Open Ministry — August 10, 2024

The Longsuffering of God, Saul of Tarsus as Its Pattern, the Passover, and the Lord's Supper

---

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:15–16; Romans 2:3–4; 1 Timothy 1:15–16; Exodus 12:3–14; Luke 22:7–20

> *"As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." (1 Peter 2:2)*
>
> *"For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (1 Timothy 1:16)*
>
> *"With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." (Luke 22:15)*

As Newborn Babes: The Condition for Understanding Scripture

Second Peter 3:15–16 says that Paul wrote things hard to be understood, and that the untaught and ill-established wrest them to their own destruction. The reason there are hard things in Scripture is not that God wrote carelessly. First Corinthians 2:14 gives the answer: the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. God's word has come down from heaven like manna for his people to feed upon. The difficulty is not in the manna but in the eater.

First Peter 2:2 gives the proper disposition: as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word. A newborn baby has no sophistication, no prior opinions, no system to protect. It is simply hungry and wants what nourishes. The older we

get, the harder it can be to recover that state — systems accumulate, preferences form, the mind fills with its own categories. But God wrote his word for little children, and if we would come with that spirit of simple hunger, we would find many things much more accessible than they seem.

The Hard Verse: The Longsuffering of God

Peter identifies the subject of the difficult passage in Paul's writings as the longsuffering of our Lord to be salvation. That locates it. What Paul wrote about the longsuffering not of believers — which is a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 — but of God himself with a world of creatures who persist in ignoring and defying him.

Romans 2:3–4 is one such passage: thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? How has the world continued until today? What is going on? The world is full of men proud of their own religion, ignoring God, yet God lets them go on. The answer is that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). The longsuffering of God with his creatures is what accounts for the present continuance of the age of grace.

That this longsuffering was particularly hard for Peter to understand has its own interest. Peter had to be told explicitly that what God has cleansed, that call not thou common (Acts 10:15). The extension of God's patience to Gentiles, to the most hardened of sinners, pressed on Peter's consciousness. God suffers long with his enemies. That is the hard thing to understand.

Saul of Tarsus: The Pattern of God's Longsuffering

First Timothy 1:15–16 makes the general principle concrete in one person. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

Saul of Tarsus: breathing out threats and slaughter, on the road to Damascus with letters authorizing the arrest of believers, the man who held the garments while Stephen was stoned. If one were to list all those who have ever believed on the Lord Jesus, and arrange them from least to greatest, Paul placed himself at the very bottom — less than the least of all saints (Ephesians 3:8). And yet the Lord reached him. The mercy of God reached to the very bottom of the list.

There is something here beyond merely saying that God saves sinners. The Lord long-suffered Saul of Tarsus: he bore with him in his enmity, he endured the persecution of his people, he waited for the moment appointed. And when that moment came, in a flash of light on the road to Damascus, the man was arrested and turned. This is for a pattern — so that all who come afterward may see in Paul the depth of what God's longsuffering will do. If the Lord long-suffered Paul, no case that comes to our minds is beyond the reach of that same patience.

The Passover: Instructions for Perpetual Generations

Exodus 12 gives precise instructions for the Passover: take the lamb on the tenth of the month, keep it until the fourteenth, kill it between the two evenings; its blood on the doorposts and lintel; flesh roasted with fire, not raw, not boiled, with head, legs, and inwards; nothing remaining until morning; eaten with loins girded, sandals on, staff in hand, in haste — it is the LORD's Passover. And in verse 14: this day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall celebrate it as a feast to Jehovah throughout your generations, as an ordinance forever.

The instructions could not have been more specific. When a Jewish man was asked centuries later whether his community still sacrificed a lamb, roasted it with fire, placed its blood on the doorposts — the answer was a sheepish grin and, well, the rabbis have explained. What God through Moses said was clear: from generation to generation, forever. The same thing will be said, one day, about the Lord's Supper.

With Desire I Have Desired: The Lord's Heart at the Supper

In Luke 22, the Lord sends Peter and John to prepare the Passover. They ask where he wills it to be done. He did not say anywhere will do. He had a specific will and had made specific provision: a man carrying a water pitcher would lead them to a large upper room, furnished and ready. The symbols in verse 10 point to the Spirit and the Word as the agents by which the Lord led his disciples to the place he had appointed. Who furnished that room? The Lord had prepared a place — not a place of their family tradition or last year's custom, but a place of his own choosing.

And then his word at the table: with desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. He knew precisely what lay before him — Matthew 20 records him spelling out to his disciples on the road to Jerusalem that he would be delivered up, mocked, and crucified. His mind was entirely on that. And at that moment he institutes the supper of remembrance, not for his benefit but for ours. I will not eat any more at all of it until it be fulfilled in the kingdom. He was looking forward to the fulfilment, and back at the Passover, and he was giving his disciples something to carry them forward until he comes.

This is my body, which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me. The cup: this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. Paul adds: as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye shew forth the Lord's death till he come. From generation to generation. Until he comes. The same spirit that

explained away the Passover lamb can enter into our observance of the Lord's Supper — something we do on Sundays, a habit since childhood. But the Lord's longing in those words — with desire I have desired — was that his disciples should have this supper to remember him, because he knew how easily we forget what he went through to secure our place with him in glory. From week to week, that loaf and that cup make it part of us again.

With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.