

BE LIKE ... **(2 Timothy 1:9-18 November 26, 2006)**

On Tuesday morning, I was listening to the radio and heard them announce that they were interrupting their broadcast for a major announcement.

I thought George Bush might have been assassinated or Indonesia had invaded.

Instead, they switched to a live press conference in Sydney to cover Ian Thorpe's retirement from swimming.

I went and flicked on the TV – *every* channel except the ABC was covering it live. This was obviously a major news event.

By the look of the press room, most of the reporters and photographers in Australia seemed to be there for this story.

Over the next day or two I read a number of articles about Thorpie that mentioned the same words – 'role model'.

John Coates, the President of the Australian Olympic Committee said:

“[Ian] has been a great champion, a great inspiration for young Australians and a fine ambassador for his country.”

He then went on to say that he is one of the great role models for our country.

Kieren Perkins said that Thorpie is the type of role model we want.

Morris Iemma, the Premier of NSW, even thought he was so good he offered to find him a seat in the NSW parliament.

Don't get me wrong. Thorpie was a phenomenal swimmer who handled himself extremely well.

But this whole role model thing got me thinking. As Christians – who do we want to be like?

In our success oriented, wealth seeking society we keep getting told that athletes are great role models. They are young, successful, wealthy – everything we could hope to be.

One of the most memorable ad campaigns in history was launched by Gatorade in 1992 built around the slogan – ***Be Like Mike***.

BE LIKE MIKE

Michael Jordan was portrayed as the ultimate role model.

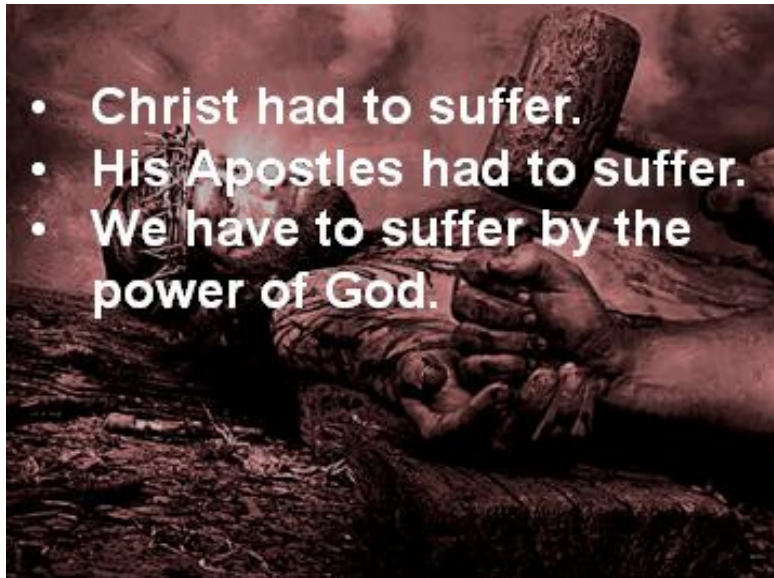


We had books on “How to Be Like Mike” and movies where the kid gets to be ‘Like Mike’.

The world wants to – Be Like Mike.

But for the Christian – for you and me – we have another role model. Not Ian Thorpe. Not Michael Jordan.

Our ultimate role model is Jesus – but – and this is the crucial point this morning – not the triumphant, powerful Jesus. We are called to be like the suffering, crucified Jesus.



Last week we saw that:

- Christ had to suffer.
- His Apostles had to suffer.

And now:

- We have to suffer by the power of God.

This was a crucial lesson for Timothy.

Timothy's apprenticeship with Paul had been in the good times. Churches planted. The gospel going forth in power.

But now it was a season of struggle.

In 2 Timothy, we find that the Apostle Paul is in a Roman prison facing execution.

The churches are suffering persecution.

And perhaps the worst part is that the churches are struggling with savage wolves from within. Men who have perverted the gospel. They taught that Jesus brings a triumphant power.

And Timothy was asking some hard questions.

Why is the gospel of the King of Kings under siege? Why is it not sweeping aside every enemy?

Timothy is feeling something of a failure. He is wondering if he really has what it takes to be in the ministry.

