

My favorite kind of book to check out from the library were those choose your own adventure books. They aren't popular any more but these were amazing. They are told in the second person so you are the hero of the story. And every few pages you make a decision. If you want to open the door on the left go to page 17, if you want to open the door on the right turn to page 36. They were always unpredictable and you never could be sure what turns the story would take. What I would do when I read them was keep my fingers in all of the pages. That way whenever I found out I made a bad choice, or got a bad ending I could just go back and do something different.

Wouldn't it be nice if life was like that? Every time you made a mistake you could just go backwards and try for a better ending. But life isn't like that. And one of the main problems of life, especially the Christian life is that no matter we don't get to do that in the Christian life. All of the doors that you're going to open will eventually involve suffering. No matter what decisions you make, some form of suffering will find you and there is no escape. It's not up to us to choose if we will suffer or not. What is up to us how would you suffer.

This morning in Luke 21:10-24 Jesus wants to prepare us for suffering. And He does not tell us how to avoid it or escape it. Instead Jesus wants us to see that suffering is actually an opportunity. This morning we will see two things suffering is an opportunity for.

I. Suffering is an opportunity to bear witness to Christ.

Each moment that we suffer is an opportunity to point people to Christ. That the very way that we suffer is an opportunity to proclaim the gospel.

Before we get into how we can be witness to Jesus and our suffering. We need to spend some time talking about what we mean by suffering.

Here Jesus begins talking about the suffering that is going to come. If you remember, last week,

Jesus prophesied that the temple is going to be destroyed.

And He is continuing that thought.
But He's expanded upon it as well.

This entire sermon in chapter 21 is known as the Olivet discourse.
It weaves together prophecies about what will happen to Jerusalem and prophecies about what will come in the last days.
As you can imagine it is a difficult to understand chapter.
Theologians have been trying to untangle its knots for centuries.

We will not untangle all of the knots this morning either.
And while we are going to touch on what will come in the last days,
I am not going to stay there.
Because I think Jesus is trying to teach us something about suffering.

Verse 10, **"Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."**

It is not just that suffering is going to come for the people who live in Jerusalem and those who care about this temple.
It is that war will break out between the nations.
In the last days, and the days to come Kingdoms will go to war.

This is not just a picture of like one big nation going to war.
Or the Roman Empire deciding to fight someone.
It seems more of the image of lots of nations going to war.
Whether is the individual wars like those currently ravaging our globe like the war between Russian and Ukraine.
Or Israel with Gaza and Palestinians.
The wars in Sudan, Burma, or Syria.
It could also be a picture of world wars,
Were have lots of nations coming together to fight each other,
It might be one big cataclysmic clash.

War is always devastating.
And war is never devoid of suffering.

There's never been a war where the innocent of not suffered.
Even in just wars, if there is such a thing.
There's never been a war that didn't lead the devastation for a whole lot of people no matter what they are.
And here, at least Jesus doesn't give us any indication of who these nations are
what these kingdoms are,
what they are fighting for or against.
It's just a simple fact of the suffering of war is coming.

Alongside the human cause suffering, there will be natural suffering.
Verse 11, **"There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences,"**

There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilence.
What can anyone do to stop on earthquake?
There's nothing anyone can do.
All you can do is run outside and hope things don't fall on you.
Or that the Earth doesn't open up underneath your feet.
This kind of suffering is in the worlds future as well.
Not just one devastating earthquake like the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami.
It seems that there will be a number of these all over the globs.

There will also be famines.
The world will run out of food.
There will be times when it is hard to get something.
In modern world today we don't really think about very often.
Famines are something that happens in history.

But what happens in other parts of the world can still affect us.
Not long ago millions of chickens got sick.
Then all of sudden eggs were incredibly expensive.
Now that wasn't really a famine.
It was mostly an inconvenience to the average person.

