

Called To Be A Leper for God

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As we all know, when God first initially opens our eyes and calls us into the truth to be a part of His ecclesia, we are not only called into the truth and into the church, we are called out of the world. We all live in a society today which is under the influence of Satan; people are just following a life of sin. As a result of being called into the truth, we then have to totally change our lives and start living according to God's laws which are very counter to the culture we live in. Depending upon what area of the world you are in and what the culture is like, there are varying degrees of how much we are at odds with the culture around us. Part of what we have to accept is that we are called into living a life that is counter to this. As a result of that, part of what we have to accept in being Christians is being "oddballs". Being the individuals who stick out in how we live and how we govern our lives—very differently to the culture around us. This may be our neighborhood, our extended family or work contacts—we just have to live a different life. That can oftentimes ostracize us because we can be anything from the "oddball" that people don't quite understand all the way to someone being downright hated for the values we stand for.

As Christ told us, when we are called out of the world, the world is going to hate us for that. This is just something, as Christians, we have to accept as part of our calling and what we have to endure to be a part of the Kingdom of God. To look at this particular concept, what we are going to do today is to look at the life and the conversion of a very popular biblical character with whom we are all familiar. We are going to look at his life because from the moment he was called into the truth he immediately became what I will call a "social leper". In other words, he immediately found himself in a situation where he was a 'reject' from all sides of the equation.

Today, we are going to look at the life of the Apostle Paul. We will then draw lessons from his life which we can learn to apply in our Christian walk and our conversion. If you would like a title for this sermon today, it's:

Called To Be A Leper For God

Let me clarify first of all, as I mention the term 'leper'. I'm obviously not referring the literal disease of leprosy; I'm using it more as an analogy. Let me establish some context so you understand why I am using this analogy. I will read a brief portion of Leviticus 13 that is dedicated to the subject of leprosy, starting in verse 42.

Leviticus 13:42 *And if there is on the bald head or bald forehead a reddish-white sore, it is leprosy breaking out on his bald head or his bald forehead.*

43) Then the priest shall examine it; and indeed, if the swelling of the sore is reddish-white on his bald head or on his bald forehead, as the appearance of leprosy on the skin of the body,

44) he is a leprous man. He is unclean. The priest shall surely pronounce him unclean; his sore is on his head.

45) *Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, Unclean! Unclean!*
46) *He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.*
(NKJV)

In other words, he was ostracized from the rest of the camp.

“As long as you have leprosy, you stay out over there and stay away from the rest of us because you’re contagious and we don’t want what you have.”

It’s the biblical concept of quarantine. I am looking at this concept from the idea of an analogy, that once a person is following God’s way of life, sometimes other people look at them like they are a leper—“You stay away from me, I don’t want to catch what you have.”

What we’re going to see today, is when the Apostle Paul was called, he literally got into a situation where this is how he was viewed from both sides of the equation. We will look at his life in just a moment, but as I mentioned, when we all came into the truth and were baptized, we made a commitment to dedicate our lives and follow God. One of the things we agreed to is was to be willing to put God above everything else in our lives; above our families, above our jobs, above our personal comfort—even to the point of losing our own lives—that is the commitment we made. Luke 14 is a very common scripture used in baptismal counseling.

When I was to be counseled for baptism, I loved the way the minister who counseled me explained baptism to me. He made it very clear in his counseling that I was not making a covenant with him; I was making a covenant with God and that he just functioned as my attorney. He was just there to make sure that I understood the terms of the agreement I was entering into. He covered this section of scripture we are about to read. He told me at the time, he said,

“I know because I’ve been in your shoes. As I’m covering this today, these are really just words to you, but I want you to understand what you are agreeing to. Because later, when it gets hard, when you have a harsh trial and you are enduring through it, I want you to remember this conversation and what you agreed to.”

Luke 14:25 *Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them,*

26) *If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.*

27) *And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.*

28) *For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—*

29) *lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,*

30) *saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish ?*

31) *Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?*

32) *Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.*

33) *So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)*

Christ couldn't be clearer about this. He was saying that you have to put Me first, or you're not qualified for the Kingdom of God. You have to be willing to put following God and His way above your personal comfort, above your job, all you own and even your own life. That's what we have to be willing to do. Realizing this, we can look at the life of Apostle Paul and appreciate what he went through. Even though our lives are typically not as severe as the example we're going to see in his calling, the same principles apply.

