

“Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.”

We are continuing our sermon series, Grace under Pressure, as we walk through the book of Philippians. Paul showed courage, or grace under pressure, as he was imprisoned in Rome, not knowing whether he would be freed or executed. Last week we discussed how Paul was able to be courageous not knowing his fate because He knew his ultimate fate: life everlasting with Jesus because Jesus rose from the dead.

Today, we are going to be focusing on the model for our sufferings, and that is Christ Himself as the model for us to emulate. Through your sufferings, the Lord is transforming you into the image of Jesus so that you are more Christlike to those around you.

The Bible teaches us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. When it comes to making images, especially metal images, you need heat to melt down the metal. Not only that, but you also need to pour the molten metal into a special vessel called a crucible. From there, you cast the molten metal into a mold before it is a finished product.

This is the story of Jesus' earthly ministry. He faced sufferings, and was poured into the crucible of God's wrath, then and only then was He cast in the glorious form of His resurrection and ascension. *That's* the path to the resurrection of which Paul hopes. **BECAUSE JESUS WAS Poured INTO THE CRUCIBLE FOR HIS GLORY, WE CAN BE ALSO.**

First, I. Jesus was poured into the crucible of His ministry (v. 5–8). As Paul writes from prison, he draws his readers to the life of Christ. Paul writes, **“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”**

This passage outlines what the Church has taught as the humiliation of Christ. When the Son of God was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, he humbled Himself. That's when he went into the crucible. He chose to hide the fulness of His divinity and set aside the full privileges of His godhead.

Imagine an artist took his masterpiece golden statue and threw it into the mud. It would still be gold under the mud, but it wouldn't look very pretty. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus got his hands dirty for you. He exhibited grace under pressure. He not only lived a humble life, but He took on your sins. He took on the sins of the whole world which covered Him in filth and made him not unlike me or you. He was selfless in His service, looking not to His interests only, but to yours above all.

As He continued to humble Himself, He entered the crucible for you. That art piece covered in mud was thrown into the crucible and the heat was turned up. The night Jesus was betrayed, the wrath of God was being poured out upon Jesus. That's wrath that we deserve but was cast upon Jesus. As Jesus was arrested, falsely tried, tortured, and crucified, the Father turned up the heat of His wrath, and the metal began to melt.

But as the metal dissolved, the mud burned up and burned away. In Jesus being cast into the crucible, your sins are forgiven, as far as the east is from the west. In the worst humiliation of history, Jesus paid the penalty for your sins as He was reduced to nothing for you. Jesus was placed into the tomb.

But even then, the Father had a plan. II. Jesus' crucible resulted in His glorification (v. 9–11). Paul continues, **“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** Metal isn't meant to be kept in a crucible forever. It is poured out. It is poured into a mold which may seem lifeless, but when the mold is removed, a beautiful sculpture is revealed.

For three days Jesus was in the tomb, and it may have seemed like all hope was lost, but He rose again assuring us that from the crucible comes beauty just as from the cross comes glory. Jesus alone is worthy of our worship, and indeed, there will come a day when all will see that Jesus indeed is God. They will worship Him, some willingly, others unwillingly.

We follow in Jesus' footsteps. III. We are poured into a crucible in this life (v. 1–4, 12, 14, 17). Even from prison, Paul encourages us writing, **“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”** **“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,”** Christianity is challenging because we are going to suffer for our faith. Life in the crucible is uncomfortable. Paul tells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

God is using your suffering to throw you into the crucible, to melt down your pride and humiliate you, so you can be renewed into the image of Christ. Always be looking for where Christ is leading you next.

A legend from the early church tells of Rome under the awful Emperor Nero. Peter the apostle left Rome to escape persecution, but on the way out he saw a vision of Jesus walking with a cross into Rome. Peter asked Jesus, “Where are you going, Lord?” To which Jesus replied, “To Rome to be crucified again.”

Hearing that, Peter came to His senses. He walked back to Rome and was crucified upside down.

If you saw a vision of Christ carrying a cross, where would He be walking toward? Maybe it's back toward your friends at the bar, telling them that you're offended when they make jokes about your churchgoing habit. Maybe it's toward your spouse, admitting to him or her that you were wrong and you're sorry. **“Do all things without grumbling or disputing.”** Maybe the cross is leading you to listening to your mom or your boss, or your professor, doing what they ask of you without spite or complaining. Maybe the cross is leading you here on a Sunday morning, even if there's sports, or something more interesting to do the Saturday night prior. God uses all of these things to turn up the heat and melt us into the people He is calling us to be in the crucible of suffering and sacrifice.

Yet IV. Our crucible has amazing results (v. 13, 15–16, 18). Yes, there are benefits to this suffering we face in this life. Yes, we may work out our salvation with fear and trembling, but **“...it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”** Yes, we are to do things without complaining or grumbling, but it is so **“that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,”**

As Peter was crucified, he knew He wasn't alone. He knew Jesus was alongside Him and strengthening him. As the heat of suffering melts us in the crucible, we know there's a glorious result waiting for us.

This is the promise and reality of the resurrection. One day, you will suffer no more, and you will be with Jesus and all believers forever. This is life out of the crucible, reformed into a Christlike image, without sin or death, shining forever like the stars.

But what's more, our suffering is for the good of our neighbor. Did you know that there's a denomination of Lutherans in Indonesia, a majority Muslim Country, that has more than double the baptized members of the LCMS?

After two American missionaries were killed and eaten on the island of Sumatra, about thirty years later, Ludwig Nommensen came back to that village and taught the people. The first baptisms happened, then the Holy Spirit called tribal chiefs to faith and thousands came with them. Throughout Nommensen's life, he translated the Small Catechism and the Bible into the language of the Batak people of Indonesia. This church is one of the biggest Lutheran churches in Asia.

Nommensen could have thought of the two missionaries who went before him and chosen a different island to share the Gospel. Nommensen could have stayed home. Surely there were no modern comforts on a Pacific island in the 1800s, but the Holy Spirit drove him to show grace under pressure, and millions of souls have him to thank for that act of courage.

Wherever the Holy Spirit may be calling you to this day, follow His lead. There may be suffering and humiliation, but it will be worth it, if not for you, but for someone close to you: your spouse, your friends, your neighbors. Look to Christ, who suffered everything for you. Because of Him, you can gladly suffer for others. Amen!