

2 Corinthians 11:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

Analysis

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. The climactic comparison begins: diakonoi Christou eisin (διάκονοι Χριστοῦ εἰσίν, 'are they ministers of Christ?'). Paul's answer hyper egō (ὕπὲρ ἐγώ, 'more I!')—grammatically fragmented by emotion. The parenthetical paraphronōn lalō (παραφρονῶν λαλῶ, 'I speak as one beside himself') indicates he knows this sounds mad.

The catalog of sufferings authenticates true apostolic ministry: **in labours more abundant** (en kopoīs perissotērōs, ἐν κόποις περισσοτέρως)—toilsome work unto exhaustion. **In stripes above measure** (en plēgais hyperballontōs, ἐν πληγαῖς ὑπερβαλλόντως)—beatings beyond counting. **In prisons more frequent** (en phylakais perissotērōs, ἐν φυλακαῖς περισσοτέρως)—imprisonments exceeding the norm. **In deaths oft** (en thanatois pollakis, ἐν θανάτοις πολλάκις)—near-death experiences repeatedly.

This inverts worldly boasting entirely. True servants of Christ are identified not by ease but by suffering, not by success but by sacrifice, not by acclaim but by affliction. Paul's 'more' is not more visions or more converts but more beatings and more imprisonments. This is the credentials list of cruciform ministry.

Historical Context

The Acts narrative records some of Paul's imprisonments and beatings (Acts 16:22-24; 21:30-33) but not all mentioned here. His missionary journeys involved constant danger (2 Cor 1:8-10; Acts 14:19; 19:23-41). The false apostles likely had no comparable suffering, suggesting their gospel was popular, not costly—a false gospel.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's catalog of sufferings challenge contemporary measures of ministerial success—numbers, budgets, buildings, influence?
2. In what ways might absence of suffering for Christ indicate compromise rather than blessing?
3. What would church culture look like if we honored scars more than credentials, sacrifice more than success?

Interlinear Text

διάκονοι	Χριστοῦ	εἰσιν	παραφρονῶν	λαλῶ	ὑπὲρ	ἐγώ·
ministers	of Christ	Are they	as a fool	(I speak	am more	I
G1249	G5547	G1526	G3912	G2980	G5228	G1473
ἐν	κόποις	περισσότερως	ἐν	πληγαῖς	ὑπερβαλλόντως	ἐν
in	labours	more abundant	in	stripes	above measure	in
G1722	G2873	G4056	G1722	G4127	G5234	G1722
φυλακαῖς	περισσότερως	ἐν	θανάτοις	πολλάκις		
prisons	more abundant	in	deaths	oft		
G5438	G4056	G1722	G2288	G4178		

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 15:10 (Parallel theme): But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

2 Corinthians 6:9 (Parallel theme): As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;

2 Corinthians 3:6 (Parallel theme): Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

Acts 9:16 (Parallel theme): For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Colossians 1:24 (References Christ): Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

Colossians 1:29 (Parallel theme): Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

1 Corinthians 3:5 (Parallel theme): Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

2 Timothy 2:9 (Parallel theme): Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.

Philemon 1:9 (References Christ): Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.