The story of Paul's conversion is covered three different times in Acts. We see the initial account in Acts 9 and then Paul tells the story again in Acts 22 and 26. Throughout the sermon today we are going to read through all three accounts because if you read through them all, each one has a few details that the other ones don't cover. So, we have to cover all three of them to get all of the details of the story. We will begin with the account in Acts 22. This is not the original time this happens, it's Paul retelling the story. As we go through this, don't just think of it academically, try to put ourselves in Paul's shoes as he was going through it. Remember Paul is a Pharisee and he was persecuting the church very zealously. If you think about this from a broad general standpoint, that is your Pharisaical Jews from true Christians, it is a lot different to how you might compare true Christians today with what's called popular Christianity around us where there is a night and day contrast. We keep Saturday, they keep Sunday, we keep the Holy Days in the Bible, they keep Christmas and Easter, we don't eat pork and shellfish and they do—there is a night and day difference. Between Pharisaical Jews and true Christians, the differences wouldn't be quite so obvious. One of the big differences between the two is that Christ is the Messiah and He truly is the Son of God and you have to accept Him as your Savior.

Realize by virtue of the fact that Paul is zealously persecuting the church—even violently so—he is violently opposed to the concept that Christ is the Messiah. That He is the Son of God and you have to accept Him as your Savior. Imagine being in his shoes when you are struck down on the road to Damascus and you find out Christ really is the Messiah and you're going to have to repent and accept Him as your Savior. Imagine what a bitter pill this was for him to swallow. He had to admit that he had been totally wrong about all of this. He has to eat a major stack of crow to repent and change sides on this whole issue. Realizing this tells us why God took such dramatic means in getting his attention and calling him to conversion. You can imagine a guy this resistant to the concept that Christ is really the Son of God, the Messiah, you would have to take a 2x4 upside his head to get his attention and get him to change his point of view. That's what happened here, beginning in Acts 22:1.

Acts 22:1 *Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now."*

- 2) *And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said:*
- 3) *I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.*
- 4) *I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women,*
- 5) *as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.*
(NKJV)

He is fervently and passionately and violently opposed to the concept that Christ is the Messiah. The group who accepts Christ, that's the group he is trying to attack, persecute and torment. Just imagine how strongly he feels about this. Think about this socially as well. This is logically going to mean that the majority of his friends are either going to be actively involved in this behavior or at least supportive of it; they will have a similar mindset to him. Imagine what this does to his life when he has to change sides.

- 6) *Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me.*
- 7) *And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*
- 8) *So I answered, Who are You, Lord? And He said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.*
- 9) *And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.*
- 10) *So I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.*
- 11) *And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.* (NKJV)

As we are going to read later in Acts 9, he was struck blind and was struck blind for several days. This account doesn't give you the exact number of days in which this plays out. He doesn't just get baptized immediately, he has several days to sit blind, fasting about this and absorbing this bitter pill he has to swallow.

- 12) *Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there,*
- 13) *came to me; and he stood and said to me, Brother Saul, receive your sight. And at that same hour I looked up at him.*
- 14) *Then he said, The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.*
- 15) *For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.*
- 16) *And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.* (NKJV)

Imagine, this is someone violently opposed to the concept that Christ is the Messiah; he now has to accept Christ as his Savior and be baptized in the name of Christ. Imagine what a bitter pill this is for him to swallow.

17) Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance

18) and saw Him saying to me, Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me. (NKJV)

Notice he is also seeing visions and has had very dramatic events taking place. I'm sure it took that to get his attention away from the resistance he would have with the subject. Christ is even saying, they're not going to accept you here. "Get out of Dodge", this is not going to go well here in town. Notice what Paul mentions to him right after this in verse 19.

19) So I said, Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You.

20) And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.

21) Then He said to me, Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles. (NKJV)

"You can logically see; you're not going to be too effective here so I'm going to send you way away from here because you are like a leper here."

Think about this, even Paul said, "Lord I'm well known among the Christians and I don't have a good reputation. I'm the guy who has been their persecutor". He had to realize that all of his former friends, who were supportive of him as a Pharisaical Jew, that now he just went from being their hero to being "public enemy number one".

In Acts 21, we read the account that led up to him giving this defense.

Acts 21:27 *Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,*

28) crying out, Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore, he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

29) (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) (NKJV)

They are not only violently opposed to where he's at but they are making up things that he didn't do to accuse him. He's being slandered and falsely accused. That's one of the things that comes along with following the truth as well.

30) And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.

