

The Afflicted Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 October 2024

Preacher: James Tang

[0:00] Father God, we come to you now and we be still!! We acknowledge that you are God, that we are here for you.

! Thank you, Lord, for the gift of your word. We hang on every single word. We know that it is living and active. So we humble ourselves beneath your word. We submit to it. We surrender to it. We trust in it. So would you speak? In your name we pray. Amen.

On that note, can I invite you to stand for the word of God? I'm going to invite the birthday girl, Mihi, to come and read it to us, just to mix up the accents a little bit. 1 Thessalonians chapter 3. Is that okay?

1 Thessalonians chapter 3. Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone. And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass and just as you know. For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

But now that Timothy has come to us from you and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us as we long to see you.

[2:30] For this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction, we have been comforted by you through your faith. For now we live. If you are standing fast in the Lord, for what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before God, as we pray earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith. Now, may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. This is the reading of the Lord. Praise be to God. Thank you. Thank you, Mihi. Take a seat, please. Thank you.

So just to rewind your mind and just to recap what we've been going through, we've been going through the book of Thessalonians. So remember this, it's a church that's about the same age as this church here. It's about two years. Paul spent about two or three months with them. We can see in Acts 17, him and Silas. They head to Thessalonica and they start speaking to the Jews in the synagogues and then people are just receptive. But when people are receptive, there are others who are not. And so then they get into some trouble. So they get ran out of town. And so when they get ran out of town, Paul just really misses this group. The church has lots of different challenges. The church in Corinth has some real challenges. The church in Galatia had some entrance requirement challenges, but the church in Thessalonica, Paul just seemed to have a sweet spot for. He just enjoyed them. He loved them. He missed them. And he was just so proud. So the first week for chapter one, I went through, this was the model church. This was as good as it gets. This is the church that you wanted to imitate. And I asked you guys the question, who were you imitating? Or rather, if someone imitated you, would you look more like Christ? If someone was, if we were to become more like Ken, would we end up becoming more like Christ? That was the question that I asked myself. And that was the question I asked you guys. Who are you imitating? When I look at you, who am I going to be reminded of? That was the first. And then the second week, last week, was Paul just going, hey,

I've been hearing people talking rubbish about me. There's been people who were spreading rumors about me, gossiping about me. And so he said, look, you know me. You know me as a leader. And he kind of slammed down this manifesto of leadership saying, hey, you know my

motives and you know my methods.

You know why I came. This isn't just for giggles. The chapter just before in Acts 16, I went to preach in Philippi and I got dragged into prison and I was beaten in prison. I'm not here for my own personal gain. This is not a popularity thing that I'm trying to do here. I'm here because there is a good news that I must share with you. So you know why I'm here. And you also know how I lived when I was here. When I was with you, I wasn't just speaking on stage and then just retreating to my room and not caring about you. We lived together day and night. We did life together. Don't forget that.

When you hear about other people talking about me, just remember that you actually know me. We spent time together. And so then he moves on to chapter three. And this is where it really gets quite interesting because as he's sharing about all these things, he's like, gosh, I really miss you guys. I really miss you. And I really want to come back to you. But right now, I can't. I can't come back into your city because I'm going to run into some trouble. So I'm going to send my disciple, Timothy. Timmy boy is going to come and visit you. And he's going to tell me about you. That's what the purpose is. And then it leads us on. So if the first week was the model church, the second week was the motive of the leader or the model leader. This week, he goes into something else. And he talks about, actually, I warned you. Guys, we had a great time. Two years ago, remember when I was here, we were just making tents together. We were doing life together. We were laughing together. We were crying together. It was fun. But remember what I told you? And this is what he told them in verse four. So chapter three, verse four. He says, when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction just as it has come to pass. And just as you know, he's like, guys, it was a good time. It was a really fun time. But don't forget, do you remember when I told you it was going to get messy? Do you remember when I told you that you were going to run into trouble? Do you remember when I told you that coming to this church or coming to this gathering would mean that it would cost you something? And then it really made me think this week, what did it cost us to be here today? And I'll confess this to you. I don't know if I have much authority or confidence in speaking about this topic today. Why? Because I grew up in the UK.