Especially if you eat eggs every day like we do in my house.
But these will be a much more serious kind of famine.
It's the famine that wipes out crops and destroys farmer's livelihood.
The famine that desolate communities towns and nations.
The kind of famine that kills millions.

There will also be pestilence.
Pestilence is a fancy word for disease.
There's plenty of pestilence going around our community of mono and strep and Covid and who knows what else.

Covid was a worldwide pestilence that killed millions and totally disrupted our world.
Our only encouragement is that it was not as bad as some of us really feared it would be in the early days.
But Jesus tells us that more of those are coming and expect them to be worse.
Expect them to be what you fear.

As if that's not enough, Jesus, then just says, **"and there will be terrors"**
I mean what could be more terrorizing than war, disasters, and plague.
Or **"great signs from heaven."**
Weird things in the sky, and in the heavens that make us afraid.
Comets, meteor showers, or weird phenomenon we can't explain.

Jesus doesn't give us a lot of specifics here, but he paints a picture of what's coming.
And it's suffering.
The last days will not be good days.
It's a normal trend and stories that right before the end of the story.
Right before the resolution in the climax,
when everything is going to work out and be OK
and we get the happy ending
Before that happens, everything gets to its lowest point.

Everything goes wrong and it's all terrible and it's never been as bad as it is right at this moment.

That's gonna be true for story of our world as well.

It has never been,

and it will never be as bad our entire globe

as it will be in those last days before the very end.

This is just some of the suffering Jesus is talking about.

So when Jesus says, suffering brings opportunity, this is the kind of suffering in the opportunity that it brings,

I want you to see that Jesus is talking about heavy serious, eschatological suffering.

It's not a little suffering.

It's not that I didn't get the grade that I wanted in school.

Or that you know I've been sick and it's pretty hard.

He means even the kind of suffering where the world is ending.

But then Jesus doubles down and verse 12 **"but before all these they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake."**

He says yeah but before all of that happens before he gets really really really bad for the world it's actually gonna eat really bad for you personally. You meaning Christians those who are true followers of Jesus are going to be persecuted.

They are going to lay hands on you.

Meaning that they will forcibly rip you out of your life and your current circumstances, and take you somewhere else.

They will beat you and harass you.

They will throw you in prison.

In front of crowds in the places where you want to be respected and known and loved, you'll be mocked and ridiculed, and laughed out .

And that you will be brought before the kings and the governors in the rulers, in order for them to pass sentence over you.
For them to decide what your punishment should be.

This is the suffering Jesus is talking about.
And is in the midst of this suffering that Jesus says, and this is an opportunity for you.

"This will be your opportunity to bear witness."

I don't know about you, but when I read this the first time, I just had to stop and go back and read it all again.
I couldn't believe that Jesus set all of it up to say yeah all those horrible, horrible awful things happened to the world and the horrible terrible things that will happen and be done to you.
Great news!
It's a wonderful opportunity.
It feels like somebody's trying to sell me in their multilevel marketing scam.

But Jesus says it is in these moments.
It is in the midst of your suffering,
When you're being persecuted and harassed.
That is the time when you get to bear witness to me.
That is the chance in which you have to stand and proclaim the truth about God.

Because the way that you endure suffering bears witness to Christ.
It is a testimony of what we believe.

When you endure that suffering, without complaint.
When you endure that suffering without it turning you, bitter and angry.
When you endure that suffering, and you still love others.
When you endure suffering and you can still sing praises to Jesus, even as it hurts your throat.
When you endure suffering in that way you proclaim the gospel of Jesus.

Then your suffering becomes a witness to the truth of Christ

Jesus says something so strange about when you find yourself persecuted or on trial.

Which is something each of his apostles and disciples will do.

"Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict."

Jesus says don't decide ahead of time what you're gonna say.

Jesus says don't meditate on your answer.

I like to meditate on my answers.

I have a lot of arguments in the shower.

Or a lot of times or I'm preparing up brilliant answers for the questions I hope people ask me.