So from the confines of his cold, dreary Roman prison – Paul writes one of the most incredible letters we have.

In it he basically says:

Timothy – why does struggling and persecution surprise you? Jesus Himself was crucified. Those in Christ will share His pain and suffering?

But, Jesus Himself gives us the power to triumph amid these trials.

So keep going – run the race – fulfil your ministry.

Turn with me to 2 Timothy 1:7-8. As we have seen, Paul writes this:

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

Paul urges Timothy and indeed you and I to join him in suffering for the gospel.

Now look down to verse 12 where Paul says – that is *why* I am suffering as I am:

What he does in verses 9-11 – is that Paul gives *three reasons* why he is willing to suffer for the gospel – and why **we** should be willing to suffer for the gospel:

We find the first reason in verse 9:

We are to join with Paul in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God because:

Suffering helps make us like Christ.



[God] saved us and called us to a holy life.

At first glance you wonder what being called to a holy life has to do with joining Paul in suffering for the gospel.

But there is a strong connection in Scripture between suffering and holiness.

Listen to these verses.

1 Peter 4:1:

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

Romans 6:6:

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

Suffering is one of God's gifts to help us become holy.

At its base – sin is turning from God to the world.

Think about when you struggle most with sin. There is a pull, a temptation to find your satisfaction in this world.

Your heart cries out that you will enjoy lust or greed.

While there are the fleeting pleasures of sin, we know that the truth is that true satisfaction is only found in Christ.

When things are going well. When we are enjoying the best this world has to offer – the world looks mighty attractive.

But when we are suffering – when we are persecuted – then it is not this world but the world to come that we long for.

Basically – Suffering is necessary to wean us from the world. We are so drawn to this world that we need to be reminded that this is a fallen world and in this life you will face trials.

Listen to how Paul put this in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18:

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

The trials of life make us long for the glories of eternity – not more of this world.

When you soak in the pleasures of this life – you don't want this world to end.

When you are suffering – you join the saints of the ages crying – How long O Lord?

David Brainerd spoke of this:

Such fatigues and hardship as these serve to wean me more from the earth; and I trust, will make heaven the sweeter. ... In this world I expect tribulation; and it does not now, as formerly, appear strange to me.¹

Our home is not of this world. Long for eternity not the Whitsundays.

John Bunyan suffered persecution, loss, deprivation. He summed up his suffering like this:

We could not live without such turnings of the hand of God upon us. We should be overgrown with flesh, if we had not our seasonable winters. It is said that in some countries trees will grow, but will bear no fruit, because there is no winter there.²

Suffering brings the fruit of righteousness.

What does this mean for us? If we want to be holy – to bear the fruit of righteousness – then we have to choose to identify with our suffering Saviour.

Galatians 2:20:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Salvation means being crucified with Jesus. Choosing to take up our cross – to join Him in suffering.

And the result is holy lives – death to our sinful nature.

Galatians 5:24:

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

If all of this sounds too hard, remember that last week we looked at passage after passage that linked suffering with joy.

When we suffer – we turn to Christ, we long for eternity, we realise how pathetic this world is – and we become more like Jesus. And in this there is a joy – a power – a life – that makes us the men and the women we were called to be – holy, Christlike saints.

¹ Cited in John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001) pp. 139-140.

² Cited in John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001) p. 72.

Brothers and sisters. We have a choice. We can choose to live for this world. Suck the marrow from it. Try and find satisfaction here.

Or we can choose to live for Christ and suffer in this fallen world.

To live more simply. Be more salty. Live more fully for Him.

And when we are like Him – the world will hate us because it hated Him.

As we join Him in suffering – we join Him in declaring – My kingdom is not of this world. I live for the world to come. The passions of this world no longer drive me.

Suffering is *one* God appointed way to make us more like Christ.

But it doesn't come naturally. We have to **choose** to arm ourselves with this attitude – the attitude of Christ who suffered in the body – and use this to overcome sin.

In choosing to take up our cross, we put off our old self. We loosen our grip on this world. We long for the world to come.

Brothers and sisters. I ask you – are you struggling with sin? Are there persistent sins you struggle to break that keep rising up to blight your Christian life?