[7:32] I went to church where I didn't really feel any trouble or affliction. I didn't put my life at risk. I didn't put my family at risk by going to church. And I come to Hong Kong and that's the same. The most danger we've had in coming to this church in more recent times is last week when the renovations are happening outside. And it felt dangerous. And I'm like, are you kidding me, James? That's as dangerous as it gets for you. So let me ask you, what did it cost you to be here?

Did it cost you anything? Dr. Alex, what did it cost you to be here today? Your sleep. Man, that's so true. You don't look so beautiful without sleeping so much.

It cost you your sleep to be here. Rocky, what did it cost you to be here today? Okay. Not sure.

Well, it cost me some time in the sun. That would have been nice to go out to the pool.

And I was literally just thinking today, oh, for those who don't work in church, you have your Sundays. It's super nice. You can just wake up and you just have the whole Sunday to do whatever it is that you want to do. I would have been by the pool this morning. But then I'm like, are you kidding me? That's all it cost me. We live in a different time. And actually, why do you even come to church? Of course, we read those statements, even though it was really fun to hear it in the Australian accent. Everything in the Australian accent sounds like a joke. So it sounded humorous and funny, especially when Paul says it. But why do you gather? Why do you come to church? I've heard people say, I wish my kid would go to church. Why? If they go to church, they'll end up being a better kid. And then they'll study better. And when they study better, they'll get into the Ivy League. And when they get into the Ivy League, they'll get a good job. And then they'll get money. That's why you should go to church. Why do you go to church? There's a, there's a, maybe something happening worldwide is this health and wealth gospel. If you go to church, if you are a good person, I don't know why bad things are happening at me. I go to church. I read my Bible. Why are bad things happening to me?

I think we may not actually acknowledge and confess that that's what we're thinking, but we're like, when we go to church, it makes us feel better. And then we're hoping as we feel better, good things will happen to us. So we will be better people that have better things. That wasn't the case.

[10:00] Imagine a church like this, a gathering like this, it would have been, you know why you're here and it costs you something. Wesley chose to come to church today. This is an example. This is not true of Wesley. I don't think Wesley came to church today, but it meant actually he couldn't tell

his family where he was going because if he, if his family knew where he was going, he would get into so much trouble. Josh came to church today, but actually it comes at a cost because in his industry, people don't go to church. You have to worship all these other types of gods to be able to join these other unions. And so you can join these festivals so you can get connections and business opportunities.

If someone found out he was here, they wouldn't give him the business opportunities that he would need. What are you here for? What's the cost that you've paid? Here's the tricky thing. If you're struggling to think of what it costs you to be here, there's another question that I have to ask you. How, how much value is it for you to be here? If it doesn't cost you anything, is it worth anything to you?

If it didn't cost you anything to be here, my, my concern, my worry is actually, it's not really worth that much. Church or no church. It's okay. I was a, with a pastor friend who, planted lots of different kinds of churches and some of those churches were north of us here.

And when you go to church there, it's different. When you go to church up there, you've got to go, okay, I'm going to church. It's not going to be fun. It's going to be hard. And if someone catches me, and actually the police may come. And if I get found to be here, that will be a whole ton of problems. And recently they did have police raid their church. And then afterwards they had a, they had a time with the church and go, Hey, look, who really wants to be here? And if you don't feel as though you can, you should be here because you're putting your family at risk or whatever it is, then don't worry.

[12:06] This is the time to maybe it's okay. Was what they were saying. And so a whole group of people left the church together and they were like, actually, it's not for us. It's not for us because we can't put that kind of risk on our families is what they're saying. And we all know that we all understand where they're coming from. And then something interesting happened. He told me to this church that suddenly went from this amount of people and it was cut by half. And when it was cut by half, those people there were just so on fire for God. They were just so on fire. The way they would worship would be different. The way they would hang on every word of scripture would be different. Why? Because they counted the cost and they decided, actually, this is worth more. It is worth me taking this risk to come here. I'll ask you again, what did it cost you to be here? And let's check our hearts and go, if it didn't cost us anything, is it worth us? Is it worth anything to us to be here? Or is it really no different? You see, it's interesting because those days, Paul knew what the cost was. He'd just come from prison and was beaten in prison. You see the church in Smyrna in the book of Revelation when

Jesus is speaking to this church. He's saying, I know that you are going through poverty. I know that you are sacrificing business opportunities to be here because now people outside aren't treating you as equals. And so he knows why, but there's something else. Even though there is all this cost for us, the church spread through that time. And this is why I don't know if I have much authority because by whatever reason that God had, he put me in two places where actually I don't fear for my life when I walk into church. I'm thinking more what breakfast I should have near church. I'm like, is it today a canteen day or is it a tagalog day? Is it a, that's what I'm thinking.

