

“It’s All Part of the Deal”

After 22 years and 248,000 miles I finally said good-bye to my 1997 Honda Accord a few months ago. Between my own car needs and my son’s desire to buy his first car with his own money I have been in car shopping mode for about 6 months. I’ll spare you the details of our own car shopping adventures, but I will say this - cars are a blessing from God. The driving experience, the freedom, the independence, and the convenience make owning a car a blessing. Activities and opportunities are available to us in a much greater way than people 2-3 generations ago. Cars are a blessing from God, but we all know that when you buy a car you never actually pay the price advertised. There are always taxes and other fees. It doesn’t ruin the car buying experience, but it does pour a little cold water on the excitement. It’s all part of the deal of buying a car. Then there is the aging of your car and the ongoing maintenance of your vehicle. Again, it doesn’t make you want to sell your car and walk everywhere, but it does dampen some of the joy of owning a car. It’s all part of the deal of owning a car. Being chosen by God to be a follower of Christ is the greatest blessing any of us has ever experienced. Being a Christian means countless blessings right now on earth and even more awaiting us for eternity in Heaven. However, the Apostle Paul is honest with us today as he reminds us that there are certain things about being a Christian on earth and maintaining your Christian faith on earth that we are going to be tempted to think are abnormal even though they are really all just part of the deal of being a Christian. Listen to 2 Timothy 3:10-17.

¹⁰You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹²In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The Apostle Paul wrote these words toward the end of his life. He was on death row, awaiting execution for being a Christian and a Christian pastor. Speaking about what life on earth would be like as we get closer to the end and Jesus returning Paul said this: **“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money. Boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power”** (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Is this not a good description of the world we live in today? It’s disappointing and upsetting to see these things happening in our world, our country, and our homes. It’s tempting to get really angry or to give up hope, or both. So the Apostle Paul comes with a bit of relief here today. While it’s not pleasant to experience these things

happening in our world, country, and homes there is no need to be angry or give up hope. What you are seeing and experiencing is all part of the deal of being a Christian on earth at this time in history. Paul goes on. **“You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹ persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them”** (2 Timothy 3:10-11). Acts chapters 13-14 detail what Paul is referring to. During his first missionary journey Paul was forced to flee Pisidian Antioch in order to protect his life after sharing the truth of God’s Word there. Paul fled to Iconium where he continued to share God’s Word until he got wind of a plot to mistreat and kill him there so he fled to Lystra. After sharing the Word of God in Lystra some of the people there threw stones at Paul in an effort to kill him. They thought they succeeded, even though they didn’t. Paul shares these details with us not so that we feel sorry for him, but rather to remind us that it’s all part of the deal for being a Christian. And to also place the spotlight on this comfort. **“Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.”** God had spared Paul’s life during times of persecution, but more than that God had strengthened Paul mentally and spiritually using the persecution as the instrument to do it. Plus, some people were brought to faith by Paul’s message. It wasn’t 100% persecution.

And God can and does do the same for you. I’m certain the Lord has allowed hardship to enter your life in some way. Perhaps it’s a health issue, like Paul struggled with. Perhaps it’s financial stress or disappointment because life hasn’t gone exactly according to your plan. Perhaps it’s some tragedy or another form of hardship. The hardship, in and of itself, is not the persecution. The persecution is when the demons whisper in your ear during those times of hardship – “Where is your loving God now?” The persecution is when people in your life say, “Why do you put your trust in God, it doesn’t seem to be working for you?” Those moments in life when it is suggested to you that being a Christian is a waste of time we need to remember, it’s all part of the deal when you are a Christian. **“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”** (2 Timothy 3:12). Or perhaps your persecution is similar to what Jesus experienced. You strive to live your life as a Christian among your friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors. You even share God’s Word with them. Unfortunately, some strongly disagree with your beliefs. Others receive your efforts with lukewarm interest. Others slyly, but intentionally try to test the sincerity of your Christian faith by tempting you to sin. At moments like that you need to remember you aren’t doing anything wrong, it’s all part of the deal when you are a Christian. **“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”** (2 Timothy 3:12).

This past week I chatted with a man, whom I had never met before, at a restaurant while we were waiting for our food orders. During our conversation he mentioned that 8 weeks earlier he had a kidney transplant. He said that his family was freaking out about his health issues and he told them, “when you have Jesus – it’s all good. God will never give you more than you can handle.” In other words, it’s all part of the deal when you are a Christian. That man’s faith was shaped and strengthened through hardship, persecution, and the Word of God. Hardship and persecution is all part of the deal when you are a Christian and if you are going to survive it, thrive in the midst of it, and fulfill your purpose as a Christian on earth then part of the deal also needs to be this. **“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through**

faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17). So many things in life change and fluctuate, including the emotional state of our faith in Christ as we deal with hardship and persecution. That is all part of the deal as Christians journey through life in a sin tainted world. In the midst of all that change, continue to remember and continue to turn to something that doesn't change and doesn't disappoint – God's Word. It's the Word that you have heard from the mouths of Christians that you trust. It's the Word that you have personally studied on your own. It's that Word that has become a part of you and is with you in every circumstance of life. Continue to let the Word remind you of your eternal salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. That is a message you can never hear too much as your sins plague you daily and need the comforting assurance of forgiveness and the gift of Heaven instead of the Hell you deserve. Continue to let the Word teach you because there is always more to learn and always room for more of it to become a part of you. Continue to let the Word rebuke you when you are tempted to avoid hardship and persecution instead of embracing it. Continue to let the Word correct you as it directs positive changes to your behavior, speech, and attitude that will make life more enjoyable for you, make you a better witness to others, and bring more glory to God. Continue to let the Word train you because God's Word is living and active and has the power to thoroughly equip you to live a Christian life.

Buying a car and maintaining a car can be unpleasant, but at the end of the day owning a car is a great blessing from God. Dealing with hardship and persecution as a Christian isn't pleasant either, but at the end of the day being a Christian is the greatest blessing we have that provides both earthly and eternal blessings. Don't let hardship and persecution rob you of your greatest blessing. Those things are just temporary parts of the deal. Instead, continue in the Christian faith that you have learned and of which the Holy Spirit has convinced you. Amen.