Then remember that **one** of the ways – it is not the only way – but it is **one** of the ways that God enables us to overcome sin is through suffering.

We choose to make sacrifices for Christ.

We choose to be salt and light such that the world hates us.

We choose to turn from the pleasures of the world to the glories of Christ.

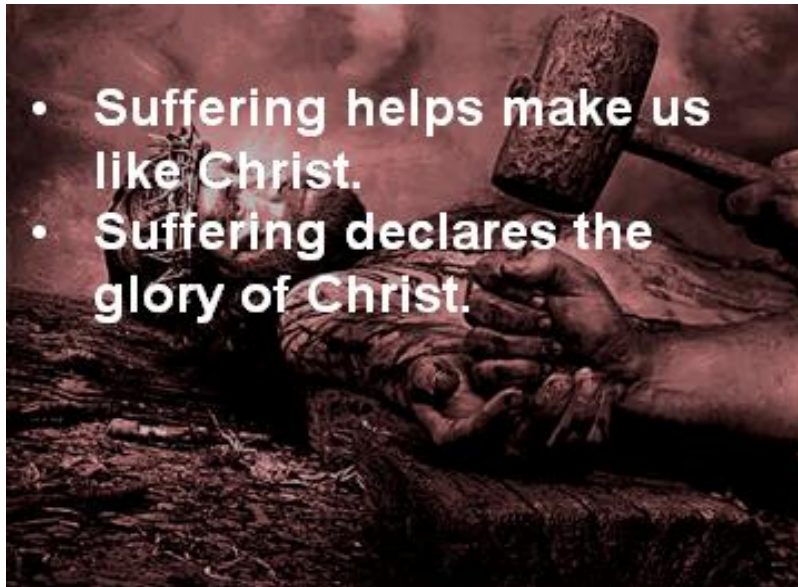
Our grip is loosened on this world and its pleasures – and we become holy.

There is a *second* reason that we are to join with Paul in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God:

Not only does:

Suffering help make us like Christ.

But:



Suffering declares the glory of Christ.

Look at verses 9 and 10:

God saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

God called and chose us for his own purposes.

In a display of His power and grace – He chose sinful men and women – you and me – and he saved us. Not because we are worthy of saving – not because of anything we have done – but because of his own purposes.

And at the heart of salvation – is suffering.

It is the suffering of Christ that enables us to move from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

And it is our suffering that God uses to complete our salvation and make us holy.

And through it all God gets the glory.

But this description of what the suffering of Christ accomplished is magnificent.

Jesus ... destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Jesus suffered and died to destroy death and suffering.

Jesus suffered to bring life to the dead.

Jesus suffered to make the perishable into immortals.

And this whole magnificent proclamation is heart of the gospel.

The gospel of a suffering Saviour cannot be proclaimed by triumphant Apostles. It needs to be carried to the world by suffering saints.

The Puritan John Flavel put it well:

A crucified style best suits the preachers of a crucified Christ.³

Alexander Maclaren agreed:

It takes a crucified man to preach a crucified Saviour.⁴

In the second century – Tertullian made the famous statement that:

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

How true this is. In all of church history the times the church has stayed pure and spread has been in times of persecution.

In times of affluence and prosperity – the church gets attracted by the world and it has to fight for its very soul.

If we want to proclaim the gospel of a suffering Saviour – we have to be ready to suffer.

And suffering gives power to our gospel witness.

J. Oswald Sanders – the great missionary leader tells this story about an indigenous missionary who walked barefoot from village to village preaching the gospel in India.

After a long day of many miles and much discouragement he came to a certain village and tried to speak the gospel but was spurned. So he went to the edge of the village dejected and lay down under a tree and slept from exhaustion.

When he awoke, the whole town was gathered to hear him. The head man of the village explained that they had come to look him over while he was sleeping. When they saw his blistered feet, they concluded that he must be a holy man, and that they had been evil to reject him. They were sorry and wanted to hear the message he was willing to suffer so much to bring them.⁵

If we are willing to suffer – then we believe what we preach – and we live out the gospel before a watching world.

³ Cited in Arturo G. Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching* (Ross-Shire: Mentor, 1998), p. 91.