I'm not trying to lose a trail behind me for people to see whether I'm going to come up to this lift. I quite proudly tell the security guard downstairs, I'm going up to the 14th floor and that's okay. But the church grew only really through, you could say, persecution. Tertullian was the one who said, actually the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church.

Something else about cost and worth. Do you know that you sat where you are right now listening to the word of God, listening to, about God, did you know for you to be sat here listening to this thing, it cost someone's life to be here. Someone gave up their life for you to be sat here listening to me talk about the word of God. Have you ever thought about it like that? We have this book in English because people gave up their lives to translate it to us. Otherwise we would have no chance in understanding what this book would be about. We, some of us may have heard of the guy, William Tyndale. Tyndale was the guy who translated, one of the first people to translate the Bible to English. Do you know how his life ended?

[15:13] He was strangled to death, hung. Why? Because he opposed in England King Henry VIII, who was wanting to get a divorce because he wanted many different kinds of wives. And so he disagreed with it. He said, that's not what the word of God says. And so I disagree with it. And then he was martyred.

They got him on some, he was betrayed and then he was hung. He had a conviction. You see, sometimes I worry that we don't really face any affliction because we don't really have a backbone when it comes to some of our convictions. I think we look at this word, ah, this is a kind of like a suggestions kind of book. This is some good advice to live your best life now. Oh, but don't worry, I'm not going to die for this book. But then we remember that actually for the fact that we even have this book is because people laid down their lives for it. And that's back then. And you know, well, not this day and age. Everything's okay now. It's pretty safe now. Well, actually, again, that is just the minority experience really that we have here. 5,000 Christians were killed last year in this world because of their faith. 5,000. 15,000 churches were attacked. Buildings were attacked because of the people and what they were doing inside. This is a real thing. Actually, this is not normal. Often this is not normal. And then I go, well, God, why did you give us this? Why, why did we deserve this? Well, I think there is something here and that's what I'm hoping to apply today. Verse four says, we told you there would be affliction. We told you there would be trouble. And now trouble is coming. But that trouble leads often to growth. You see, what happened is in actually this start, the trouble really starts from Acts 6 and 7. Okay. So the church is growing, the church is growing and there's tons of things to do. So this is what exactly what happened. I was talking to my brother about this last night. So the church started growing and it started growing very big. And then they were starting to run out of people. So they needed help with people. So they said, you know what? We've got the pastors doing this and talking about the word of God and praying. But we need people to help look after some of these other people out here. So what do they do?

They basically appointed some deacons. So Stephen's one of the deacons in Acts 6. I'll help. I'll help distribute the bread. And what happens in chapter seven? He gets killed. He gets stoned to death. He gets dragged out of the city and he gets stoned to death. Acts 8 is one of my favorite stories of evangelism. It's Philip who meets the Ethiopian. Why do I love it? Because he gets transported. He just gets zapped to a different city. I just love that. That's my superpower that I would love to have.

But why did he even have that superpower? It's because at the end of chapter seven, when they were stoning Stephen, everyone had to scatter. They were like, oh my goodness. That helper that we just appointed has now been killed. We have to get out of here. So Acts chapter 8, Stephen leaves Jerusalem.

But he doesn't leave with a fearful mindset. He leaves and he just goes into the next town and starts preaching the gospel. He's saying, hey, if you won't let me preach here, I'll just go and preach over there. And so he starts going and he starts preaching and then God zaps him. And then he meets the Ethiopian. And it's a fantastic story that I hope you look into. Acts chapter 9, then you see the guy who was witnessing the murder of Stephen now gets converted because he meets Jesus himself and he gets blinded by it. Paul. Acts chapter 10 is this centurion who has a hundred people at his disposal.

[18:48] And yet he has this vision from God. And he's like, I have to worship this God. I am a man of power, but I have to worship this God. Acts chapter 12, James dies. Acts chapter 16, you see Paul getting thrown into prison. They're having this dream and say, hey, leave Asia, go to Europe.

And actually without him responding to that dream, the gospel won't have reached Europe. And I actually won't be speaking the word of God to you here in English.

