beginning on the horizon. But that is not my overall reason for right now. In this sermon I am more concerned with persecution's basic meaning. In Greek, its meaning is pressure, stress. Pressure produces suffering in various forms and degrees.

Hebrews 2:5 For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels.

The "He" there is God. The Kingdom of God on earth is not going to be in subjection to angels.

Hebrews 2:9-11 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, [Jesus] by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him [the Father], for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one [that is, all of one body; all of one group; all of one team; all of one family], for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

The "He who sanctifies" there is Jesus Christ this time. You have got to follow the flow of the pronouns that are being used within their context.

Contained within those verses is the overall reason for suffering. The entire wilderness experience of the Israelites when God freed them from their slavery was to prepare them for living in the Promised Land. In like manner, God has willed that we suffer because, as it did for Jesus, it prepares us for what lies ahead. It helps complete us for the Kingdom.

We are now going to go to Galatians 3, because I want to make very clear to everybody here, and to all those who are tuned in, what it is that we are going to inherit.

Galatians 3:26-29 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [One group, one family, one team; we are all playing a part within what is going on.] And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

What is it that we are promised? Since we are heirs of it with Jesus Christ, and also I might add here, "with Abraham" (because he is an essential part of all the operations of God on this project God is working out), we should want to know what was promised.

Romans 4:13 For the promise that he [Abraham] would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

That is one whopping inheritance! I think if you were some multi-billionaire's heir, what would be received by you upon the completion of whatever was needed to become an actual inheritor—boy, that would be a lot. But what is "a lot" that we might inherit in terms of money? We seem to be able to relate to that. What is that compared to inheriting, with Jesus Christ, the entirety of the earth? That is pretty awesome!

Do you think that you now have the knowledge, the understanding, the wisdom, and the character to take over the position that you are going to be in when that inheritance is actually, as it were, put into your hand?

Let us go back to the present now. God is whipping you and me into shape to see, first of all, above all things, that we have the character to govern ourselves, to follow His Son in whatever instruction He gives us to carry out for the well-being of His purpose, which will be then going full bore ahead right on the earth. Can you rule a city? Can you rule one city, five cities, a county, a state, a nation in every circumstance, in every kind of weather, every kind of trial that might come upon human beings at that time? Do you have the wisdom, the character, and the understanding that is needed to know what to do and when to do it?

We just do not have those characteristics, and above all, we do not have the character that is tested and tried so that we will not in any way depart from what God's purpose is at that time.

Back now to this subject of suffering. Why did Jesus suffer? Because His Father willed

that it was necessary for His [the Father's] reasons that Jesus Christ suffer. We have put on Jesus Christ. We have become a part of His body, and therefore, *like* Jesus Christ, God the Father has willed that we suffer like Jesus Christ did, that it is necessary for our preparation to work with Christ. Is that a good enough reason to suffer? We suffer, because in the preparation for the Kingdom of God, we are being required to do things that human nature has a powerful proclivity to rebel against doing, and brethren, it complains, and it fights back mentally to avoid it.

Nobody likes to suffer unless there is a good enough reason. We might change our mind. Are you willing to suffer to be in the Kingdom of God, to be working with Jesus Christ? That is the question for the day.

There is a rather blunt saying that goes like this: "Where there is no pain there is no gain." Almost all suffering in Christian life occurs because of just a few circumstances everybody must face. One is the existence of Satan and of his demons. The other is the continued existence of human nature in us, even though we have been freed of bondage to Satan. Our mind is changed. Our goals are far different from what they previously were, and our knowledge and our understanding of the evil within is continually increased, and we fervently desire to get rid of it. Those famous words of the apostle Paul—"Oh, wretched man that I am!"...do you think he did not want to get rid of that human nature that every so often would captivate him to the extent he would actually carry through with what he wanted to do?

God is on His throne, and as we heard in the sermonette, He has concern about us as individuals who are being prepared for His Kingdom, and He makes sure that suffering is generated internally within us.

Now because of an understanding of who Jesus was and why He did these things, and what He endured and overcame, it helps, among other things, brethren, to build an appreciation in us for Him that in turn adds incentive to our effort to please Him. Do you want to please the Boss? Then you suffer through with what the Boss says to do.