Jesus weirdly says yeah don't do that.

Instead, Jesus says that he will give us wisdom.

He will give us the answer.

That in the moment the Holy Spirit will fill you, and he will speak out of your mouth.

And the words that come through the spirit be witness to Jesus will be exactly what you need to say.

That your adversaries won't know how to answer you.

Jesus saying I've got it.

I don't need you to put all of your brain power on this.

Jesus tells us he doesn't need us to stay up all night in the exact perfect answer.

He will give us what we need when the suffering comes.

We do not need to meditate and figure out the best way to make sure our suffering bears witness to Christ.

He will do that for us.

He will give us the words we need.

When someone asks you, why are you a Christian, don't you know the Bible was written way later?

Why do you follow Jesus? Do you really believe those miracles actually happened?

Why do you follow Jesus? Don't you think it's so repressive and hateful to tell other people their beliefs are wrong?

Jesus tells us, He will give us the answers.

And if we endure rightly, His answers will dumbfound people.

He will answer better than we ever could.

Jesus then tells us to expect to be betrayed by those that you love.

"You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends,"

Expect to have your own family.

Your own parents, or your children betray you and turn on you.

They will hand you over to be persecuted to suffer.

There will be suffering that comes even from your own family.

If that wasn't bad enough, he says, **"some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by my name's sake."**

And if you don't die, all of you are going to be hated.

I don't know why Christians seem to be so shocked and nowadays, when people hate them for being Christians.

Jesus tells us a bunch of times it's gonna happen.

Jesus tells a bunch of times to prepare for it, and to expect it.

Yet, I continuous see Christians lose their minds when Christians and pastors and Christian leaders are not respected or applauded and celebrated. But instead of hated and mocked.

We shouldn't be this is how it should be.

But notice what kind of persecution and hatred and suffering should be because of the name of Jesus.

It should be because of how we follow Jesus.

There sometimes Christians are hated because of jerks not because of Christians.

If you go to a restaurant instead of leaving a tip you leave a gospel track , and then your waitress is right to be angry that you're a Christian.

You're not being hated because the name of Jesus you're being hated because you're cheap.

That's not persecution.

But it is when you are hated even when you are overflowing with the peace, love, and joy of Jesus.

We will always suffer, but we don't always suffer cause of Jesus.

Suffer for Jesus name, is a high privilege, and we should view it as a privilege not as an unfortunate circumstance.

If you wanna be worthy of that privilege, you need to suffer in the small things well

Now again,

Suffering is an opportunity to bear witness to Jesus.

One of the best way you can proclaim the gospel is how you suffer.

Maybe you feel like you're not good at evangelism.

Maybe you don't have a lot of Bible verses memorized.

And there's questions about theology that just confuse you and scare you.

Even just the idea of the Trinity makes your head hurt and you don't know what to do with it.

You can be an incredible evangelist for Jesus if you suffer well.

If you embody the fruit of the spirit even while you suffer.

If you were self-controlled and patient and kind and loving even in your suffering.

If you don't just lose your temper, because what's happening to you.

If you continue to be humble and patient even in your suffering.

If we act like the apostles when they were in prison.

For they sang songs and praised God because God counted them worthy of suffering for his sake.

I couldn't help but think of Polycarp as I read through our passage this week.

Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John.

He was part of the second generation of Christians and a leader in the church.

His story, the story of his martyrdom, and his death, for Jesus, is the first story that we have outside of the Bible itself of those who died for their faith in Jesus.

He was persecuted and arrested for his faith in Christ.

The police came to arrest him riding on horses and armed to the teeth as they usually were when they were hunting down fugitives.

Do you and they actually found Polycarp, he was praying.

And Polycarp was happy to see them.

He invited them inside.

He set the table for them made them dinner.

And he asked him if they wouldn't mind eating dinner while he finished praying for about an hour.

They were so amazed by his conduct that they were dumbfounded

They couldn't believe they were coming after such a godly old man.