Do you realize that the seat that you're sitting on is because someone paved the way for it?

Someone laid their lives down for it. We may not be a church that faces affliction, but the question I have is, are we a church that gets any attention at all?

You see, in Acts 2, you have these believers who are also like, they're just filled with awe and wonder, cut to the heart is what it says. And then people outside look and see this group of people are different. So we may not have affliction, but we have to ask ourselves, do we get garner any attention from the people outside at all? What that means is, are we different at all in any way? Because the gospel has to continue to move. I think that's one of the biggest problems that we face as a church globally, that we've picked comfort over sacrifice. That's why I love the idea that the church doesn't have, our church doesn't have enough comfy seats. I know we have beanbags, but I want us to feel just that urgency, that urgency to be on edge and go, this is the good news. We can't keep good news to ourselves. We have to share it because it's good news. The very nature of news is that we must share it out, but instead we've picked complacency over conviction.

[20 : 53] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who lost his life during the war, he said, I think the church is struggling to grow is because we've given up, given into our temptations. And when you give into your temptations, no, there's no really any resistance. But the problem here is this, if you don't have any resistance, you won't grow. If we don't face any resistance, we won't grow.

I was talking to Kenneth earlier here and I put my hand on his shoulder and I felt a muscle that I didn't know existed. I was like, what's going on there? What is that thing? Apparently it's a muscle that you can work on. And apparently you work on it in this place called a gym. But it doesn't grow without resistance. There's this saying, no pain, no gain. My son actually, MJ has a t-shirt today that says, no rain, no rainbows. And that's cute. But it's so true. When we are a church that doesn't face any kind of affliction, and literally the only problem we have is navigating the air conditioning refurbishment as we leave here, how are we wondering why we're not growing? If it doesn't really cost us to be here at all, then we're not really putting any worth to it. And then we complain that we're not really growing and it's all just a little bit too comfortable. But what if it was a posture of the heart? What if it was something inside you that, okay, this means something. So the next time I have an opportunity to choose whether I follow the world or whether I follow Jesus, and I know that it might cost me, which one will I choose? When I choose the likes and the public approval, when I know that God wants me to go this way, and it's going to be ugly, and it's going to cost me something. Are we willing to do that? So my question here is this, maybe it's not affliction we're after right now.

What about if it's just discomfort? Can we be a group of people who are comfortably uncomfortable? Because I'll tell you, as I look back on my life, the only places that I really grew are away from the couch. I did not really grow whilst I was chilling, sipping on some red wine, watching a show on the couch. I grew when I was out of my comfort zone. I grew when I was doing things that I didn't want to do. When was the last time you did something that you didn't want to do, but you knew that God was the one who was asking you to do it? I'm not saying like your mum told you to do something and you don't want to do it because you hate doing laundry. It's not that. That's not the kind of affliction where I'm after here. I'm after here is your friends invite you to go out to a party, and you're like, you know what? I just can't because I know what you guys are wanting to do at this party. I'm not judging you necessarily for it, but it's just not me right now and it's just not what God wants me to do. And then you say, okay, I won't go. When was the last time you did something like that? When was the last time you deliberately got yourself to a place that was uncomfortable? My guess is that a lot of us spend most of our time in this comfortable place in our spiritual walk where we're like, look, I'm just going to do my Christian thing whenever it kind of works out for me and whenever I can squeeze in a little bit of time. Basically, we don't ever go to the gym. And then we wonder why we don't have that muscle here that Kenneth has.

I have no gripes when I look at Uday because I know that he pays the cost to do what he does to look this beautiful. He has to go to the gym and will pay in Hong Kong a hefty membership price to join just to guilt trip you to continue going there. Don't feed the beast. But I know, I know that all good things are hard. I know that growth is a cost. And this is why, and my brother and I were talking about this, I don't want us to grow too fast. Because I don't think we're ready.

I don't think we've faced enough resistance. I don't think we've faced enough affliction. And I don't think we're growing. And I don't want to be in that place where we are just a cruise ship of people just floating. Do you remember like Disney film Wall E? Those people just sat in those chairs just being fed and all around. That's the last thing. That's the last thing you should want.