In the previous sermon in this series this year, we spent a great deal of time expounding things that Peter wrote, and the reason is because he specified what we are training for. As we read this next series of verses, I want you to notice that Peter established a listing in chapter 2 of the functions we are called to be prepared for around the example of Christ's suffering. First let us turn to I Peter 1 and read these verses.

I Peter 1:10-11 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching

what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

I Peter 2:19-23 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called [Did you know you were called to suffer?], because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: [We are going to follow Christ in this regard.] "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

Again, suffering appears in the context of Jesus Christ in His life.

Now we will go to chapter 3. Remember I said that Peter built the whole epistle around Christ's suffering, and he applied it then to you and me.

I Peter 3:17-18 For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.

I Peter 4:1-2 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

I Peter 4:15-17 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins

with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

The wilderness analogy appearing in Exodus through Deuteronomy reveals that what Israel went through was especially psychologically difficult. It was extremely tedious and boring among other things.

Can you imagine going through a wilderness that was largely desert and spending forty years of your life where there were no cities, hardly any roads, no lakes, all mountains, brown and bare all the time? This is *life*? This is what I mean about it being boring and being mostly a psychological burden.

When you begin thinking about Christianity, there are parallels there which we will not go through at this time. In that kind of situation, they endured a great deal of uncertainty that they expressed in their fears, and in their many murmurings. Never forget that they experienced these things with little or no spiritual faith. It is entirely possible there were only two families converted—maybe three: Moses' family, which would include Aaron and his sister, and then there was Joshua and Caleb and their families. All the rest were unconverted as any raccoon or whatever they might have seen on the way there.

We are presented now with this picture and the problems that might ensue. Now how are we going to get the most out of what God is throwing at us, with what God is challenging us, and we have to live by spiritual faith in the paces that He is putting us through? Believe it or not, the apostle Paul gives us a very clear example, and once I begin reading it, you will probably be able to recite it right back to me.

Turn with me to Philippians 2. God really put Christ through the paces.

Philippians 2:5-12 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. [And then Paul gives that very succinct, poignant statement:] Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed,

not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

There is our example and the instruction as to the mind that we have to adopt and make our own. If we are going to go through this with a kind of growth that God wants us to have, it takes a certain mindset to be able to do it.

One of the things God wants us to get out of this is He wants us to consider often that He, the Father, did not withhold suffering from His Son and our Savior Jesus Christ. He shared suffering with us despite His high status as God in the flesh and living a totally sinless life. We are neither God in the flesh nor have we led a sinless life. He did this to be our Savior. He did it in order to be our example, and He did it to be perfected to carry out His job as High Priest and Savior. He set His mind to be this way, and He carried through.

I want to go back in thought to I Peter. In I Peter 1, Peter uses Christ's suffering in the crucifixion as his primary focus right there, but it can include more than just the crucifixion. It can include such things as His rejection by His hometown friends and neighbors and so forth which is what He got when He preached His very first sermon. The account is given in Luke 4. They wanted to throw Him over the hill and kill Him. "Here I am, just starting, God, and already they want to cast Me off the mountain!" Betrayal by His friends.

How many times did people reject Him—the greatest Preacher, the greatest Teacher who ever lived? They could not get it. I know as a speaker that would hurt me. I am sure that He felt it. "Here I am, speaking My heart out, feeling for these people, and they walk off."

How about, what we might say, the ultimate betrayal when the apostles did what they did at His crucifixion? Suffering rejection? Absolutely! How about the scourging He took, and all the embarrassment that there was with that, being stripped naked, and then having His body beaten to a bloody pulp and being displayed before the people?

Here is what you might just consider as being a rejection or something difficult to take, but how many times did people challenge Him verbally with tedious arguments about things that were so minor? He had to just take it. "Don't you get it?" I am sure those thoughts came to mind, but He controlled Himself.

His suffering was not limited to the crucifixion. His suffering grew in Him as a result of

His feeling, His love for people, and that they just would not listen to what He was saying.

