

# **The mystery of the suffering Church**

# The mystery of a suffering Church

Although the knowledge of a suffering Church is not a mystery of the scriptures, as we will see, it is hidden because we have too much invested in the world. There seems to be some mass delusion that the world is in fact the promised land, which will only come with a new heaven and earth.

We have repeatedly forgotten how entry into the church is to another kingdom not like the world. *"They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."*  
John 17:16

Although many would say that their hope is in heaven to come with Christ, a great many live as if this world is all there is. When the trials God has ordained for our good come to us, our anxious reactions tell the story of what we really believe in concerning the promises of God.

Some want to live as if we have already arrived in the promised land, thinking that because Jesus gives us rest from our heavy burdens, we won't be burdened again. This is a serious misapplication of scripture which accommodates our flesh. For the Bible says we are soldiers who are at war with the powers of darkness and we have already put on the full armour of God, because the fulfilment of the kingdom rest is not yet established.

When Jesus consummates the wedding feast of His bride, (Rev 19:6-9) there will be no need to stand against the principalities and powers, because all things will have been reconciled in Him. The rest Jesus offers is from the dictates of false religion, so that in being yoked to Him we will know His strength and enabling for the work to be done in His name.

The Church as the people of God has a treasure in heaven, and the way to heaven is the way of Christ who said: *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*  
Matt 6:19-21

What we need more than anything as we live in the fallen world, is the presence of God. So, to help us endure the valley of the shadow of death, God's promise is His presence abiding or remaining in His chosen children.

<i>I am with you always.</i>	Matt 28:20
<i>Christ in you.</i>	Col 1:27
<i>Christ lives in me.</i>	Gal 2:20
<i>Christ is your life.</i>	Col 3:4
<i>With Christ in God.</i>	Col 3:3
<i>"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, so that He may be with you forever."</i>	John 14:16
<i>Consequently, "My peace I leave with you."</i>	John 14:27

The pain of suffering is real and remains, otherwise there would be no need for faith. But the presence of God in us is for our endurance, even to the end.

The Christian life is a spiritual kingdom life not of this world. Having kingdom life means our priorities are no longer determined by the world and the things of the world, but heaven. And in the same way that Jesus suffered as He entered His heavenly kingdom, so must we. *"It is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God."*

Acts 14:22

*And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, this is the one who will save it. For what good does it do a person if he gains the whole world, but loses or forfeits himself?"*

Luke 9:23-25

The cross is an instrument of personal suffering and death that cannot be avoided by those who want to follow Jesus. Our cross is our key to heaven. We take up our cross of self-denial and obedience to follow the way of Christ. Our cross must be carried in this world where self-preservation is the priority. But we struggle to put ourselves to death because in our fleshliness we prefer to listen to those who say we deserve prosperity, good health, and peace on earth. But Jesus has other plans. *"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to turn a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; "The one who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and the one who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And the one who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. The one who has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life on My account will find it."*

Matt 10:34-35,37-39

During the Reformation of the Church this truth was once again highlighted by John Calvin.

"It is true that we have the reading where God tells us that He will not have any man to trouble his neighbour, or commit robbery, extortion, covetousness, deceit, or any manner of evil. He tells us those things and in addition commands us to live chastely and to abstain from all violence. Now when wars are stirred up in the world, when blood is shed, when no end of rapes are committed, shall we say that such things are done without God having regard in His purpose to what was good? Do we think that He suffers chance to have the upper hand here below, as though He Himself were asleep in heaven or was taking rest there in His pleasures? What blasphemy that would be! We would make God like an idol. Again, what would become of us if it were so, for Satan is like a roaring lion, [1 Pet. 5:8] seeking to devour us as his prey, and we should continually be, as it were, in his paws and between his teeth? If then God does not order all things in this world, or hold Satan and all the wicked in check, surely a hundred times over and perish every minute of an hour. Again, if we did not know that wars and such other similar things a God's judgments, by which He chastises our sins, it is certain that we should be lost are we would never be drawn to repentance. Now then, let us learn what is told us here, I mean according to our small ability, that is we to say, that God has only one will, and that the same is sure and thoroughly consistent with itself, and has no capriciousness or unsteadiness in it. Nevertheless, at the same time we must reverence His secret purposes which are now so high and profound that we cannot reach them."

