

## The Purpose of Suffering Part 2 - 08

*The Mystery of Human Suffering*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Peter 1:3-9; Romans 5:1-5  
**Preached on:** Sunday, August 20, 2006

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Two passages of scripture I direct your attention to. If you have your Bibles, open them to 1 Peter 1:3-9 and Romans 5:1-5. They're also printed on the back of your bulletin, if you would like to follow along there. Reading from 1 Peter 1:3,

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively [or a living] hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

Now Romans 5:1-5,

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: 2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: 5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

May God bless the reading of these two passages.

This morning we'll be taking the substance of our thoughts today from these two passages of scripture. In our last message, we moved from the general sufferings which all men endure as humans, to the specific sufferings which only Christians bear. Peter stated there

that if any man suffer as a Christian, there is a distinct suffering that Christians go through that the unconverted do not, and there we stated that there were two basic purposes for the sufferings of which Christians undergo. First, they identify us with Christ and connect us to his sufferings, and then this we examined in detail, entering into the fellowship of his sufferings. We saw there in that message that these sufferings draw us closer to Christ. Secondly, they provide a testimony to unbelievers when unbelievers watch how Christians suffer. Spurgeon said he could preach like a lion when he watched how his people died. And then the third reason was to draw us closer to other Christians.

Now secondly today, Christians suffer for the disciplinary purpose of producing a godly or Christlike character to prepare us for our life in the new heavens and the new earth, and this we will now seek to understand. Not only do we need to be justified in God's law court, but we need a change and transformation of our character to enable us to enjoy a state or place known as the new heavens and the new earth. In verses 6 and 7 of 1 Peter, notice those verses. There Peter makes the rather strange statement that we ought to rejoice in our sufferings. How can anyone rejoice in sufferings? I confess that I do not fully understand how this can be possible but we can observe that Peter does not say that we should rejoice at the sufferings, but in the sufferings; instead we rejoice in that we understand that our sufferings are being used for our benefit and serve to give evidence of our genuine relationship to Jesus Christ.

The writer in Hebrews 12:11 says, "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous." Get that? When you are suffering, at the moment it is not a joyous thing but it is a grievous thing. Suffering always brings grief and the point is not that somehow we must learn to enjoy pain, but that we should seek to understand the purposeful meaning behind our appointed sufferings. That's how we are enabled to rejoice. If we do not see a reason for it, we cannot rejoice in it. The last half of Hebrews 12:11 goes on to say nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto those who have been trained or instructed in it.

It is only as we trust that God has a purpose to bring good out of our sufferings that we can truly rejoice in them, and Peter goes on to compare the testing of our faith with the process of the refining of gold. Gold is found where? In a common rock or ore. It is then refined or separated from the ore by heating it in fire to the point of melting. The dirt or the ore is then consumed by the fire, and the gold is then allowed to return to its purified, solid state. While there are numerous benefits listed in scripture which occur from our disciplinary sufferings, time will only permit us to address three.

1. Our sufferings are designed to purify us from sin. If we desire to obtain the precious metal of gold, it must be separated from the worthless rock in which it is found. Fire purifies gold but it consumes the rubbish in which the gold is found. In like manner, God is willing to expose the believer to suffering in order to do, as the hymn writer says, "Thy dross to consume, and thy," what? "Thy gold to refine." Christians endure the heat of the fire because it burns off that part of us that is not glorious or is unchristlike, and this is not an easy thing to endure because some of that dross looks very precious to us and we may feel it is absolutely necessary for our happiness and well-being in this present life. Family, friends, jobs, all the temporal things of this present life, they are precious to us. It

hurts to have our temporal, earthly comforts taken from us. We all want a pain-free life in a garden of Eden environment.