[25 : 44] That you would be that. When was the last time we took ourselves out of our comfort zone? When was the last time we got attention? Chapter one talks about this attention that they got, that people are hearing about this. But now Paul sends his Timmy boy to go find out how this church is doing. And he just, he's, he's just relieved. He's like, oh my goodness. Timmy tells me that you guys are still in love with the Lord. That even though you have all these afflictions, even though it's cost you in so many different ways, you are still there. And that filled his heart. And verse, verse eight, it says this, for now we live. If you are standing fast in the Lord, he said, that is so life-giving for me to hear. So life-giving for me to hear that you are still standing strong in the faith, despite all the costs that it costs you to be where you are.

So the question really is, what do we do? How do we get ourselves out of this comfort zone? Or what do you need to do to get yourself out of this comfort zone? What are you, what have you been doing for years? And you know, it's not really been working. You just haven't got the guts to change

to do something different. We may not have affliction and praise God that we don't have affliction, but that can be a curse in the sense that we will also just never grow.

The fastest growing churches around the world are the ones who are facing affliction. We may not need to go out of our way to try and find people to persecute us and to get that affliction. But maybe a question for us is, do I even get any attention at all because of my faith?

Positive or negative? Can I put myself in an uncomfortable place so that I have to make a choice? Which way do I go? Can I be different? One of the ways, and this is where really I'll come to an end. I love it when Paul's writing, so this is just a letter. We're just going through a letter between Paul and the people that he loves. And halfway through this letter, he just stops and he just breaks out into prayer. May we be those kinds of people that we're just talking to. You know what? I just can't help but pray for you. And he prays for them towards the end of this chapter three. And he says this, now may our God and father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you.

Oh, God, I so miss you. God, would you just let me go and spend time with these people? But until then, may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you.

[28:19] He's saying, as you face all these afflictions and these problems, you know what? I just pray that you would love each other. And if you're wondering, hey, how can I make myself feel uncomfortable so I can grow? Actually, it starts here. I guarantee you there is someone here in this room who you will find hard to love. Guarantee you. This is where spouses are just making sure they don't look at each other because that could be the person that is hard to love. And the church is essentially the school where we practice Christian love. And what is love? Love is the agape kind of love, which is a selfless, unconditional kind of love. If you're thinking, okay, I need to get myself uncomfortable so I can start growing. It will actually just start with you identifying now. And it's quite convenient that we're sat in a circle. You can look at someone, you're like, you know what? That person will be really hard to love. I'm going to have nothing in common with that person. And I'm going to go talk to that person. Maybe that's it. And honestly, that's the lowest bar. And especially for introverts, that's already daunting. And that's already like the end game. But that's such a low bar. And he's saying, may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all. It starts with just us. Have a think. Who here can you show some love to? And love here is very simple. Oh, how do I love? Well, is it a hug or is it a weird? Just go out of your way. That's it. Would you be willing to go out of your way to do something different? To speak to someone you don't want to talk to?

To take someone out for coffee when you don't have the time for them? What is the thing that we can do to practice that love? And I'll even say, let's have a little bit of a selfish motive there. He's like, I'm going to love you because I want to grow. I want to practice how to love someone that's really hard. And I want to, Julian, let's go and have lunch together. Like, I really enjoy having lunch with you. So let's go do that together. Find your person who you find hard to love and take them out for lunch. Take them out for lunch. What is that for you? What is that for us? And then once you've done it with someone within the church, it's now time to do it with someone outside of the church. Someone who you've just looked across from the office and you're like, oh my goodness. Honestly, every time you open your mouth, just garbage comes out.

That boss that you have is just like, oh my goodness. Like, if I was allowed to punch anyone, this would be it. If all those lessons of Muay Thai was for something, it'll be for this. It'll be for you.

Jesus says something really interesting. He says, you've got to love your enemies. You've got to, and I know we've heard that before. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you and who bully you and who are horrible. That means you've got to look someone in the eye who has been mistreating you and go, how can I love you? How can I go out of my way to love you?

[31:53] When you do that, that's when you know that you're starting to become Christ-like. And you all have those people in your mind right now.

The people that you want to punch. The people that you want to hear about a scandal from. Like, I can't, like, when something bad happens to that person, then you feel good.

Like, Jesus says, actually, that'll be the moment. When you can love them, when you can pray for them, that will be the moment when you are different.

And it says, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness. Holiness just means that you're just different. You're just set apart. So when someone looks at you, you're like, oh. That person just acts differently to the boss that we all hate.