31) *Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.*

32) *He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.*

33) *Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done.*

34) *And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks.*

35) *When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.*

36) *For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, Away with him!"* (NKJV)

Notice, he just went from being the hero of the Pharisaical Jews—he's persecuting the Christians and taking care of the heretics as far as they see it—and now he became the heretic. He became "public enemy number one" and now wherever he goes, people want to kill him. Just think about what this did to his life socially. This means the people who he would have been loved by or were his friends and companions, now all want to turn on him. He's not real welcome in a lot of Christian circles either because he's known as their bad guy. He became a social leper the moment he came into the truth. He paid a severe price for following God.

We also need to realize that our lives are typically not as dramatic or as severe as Paul's example but some of the same concepts apply to us as well. They are fundamental to our calling and Christ Himself taught this. In John 15 we see that Christ warned His disciples that following Him was going to mean being hated by the world.

John 15:18 *If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.*

19) *If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*

20) *Remember the word that I said to you, A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.*

21) *But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.* (NKJV)

Christ said, it's a normal expectation to expect that, if you are diligently following God, you are not going to be popular with the culture around you. So, we have to realize we can't look at Christianity as, just as long as I'm following God, people will love me and accept me and I'll be popular. No, often it's the other way around. You're the oddball and sometimes viewed as the leper. In John 17 Christ emphasize the principle again.

John 17:14 *I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

- 15) *I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.*
 16) *They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*
 17) *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*
 18) *As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*
 19) *And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. (NKJV)*

It's the truth of God which sets us apart. It is trying to diligently follow the truth and accept the truth revealed to us and repent and change our lives which puts us at odds with the culture around us. That is oftentimes why the world hates us. We have to realize that sometimes we can be in a situation where it's not just the world that hates us, this can happen in the Church of God as well. It's absolutely prophesied in Matthew 24 to happen in the message that Christ gave in the Olivet Prophecy. We're going to read a section of scripture here that obviously is specifically referring to those called into the church and are followers of Christ.

Matthew 24:9 *Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. (NKJV)*

Obviously, those who could be hated by all nations for Christ's name sake are those who are following Christ. Those who have accepted Him as their Savior. Now let's just keep reading.

- 10) *And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.*
 11) *Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.*
 12) *And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. (NKJV)*

If you look at verse 12 in an interlinear, you will see the word "love" is the Greek word, *agape*. This is the *spiritual love we get through the Holy Spirit*.

13) *But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (NKJV)*

Who are those who can endure to the end and be saved and receive salvation? They are the followers of Christ who have accepted Him as their Savior. So, if we look at these verses together, we are talking about those who all the world are going to hate because of Christ's name, the people who could lose their *agape* love and endure to the end and be saved. Now when we talk about "many will hate one another, will be offended by each other, will betray one another"—who are we talking about? We are talking about church members; we're talking about those called into the truth actually falling into this behavior.

Let me add more light to this by sharing with you what is meant by the word *betray*. We use that word in English sometimes to have some broad meanings. A lot of times the meaning that we're using is not as severe as how Christ is talking about here. To give an obvious example, one of the ways in which we use *betray* in our common culture today for example, is if you shared something personal with a friend; maybe it was embarrassing and you wanted to keep it quiet, but you shared it with a close

friend. You asked them to keep this in confidence and not to let this go beyond the two of you but your friend didn't do that. They blabbed it to everybody else. This gets back to you and you feel hurt and betrayed because you feel like your friend stabbed you in the back. You would say that your friend had *betrayed* you. Here's what they did, they blabbed it to the whole world and I asked them not to do that.

The meaning that Christ is expressing here is much more severe than that. The way He's using *betray* here is similar to when the Bible refers to Judas betraying Christ. He didn't just go blab a secret about Christ, he set Him up to be "taken captive, falsely tried, beaten and murdered". That's more the concept of what this is getting at. This is why I say this: The Greek word translated as *betray*—I may butcher the pronunciation is—*paradidomi* and [Strong's #3860](#) and according to [The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament](#) by Spiros Zodhiates, here's how it is defined:

"To deliver up or over to the power of someone. Spoken of a person's delivery with evil intent over to the power or authority of others as to magistrates for trial or condemnation".

If you think about what Judas did to Christ, that's exactly what he did to Christ; he delivered Him over with evil intent for trial or condemnation. If you have church members doing this kind of thing to one another, they definitely hate one another. This is something prophesied in the future with the literal application of what Christ was referring to.

The concept I am trying to get across here, is that Paul was in a similar situation to this when he was converted and brought into the truth. Just accepting the knowledge that Christ was the Messiah; that He is our Savior and you have to accept Him to be your Savior put Paul into a situation where now, his Pharisee friends don't want anything to do with him anymore. In fact, they wanted to kill him. The Christians were like,

"We don't know if we want to deal with this man, he's the one who has been persecuting and attacking us. We want to stay away from him."