C. S. Lewis pointed out, listen, "We want not so much a Father in heaven as a grandfather in heaven, whose plan for the universe was such that it might be said at the end of each day, a good time was had by all." Is that not true? Everywhere you go in business transactions, at the service station, watch the closing greeting, "Have a good day. Have a good day. Hope things go well for you today." I'm a father and I'm also a grandfather. I've learned the distinction. The father that I am was responsible for the messy action of disciplining my kids, having to spank them and correct them and be in a confrontation with them. Now as a grandfather with my grandkids, I don't have that responsibility. I can just spoil them to pieces. We want, Brother Clint, not a Father in heaven who disciplines us, we want a grandfather who will spoil us by giving us a good day every day, just like Adam enjoyed in the garden of Eden before the fall.

Before we were saved, God found or saw us fallen in Adam. We were dominated by the selfish ego of me or I. This self-centered ego wanted to be the center of the universe so that God and everything that existed was to exist for its desires and pleasure. That's what you wanted before you were saved as an individual. If you believed in God, you only wanted him there to advance your needs, advance your interests. This self-centered character must be changed and replaced with the character of a servant that gives in order to enjoy dwelling in the self-giving state of eternal righteousness known as the new heaven and the new earth. No selfishness can enter or survive in that state or place of existence.

Now, when God saves a person, he places the moral spirit or attitude of Jesus Christ within that person. The old ore of self remains but its dominant power is broken. The Holy Spirit then proceeds to purge out and refine our old sinful nature of self, and the instruments which the Holy Spirit uses are the fires and trials of Christian sufferings. These fires purge out the ore of selfishness and develop a new moral character of self-giving, that of a servant rather than a desire to be the master or the boss. And these sufferings are the predestinated appointments from God to conform us into the image of his Son, Romans 8:29. Get it? We have been predestined to be conformed to his Son, and those instruments, or rather the Holy Spirit is the agent, and the instruments which the Spirit uses are the appointed sufferings which God's providence brings into our lives.

You're never going to become like Jesus Christ apart from suffering here in this life. This is an ongoing process known as sanctification, wherein the old ore of self-centeredness is consumed, therein allowing the precious Spirit of Jesus within us to become more and more manifest to the universe of God's moral creatures of angels and men. And thus our character is being changed from what Paul describes from one degree of glory into, what? Another degree of glory. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." As you behold the sufferings of your Savior, you will be gradually changed and transformed into that character of the ideal model servant of God. Behold my servant, this is Christ, and also his people.

Now while the Spirit of God is the person or the agent bringing about the change, I repeat, the instrument which he uses is the refining process of suffering. Suffering is the instrumental means which conforms us to Christ's moral character. Turn with me to Philippians 3 and verse 10 in your Bibles. Philippians 3, 10. I'll give you time to locate it. There Paul states, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his," what? "Of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." How are we made conformable unto his death? By entering into the fellowship, the communion of his sufferings, and that can only be done through our own suffering.

Paul elsewhere expresses it in the words of 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 11. Turn there if you would, please. 2 Corinthians 4:11, "For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest," where? "In our mortal flesh." Do you see that? It is as God's providence is bringing to death my selfish plans, my ambitions, my desires; as those are being crushed or squeezed in the fellowship of his sufferings, the Spirit of Jesus is becoming more and more made manifest unto others. Get it? Being made conformable unto his death, the life of Jesus is appearing more and more in the lives of God's people.

Paul goes on to say in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Temporal afflictions in this life work to produce a glorious experience in the life to come. The story is told of a small girl who developed a high fever and in order to prevent brain damage, the doctors told the parents to give her cold baths in ice water. This troubled the little girl. She could not understand why her parents were hurting her so. Were her mommy and daddy doing this to her because she had been a bad girl? She could not understand and neither could her parents explain it to her but it was necessary to refine and purify her body from the evil fever. The parents – now listen – who were administering the cure could be touched with the feelings of her sufferings. Fellow believer, your Lord who brings on your sufferings can be touched with the feelings of your weaknesses or infirmities. He's not separated from you. He is in union with you. Does that not help us to understand a little more what's going on, even though we can't grasp it fully? Can you trust your heavenly Father and his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit that they are working things out that are good for you?

