

Sermons
New Testament
Mark
8:31-38

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Date written: March 23, 1947

Text: Mark 8:31 The Son of man must suffer many things.

Theme: Suffering

Proposition: Suffering, as exemplified by Christ and as experienced by men, has great meaning for men.

Sources: Macartney's Illustrations
Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II.
The Story of ~~the~~ Christian Year, George M. Gibson.

Places preached:

~~Salisbury~~ ^{Barnstable} ~~Salisbury~~ & ~~Epworth~~, Mar. 23, 1947

Epworth & Salem, May 18, 1947

Huntington, W. Va. 3-1-48

Cravens & Keumeyer, Miss., June 4, 1950
Clarendon, Collier, Ala., Apr 4, 1954

over

Stensån, up; 9:30 & 11:00, March 19, 1961

Scripture: Mark 8:31-38

And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.

But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of man.

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Introduction:

1. Today is Passion Sunday, the beginning of Passon Week.

2. Passion Week immediately precedes Holy Week, which begins Palm Sunday and ends Easter Sunday.

3. The word "passion" means suffering and usually in Christian usage refers to the suffering of Christ.

4. In tradition, the passion of Christ, which is honored through the observance of Passion Week, began with the Last Supper and lasted through Christ's death on the cross.

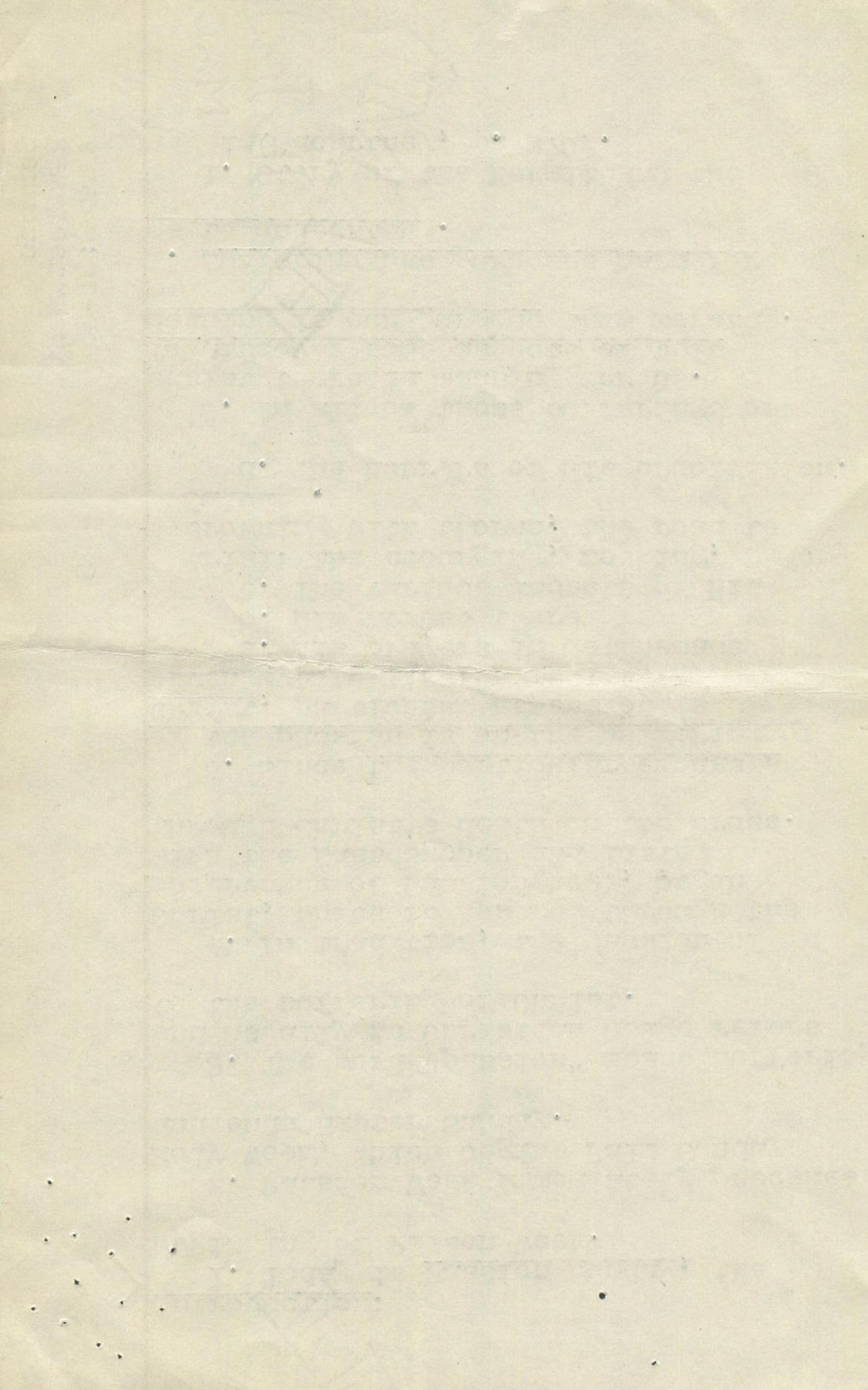
5. Since the particular emphasis of the passion is on the suffering of Christ, particular attention is given events like:

- a. His prayers in Gethsemane
- b. His arrest there
- c. The various aspects of His trial: the scourging, mocking, crowning with thorns, the road to Calvary,
- d. The horrors of His crucifixion.

6. In all of these sufferings of Christ there is meaning for us. To discover some aspectsoof this meaning is our purpose this morning.

I. Suffering has purposes hard for us to understand.

1. Story of the Hermit and the Angelm(Macartney, pe 370).

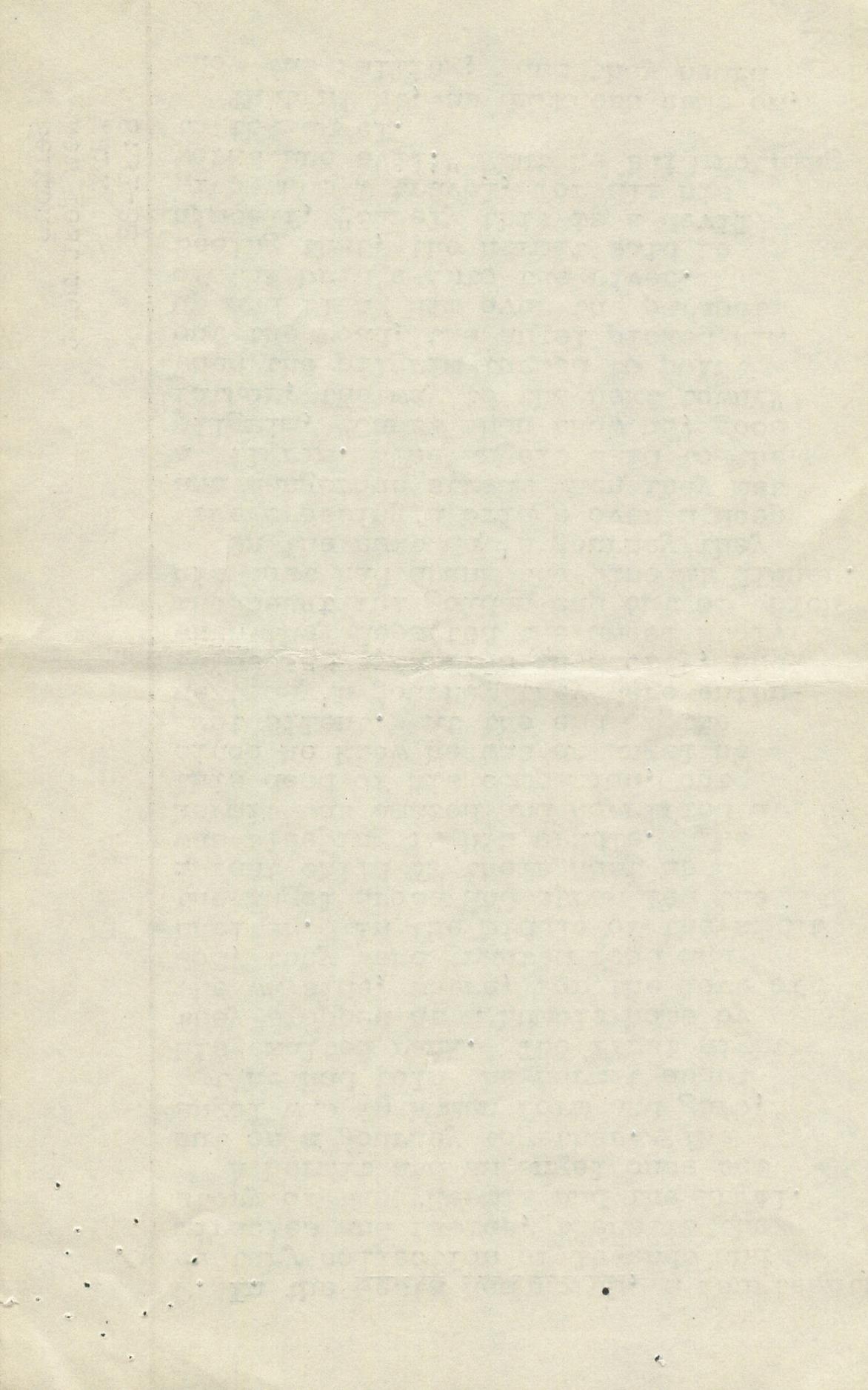


2. In the Gesta Romanorum, a fourteenth century collection of legends and miracles and fables, there is the story of the "Hermit and the Angel."

A hermit and an angel once set out on a journey together. The angel was in human form and garb, but he had told the hermit about his exalted rank. The first night they stopped at a humble home by the wayside, where, for the love of God, they were granted food and shelter. In the middle of the night the angel arose and strangled the infant child of their host as he was sleeping in his cradle. The hermit was amazed and horrified at this deed of his companion, but since he knew he was an angel he kept silent. At the end of the next day's journey they were entertained at a mansion in a city, and when they departed the angel stole the beautiful golden cup out of which his host had drunk the wine at dinner.

On the next day's journey they were crossing a bridge over a deep and dangerous stream when they met a pilgrim. The angels said to the pilgrim, "Canst thou show us, good father, the way to the next town?" When the pilgrim turned to point out the road, the angel picked him up and flung him over the parapet of the bridge into the river. Seeing that, the hermit said to himself, "Surely this is a devil with whom I travel, for all his works are evil!" But he said nothing to the angel.

That night, as darkness came on, snow was falling; and they heard



the howling of the wolves in the forest. In the distance they saw a light in the window of a cottage, and making their way thither, they asked for refuge. The surly master of the house with oaths and curses turned them away from his door.