In chapter 1, where the crucifixion appears in Peter's teaching there, we have to connect that to more than just the crucifixion. There is more to it than that. There is a principle here, and I want you to begin having formed in your mind the importance of why we are having to go through these things. I began to touch on this when we read through Philippians 2:5-13. What was the conclusion of what Paul wrote there? You add everything up, and it is this:

Peter is beginning to talk about the same basic things to you and me—the glory of being resurrected into the Kingdom of God and having a mind and a body and an endless life and all that goes with that. Glory follows suffering. It is the path through which God, in His wisdom, has determined He is going to take His children through, because suffering really tests our loyalty to Him, and understanding what He is working out, and our loyalty to His purpose if we have the vision, brethren, of the Kingdom of God and we are going to give ourselves over to whatever it costs. God is warning us that it is going to cause suffering.

In I Peter 2:19-23, again Christ's suffering is somewhat focused on the crucifixion, but Peter's focus slowly begins to shift to our conduct under duress and toward Christ's conduct under duress. In other words, it is beginning more to shift over to a persecution pressure. The point that is slowly being drawn to here is that bearing undeserved suffering is good for God's creative purposes of His children.

In chapter 4, Christ's crucifixion has shifted almost out of sight in what Peter is writing, though it is in the background now, and *our* conduct under duress is almost completely the focus. In other words, are we going to do as Christ did?

Is it God's will that we suffer? I think that ought to be pretty clear. It most definitely is.

I Peter 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

God sees this challenge of conquering suffering—especially undeserved suffering—is going to be a major help to us quitting sinning. Verse 2 nails this down.

I Peter 4:2 That he no longer [the person's suffering] should live the rest of

his time in the flesh for the lusts of men [lust of the sin], but for the will of God.

God sees it as a tool for helping us to stop sinning.

Let us get one more confirmation on this question of whether God really wants us to suffer. Let us go back to Deuteronomy 8. Here we are, getting right to the end of the wilderness journey of the Israelites, and this is the last 30 days of Moses' life. They are just about ready to go into the land, and he says this to them.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 And you shall remember that the LOORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LOORD.

We need encouragement. God is still leading. As to the Israelites' experience—as to how much suffering they went through in the wilderness—we are on our own personal pilgrimage, and we go through these kind of things. God is still with us.

So Peter has used Christ as an example, that despite the fact that He never sinned, He nonetheless suffered. God took a direct hand in causing that suffering because He wanted Christ to be prepared. We can reach a bit of a conclusion here. We are to understand from what Peter writes here that suffering comes with the territory of being prepared. Do you want to be ready to be in the Kingdom of God? It is going to cost something. We are going to suffer. It becomes clear that the path to glory lies through suffering for a specific reason: for righteousness' sake.

I am going to say a little bit more about this. The path to glory lies through suffering for righteousness' sake. Suffering, of and by itself, has no intrinsic good value, but suffering that results from *godliness* indeed *does* have intrinsic good value to it. There is a big difference between suffering as anybody might suffer, and suffering because God is making us suffer. A big, big difference, and so righteousness' sake is the pace through which God is putting us, and of course one of these is the keeping of His commandments. Much of its value lies in being loyally committed to God personally. Did you get that? **Loyally committed to God personally**; committed to His purpose, and

committed to His will, and steadfast devotion that overrides personal suffering.

Brethren, God shows that after He put Christ through what He did, that Christ was completed (as we will see in just a little bit), and it so impressed the Father He gave Him **the** name. There is only one name before which everyone must bow. It is not **a** name. It is **the** name. That is the glory—that everybody has to bow before Him because He bore up under the suffering that the Father tested Him with.

Let us transfer this to you and me. Because Christ did it, we can be confident that those who are joined to Him can also do it by being willing to delay gratification while still faithfully carrying out the responsibility. This goes for those who are really "in" Jesus Christ. They have *put on* Jesus Christ.

Now Peter's advice here, in I Peter 4:1, is that we arm ourselves with the spiritual battle-gear so that we are prepared for the spiritual battles that will bring suffering. "Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind." So that is our attitude. Taking the attitude out of Philippians 2, we arm ourselves, taking on the battle-gear that Paul mentions in Ephesians 6. We will not go into that.