John Calvin. Sermon on Eph 3:9-12. First printed in French in 1562, then in English in 1577.

As for today, the Christian life with Christ's church is found in God, and is to be lived as members of His eternal kingdom, doing all things for Christ according to our utmost ability, with a view to, and in anticipation of, the perfection of the coming fulfilment of the eternal kingdom of God with a new heaven and earth.

To be in Christ means we have died to the world and been raised up to eternal life in Christ. We are to begin living for Him and the fulfillment of all things in Him. And He has provided us with all we need for His kingdom life.

*"For His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory*

*and excellence. Through these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world on account of lust."*

2 Pet 1:3-4

*"I will put My Spirit within you and bring it about that you walk in My statutes, and are careful and follow My ordinances."*

Ezek 36:27

What we see here on earth is at best a faint shadow of the glory that is to come. But for now, we can enjoy God's creation, while the world serves as the training ground for faith in righteousness for the chosen, and the for the judgment of the unbelievers under the dominion of satan. For the world is satan's kingdom but only for a season, and his deception is always subject to the sovereignty of God. When the Lord comes again, He will destroy satan and his helpers by the breath coming from His mouth, along with all who have not died to self to live for Christ. Satan would have us think he is a big deal, but he and those he controls will be destroyed without Christ lifting a finger. And whatever satan intends to cause us harm, God works for our good.

Rom 8:28

*Jesus said: "These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."*

John 16:33

Because Jesus has overcome the world and satan's rule, we who are in Christ are not in bondage under satan's power, for we have died to the world with Christ, and now live under His banner of love over us as if His kingdom is already perfected in us who live for the reality to be given to us when He takes us to be with Him forever. For this is the Church as the body of Christ that we belong to as we eagerly work out our salvation in reverence to God, putting off what remains of our citizenship on earth for our citizenship in heaven as God works His will to be lived in us who are in Christ. In Christ we can rejoice.

*"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the eagerly awaiting creation waits for the revealing of the sons and daughters of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until*

*now. And not only that, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, through perseverance we wait eagerly for it."*

Rom 8:18-25

Therefore, the church of Christ is made up of all those who have denied themselves and taken up their cross to follow Christ. So, suffering with Christ is the normal way for those who live for the kingdom of God.

*"Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which perishes though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ;"*

1 Pet 1:5-7

Suffering with Christ is for our eternal good, even if it costs us our life on earth. *"And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

Matt 10:28

*"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though something strange were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that at the revelation of His glory you may also rejoice and be overjoyed."*

1 Pet 4:12-13

### **Heaven will come with Christ**

*"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.."*

1 Thess 4:16

*"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality."*

1 Cor 15:52-53

For these reasons, according to the mystery revealed in Christ, we can be anxious for nothing. Although the work of Satan and sin creates much anxiety for those who have their treasure in the world. But those who belong to Christ and live for Him, they have the Spirit of God protecting them. This is the same Spirit of God who is in control of all things on earth. So, we who belong to the kingdom of God are not to allow anxiousness to overwhelm us as we observe the corruption of sin bringing chaos to the world. For we are made alive to live by faith, with Christ in us, and we should not be disturbed by the sight of God working out the reconciliation of all things in Christ Jesus in a sinful world that is under His judgement. *“Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth.”*

Col 3:1-2

*“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and reliable and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

Heb 6:19-20

*“For we know that if our earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made by hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed, in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, since in fact after putting it on, we will not be found naked. For indeed, we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a pledge.”*

2 Cor 5:1-6

What we look forward to is the actual face to face encounter with God that will occur in heaven. So, our longing is to be in His presence in heaven. Until then, we worship in His presence daily as we live by faith in the knowledge that God already abides in us by His Spirit. Knowledge of God's presence makes our trials endurable and provides a shield from anxiety and fear.

This peace in the presence of God remains a mystery for those who live for the world. If the presence of Christ isn't at the centre of our life, the world that is passing away rules in us. God has allowed the world to be a fearful place in the hands of Satan for our good. What Satan means for our destruction, God uses for our good, for He tries us in the world for growth in holiness.

# Living Water Resources

## Come to the River

*Seek first His kingdom and His  
righteousness.*

*“For here we do not have a lasting city, but  
we are seeking the city which is to come.  
Through Him then, let’s continually offer up  
a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit  
of lips praising His name.”*

Hebrews 13:13-14

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