The purifying purpose involved in our suffering requires us to examine ourselves to see if there may be some wrongdoing or sinning that is taking place in our lives. The chastisement will do no good until we acknowledge that we have done something wrong. If we have sinned, we should repent of that sin immediately and be thankful – now listen – for the discipline that did not allow us to get away with the sin. But, as we have seen here in the previous messages, on the other hand, we must not blame ourselves for sinning every time that we suffer. Chastisement for sin is not the only reason that we suffer as Christians, you see. It may be a reason, but it's not always the reason. Example again, the patriarch Job. Jesus suffered, there was no sin in his life, and he learned obedience through the things which he, what? Which he suffered. So don't allow Satan to pile on great piles of guilt in your conscience that every time you're suffering it must be due to your sinning. It may be, and if you know of some sin, repent of it and thank God that God wouldn't allow you to go on in that sinning.

Revelation 3:19, Jesus says, "As many as I love, I," what? "I rebuke and chasten." Or discipline. That's what the word chasten means. The church or the Christians in the church at Laodicea had been seeking to avoid suffering by compromising. Jesus called them lukewarm Christians, chapter 3 verse 16 of Revelation. He then goes on in verse 18 to say, "to buy of me gold tried in the fire." The gold refined in the fire that is used by John in that statement is a metaphor, a figure of speech describing the purified character produced by sufferings which Peter is discussing here in 1 Peter 1 and verse 7. So what is Jesus saying to the Christians there at Laodicea? He is encouraging them to embrace his discipline which is designed to change their conduct.

We had a term back when I was growing up of when your parents were going to whip you, they'd take you to the woodshed. Now to the young people here today, they don't even know what an outhouse is, let alone a woodshed. And I won't take time to describe an outhouse, okay? If some of you teenagers want to know, why come, and we'll talk to you after the service this morning. But when your dad took you to the woodshed, it meant he went out and he cut a limb off the tree and so mama wouldn't cry to see you getting whipped, why, he'd take you out there in the woodshed and shut the door. You can hear the screams from there. No chastening seems to be joyous for the moment, but what Jesus is encouraging the Laodiceans, "Embrace my discipline for it's designed to change your character and you'll be given courage to stand up against the opposition out here in the world," the physical persecution that the Roman system was inflicting upon the early Christians.

Now the second reason why our character needs to be changed is that it is designed to wean us from this present world. This benefit of receiving disciplinary suffering is that it weans us from an undue love and contentment of this present world. Notice I said undue love and excessive love. John says in 1 John 2:15, "Love not the," what? "The world, neither the things that are in the world." In Galatians 1:4, Paul says that Christ, "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this," what? "Present evil world." There's a system here, a system of darkness that envelops us in self-centeredness. Christ came not just to save us from hell, but to deliver us from this self-centeredness, this present world system in which we view ourselves as the most important thing in the world.

St. Augustine observed that we often get things backwards. He says we are supposed to love and rejoice in God and our neighbor and use the temporal things of this world to promote that end. He goes on to say but instead we prefer the temporal comforts of this world and use God and our neighbors to achieve them. Get it? We get things backwards. That's what happened in the fall. It turned man inside out, upside down. And in redemption, Brother Jim, God has come to restore us to an upright position to where we will be servants and serve our God and our fellow man and use whatever means that God has given us to do so. Instead of using God for my ends and using you to promote my ends, then I'm to use the temporal things of this life to promote the glory of God in you. That's servanthood.

Suffering has a way of weaning us from such selfish desires. Richard Baxter observed that "suffering so unbolts the door of the heart that the word has easier entrance." Think about that. Suffering so unbolts the door of the heart that the word has easier entrance. I tell you, a proud person is hard to sit down and talk with but you let a person that gets humbled through suffering, and there is a willingness in most cases to listen to what you have to say.