Somehow, they make it work. What is going on? And I'll tell you, it's not you. It's you opening up your hand and your heart's going, that person is hard to love. God, I will never be able to love that person on my own.

[32:57] But Christ living in me, Christ, can you love that person through me? So it doesn't require you to kind of grit your teeth to spend time with someone who you find hard to love. I'm just going to sit here.

Christ, can you just love them through me? I empty myself. I surrender so that I can be a little bit of you to them. That's really what this passage is about.

It's funny. Acts 17, that talks about the beginning of this church. So they get all this attention. And then there are some jealous Jews that start complaining, that start making stuff up about this group of people that are gathering.

And do you know what they're saying? These guys are turning the world upside down. I mean, actually, I want to find it because I think it's, of course, it's a little bit of hyperbole and they're exaggerating a little bit.

But it's just the way they say it is just so encouraging. And he says this. So they drag this. Acts chapter 17, verse six. And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the other brothers before the city authorities shouting, these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.

[34:03] And Jason has received them. And they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar saying that there is another king, Jesus. And the people of the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. So they get dragged out.

They go, these people, they're turning the world upside down. They're causing revolt. Why?

Because they're saying there is someone who is king who isn't Caesar. And of course, they're just kind of exaggerating because they're just jealous and they just want to get rid of these people.

But how beautiful to be described as a group of people who are turning the world upside down. The enemy was exaggerating. But how good would it be if we truly were a group of people as we scatter from here that we truly do turn the world upside down so that you respond in exactly the opposite way to your colleagues when something bad happens.

And that we completely turn it on its head and we do not conform to the patterns of this world, but we renew our minds to live in a different way. What would that be like?

That we would be that kind of church. We would be that kind of people. And of course, you don't have to make it up as you go along. The truth is, Christ already showed us the way.

[35:17] Christ already suffered for us. And so let's not be afraid of suffering. Let's not be afraid of affliction. Romans 5 says, suffering leads to endurance, which leads to character and leads to hope.

Let us be people who lean in to suffering, who lean in to affliction, who lean in to negative attention. Why? Because it's what our Christ did for us.

At the beginning of Acts 17, at the beginning of this church, they said this, And Paul went in, as was his custom. And on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead.

And saying, this Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ, is the Messiah. It was necessary for Jesus to suffer so that he could then rise from the dead. But it is necessary for us to die to ourselves in order for us to live this life that is abundant life.

So whatever suffering you're going through, may the Lord use it to create endurance, character, hope. The pains that you're going through, may they be growth pains.

[36:29] May we have the backbone and the conviction to even draw attention to ourselves and for people to look at us and go, that person's different. That Christianity is simply too real, too good.

Let us not just be the same because our Christ, our Savior, was not the same. He was a king who came down and emptied himself.

And he turned things completely upside down. Would we do the same? Let us spend time now, and this is where we'll finish, is let's remember that Christ suffered for us.

And so we weren't, he didn't suffer for us so that we would have this beautiful life here on earth.

There's a theologian who said, our Lord took on a crown of thorns.

What makes us think that we should have a crown of roses? Our Lord took on a crown of thorns for us. What makes us think that we're entitled to a crown of roses? And then we're shocked when something bad happens to us.

[37 : 38] Like, yeah, the kind of the guy that you said you'd follow, he did things in an upside down kind of way. So don't be surprised at the trials that you face. Don't be surprised that people look at you negatively.

Because they looked at him negatively first. Why? He didn't have to. But for us, he did. I'm going to invite Johnny up here to lead us in a time of communion, where as a people who forget easily, we always forget.

We remember that Christ suffered for us. And through that, we get to live. Johnny. Jesus, that is the one thing that we ask, one thing that we seek.

The only thing that we would dwell in your house all the days of our lives, to gaze upon your beauty. And when that beauty is in full focus, everything else fades away. Any suffering. Any pain.

[38 : 54] Any tears. Any anxieties. We pray that that beauty would turn this world upside down.

And that we would reflect, we would emit some of that beauty to this world around us. We know the costs you paid.

We know the costs that others have paid for us to be here. Some gave their lives. You gave your life. So we seek to give you our lives.

We surrender. Help us to be people that embrace and lean in to discomfort. That we would truly be comfortably uncomfortable on the edge of our seats as we pursue you, wait for you, yearn for you. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. We love you. We worship you. It's in your name we pray. Amen.