"Yonder," he said, "is the pig sty. That is the place for dirty beggars like you!" So they passed the night in the pig sty among the swine. In the morning the angel went to the man's house and thanked him for his hospitality, and for a keepsake gave him the stolen goblet.

At this the hermit's anger and horror would no longer be contained. "Get thee gone, wretched spirit!" he cried. "Thou pretendest to be a messenger from heaven; yet thou requitest good with evil and evil with good." Then looking upon him with compassion in his eyes, the angel said: "Listen, short-sighted mortal. For love of that infant son the father had been made covetous, breaking God's commandments to heap up wealth for his boy, which the boy, if he had lived, would have wasted in riotous living and debauchery. My act which seemed to you so cruel saved both parent and child. The owner of the golden goblet which I took had once been abstemious, but he was becoming a drunken sot. The loss of his cup has set him to thinking, and he will mend his ways. The poor pilgrim whom I threw into the river was about to commit a mortal sin, when I interfered and sent his soul unsullied into heaven. As for this wretch who drove God's children from his door, he is, indeed, pleased for

the moment with the bauble I have given him; but hereafter he will burn in hell." When the hermit heard these words, he bowed his head and murmured, "Forgive me, Lord, that in my ignorance I misjudged thee."

2. Christ Himself, as a man, experienced something of this type of thing. After His baptism, having gone into the wilderness to be alone to determine how He should go about His life, He was tempted to take the road of glory, power and riches. Anyone of us might have looked at his opportunities and said, feeling that he had reason on his side, "if I take this road I will be in a position to influence the world for good." Yet, after a tempestuous spiritual struggle there in the wilderness, Christ saw revealed the way that He should go.