The book of Exodus is a book which illustrates this principle. God's people Israel had suffered as slaves in Egypt for 400 years and God saw their sufferings and delivered them. Exodus 3:7, there we read these words, "And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters." Could he not have prevented the suffering from ever starting? Make the application in your life right today. If you are undergoing some real trial or suffering, could not God have prevented that? And if you want him to deliver you, what are you going to learn in the process? Consider that if God had done so, that is that he would have delivered the Israelites and never allowed them to suffer, would the Israelites have ever desired to leave Egypt and return to the Promised Land? Are you getting ahead of me? I hope you are. If you're not, you're not staying up with me. If you are, you know that you need to put your own application. Why has God put sufferings in your life? So you don't settle down in this present world.

It's hard enough to get the Israelites to leave when they were suffering. When they crossed the Red Sea into the wilderness, it was not long before many of them wanted to go back to Egypt because of the hardships they were facing out there. "Oh, let's go back, let's make us a new leader and go back into Egypt where we had it so good. We had the onions and the leeks and the garlies." They forgot that they were slaves. So when we wonder why God does not just leave us alone and let us enjoy a carefree, painless existence in this life, the answer is, Brother Dana, is that this world is not our permanent home. We're just passing through. This life is a wilderness and we are in enemy territory. We're pilgrims and strangers dwelling in tents. How hard it is to desire the new heavens and the new earth when we become so comfortable here in this present life. We must be looking for a permanent city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God and that city is found in the life to come, what Abraham looked for.

If it was somehow divinely revealed to you that in the next 30 minutes you were going to die and leave this world, what impact would that knowledge have upon you? What would be the first thing you'd start thinking of? Now, be honest. Would it be, "Oh, I'll see my Savior"? Or will it be, "Oh, I won't see my wife, I won't see my kids, I won't see my job. I'll have to leave my dog and my cat. I won't have my job." Will, would that thought take you back to this present life or would it give you a joy and an expectation of what was going to happen in 30 minutes? Now how you respond to that tells you whether you are rooted too much in this present world or not. And if you are, I can assure you God's got some weaning processes that he's going to cut the cords loose from you if you're one of his to make you glad to go on to be with the Lord when that time comes.

Things are getting awful quiet, Asa. Folks, I'm not preaching to you and leaving me out of this. I'm in the same boat you are.

James Dobson in his "Focus on the Family" series tells the story of a terminally ill little boy who would from time to time cry out, "I hear the bells! I hear the bells! I hear the bells!" The nurses assumed that he was hallucinating from the pain medication given him for his sufferings. His mother took the nurses aside and explained, "I told him that when the pain gets so bad that you don't think you can stand it, to remember that God is starting to ring the bells of heaven to welcome you home." Brother Jim, do your afflictions and trials ever get so bad that you could just wish you could leave this old world and go home to be with the Lord? Huh? What about it? Am I talking to anybody that's homesick this morning? Or are you still so in love with this world that you hardly ever think about heaven? You hardly ever think about the glories that lie ahead for the child of God because you're so in love with the temporal things of this life? If you ever get in a situation in which you are so homesick for heaven to go home and be with the Lord, then listen for the bells. Listen for them when the suffering and the afflictions and the trials so overwhelm you. Listen. Look up. Your redemption draweth nigh.

There's nothing like suffering to make a true believer turn away from this age and focus on the age to come. Oh, my people, you that work in the rest homes and deal with the true saints of God there, when one of them says, "I just want to go to be with the Lord," don't discourage that. Don't say, "Oh, don't talk like that. That's not Christian talk." Don't discourage a saint of God who is in deep suffering and they express a desire to go to be with the Lord. Let them enjoy that desire. "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." I'm in a twixt between the two, stay here and minister to you, Paul says, or to go on and be with the Lord, which is what? Far better! Far better. Oh, we need an understanding of what lies ahead, not where we've come from and where we're at here today, but a hope! A hope! And our sufferings are designed by God to wean us just like the mother has to wean the child from her breast so God has to wean his people from an undue love of this present life.

