

A Fellowship of Suffering

As we continue going through the book of 1 Peter. Today the context of the teaching - is on **suffering as a believer**.

1 Peter 4:12–19 (NKJV) — 12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

Suffering is a major them of this book of 1 peter, as it is mentioned **17** times throughout the book. Here Peter reminds his readers that suffering was not to be considered as something unexpected or even odd for the believer. In fact, if we truly understand the spiritual battle that we are engaged in, then **we will expect to endure suffering as a result of following** Jesus as Peter noted back in chapter 2.

1 Peter 2:19–21 (NKJV) — 19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. **20** For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. **21 For to this you were called**, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

The context of suffering here in 1 Peter was **not just** enduring trials and tribulations which we all endure at times in our lives. But more in the context of suffering from persecution **as a result of** following Jesus.

This idea of actually experiencing persecution is somewhat foreign to us in America today. Oh, I know that some might experience some forms of persecution such as being singled out by their employer or being considered as an outcast by members of their family.

Not that those things are easy to deal with, but **they shallow in comparison to the persecution** that so many in the world experience today.

According to Gordon-Conwell Resources –

- there have been an estimated **70 million** Christians martyred for their faith through out history. And more than half of those death occurred during the 20th century.
- There is an estimated 100,000 to 160,000 Christians killed each year or their faith

So even though the reality of losing our life for our faith – currently seems distant to us. For so many in the world, that is not the case. But understand that those statistics may be hitting very close to home to us in the immediate future as we get closer and closer to the end.

But even **if we are not presently suffering direct persecution**, we **all** endure suffering resulting from trials and tribulations in this life. So, there is application that **we can all take** from these scriptures this afternoon concerning suffering.

1. **The first point** is that we all suffer at some point in our lives. Therefore, when we find ourselves in a season of suffering, it should not feel as though something is totally out of order. In other words, we should think it strange or odd that we suffer.

The verse from chapter 2 reminds us that as followers of Christ, **we were called to suffering**. Because Jesus also suffered leaving an example for us follow.

- But the point of our **suffering is not just for the sake of being miserable**. God is not just some cruel master who enjoys putting us under the fire. He is a loving and sovereign Creator who promises to work ALL things for the good in the life of the believer – even in seasons of suffering.

So even **when not if** - we suffer, God is using it for good in our lives. And that brings me to →

2. **The second point** is that we are to rejoice in the midst of our suffering. In fact the language used in the Greek makes this a command - not an option. We are commanded to constantly be rejoicing in the midst of the suffering.

But here is the key. We can only truly rejoice in suffering, if we believe that God in His sovereign goodness, has a purpose and plan in our suffering. **It is a matter of faith.**

If we think that what we are going through **is just by chance or at the control of man**, then we will never be able to have peace or joy **in the midst of our suffering**.

- But if we trust in the power and goodness of God, then we can rest assured that He **has a plan that He is working out through our suffering**. **And it is not for not**. This doesn't mean that it is easy, but it means that we can have hope in the mist of that suffering.

One purpose for suffering is to **prove or refine us**. Peter calls the suffering a fiery trial. How is gold purified but through the presence of intense heat.

But there is another element of suffering that we often fail to consider - Do you realize that in the **midst of suffering there is special fellowship that is experienced with Jesus** that apparently is not experienced any other way?

Paul noted concerning his relationship with Jesus -

Philippians 3:10 (NKJV) — 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Now Jesus Himself suffered for us and **our fellowship of suffering in NO WAY substitutes His sacrificial death for our sin.** In other words – we are not earning anything before God in our suffering, but instead, our suffering allows us to **identify with Jesus’s suffering.**

Being a self-martyr and placing my self on a cross would add nothing to my relationship with Christ. In fact, it would only hamper that relationship because by doing so, I would be putting my focus on myself instead of on Jesus.

We are to identify with our Savior’s suffering, **not attempt to become our own savior through suffering.**

We could never possibly add anything to what was accomplished through Jesus’s death on the Cross. We can **only surrender to what was already accomplished for us,** by willingly identifying with Jesus’s suffering.

Our hope in the mist of suffering **stand on the bedrock of our faith** in the Goodness of God.

- 3.** And this **brings me to the 3rd point** about suffering. Not only are we commanded to rejoice in the present. But we are promised that faithfulness through suffering will bring about an exceeding joy in the future.

13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, **that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.**

Alan Stibbs noted: “Suffering as a Christian confirms to us the fact that we are indeed Christ’s: ‘To share, therefore, in Christ’s sufferings here, is to be on the sure road to a share in His consequent glory hereafter”

I confess that I have do not have a full grasp on this idea of sharing in Jesus’ glory upon His return. I am certain that **we will also have abundance of joy when we finally experience His presence. But as for sharing in His glory** – that I do not understand. I just have to trust His word.

- 4.** My **4th and final point about suffering as a Christians** is that God is glorified when **we faithfully** endure suffering through the power of the Holy Spirit.

14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

I love this reminder from Spurgeon - **“If you do not share in Christ’s humiliation, how can you expect to share in His exaltation? But if worldly people begin to rebuke and reproach you, take it for granted that they can discern something of Christ in you.”**

But even when we faithfully suffer for Jesus. **We can receive no credit.** But it is the Holy Spirit working through us that enables us to faithfully endure with Jesus. I am always reminded that Eph 2:10 tells us that we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus.

This take such a **load off of my shoulders** when I am reminded that it is God **working through me.** I don’t have to somehow endure on my own nor is it about **ME!**

As far as experiencing persecution. I am confident that **if and when** we do experience it. We will not be enduring it on our own. **But it will be the Holy Spirit working through us, so that we may have the power to endure faithfully.** We must just keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

But the reality is that sometimes our suffering is not because of our faithfulness to God, but instead it the consequence of sin. And so, Peter warns us:

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. **16** Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

In our ME culture - It is hard for us to accept that life is not all about us. Life is not about what we can get out of it. But it is about glorifying God our Creator and Lord. Peter is reminding his audience that we are not here in this life for the purpose of **becoming something great** or **receiving great comfort** and **wealth.**

This is so opposite of the message that is given with the prosperity gospel today, which claims that true godliness will ensure health, wealth, and prosperity. **Nothing could be further from the truth.**

This life is not about our comfort or even our happiness. But it is about our Creator who in His mercy and love, chose to have fellowship with us, at **the cost** of His own Son.

17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? **18** Now “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” **19** Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

I do not have the time to cover these verses in detail but to put it in a nut-shell. **We are sinners in a fallen world.**

As sinners we must understand that our only chance of Salvation, came at a great cost to God. That price was the blood of His only Son, Jesus Christ. Peter said the righteous is scarcely saved.

Matthew 7:13–14 (NKJV) — 13 “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. **14** Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Regardless of what suffering or hardship that we experience in the present. We know that through the blood of Jesus Christ **we have the promise of eternal life.**

So, even if we must endure great discomfort and suffering in this life, we must continue to do what we know to be right as we commit ourselves to God in full faith. **Looking to what is eternal, not temporal.**

I am going to close with a reminder from Paul, who knew a thing or two about suffering for Jesus.

Romans 8:18 (NKJV) — 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Close in prayer -