⁴ Quoted in Alex Montoya, *Preaching With Passion*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000) p. 27.

⁵ Cited in John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), pp. 94-95.

Unless we are willing to suffer – then the gospel will be robbed of some of its power in a land like Australia.

There is a *third* reason that we are to join with Paul in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God:

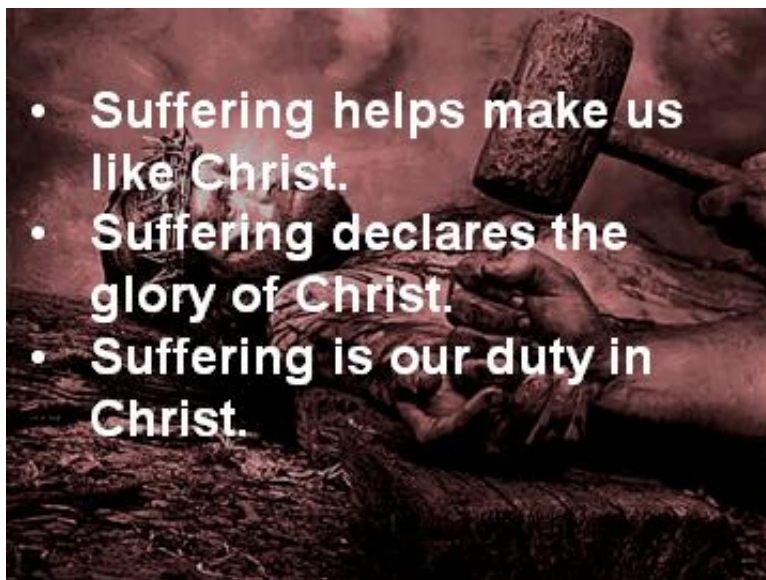
Not only does:

Suffering help make us like Christ.

And:

Suffering declare the glory of Christ.

But:



Suffering is our duty in Christ.

Look at verse 11:

And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.

Paul was chosen by the risen Lord Jesus to be a herald and an Apostle and a teacher of the gospel.

Those who would proclaim the gospel – must suffer for it.

When Paul was chosen as an Apostle – he was told that he would be shown how much he must suffer for the name of Christ.

And this applies to us.

We may not be Apostles. Not all of us are teachers. But in one sense we are all heralds – so it is our duty to suffer for the gospel.

2 Timothy 3:12:

Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Philippians 1:29:

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.

The saints of all ages have understood this.

The Moravian Brotherhood was founded under the hand of Count Nicolas Zinzendorf in the 1720's. Right from the earliest they understood the necessity of suffering.



They adopted as their seal the image of a lamb on ground stained crimson with blood.

Their motto was "*Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow Him.*"

Isn't that a great motto? The Lamb of God conquered through suffering. Let us join Him in suffering.

They embraced a lifestyle of self-denial, willing suffering and obedience. They followed the call of the Lamb to go anywhere and placed an emphasis upon the worst and hardest places as having the first claim.

In 1731, while attending the coronation of Christian VI in Copenhagen, the young Count met a converted slave from the West Indies, Anthony Ulrich. Anthony's tale of his people's plight moved Zinzendorf, who brought him back to Herrnhut. As a result, the community resolved to send their first missionaries.

They were ready to depart on October 8, 1732. Two men, John Leonard Dober, a potter, and David Nitschman, a carpenter booked passage on Dutch ship bound for the Danish West Indies.

But they really had to count the cost and drink the cup of suffering. At this time, only *slaves* could go to the West Indies. So the men had decided to sell themselves into slavery – a lifetime of servitude – just so that those African slaves in the West Indies might hear the gospel.

As the ship slipped away, their family and friends lined the dock. Everyone knew that the next time they would see each other would be in glory. And over the water, these men lifted up a cry that would become the rallying call for all Moravian missionaries. They cried “May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering.”

His reward includes saints willing to suffer with Him.

Over the years, that small community in Herrnhut sent at least 2,158 of its members as missionaries.

They understood the duty of joining with Paul and all the saints in suffering for the gospel.

A gospel of triumphalism backed by worldly power destroys the gospel of a suffering Saviour.

And that was at the heart of the false teaching in Ephesus.