3. Oftentimes our suffering will seem equally unfathomable, and so will the suffering of our neighbors the world over. Yet long-range Biblical perspective and human experience have shown us that there is a purpose -- usually invisible at the present time -- in such suffering. This realization, however, doesn't relieve us of the responsibility of trying to alleviate such suffering.

III.1. When Robert Louis Stevenson first saw the terrible devastations of leprosy he was almost turned into an infidel. But when he saw the miracles of Christian pity and compassion in the leper hospital

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at Malokai, his faith emerged triumphant, and he wrote in the guest book there:

To see the infinite pity of this place
The mangled limb, the devastated
face,

The innocent sufferer smiling at
the rod--

A fool were tempted to deny his God.
He sees, he shrinks. But if he
gaze again,

Lo, beauty springing from the
breast of pain!

He marks the sisters on the mournful
shores;

And even a fool is silent and adores
(Macartney, p.372.)

2. She had been taken from one hospital to another, and back to her home, and then from the home back to the hospital. This time she was in her own home, with the foot of the bed lifted higher than the head. On her face were plainly traced the lines of suffering and emaciation. After a visit and prayer, she took the pastor's hand as he rose to go and said, "My sufferings have brought me closer to God." The words were spoken slowly, deliberately, with an air of finality. It was the sure verdict of her heart and mind. Hard and weary as had been the days through which she had passed they had brought her nearer God. (Macartney, p.370).

3. In the hour of darkness when He hung upon the cross, Jesus wondered, like all men in time of deep suffering or distress, why God did not help. "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" he cried. Yet before death came to Him He had fought His way through

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the problem of His suffering as a man, and said "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46).

4. Observing the life of Christ, or experiencing life himself, man should come to understand that suffering can strengthen faith, though he may not yet see the purpose of the suffering.

III. 1. One of the famous bells of China is the bell in the Great Tower. Five hundred years ago the ruler of China, the Son of Heaven, commanded the official of this province that he should have a bell made of such size that the sound of it could be heard a a hundred li. The mandarin assembled artisans and belsmiths from all parts of the empire. But when the metal had been cast it was found that the result was void. The brass, which had been used to strengthen the voice of the bell, and the gold, to deepen it, and the silver, to sweeten it, had rebelled one against the other. A second time the bell was cast, and again the same result. This time the emperor, the Son of Heaven, sent a grim message to the mandarin, saying, "Twice thou hast betrayed thy trust; if thou fail a third time, thy head shall be severed from thy neck. Tremble and obey."

The mandarin's lovely daughter, who had refused a hundred suitors rather than leave her father's home desolate, learned the contents of the message from the emperor, and was in

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deadly fear for her father. When she consulted an astrologer he said, "God and brass will never meet in wedlock. Silver and iron shall never embrace until the flesh of a maiden be melted in the crucible, until the blood of a virgin be mixed with the metals in their fusion."