He basically became a leper; just imagine what that did to his life and the emotional effects that this would have had on his way of life. From the time he was called into the truth and all through the years going forward, he didn't live an easy life. It's easy for us to look at it academically and say he was the hero and he wrote the majority of the New Testament and performed miracles. Yes, he did; he accomplished all of that. But he lived a very painful life in accomplishing all of that. As we're going to see later in the sermon there were times he literally just wished for death; that he could just die and get it over with and not face this anymore. To really value the lessons of his life, we have to think about it in terms of how he experienced it. It puts our trials into perspective as well.

Sometimes we can get overwhelmed with the trials we are facing and if we stop and look and think about what Paul faced, what we are facing is nothing compared to what he went through. If he can make it through that, I can too. It puts our trials into perspective. Now to Acts 9 and we'll read the original account of Paul's conversion. You can see when he was called into the truth, he was called into a very difficult life.

Not only called out of the world, but socially separated from everything that he had known. That's a concept that could apply to us in a typically less severe fashion as was applied to him, but this same concept we need to deal with as well.

We'll also see that Christ informed Paul that he was called to suffer which, as we're going to see is also a concept that very much applies to our Christian lives.

Acts 9:1 *Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest
2) and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (NKJV)*

He is actively persecuting the church.

*3) As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.
4) Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"
5) And he said, Who are You, Lord?"
Then the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."
6) So he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what do You want me to do?"
Then the Lord said to him, Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (NKJV)*

Notice the dramatic effects that had to be done to convert Paul. If you put your thought process into his thought process, being so violently opposed to the truth that Christ is the Messiah, it would take a 2x4 upside the head to get his attention. God had to stuff the truth up his nose to get him to pay attention and realize he had to repent. I doubt less severe methods would have gotten his attention. Continuing in verse 8.

*8) Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.
9) And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. (NKJV)*

As I mentioned before, this is a detail that Acts 22 didn't include for us. If you just read through Acts 22 you get the concept that he immediately repented and Ananias immediately showed up and baptized him and that's all there was to it. There was more to the story than that. Paul is struck blind and is in there praying and wondering if he is ever going to get his sight back. He didn't eat or drink, he was fasting through all this, crying out to God. He has time to think about all this and to adjust to this bitter pill he had to swallow that Christ truly was the Messiah.

Notice as we read through Christ's instructions to Ananias, Ananias' response. Paul pointed out earlier, "I persecuted the Christians, they are not going to be too crazy about dealing with me." And that was Ananias' reaction. Notice in verse 10.

10) *Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, Ananias.” And he said, Here I am, Lord.”*

11) *So the Lord said to him, Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. (NKJV)*

He’s praying to get his eyesight back, because he’s blind.

12) *And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.” (NKJV)*

Notice Ananias’ response.

13) *Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.*

14) *And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” (NKJV)*

Ananias is politely saying,

“Do I have to go help this man? Do you know who we are talking about here? This is the one who has been the bane of our existence, been actively persecuting Christians. He was there when Stephen was killed, this man has been involved in torturing and imprisoning church members just for believing in You—now we have to help him?”

You can imagine the reaction they would have here. Fortunately, Ananias submits to Christ’s instructions.

15) *But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.*

16) *For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name s sake.” (NKJV)*

Notice, Christ said right off the bat, I’m calling him to suffer. He’s going to be the hero who writes the majority of the New Testament, he’s going to perform miracles and do lots of dramatic things, but life is not going to be a picnic for him. He is going to have a hard life because it stretched way beyond the issue of being a “social leper” from the time he was called. Especially early on, before he proved to the Christians that he was now totally devout and on the same page with them. He’s going to be rejected on both sides. The Pharisaical Jews don’t want him anymore, they want to kill him—he’s “public enemy number one”. The Christians are going to be really leery; we don’t want much to do with that guy, this is the guy who imprisoned my friends, he attacked my family, I don’t want anything to do with him; that’s the reaction he’s going to get.

Paul’s life was a lot more difficult than that. Let’s go to 2 Corinthians 11. We’ll come back here to finish the rest of the Acts account. But first let’s look at some of the trials that Paul’s life included. It went way beyond just the social ostracization that he would receive by being called into the truth.

1 Corinthians 11:22 *Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.*

23) Are they ministers of Christ? —I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

24) From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.

25) Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

26) in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

27) in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—

28) besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. (NKJV)

Imagine the life he got called into. If someone came up to you and said that they would like to offer you a deal. They had a job for you but you are going to be beaten up, thrown in prison, stoned, people are going to want to kill you everywhere you go—how many are going to say, “Pick me!” Most people would say, “No thank you, can I pass on that one? That doesn’t sound like any fun.” That would be the natural reaction. We have to realize that Paul, just like us, from the time of being called had to make the deal that he was willing to follow God’s will, regardless of how painful it was for him.

“Whatever God wants me to do, even if it’s giving up my own life,
I value the Kingdom of God so much, I’m willing to do it.”

At the end of this, we are going to see that he said his deep concern for the churches is what he appealed to. Keeping his eye on the big picture of what was being accomplished is what kept him going. Imagine yourself being in Paul’s shoes and not only from the time you’re called are you this “social leper” and nobody wants much to do with you, but you have this life that everywhere you go, people are plotting to kill you, beat you up and throw you in prison. This would get old; you would get worn out after a while with this and just want to go to sleep and not wake up the next day. Can I just die and have this be over with? That’s exactly how Paul felt.

First of all, before we look at Paul’s motivation, let’s also connect the concept that we were also called to suffer as well. It wasn’t just Paul going through all these severe trials. One of the things we agreed to when we went into the baptismal water is that we were willing to suffer too. Not just because of our sins, we were willing to suffer and be persecuted, but even when we were doing right. In 1 Peter 2 notice, that part of our calling is to being willing too, just like Paul was when Christ told Ananias that He was calling Paul to suffer. That is part of our calling as well and that is directly stated.

1 Peter 2:18 *Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.*

19) *For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.*

20) *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. (NKJV)*

Notice verse 21.

21) *For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:*

22) *Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;*

23) *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;*

24) *who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.*

25) *For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (NKJV)*

We were called to this as well. Part of what we agreed to when we went into the baptismal waters was, we will have to suffer. We will have to endure adversity and endure it to the end, even if that's painful, even it means becoming a “social leper” and your friends reject you, your coworkers, even if your family rejects you. We have to endure and stick with our beliefs and not cave in if it doesn't become popular.

A few years ago, as most of you know hearing this sermon, that we in the Pacific Church of God had our eyes opened to the understanding that Christ is not the God of the Old Testament. We started embracing the role of the Father and all that we had missed out on in that understanding. I had friends along the way, whom I know had studied the subject, had thoroughly proven it, stated it numerous times but once it became unpopular and they realized there would be a painful, social cost as a result of it—that some of their friends and family would reject them and treat them like a leper for embracing this knowledge—suddenly the truth wasn't quite so important anymore. They felt the need to compromise on this because, “I don't want to lose all my friends; I don't want to be unpopular because of all this”. We have to be willing to face that. We have to realize that suffering persecution for following the truth is just a part of the Christian walk. In 2 Timothy 3 we see where Paul directly states this as part of our calling.

2 Timothy 3:12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (NKJV)*

Notice it's an all-encompassing statement; it doesn't say just the apostles, just the prophets, just a small number of people, it's just part of the deal and is what everyone has to be willing to face. We all face these things at varying levels because we are in different roles in life. God throws different trials at us but we all have to face the painful, difficult trials that come upon us. We have to realize that enduring through these and accepting them with a good attitude going forward is just what we agreed to as Christians.

To finish up the account in Acts 9, we will go back there and pick up where we left off.

Acts 9:17 *And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (NKJV)*

Notice that phrase, “filled with the Holy Spirit”, we’ll come back to that.

18) Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

19) So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. (NKJV)

Notice what he does immediately afterward in verse 20.

20) Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

21) Then all who heard were amazed, and said, Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?”

22) But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. (NKJV)

Put this in the context in which it happened. Right up until days prior to this, Paul has been a staunch opposer of the very idea that Christ could be the Messiah, he was violently opposed to this idea. Then he was struck down, initially converted and all of a sudden, he’s powerfully preaching and amazing other people. This is not normally what you see taking place. Paul himself, later in Timothy and Titus when he records the criteria for what you should look for in ordaining someone for the office of the ministry, he specifically says don’t do this to a novice; that’s a set up for trouble—you don’t want a newbie out being a teacher.

Starting off the church like this, God had to make some exceptions. You can’t just launch this off and immediately have a ministry that has been baptized for decades. The logistics of that just aren’t going to work. What God had to do here was powerfully move with the Holy Spirit upon people just to inspire them to be able to preach what He wanted. What you are going to see is that this phrase, “filled with the Holy Spirit” which oftentimes is a reference, not to people receiving initial conversion, but to the Holy Spirit moving upon a person to inspire them to either perform miracles, have powerful preaching, basically to fulfill the Word of God and advance His purposes.