Later when he stood before the proconsul on trial, he was demanding the Polycarp just go through the motions.

Swear to Caesar as god and revile Christ.

But The Polycarp responded "for 86 years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blasphemy my king who saved me ?"

Polycarp was at least 86. I think it's likely he was closer to 100.

I would encourage you to read his whole story.

Because he suffered and he died for Jesus.

But the way that he endured his persecution.

The way that he endured his suffering bore witness to Jesus.
And his witness echoes through the ages 2000 years later.
So it should be with us.

The way that we endure suffering should point people to Christ.
It is unlikely that any of us will be murdered.
It is certain that all of us are going to suffer.
Many of you are probably suffering from something right now.
And the way that you endure that suffering.
The suffering that you are experiencing today or that you're going to
tomorrow, however, big or however, small it seems to the world is an
opportunity for you to bear witness to Jesus.

II. Suffering is an opportunity to endure with Christ.

Verse 19 tells us, **"by your endurance you will gain your lives."**

Our suffering is a chance to endure.

But we do not have to endure on our own.

Remember, Jesus endured his own suffering on the cross.

And 1 Peter 4:13 tells us, **"But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings"**

When we suffer, we are getting to participate with Jesus in his suffering.

I do not mean that Jesus is with you when you suffer.

I mean that when you suffer, and when you endure it.

When you do not tap out and quit And you push through.

We get to endure and participate with Jesus.

We are getting to somehow mystically mysteriously and spiritually
participate in the suffering that Jesus endured on the cross.

Because we are in Christ and He is in us.

Jesus tell us is that when we endure, not a hair in our head will perish.

"But not a hair of your head will perish."

And it won't be harmed because of the resurrection that to come.

It won't be because of the eternal life that we gain.

We can endure the suffering with Jesus, because we know that this is not the end of the story.

We know what the last chapter is.

We know this will have a happy ending.

We know as Tolken said that all sad things will come untrue.

"By your endurance, you will gain your lives."

When we endure suffering, well.

When we endure this suffering with Jesus it brings eternal life.

Now that doesn't mean that this is how we gain eternal life as in, it's something that we must accomplish.

As if it is a work, or a way that we can earn salvation.

It is the idea of the endurance of the Saints.

There's a lot of people who profess faith in Jesus when it's easy and when it's popular and whenever everyone in town is a Christian and when if you're member of a church, it makes it easier to get elected.

But when suffering comes not as many people want to be Christians anymore

So those who truly do have faith in Jesus.

Those who truly have gained eternal life in him endure suffering

And those who fall away in suffering prove they don't have it.

Then Jesus begins to get specific with some prophecies about Jerusalem.

He tells them OK that generally you know there is war in calamity and everything coming.

But then he says, and I want you to know some of that coming for you soon.

The city of Jerusalem itself is going to be destroyed.

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near."

And he says this, so they can be prepared.

They can be prepared when the armies surround the city.

They can know that this is the end.
This is the suffering the Jesus talked about.
And it is going to be terrible, but he wants them to endure.
He encourages them to run.
To flee the city get away.
Don't stand and try to fight it.
Don't try to make it stop.

"Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, 22 for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. 23 Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. 24 They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."

The Jews are going to be punished for their sins.
And that suffering will continue until the time of the gentiles is over.

The key idea here I think it's not just Jesus telling them about the suffering that is coming for them particularly.
But he's telling them this, so they can endure it when their day comes with Jesus.
So that they can know how to survive the suffering.
So that they can endure.

Suffering with Jesus is one of the things that I love about the gospel.
We serve a God, who will get down on his hands and knees with us.
A God who became man so he could feel what it feels like to be betrayed.
A God who became man so he could feel what it feels like to bleed.
A God who became man so we could feel what it feels like to suffocate to be in blinding pain.
Believer when you suffer.