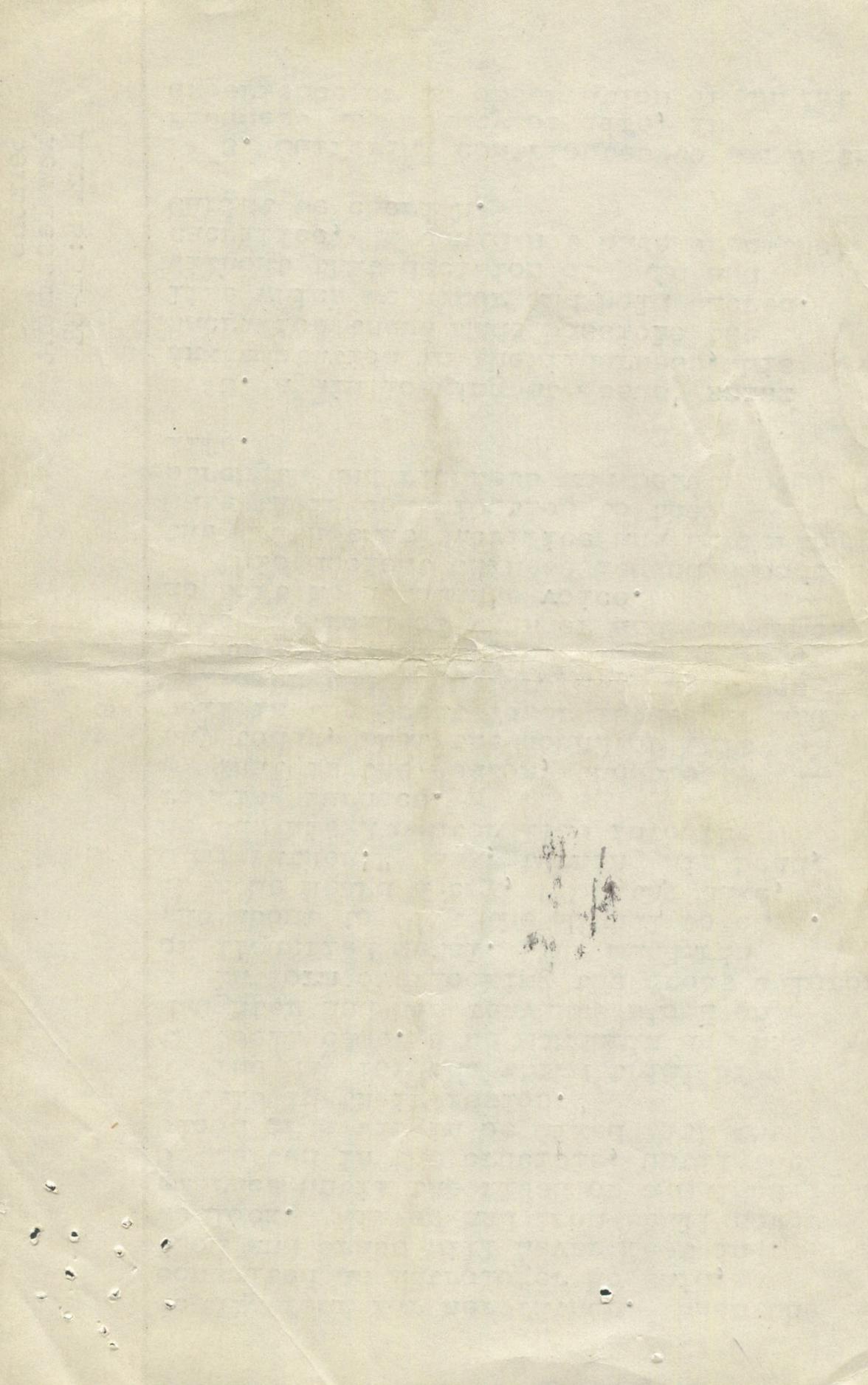
The day for the third trial of the bell came. The mandarin and his daughter and her servants stood on a platform overlooking the great caldron of liquefied metal. The mandarin was about to give the signal to cast. Then he heard a cry, "For thy sake, O my father!" and, turning his head, he saw his daughter leap into the roaring furnace.

o That is the reason, the people say today, that the sound of this bell in the Great Tower is deeper and mellow and mightier than the tones of any other bell, sometimes pealing like the roll of thunder and sometimes as soft as a woman's voice.

This ancient Chinese legend embodies the truth that sacrifice and suffering make their contribution to the strength and richness and beauty of life.

2. Again looking at Jesus' ~~zzzaz~~ ~~or~~ temptation in the wilderness, his sacrifice there made possible the life which we honor and hold sacred. Without that decision of pain and sacrifice, He could not have been the Christ we cherish.

3. Suffering contributes to strength, richness and beauty of life, in experience or in observation of Christ



IV. Christ's suffering has an even higher meaning than these for us.

1. In Christ was both man and God suffering.

2. As God suffering, taking the evil results of man's sin upon Himself, Jesus' pain shows that the contradictions of history are not answered here, now -- many of these questions about suffering will never be ~~known~~ answered in this life --, but are only ultimately resolved on the level of the eternal and the divine.

3. As man suffering, Jesus showed that man in time, in history as opposed to timeless eternity, must become conscious of his guilt and his redemption. That redemption comes through faith in God through Christ here by realization of guilt and repentance, but is realized finally only when the soul has stepped into eternity.

Conclusion:

Suffering, as exemplified by Christ and as experienced by men, has great meaning for ~~Christ~~ men. Don't rebel at suffering. Profit by it.