We can see this more clearly in to Acts 2, in the story of Pentecost.

Acts 2:1 *When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*

2) And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

3) *Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.*

4) *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit [notice the rest of the sentence] and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (NKJV)*

The people who we are talking about didn't plan ahead, saying, "I'm going to have to speak on Pentecost, so let me think about what I'm going to say and plan it out, make my notes or script it so I know exactly what to say." That's not what happened; the Spirit gave them utterance. The Holy Spirit powerfully moved upon them, caused them to speak in tongues, gave them the words to say because God had to move powerfully to get people to realize, that first of all, this is real. This isn't just men making crazy claims. The Holy Spirit was really moving and doing all this. Notice Peter later gave a very powerful sermon on this same day and it resulted in a great many baptisms afterwards. How does a newbie who, just days ago, really wasn't getting all that Christ had taught them and a lot of what Christ had told them when He was with them?

"You are not going to understand now, but you will understand later."

How does He do this? Because the Spirit gave them utterance; the Holy Spirit was powerfully moving to inspire them to take those particular actions.

We can see a couple examples of this in Acts 4 and another example involving Peter.

Acts 4:5 *And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes,*

6) as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

7) And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power or by what name have you done this?"

8) Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit ... (NKJV)

Notice what happens, because when you normally see this phrase, "filled with the Holy Spirit", right afterward there is a description of someone powerfully preaching, performing miracles or being inspired to do some specific act to fulfill the Word of God.

8 continued) ... said to them, Rulers of the people and elders of Israel:

9) If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well,

10) let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.

11) This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.

12) Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

13) *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. (NKJV)*

The Holy Spirit inspired him to say and do these things and the people around him said, "Wow, where did this come from?". That is because the Holy Spirit was giving him utterance, it was inspiring him to do this. We can see another example of this involving Paul in Acts 13. It mentioned him being filled with the Spirit in Acts 9, now in Acts 13 it's going to happen again.

Acts 13:6 *Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, 7) who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8) But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9) Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10) and said, O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? 11) And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. 12) Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord. (NKJV)*

When Paul starts preaching days after his baptism, it talks about him being filled with the Holy Spirit which it inspires him to do this. Here is in another situation where again the Holy Spirit comes upon him and he was inspired to say this and to perform these miracles. You will see numerous examples like this if you follow that phrase.

It's a similar concept that you see in the Old Testament. In Judges 14 is the way it's typically worded in the Old Testament. It's the Holy Spirit "coming upon" someone. It's the same idea. We see this in the life of Samson in the account where he winds up killing the lion.

Judges 14:5 *So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah. Now to his surprise, a young lion came roaring against him. 6) And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done. (NKJV)*

Later, as this story goes on in this chapter, Samson formed a riddle that he challenged the Philistines with. It was based upon this event where he killed this lion. He had everybody puzzled with it; he doesn't tell anybody about the secret of the riddle. His wife began working upon him, playing on his emotions and he finally broke down and gave the secret of the riddle. She quickly threw him under the bus

and blabbed it all to the Philistines and now they know the secret of the riddle. With that context, we will continue in verse 18.

18) So the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down: What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?" And he said to them: If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle!" (NKJV)

He is saying this because he knows his wife is the one who blabbed his secret to them. Notice what happens next.

*19) Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes of clothing to those who had explained the riddle. So his anger was aroused, and he went back up to his father s house.
20) And Samson s wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man. (NKJV)*

The point I'm getting at is, the Spirit of Yehovah came upon him and he killed the lion. It gave him super human strength; God was enabling him to perform the task He wanted him to do to fulfill His will. It came upon him; he killed the lion and that took care of that situation. Then later, the Spirit again came upon him with superhuman strength. This is the same concept when it referred to Paul just having been converted and then days later, he is preaching and explaining Christ to everybody. He had accepted Christ as his Savior himself, just days earlier. You just don't normally see that happening. Normally before someone is a teacher, they have had years if not decades to grow and mature and develop their understanding and to study. He didn't do all that and it was because the Holy Spirit was moving upon him and giving him the words to say.

Now let's look over at the third account. Acts 26 is the third time in the book of Acts that Paul's conversion story is recorded. This is going to give us another important detail. It's kind of a theme that I've covered through this sermon; Paul's initial calling put his life into a tailspin. It immediately turned him into a "social leper" and now he is called to suffer, called to a life of adversity. But what really kept him going through all of this was realizing the big purpose that God had in mind for doing all of this. God didn't just call him to a difficult, painful life with no point involved. He called him to accomplish a very big purpose. There was a very meaningful reason why he was put through all this adversity. It was because of what it would ultimately accomplish. In Acts 26:12 we see what the big picture God had in mind for putting Paul into this situation.

