

Sanctify Your Sufferings as Spirituality

My preacher-hero of the twentieth century, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, made a perceptive observation about John Bunyan's timeless allegory of the Christian life, *Pilgrim's Progress*: "The great truth in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is not that Christian endured great hardships on his way to the eternal city, but that Christian thought it to be worth his while to endure those hardships."¹

Those familiar with Bunyan's classic will know that most of Christian's hardships—and certainly his most difficult ones—were not those common to everyone. His most agonizing troubles were those he suffered internally and externally precisely because he was following Christ. But he found them all, even the life-threatening ones, "worth his while" in light of what he anticipated at the end of his journey.

As you're reading this, tens of thousands of the Lord's pilgrims around the world are threatened with execution, torture, slavery, starvation, homelessness, poverty, imprisonment, and other persecutions designed to destroy their faith in Jesus Christ. And yet, despite many of the same kinds of evil cruelty hurled at Jesus Himself, they find it "worth [their] while to endure those hardships" because of what they have and hope for in Christ. With far more than words, they prove they believe that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Even if we do not pay the ultimate price of dying for our devotion to the One who died for us, everyone who wants to live for Christ will suffer for it. For "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). But when we do suffer for being a Christian, or even when we experience the same hardships that unbelievers do, we should sanctify our sufferings as part of our spirituality.

For example, when persecuted for our faith, our endurance testifies to the worthiness of Christ. Unrelenting faithfulness in the absence of all earthly explanation says to the watching world, "It is worth enduring all this pain and heartache to know Christ and to anticipate the glory of being with Him forever." And when we grieve and groan under the hardships that grind Christians and non-Christians alike, we sanctify our sufferings when we draw closer to Christ because of them.

Thinking this way helps to simplify the spiritual life because it simplifies our understanding of the nature of spirituality. Instead of mentally cloistering our spirituality to the strictly religious areas of life (such as devotional habits or church), this approach seeing even our sufferings as spirituality enables us to realize that in some sense everything is spirituality, even our sufferings. Those who suffer best realize that even the worst and most painful parts of life relate directly to the soul and to our walk with God.

In all suffering, may God give us the grace to live with faith, remembering what the apostle Paul proclaimed in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this

present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Happy is he for whom the hope of glory in "the eternal city" makes any suffering "worth his while."

¹ Iain H. Murray, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *The First Forty Years 1899-1939* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), p. 98

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