Thirdly, our sufferings are designed to prepare us for a new home. This third benefit is that a godly, Christlike character is being produced to enable us to enjoy our new home in heaven. See if you agree with this: there is no self-interest or self-promotion in heaven. Do you agree with that? There will be nobody in heaven arguing about who is going to be the greatest. Everyone there will possess the perfected giving spirit of that of a servant. Our satisfaction will not come from being served, but in serving. All of the inhabitants of heaven will say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive riches and power and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessings. Worthy, not me, but the Lamb."

While all believers have a legal title now to the inheritance in heaven, they do not yet have the glorified, perfected disposition of character to enjoy the heavenly life to come. This is the end goal, Peter says, of our faith, and thus Peter would say in verse 9 of chapter 1, "Receiving the end of your faith," the goal of your faith, "even the salvation," or the deliverance, "of your souls." To be delivered from this present evil world, that's the end design out here.

Paul expresses it like this in 2 Corinthians 4:17 and 18, listen, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of

glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are," what? "Eternal." I'm looking out over an audience this morning and everything I see is temporal. This building is temporal. These pews are temporal. The sound system is temporal. And every one of you I'm looking at is temporal. If I understand the Bible correctly, then my ultimate hope and happiness is not found in anything I'm looking at today. My hope is in an unseen world and I can only go by the testimony of the Holy Spirit of God who has revealed it through the writers of scripture what lies ahead in that world. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man what God hath prepared for them that," what? "That love him."

Romans 8:17 and 18, Paul states the same truth in this manner, "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Put all of your sufferings on one side of the scale and when you think that scale is going to go all the way down, look on the other side of the scale of what God has promised. Brother Pete, to more than offset whatever you go through in this life, it will be more than offset and rewarded in the world to come.

Weigh it carefully. There is in life a priority of some things over others and Paul compared the value of this temporal life with that of eternal life to come and reached this conclusion, that if I must endure suffering to enter the eternal stage of the kingdom, it will be worth it all. Thus the songwriter, what does he say? It will be worth it all when we, what? See Jesus. Life's trials will, what? Got it? Seem so small when we see Christ. One glimpse of his dear face, all sorrow will erase. It will be worth it all when we see Christ. Can you say amen to that?

Then let's live like we believe what we say. In light of the fact that our sufferings are ordained of God to develop and perfect human character, Paul says we can now rejoice in our sufferings. Romans 5:1 through 5, I want your attention now directed to that, either in your Bible or on the back of your bulletin. We've covered the essence of 1 Peter. Let's move to Romans 5 just briefly now. In these verses, Paul describes the order in which our sufferings lead us into glory in the world to come.

Now watch carefully in your text. In verse 1, he describes how our being justified by faith is the entrance into the Christian life. Do you see that? It gives us a legal standing of righteousness with God, thereby securing a peaceful relationship with him. I think for time's sake, I'm going, or rather to be able to focus on that, let's go back to that text again. You've got it. I'm going to bring it up again. That being justified by faith, we have, what? Peace with God. That's justification. That's the entrance into the Christian life.

"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." That's where the Christian life begins. Now, this faith gives us access unto grace, and it means that we are not only reconciled to God here and now, but one day we shall be in his presence and enjoy him forever and ever. Verse 2, the word "hope" there means not a maybe-so, but a



certain prospect of things to come, okay? "Well, I just hope I'll..." No, it's a certain prospect of things to come.

And this new vision which we have in our understanding on life changes our priorities. The obtaining of temporal earthly comforts now begins - now follow me – to be laid up in heaven for the world to come. What did Jesus say? Lay up for yourselves, where? Treasures in heaven. We begin the Christian life on a foundation of justification but our character now gives us a new vision that where our treasure is, where our heart is, there will be our treasure also.

Our present trials and afflictions, stay there in Romans 5, are now seen as being that which will bring out and increase our enjoyment of God in the eternal state. In verses 3 through 5 of Romans 5, Paul gives us what I call a biblical philosophy of suffering. It is a perspective that connects it both to the salvation which we now enjoy and the completion of that salvation when the glory of God is fully revealed to us. That is, it connects us. Our sufferings enable us to enjoy our present salvation and the completion of that salvation when we stand in our character perfected in glory.