The fruit from this that we can learn is we should understand that even as Christ had to bear the sins of the whole world, that we, as being part of His body, and also in preparation to be priests under Him in some small measure or in principle, have to *also* take on us some of the measure of the sins of others' suffering and of the suffering that will bring.

Let me just summarize this. What it means in practical fact is that every problem, every offense cannot be resolved. What are we to do? What Christ did. He bore it, and got over it. You can find nowhere where Christ was filled with resentment about what was being done to Him. He just took it, knowing that these people did not understand. They did not grasp what was going on. They did not know who He was.

Just apply those things to you and to me now that we are part of Christ's body. People who may offend us do not really realize that, and they may offend us terribly. It really hurts, but in many cases, as Paul teaches in I Corinthians, there is really nothing you can do about it. So what does Paul say? Just get over it. That does not mean we should not make an attempt to try to resolve it, but some things cannot be resolved yet. So that is what a priest does. A priest is a bridge, and the bridge bears the weight of the traffic that is going over the troubled waters, and so he has to take it, for now.

We have advanced far enough through this sermon that Peter tells us then in I Peter

1:12-14 that we are not to be surprised that this has become our lot in life. Peter teaches us that suffering is inevitable. Please understand this. Nowhere does the Bible tell us that we are to *seek out* suffering. It is just telling us that suffering will come if one is devoted to this way. And then Peter says we are to rejoice that the suffering is not coming on us because we have done evil, and therefore we are not undergoing punishment, and that should be a cause of rejoicing, because it becomes then able to be seen as a test supplied or permitted by God's discipline, His training of us. So rejoice, because it is sharing with Christ in *His* suffering, and rejoice because it is the way to glory. No suffering, no pain, no glory.

Now what if you are suffering and you compromise? What will happen? Well, the world will let us off the hook. It might even make us feel good. The pressure will diminish and go away, but there is instruction in God's Word that covers this in Hebrews 11, the faith chapter. It says to you and to me,

Hebrews 11:35 "Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, [What a persecution while suffering!] not accepting deliverance [they took it], that they might obtain a better resurrection."

So what we have been called to, and indeed have the privilege of doing, brethren, let us begin to sum this up, is suffering *with* Christ. We are following Him, we are going to be working *for* Him in the Kingdom of God. In order to be prepared to be subject to Him in the Kingdom of God, the Father and Son are requiring us to go through some measure of the kind of suffering that Christ went through, and God sees it as something positive that prepares us for working under Jesus Christ. From that will come the kind of mind that will help us once we are in the Kingdom of God because we will be prepared to face *anything* the world throws at us.

I do not believe that working with people in the Kingdom of God is always going to be a joyous thing. Does not God even warn us that if Egypt does not come to keep the Feast [they will suffer plague]? It means to me that people are going to be disobeying. Are you going to be over a city with Egyptians in it and they are not going to go to the Feast? These people are going to be sinning during the Millennium and we are going to have to deal with that either as a priest, as a king, or both, as a governor who is over an area, a territory both in a civil sense and also in a religious sense.

We are going to have to deal with both. How do I know that? Because we are going to be working with Christ, and what is Christ? He is King of kings, and Lord of lords. He is the King over all kings. He is going to be ruling the earth in a civil sense, governing; but

He is also the High Priest, so He is the highest One in terms of religion, all kinds of spiritual things. We are going to be working with Him in person, and so we have to be prepared to work under Him, carrying out with an understanding mind and with the right kind of character, and to really be able to see that when He gives an order we understand why, and we do it in complete agreement because we are one with Him.

I hope that I am convincing you that there is good, invaluable reason to suffer, because we are being prepared in the same mode as Jesus Christ was because we are going to be working with Him. Others who come along after us are not going to be trained in exactly the same thing. This that we have been called to is beyond estimating in terms of value. Maybe 50 or 60 billion people have been born, lived, and died on earth, but how many have ever been given what we have been given, and for the purpose it has been given? Ah! Mind-boggling! I think that it is perfectly logical that God should ordain that we suffer because of it, but always suffering, though, with a positive purpose behind it. Remember the suffering is coming, not because we are evil, but suffering because human nature is fighting back. Otherwise, we would just go with it and we would not have a pause in our thinking about it.