Look over to chapter 2:17-18:

Among the [false teachers] are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.

The essence of their teaching is that we are already raised in Christ. Therefore we are done with this world and the things of this world.

The resurrection power of Christ is ours now and the result is some measure of worldly power.

We saw in 1 Timothy some of the fruit of this which included the teaching that godliness leads to financial gain. They taught that those in Christ are to have the riches of this world.

So you can imagine what is happening to Timothy.

He is in Ephesus proclaiming Christ and Him crucified.

But people in the church and unbelievers will be saying – this Jesus can't be a very powerful King if His own Apostle is in prison about to be killed.

And the false teachers are saying – our Jesus will give you power and wealth.

They don't preach Christ crucified – but Christ raised in power.

Christ is raised in power – but the one raised in power is also the one who was crucified.

And it seems that on some level Timothy is saying – maybe I got it wrong. Maybe Paul got it wrong. Maybe that is why my ministry is struggling.

Surely the ministry of the King of Kings should be more powerful than this?

And Paul now says: – No – I am suffering for the sake of the gospel. And you my son must guard this gospel of a suffering crucified Messiah.

Look at verses 12-14:

That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Paul would **only** preach Christ and Him crucified.

The gospel of a suffering Messiah spread by suffering saints is the only gospel that can save.

Paul is not ashamed of this gospel – because it is the power of God unto salvation.

Timothy should not be ashamed of this gospel. He should guard it against the false teachers.

It is a sacred deposit entrusted to him. He needs to guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Men don't want to hear of a suffering Saviour who calls us to take up our cross.

They want to hear of a risen Lord who sends power among His people.

Paul was about to be executed. The task of guarding the gospel was about to pass to the next generation – to the Timothys and Tituses.

But as we will see in chapter 2 – Paul is also thinking of the day when Timothy has gone.

This gospel of the suffering Saviour had to be passed on to faithful men who would teach others the truth – and in this way they would guard the gospel.

The question becomes – would Timothy be faithful?

So Paul gives two examples to help Timothy see the consequences of his choice.

Examples of men who failed to suffer with Paul and an example of a man who was willing to count the cost and suffer with Paul.

Look at verse 15:

You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.

The context here suggests that the leaders of the churches in Asia – had turned from Paul at a crucial time – most likely his arrest and imprisonment.

Phygelus and Hermogenes were probably key leaders in the Asian church.

To stand with Paul would almost certainly lead to their own imprisonment and suffering. It was a crucial test.

Did they understand the gospel of a crucified Saviour? Did they understand the necessity of taking up their cross and following Jesus?

It was a time of testing and they failed.

In stark contrast – Paul refers to one man who was put to the test and passed – Onesiphorus.

Verses 16-18:

May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

All we know about this wonderful saint is found in these three verses. He had been with Paul in Ephesus – helping him in the ministry.

He had come to Rome and searched till he found Paul in prison – and there he refreshed Paul and minister to him.

To stand with the Apostle at this time was dangerous – to associate with Paul might well have cost Onesiphorus his life.

The Mamertine Prison in Rome was no holiday inn.

It is still standing today.

To get to the cells you have to go underground.

Prisoners were then lowered into the cells through the single opening.

So when Paul says that Onesiphorus searched for him and came to him – it meant that he went into this prison and spoke through one of these openings to Paul. The guards would see him. All would know that he was identifying with Paul and his gospel.

It was a courageous thing to do.

In fact, the way Paul phrases these verses may well indicate that Onesiphorus was martyred for joining Paul.

Paul prays for mercy for his household in verse 16. He prays that he might find mercy on the last day. These are strong indications that Onesiphorus was already dead – killed for identifying with Paul in his chains.

At the very least this man chose to join Paul in his suffering.

So Paul asks – Timothy, what will you choose? Will you turn from a suffering Christ, His suffering Apostle and His gospel of suffering? Will you be like Phygelus and Hermogenes?

Or will you choose to join with Paul in his suffering like Onesiphorus?