Acts 26:12 *While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,
13) at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.
14) And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*

15) So I said, Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. (NKJV)

But notice the explanation he gives for what was going to happen.

16) But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose [He has a big purpose in mind], to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.

17) I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you ... (NKJV)

He needed deliverance because everywhere he went, they were trying to kill him.

18) to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me. (NKJV)

God didn't call Paul to this difficult, painful life just to be mean to him and mess with him. It was for a big purpose—to be able to reveal the truth to the Gentiles, to write the majority of the New Testament and to help millions of people later. If we keep that picture in mind, it makes all that Paul had to go through worth it. As we see in Paul's own words, that was what kept him going, that was what kept him motivated in dealing with all of this adversity.

As I mentioned earlier, if you are living Paul's life and everywhere you went, people are trying to kill you, you are rejected, you are put in prison, you get beaten up repeatedly, it would just wear you out. You would have times where you just wished for death, to die and get it over with. This is how Paul felt in Philippians 1. It's important in the context of reading Philippians, to realize that when Paul wrote this book, he was a prisoner. He was in chains when he is actually writing it. He was not talking about something academic that was just a concept he was explaining, he's actually living it when he's talking about the things that are positive. He was writing that from prison. Notice the struggle he went through, in verse 19.

Philippians 1:19 *For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,*

20) according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

21) For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (NKJV)

In other words, if I could just die and get this over with, I would consider that gain.

22) But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

23) For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. (NKJV)

In other words, I would rather die than to keep living like this.

- 24) *Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.*
25) *And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith,*
26) *that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again. (NKJV)*

What kept Paul continuing to push forward and enduring his difficult life was looking at the big picture of what God had in mind with the ultimate purpose of what his life was to fulfill. If he just looked at it from his own perspective as he described in his own words.

"Can I just go to sleep tonight and die and not wake up tomorrow? That would be okay, if I could just stop living this painful life, I would consider that gain."

He would wish for death and I think we all have those times when we get down in our trials and think, "an I just get this over with?" We too have to remember that God has a big purpose for us.

There is a common saying in our colloquial world today when people are looking at the painful times they deal with in life and will sarcastically say, "Life's tough and then we die". Sometimes we feel like that. We have to remember there is a much bigger purpose and future that we have ahead of us that we can look to, to motivate us. Take a brief look at that in 1 Thessalonians 4:13.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 *But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.*

14) *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.*

15) *For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.*

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

17) *Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

18) *Therefore comfort one another with these words. (NKJV)*

These are not just comfort words for those who have lost loved ones and long to see them again; to know they will be in the resurrection. They can also be comforting to us, knowing that if we faithfully endure to the end, that's our future. That's what we have to look forward to. It's very easy to get overwhelmed in our trials today and think "life is tough and then you die. Can I just die now and get this over with?" That would be an easy way to end it. We have to keep in mind this glorious future that is ahead of us and that we can look forward to.

Not only when we are resurrected, do we get to meet Christ, He then escorts us directly to the throne of God the Father in heaven. Revelation 14:1, tells us what happens next after you meet Christ in the air and ascend up to meet the Father personally, before His throne.

Revelation 14:1 *Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads.*

2) *And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps.*

3) *They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.*

4) *These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.*

5) *And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God. (NKJV)*

These are the resurrected Firstfruits who now no longer have any physical pain. They are now God beings. Now pain and death and all that, has no effect upon them. They get to stand before the throne of God and meet God the Father Himself. That's the future we have to look forward to if we successfully endure to the end through our trials in this life. This isn't just about the reward that we get to receive, it's about the purpose that we fulfill for everyone else. Notice the same group in Revelation 20:4 and the purpose they will fulfill.

Revelation 20:4 *And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (NKJV)*

The purpose for all of this is to be able to reign with Christ and to work with all the rest of mankind. Then to work with all of our friends and loved ones who may have shunned us in this life and thought of us as the "oddball leper" who lived that weird way of life. But now we get to help them to understand what it is all about and to have their chance of salvation. We need to be like the Apostle Paul, who, throughout these hard trials said,

"I don't want to have to do this anymore but for the sake of the purpose I'm here for to help everybody else, I'll suck it up and deal with it."