Let us go back to where we started, in Hebrews 2, because this ties now to what I have just said in the past four or five minutes.

Hebrews 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

The *NKJV* says "*captain* of their salvation." The *KJV* says "*author* of their salvation," and He was made "perfect through sufferings." That same word—author or captain—is translated from the Greek term *archegos*. It is a word capable of many translations. In the Greek secular language, in their pantheon of gods, Zeus was called "archegos" of the gods, meaning he was the head or the chief of all the gods. Incidentally, "head" or "chief" is *archegos*' simplest literal meaning.

Jesus Christ is being talked about in this next verse.

Acts 3:15 And killed the Prince of life [Jesus Christ], whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.

The word "Prince" there is translated from the word *archegos* which was translated

"author" which was translated "captain." But here Jesus Christ is called "the *Archegos* of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses." Here the word has the sense of being "originator"—someone who starts or begins something. An *archegos* is one who leads the way so that others may follow. It can also be translated "trailblazer," "scout," or "pioneer," and so it indicates one who leads into battle, blazes a trail, sets a pattern, one who initiates and guides.

In the *Daily Bible Study* series commentary by William Barclay, he used the illustration of a ship floundering on a rock, and someone jumps overboard with a rope and swims ashore, secures the line somewhere on the shore so that others are able to grab onto the rope and come to safety. The one who did it originally is an *archegos*. He fulfilled the role of an *archegos*. That is what Christ is there. He is saving us from the rock, from the loss of our hope of eternal life. That is His job. He is leading and guiding us there to the safety of actually being in the Kingdom of God.

Luke 22:27 For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.

Let us connect this to what I said earlier, and that is that Christ is the Prince of life. Luke quoted that. God approved of it. He is the Originator of life.

Now Christ makes very sure that we understand who He was as a human being in terms of His position, and this coordinates perfectly with Philippians 2, that though He was God, He came in the form of a servant. That has very helpful meaning for you and for me, and that is this: He came not to rule; He came to serve, and that our leadership has to be one of following the example of what He did in terms of service. He came as a servant.

We are going to add something more here to complete the picture at this stage. In Hebrews 2:10 it says "He is the Author of their salvation, made perfect through sufferings." It is the word "perfect." That word is rightly translated as "made perfect" is *teleioo*. It is a verb that is derived from the adjective *teleios*. *Teleios* is usually translated by the English word "perfect." The English word "perfect" to you and me means "without flaw." This word does not mean "without flaw," even though "perfect" is a good and adequate translation of the word. This word has a special meaning. We are not talking about something that is abstract here. It is not a philosophic thing. It is talking about something that is very practical about suffering.

In the Old Testament, an animal could be used for a sacrifice, and in the context, right in

the Scriptures, it would call that animal "perfect." The animal itself may not have been perfect at all. It may have problems on the inside of it so we cannot see it, but for the use it was going to be put to, it was "perfect."

This same word *teleios* can be used as one who is no longer in an elementary state, but has matured. There the word can be translated as "mature," but a mature person, say in terms of age, does not mean that he is perfect. In other words, the meaning of this word is slowly but surely focusing on something.

There is a place or two in the Bible where somebody who was just baptized is called perfect. You know very well they were not perfect, but God allowed that word to be used there, and it had to be translated "perfect."

Vines Dictionary says it means "to make perfect, to accomplish, or consummate." Thus in Hebrews 2:10 it means "to make or accomplish the process of enabling one to carry out the purpose for which one is divined." In English we would have to express it as "that person is perfect for the job." He might have imperfections in terms of physical ones, but that person has the experience and the maturity that fit, and he is perfect for the job.

Maybe you cannot relate to this the way I can. Some of you undoubtedly can because you had the kind of job I had in my background. I was in construction for a very large part of my life, building buildings, working with pipefitters, working with fitters and boilermakers and things like that. I was a welder. As we were constructing a building or doing something, making a change within it, we would make what is called a "jig."