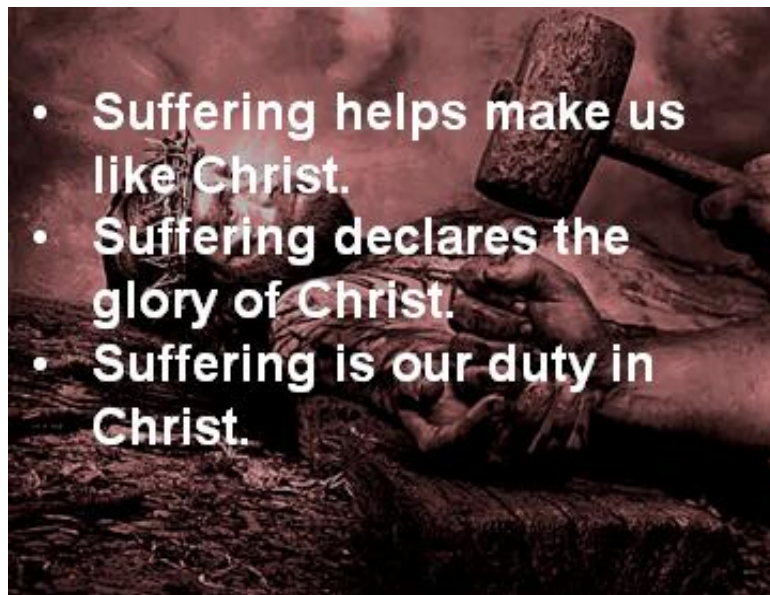
He is a role model for you Timothy.

Be Like Onesiphorus. He chose to be like me a suffering Apostle. He chose to be like Jesus – our suffering Lord.

And now this epistle comes to us.

And Paul asks us the same question. Are we willing to be like Jesus and Paul and Onesiphorus?

Are we willing to suffer and sacrifice – even if it costs us our comfort, our reputation – perhaps even our life?



Suffering helps make us like Christ.

It is one of God's means for making us holy. And:

Suffering declares the glory of Christ.

In our suffering – the power of the gospel and the glory of the gospel are seen. Suffering declares we live for eternity and not this life. And:

Suffering is our duty in Christ.

The same day I watched the Ian Thorpe retirement interview – I was reading the lead story in a recent issue of *The Voice of the Martyrs* newsletter.

It concerned Brother Pao in Vietnam. Pao was arrested for preaching Christ – spent two years in prison – where he was repeatedly beaten.

During one beating, he thought death was at hand and said to himself:

If they kill me, I will rise unto the heavens to be with Jesus – but I will never deny Him no matter what they do to my body. I will be strong in Jesus.

I couldn't help but compare these two men. One the whole world knows – one the world has never heard of.

One the world trumpets as a role model – one the world looks at and prays they never have to go through what he went through.

But I tell you – Brother Pao is the one who found power and joy in this world.

But now – the question comes to you.

The world cries out – Be Like Mike.

Paul says – Christian – Be Like ... Jesus. Be like me – His suffering Apostle. Be like Onesiphorus. Be like Brother Pao.

I know that there is a part of us that wants to be like Mike. The fame, the fortune, the life. Listen to the words of that Gatorade ad again.

*Sometimes I dream, that he is me
You've got to see that's how I dream to be
I dream I move, I dream I groove
Like Mike If I could Be Like Mike*

That ad was so successful because the pull to be like Mike – famous, rich, important – is so powerful.

I like sport. And I have to admit that at times I watch sport – Darren Lockyer scoring the winning try in extra time – and somewhere I think – I'd like that to be me.

And I don't think I have ever thought about Paul in that dank, dark, cold prison suffering for Christ and said – Wow – I'd like that to be me.

But, that is my worldly heart speaking.

The truth is that I don't want Michael Jordan's life. I don't want Darren Lockyer's life. I don't want Ian Thorpe's life. I don't want to be like them.

I want to know Jesus Christ and the fellowship of His sufferings. I want to know Him. I want to see His power in my life.

And I know that means identifying with a suffering Saviour.

I want to be like the Moravians – crying "Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow Him."

I want to be like Onesiphorus – crying – I will not be ashamed of Jesus or the chains of Paul

I want to be like Jesus.

Who do you want to be like – and what are you willing to suffer for it?

May we choose to know the power of the Lamb who was slain.