

Sermon Series: “You’ve Got Mail!”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—9/14/08

Title: “When Suffering Strikes”

Text: Revelation 2: 8-11

Intro: Ills.: Why suffering?

Theme: In Christ we have gained everything and so no matter the threat we remain faithful, knowing that we can lose nothing.

Why do Christians seem to “suffer” so much?

- Pressed upon (*tribulation*) by the world around us to *compromise* and *conform* so we don’t stand as a *conviction*
 1. Mediocrity and self-interest punctuate our sin-broken world and Christ redeemed servanthood stands in bold relief
 2. That is why righteousness that challenges to change always is crucified in the public square
- Satan *slanders* the life of the believer because he doesn’t want you to bring *LIFE* to others whom he has stolen blind
 1. *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10*
 2. Sometimes, you and I will be maliciously slandered for our good behavior for no other reason than we are Christ’s
 - a. Church at Smyrna were slandered and persecuted by the Jews/Jewish synagogue out of envy/economic gain (9)
 - b. Maybe, it is jealousy by misguided Christian or envy over something you have and they don’t
 - c. **Ills.: Slander**
 - d. *Keep a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:16-17)*

Jesus’ words of comfort to you in the midst of trouble waters

- “*I am the First and the Last.*” vs. 8
 1. Jesus says, “*I’m not going anywhere.*”
 2. When in school it seems that living out your faith is ridiculed, at home or in the marriage it tolerated, and at work it is down right risky to have a living witness to Jesus, hang in there—because Jesus is
- “*I am he who died and came to life again.*” vs. 8
 1. Jesus also says, “*I am the one who brings people back to life, and I am life itself. Those who believe in me will live even if they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.*”(John 11: 25-26)
 2. The resurrection principle teaches: What can the world take from you that Jesus can’t put back
- “*Despite your troubles and poverty, you are rich*” vs. 8
 1. **Ills.: Patrick Henry last will and testament**
 2. *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)*
 3. Rich in comfort, rich in hope, and rich in resource because you are tapped into Heaven’s storehouse through Christ
 - a. *Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through Christ, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing that heaven has to offer. (Ephesians 1:3)*
 - b. God not only knows your need but promises to supply your need for Jesus’s sake

God’s truths for surviving and thriving faith’s trials

- Don’t be surprised!
 1. *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12-13)*
 2. Sometimes, we can be surprised, overwhelmed, and deceived into bitterness and so give us
 - a. *See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; (Hebrews 12:15)*
- Rejoice that you stand in good company
 1. *If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first . . .but I have chosen you out of the world.. (John 15:18-19)*
 2. *Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:12)*
- Look for God’s big plans during your tribulation training camp
 1. **Ills.: Colts missing the point of training camp**
 2. **Romans 5: 1-5**
- Go for the gold!
 1. **Ills.: Olympic Miscue**
 2. Every day when we get up is another day of grace which we will need for the faith challenges and trials ahead

3. *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. vs. 10*
4. Remember what you have been saved from (*second death – vs. 11*) and what you are saved for (*crown – vs. 10*)

Why suffering?

Someone asked C.S. Lewis, "Why do the righteous suffer?" "Why not?" he replied. "They're the only ones who can take it."

Slander

When a loud-mouth detractor abused a wise man, the wise man listened in silence; but when the accuser finished, he asked him, "Son, if a man declined to accept a present made to him, to whom would it belong?" His opponent answered, "To him who offered it." "My son," said the wise man, "I decline to accept your abuse, and request you to keep it for yourself." **Will Durant, The Story of Civilization, Simon and Schuster.**

Patrick Henry Last Will and Testament

"I have now disposed of all my property to my family. There is one thing more I wish I could give them and that is faith in Jesus Christ. If they had that and I had not given them a single shilling, they would have been rich; and if they had not that, and I had given them all the world, they would be poor indeed." **Patrick Henry.**

Olympic Miscue

Americans flub handoffs in relays, lose shot at gold by The Associated Press Thursday August 21, 2008, 9:23 AM

And yet another gold medal opportunity slipped away for the American team. Moments before the relay, American Allyson Felix finished second behind Jamaica's Veronica Campbell-Brown in the women's 200, adding her name to a long list of U.S. favorites who have failed. Felix (200), Gay (100, 200), Bernard Lagat (1,500), Brad Walker (pole vault) and Reese Hoffa (shot put) are American world champions who failed to win gold in their events this year. Lolo Jones and Sanya Richards were other American favorites who came up short. Now the relay team, which failed to reach the Olympic final for the first time since 1912. For teams like the United States, first-round relay heats are supposed to be about as routine as making the bed, filled with safe passes and no risks. Things were going smoothly for the United States through the first two legs. But when Patton closed in on Gay and Gay reached backward, they couldn't connect. Patton made a final lunge to get the stick to Gay before he ran out of the passing zone, but as Gay's hand closed, the stick wasn't in it. It bounced off the rain-slickened track, and the crowd gasped.

Rev. 2:8-11

"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death. [NIV]

Romans 5:1-5

¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.