



Bethany Lutheran Church
& Early Childhood Ministry
5051 McCarty Road
Saginaw, MI 48603

bethanysaginaw.com | 989.793.9579

Viewpoints

Observing events in our modern world from the viewpoint of our ascended Savior.

Blessings in Sufferings ~ February 2, 2017

The greater life's difficulties, the greater God's blessings.

[Online Version & Archive](#)

Last month, one of New York City's finest officers passed away. Detective Steven McDonald was in his second year on the police force when in 1986 he was shot by a thief. Paralyzed from the neck down, McDonald relied on a wheel chair and a respirator for the rest of his life. Yet he also remained active on the force, serving as an ambassador for the City and as a mentor for other officers. He's remembered as an "iconic symbol of courage, faith and forgiveness." Yes, forgiveness! In a public letter to the media, McDonald wrote: "I forgive him [the shooter] and hope that he can find peace and purpose in his life."

What if we were similarly paralyzed? Would we be able to forgive the thief? And more importantly, would we be able to believe that God has truly forgiven us? For when life crashes down on us, it can cause us to doubt God's forgiving love.

- Life's painful tribulations raise questions: "If God loves me as much as the death and resurrection of Jesus declares, why do I suffer afflictions?"
- When life boils over, human experience screams at us that God is angry; and it reasons with us (wrongly) that we must do something to appease his anger.

Since we're all incapable of making up for one sin (Romans 3:23-24), let's rejoice that our Holy Substitute has done all that needs to be done at the cross to forgive us and grant us peace with God. This truth is greater than all tragedies that may crash down on us, which Saul the Persecutor realized at the time when he was converted into Paul, the Apostle.

One day as Saul was on his way to persecute more Christians, Jesus struck him down, leaving him physically blind and spiritually mortified. The soul-piercing message—"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting"—percolated for three days in Saul's inner being before God sent Ananias. God explained to Ananias: "**Go to Saul. This man is my chosen instrument. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name**" (Acts 9:15-16).

So Ananias came to Saul. "**Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'** Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength" (Acts 9:17-19). Notice that Ananias demanded nothing from Saul, and instead freely delivered the Holy Spirit working through the gospel news of Jesus and through baptism. Therefore when God said, "I will show him

[Saul] how much he must suffer for my name,” this was not an angry judge punishing Saul, but instead this was our God of grace promising to shower Saul with blessings.

But if blessings are heaven-crafted reasons for joy that this world cannot rip away, how can sufferings be blessings? Because Jesus uses sufferings to bring blessings! Jesus promised: **"Blessed are those who mourn... blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"** (Matthew 5:3-10).

As the Holy Spirit enables Paul, so the Spirit enables us to look at our trials through the gospel promises of Jesus. **"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children... and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory"** (Romans 8:15-16). The Spirit convinced Paul that he was fully forgiven in Christ, which guarantees that through sufferings comes the glory of blessings.

This same glory is for you and me and for all who know they're forgiven in Christ. Which also explains how we, like Steven McDonald, can learn to forgive those who hurt us. ✚

Learn more about how Jesus blesses us even when we're oppressed. [Visit our Sermon Page](#) to access the sermon preached on **January 29, 2017 – The Word Is Bless, Not Bleak** (available in audio or video formats).

Source Material (Links may become inactive over time.)
[Steven McDonald, A Symbol Of Forgiveness...](#) @ NPR.org

To become a recipient of Viewpoints, please email mike.nitz@bethanysaginaw.com and simply type the phrase "VP please" in the subject line. Or if you wish to no longer receive Viewpoints, type the phrase "discontinue VP" in the subject line. Thanks.

Blessings to you and your loved ones, Pastor Mike Nitz