God suffers with you.
He endures it with you.
You do not have to do it on your own.
The difficult thing about suffering is having to do it alone.
But if you've put your faith in Jesus Christ, as your savior, as you're only hope in life and death, and you never have to suffer alone.
Then you can endure and you can hold on.
Because he is he is with you.

If he is with you, then you can take it.
Not because you were so strong.
Not because you have it in within you if you could just dig deep and activate it and make it happen.

I don't want you to think that you are weak because the pain and suffering you are walking through feels like too much.
Because your chronic pain feels unending and your tired of having to tell people about it.
Or because it keeps making you want to quit and you don't know if you can get out of bed.
Or because your memory is fading and you feel yourself slipping away.
Don't hear this and think you can endure on your own.
You cannot do it alone.
And do not need to.
You never did.
Because Jesus is inside of you.
Because the Holy Spirit lives in you.
Because you and Jesus together can do it.

When Polycarp was on trial, he was being threatened with execution. And they threatened to feed him to the wild beasts, unless he repented of following Jesus.

And without fear, Polycarp said, call them I've already repented from following my sins.

Then they threatened to light them on fire, since he wasn't afraid of animals.

And Polycarp responded " you threatened with a fire that burns only briefly, and after just a while, it is distinguished, for your ignorance, with the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment, which is reserved for the ungodly. But why do you delay come and do as you wish?"

So they prepared to burn Polycarp alive.

And they also got ready to nail him to the piece of wood. They would nail people in place so they couldn't run away.

They brought the nails, Polycarp said , "leave me, as I am, for the one who enables me to endure. The fire, will also enable me to remain on the pier without moving, even without the sense of security that you get from the nails."

So they tied him to the wood.

They let the fire, and Polycarp died.

In his last words were prayer praising God, and thanking God for allowing polygraph to suffer for the name of Jesus.

Polycarp was able to endure the flame.

Not because he was a super Christian.

Not because he had secret knowledge from the apostles that we don't have now.

He was able to endure the flame because he endured it with through for and by Jesus Christ.

And that same Jesus is here.

You have the same Holy Spirit, that every believer and follow of Jesus before you has hand.

You may not have to endure the fire, but you will go through fiery trials in your own life.

And you can endure.

You might be tempted to say there is no way that is true.
That there is no way you could endure like the apostles and others have.
I've good news for you.
None of us can on our own strength.
But I have better news.
Jesus can do it.
Jesus can endure it.
And Jesus wants to endure it with you.
If you and Jesus are carrying a burden together do you think he will let it drop and crush you?
If Jesus is suffering with you, do you think that he is going to tap out and quit?
No.
He will carry you.
He will strengthen you.
He will allow you to endure.

I don't know what you're facing today.
I definitely don't know what any of us are going to face tomorrow, but what I do know is that with Jesus, you can endure if you hold onto Jesus.
And recognize that you're suffering unique opportunity to get to participate with Jesus in his suffering with you.
Don't quit.
Endure because Jesus is with you.

CONCLUSION:

Suffering is an opportunity to bear witness to Christ and to endure with him.
Those choose your own adventure books would have a 40 endings.
And they would make it really challenging to get a good one.
Some books will intentionally get you stuck in a loop where you are going around in circles.
Some books would only have bad endings.

And some the only way to get a good ending was to cheat or return to the wrong page accidentally.

I don't know what God story for your life is.

I can't tell you what's going to be on the next page.

Many of the pages ahead of all of us are going to be filled with suffering and discomfort.

And I do know That if you put your faith in Jesus Christ.

If you are following Jesus.

If you are trusting in Jesus alone,

and if he is your only hope to endure this life.

I promise you that you were going to get the good ending.

And the end of the story for all who've put their faith in Jesus is a story of being resurrected from the dead into eternal life and a New World where pain and suffering are a thing of the past.

You won't find that ending through hard work making all the right decisions.

But you can find it in Jesus.

And the same God who endured suffering for our sake will come and will help us endure our suffering for his sake until the end comes.