That's the attitude that we need to have because we are called as Firstfruits, to an awesome reward ourselves, but more importantly, to a greater purpose to help everyone else. That needs to be our motivating factor as we deal with our painful trials and the times that we are a "social leper", not only in the world but sometimes even in the church of God. That should be our motivator.

Notice in 2 Peter 1 what this should motivate us to do.

2 Peter 1:5 *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,
6) to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,
7) to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.
8) For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
9) For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.
10) Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;
11) for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (NKJV)*

We need to be motivated to pursue these character traits and to build these within our lives, practicing them in our daily in our lives. If we use that as motivation to build this character then we'll wind up fulfilling that great purpose in the Kingdom of God. Notice in Ephesians 4, Paul emphasizes this as well.

Ephesians 4:1 *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,
2) with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,
3) endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
4) There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;
5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
6) one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (NKJV)*

We need to make our calling and election sure. Keeping that big picture in our minds is the key to motivating us to staying on track through a painful life that we may have to suffer a lot and give up a lot to do this. Realize that it is something we have to urgently follow. We have to understand that our calling—from the moment we are called and God opens our eyes and reveals the truth to us—we have reached the point of no return. As we grow, even as Christians from that initial calling, I think we reach multiple points of no return along the way. Once you know that, you have to act upon that knowledge and move forward. It's a life or death situation because there are no "do overs". There is no ignoring this now and come back later. It's literally the point of no return. Look at Romans 11:28.

Romans 11:28 *Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.
29) For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (NKJV)*

In other words, once you have been called, it's your chance; it's a "do or die" now. It is "make it into the Kingdom of God or wind up in the lake of fire". It's one of those

two alternatives; there's not an in-between option. There is no option C or I'll just take a pass and I'll look at this later. Now, you are at the point of no return. In Hebrews 6 we see this emphasized even more clearly.

Hebrews 6:4 *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6) if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. (NKJV)*

Once we are called and revealed to the truth, it's now at the point of no return. You either accept that calling and faithfully endure to the end or you fail at putting God first and wind up in the lake of fire. We live our lives every day realizing it's literally "the point of no return". It's not just that initial calling because you know when you first begin to understand the truth you have to respond to that. Then you get a little more truth and respond to that and you get baptized and you hit other trials. But as you grow through this process, there's more and more things revealed to you; there's more personal sins you realize that you were doing and you have to stop doing them. You didn't realize they were wrong but now that you do, you can't do them anymore. There is truth revealed to you along the way that you didn't realize was correct but now that you realize something and fully understand, it's another point of no return. Even if that turns you into a "social leper", it's something we have to accept. That's the contract we signed at baptism. We made the deal and it was,

"I'm going to put God and Christ first and whatever they require of my life, I'm willing to do. It doesn't matter if I'm going to lose my job, my family, my house or my life."

We all agreed that we would put the pearl of great price—the Kingdom of God—as the number one priority in our lives and we would face whatever adversity that we have to face to do it.

We have to realize that Christ makes us the same promise that He made to Paul. As He said to Paul,

"I'm going to deliver you. The Jews are going to want to kill you, the Gentiles are going to want to kill you, you are going to be persecuted by everybody but I'm going to be faithful to you and deliver you through this."

We have to realize that God and Christ have made us that same commitment as well. As the final scripture look at Romans 8:28.

Romans 8:28 *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (NKJV)*

You were called into His church to face the difficult path that requires persecution and suffering.

- 29) *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*
- 30) *Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*
- 31) *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*
- 32) *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*
- 33) *Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.*
- 34) *Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*
- 35) *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*
- 36) *As it is written: For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."*
- 37) *Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*
- 38) *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,*
- 39) *nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NKJV)*

As we go forward from this day living our Christian lives, let's remember the example of the Apostle Paul and all he had to suffer and go through. Realize from the moment he was called, his life was thrown into chaos, he was turned into a "social leper". Just by understanding the truth and having the knowledge that Christ is the Messiah, literally made him a leper. He accepted that and lived a life of great adversity. He put God first throughout it, even at the expense of having his own life attacked a number of times and being thrown into prison.

We all face our harsh trials, but I doubt any of us can say that we have faced the kinds of trials that Paul did. We can look at his example and find inspiration for our own lives. God had a great purpose for Paul's calling. Our Christian lives are the same way. We have harsh trials that we have to endure and deal with. But we have an awesome future to look forward to, of meeting God and Christ personally before Their thrones and serving directly with Christ to help everyone else to have their chance at salvation. As we go forward from this day, let's look to that inspiration and make our calling and election sure.