Now, keep your location there in your King James Version. I wish to now quote from the New American Standard Bible because there are some words here in our King James, while they are still accurate, we no longer use them the same way that they were used in the 16th century and here is a translation of those words, have the same meaning, but they are more up-to-date in how we use them today. Let me quote it. "Not only this, but we triumph in our tribulation, knowing that tribulation brings about our perseverance," rather than patience. When we use the word patience today, what do we think of? How do we use it? Do you know how I use it? When I get in the checkout line at the market and there is a woman there writing out a check for 95 cents in the fast checkout lane, one little item, she has got to write a check for it, and I say, "Boy, God give me patience." Now, that's the way we use patience today. That's not the way it was used in the 16th century. In the 16th century, it meant endurance, perseverance. Now, let me read on, "knowing that tribulation brings about our perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

I must hurry for a conclusion here. In your passage there, the word tribulation comes from a word meaning pressure, like that of a press squeezing juice from grapes. That's what your trials are designed to do, is to put a squeeze on you. And the pressures come not from the normal pressures of living in a fallen world, but from the pressures of living a Christian life in a fallen world. Beloved, it is not easy to live a Christian life in this world system today. Try really devoting yourself to God and see how many friends and family members really are excited with you. This pressure, this tribulation, produces perseverance or endurance, which means the stability to stand up under the tremendous weight without giving in or giving up. And as this endurance grows, it forms – are you following me – a proven character. It gives you backbone. Which is maturity that has been attained by being tested like a metal in the fire. And as this character is developed, a hope of certainty blossoms as we anticipate our seeing and enjoying God in the world to come. Such hope will not disappoint us in that it is strengthened by the Holy Spirit

pouring the love of God into our hearts and thus the genuineness of our faith is demonstrated and developed in the fiery furnace of our sufferings.

So I close with this observation then: let us then rejoice in our tribulations, in our being squeezed when we find our plans are being crushed in order that the aroma of Jesus Christ as a servant might begin to be observed by all. If we now know what the purpose of our afflictions are and what they are producing, then we shall be enabled to enjoy God and the holiness of heaven because we shall be made partakers of a character like that of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How many of you want to be like Jesus? Then here is what is ahead for you. Paul was shown how many great things he must suffer. Oh, he's going to get to preach before kings, but he has got to be a prisoner to do it. And when he founded the churches on that first missionary journey, he went back and he confirmed the souls of the disciples, explaining to them that through much, what? Tribulation they shall enter the kingdom. Producing character. Brother Walter, he is going to develop you into a person like your Savior, the Lord Jesus. Is that all right with you? Is that what you want? There may be some pressures ahead. Those things which you love the most may yet lie ahead in God's plan to be taken away from you.

When my wife and I go back to southwest Missouri where our grave sites are, we go to the cemetery where our plots are out there in the country in the rural section of this earth where just a short distance from where we both were born, as we stand there at those grave sites, we reflect in God's providence which one of us is going to be here looking at a grave. Folks, you are not going to get out of this thing alive and if God has ordained for you to live a certain length of time, you may part with a beloved wife or a husband or a child or a church even. You, the members here of Vineland Park, you've been here for a long time. Don't ever think Vineland Park is going to go on forever. It can be taken away from you in just a short matter of time.

The squeeze is going on, but bless God, the aroma that's coming from the grapes is tasting good. I hear the bells! I hear them. I hear them. May God bless his word today to the well-being of our souls.

Let's pray.

*Father, take these thoughts and help us as your people to be prepared to live the life that you've ordained for us here and be prepared to leave it when you separate us from the things that we enjoy in our earthly comforts. Focus our attention like Abraham upon that city, not in a temporal world but in an eternal world. Give us a hope that's laid up for the world to come. May this develop strength and backbone and character and may unbelievers be made to marvel when they see how God's people suffer and yet remain firm to you, not denying the faith but continuing to say, "God, you're good. You're good." In Jesus' name, amen.*

May God bear with us today. Come ahead, brother.