Do you know what a jig is? A jig is simply a device that you make and adapt in carrying out a certain job. In my line of work most of the time what a jig did was hold something in place for awhile until you could complete something else, and then you would come there and that thing you fixed the jig for was ready now to be perfectly installed. We would say, "Oh, that jig is perfect for the job!" That is what this word means here. It is something that has been adapted and made to be used in a certain circumstance, and though it does not have the abstract perfection of the English word, what they have been made into are perfect for carrying out that responsibility.

That is what God is doing for us. He is bringing us to perfection so that we are perfectly adapted to working under Jesus Christ. That is awesome!

Like Paul, we can look at ourselves, and say, "O wretched man that I am!" and God can turn around and say, "You know what Paul? You are perfect for being an apostle." That

is what that word means. That is what God is doing. We have our problems, we have our faults, and we are put through the paces by God, and we are made to suffer for a reason, and that reason is to be made perfect for carrying out something in the distance.

What an awesome thing! We can look at ourselves, because we can see ourselves, and we know very well we are far from perfect in an English-speaking sense. But that is God's purpose. He is making us perfect for carrying out responsibility under His Son, and at the top of the list is character. We have to be adapted to do the job right.

Let us go to Hebrews 6, and we run into another very interesting word. We are breaking into the middle of a sentence here.

Hebrews 6:20 [W]here the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The word is "forerunner." You are familiar with that. The Church of the Great God magazine is called "Forerunner." This is where we got the name. In Greek it is *prodromos*. *Prodromos* is somewhat akin to the word *archegos*. A little bit different, but the emphasis on the word *prodromos* is as a scout. A *prodromos* is one who goes ahead, making sure that the way is safe. How many Western movies have you seen where there was always the great hero? He was the scout. He went out ahead of the wagon train that was heading west to make sure that there were no Indians on the trail out there a little bit farther. He was making sure that the way they were going was safe. That is what Christ performed for you and me.

Now what is in the picture here that we have to fill in is this: Think back to the Tabernacle. How often in a year's time did the high priest ever get to go into the Holy of Holies? One time a year, on the Day of Atonement. If you can remember that series of sermons I gave on the dress the high priest wore, do you know what was at the bottom of the hem of his gown? Silver bells. Do you know what they were on there for? They were on there primarily for that one day he went into the Holy of Holies. God was the one who ordered them to put those bells on that garment.

Because God is so holy, He is so pure, He is so far above us, it is not good for a man to be in the presence of God unless God permits it and turns the volume off, and so silver bells were on the hem of the high priest's gown because nobody else was allowed in there on the Day of Atonement. Every time the high priest moved, the bells tinkled, and thus they knew he was still alive. I do not know who was going to rush in there in case he was dead! I have no idea, but that is why the bells were there, so that they would be

assured that this man, this human being, this foul man, was in the presence of God, and God had accepted him and allowed him to live, and so they knew he was still moving around.

What Jesus Christ has done is God has accepted His sacrifice of Himself, and He has gone into the Holy of Holies. He was the scout who went ahead—the *prodromos* who went ahead and made sure that the way was safe for you and me.

We do not have to wait until the Day of Atonement to go into the presence of God, because our *prodromos*, Jesus Christ, went there before—the Forerunner—and God accepted Him, and now we can follow Him into the Holy of Holies, into the very presence of God. But in order to be there, He had to go through the sufferings that made Him perfect for the job that has been given for Him to do.

Now we are in the same process. We are part of His spiritual body, and in order to be prepared to work under Him we have to go through a measure of suffering—an intensity not equal to Christ, but of course toned down for you and me—in order to prepare us to be perfect for working with Him.

We will close in Philippians 3. Paul just talked about his human pedigree, that he was a Pharisee, and so forth, and he says in verse 7:

Philippians 3:7-12 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Why do we have to go through this suffering? For the same reason that Christ did. Verse 10—**"that I may know Him."** In what way? By the experiences of going through the same kinds of sufferings He went through. We gain intimate knowledge of what it took for Him to do what He did even though our tests and our trials and sufferings are way toned down so that we can bear them. It is almost as if we are given a little bit of

walking in His shoes.

That is why we are here, and that is why we suffer. I hope you can now say that you know an awful lot more about why we are suffering that you did before. There is very good reason why we have to go through it. If we do not, we do not really know Christ. He Himself said in John 17:3, "Eternal life is to know God."