

Righteousness triumphs in the darkness.

Can we hurt well? How do we suffer well? Is there a way in which our pain actually can achieve redemption? Is there a place where our pain is actually purposed for the benefit of helping others through their own pain?

It seems to be that that's the main thrust of I Peter as we've walked through it over the last 6-7 lessons. Peter is a man whose undergone tremendous suffering as a leader and we find Him writing to the scattered churches in this letter and encouraging them in their own suffering. As you can recall, this time in church history was a very dark time. The persecutions and treatment of the church under the reign of Nero can only be described as utter darkness, depravity and degradation.

The Christians of this day were being hunted down, slaughtered and punished for their beliefs, and it was all they could do simply to stay together and find refuge from the all out attack.

But in this letter do we find a surviving church? Do we find Peter simply encouraging others to do their best simply to stay above water? Or do we find a thriving a church...a church seemingly stronger than we would anticipate? Do we find a people more devoted to the truths of Scripture than you or I? Is it possible that out of this darkness and utter wickedness that the light of righteousness—the heart of Jesus—and the love He has to give actually multiplied?

It wouldn't be too hard to believe I guess. I Thessalonians 1:3-4; "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring." So, in the midst of intense persecution and trial the church of Thessalonica actually grew in their love for each other. It brought them together. It made them honest. It made them depend on each other and thus it strengthened everyone involved.

This is the kind of response that Peter is looking for here. In the intensity of wickedness and depravity he is not depressed. When things aren't going his way, or the church's way, it doesn't seem like he's despondent, but it actually seems to encourage his hope...as it should ours.

In many ways it seems almost foolish and silly to compare our troubles to what the church was going through in that time. There really is no comparison. But I think we still need to find the bridge between then and now. And we too live in a darkening day. Look around you. We don't celebrate life anymore, we actually kill it...then we go a step further and celebrate and glorify death. Death is Satan's territory, but yet our news headlines, destructive gossip columns, T.V. reality shows seem to display everything that's dark with the world. And you know what? We call it entertainment. It's a dark day indeed when like the Romans getting their kicks off of people getting killed mercilessly in coliseums, we too gather in our stadium seating to surround a altar-like

T.V. in order to find comedy in someone else's godlessness and misfortune.

It's in this culture that we live. It's dark. But you know what? In wickedness is when righteousness triumphs. The darker things are, the brighter the light shines. The more corrupt things become, the more marriage falls apart, the more relationships reach destruction—sex is perverted, pleasure abused, giftings, talents and treasure thrown into stupidity—the more this happens, the more the Christian stands out.

There is a way to suffer well, and this following chapter is going to show us how to do it in unity, action, word, remembering victory, and proclaiming openly the glory of God—go figure—we're going to do all this amidst our pain. How? Worship that's how.

Beginning with our unity in I Peter 4:8-9: Finally all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

How is it that we are unified? I mean, it seems in our countries and even in our churches we experience nothing but disunity—in our ideas, our beliefs, our occupations, our aspirations etc. How are we to be unified Peter?

Let's begin by giving an example of what people think unity is. Today unity in the mind of most people is based on *common preferences*, rather than *essential precepts*. What I mean by this is most people gather around people that are most like them. They find friends who are democrats just like them—they find people who value the same type of education for their kids—and we all collect flocks of people around us that think like we do. This is what we think to be unity—preferences.

In the eyes of the Bible, unity is much different. The Bible deems it to be a selfish preference to choose your future spouse in the way the sitcoms will tell you, but it also frowns upon this method in loving others in general. When it comes to loving those that are unbelievers, or let's just say those that aren't like us in the most important way—faith—we are to embrace an essential precept about them...they are valuable.

I'm a Dad and so I know how much it touches my heart when someone goes out of their way to bless my children. When someone speaks into their lives, or plays with them, or invests in them, it's as if they are directly touching my life. You know why? It's value. They are choosing to value me by embracing my reflection—my image—my likeness—my children. How much more is this for God when we embrace His children—made in His image—His likeness...?

I think a bottom line to embracing those that are different from you, has everything to do with *value*. Unity has everything to do with us embracing what God values, and has everything to do with us being a part of what God values. This passage is talking about the believer to the believer. It talks in terms of family—*brotherly love*. The Bible tells us that we are baptized in the Holy the Spirit. This means that there is neither slave nor free, Jew nor Gentile, male nor female; through Baptism we are united in Christ as family. *Brotherly love*.

Because of this unity and family implication we need to turn to how “we have unity of mind.” The Bible is going to give us a *precept* to unity not a *preference*. The Bible is going to connect us to each other far beyond simple hobbies’, sports teams, or common interests.

The Bible says we have the mind of Christ. Correct? Now many people use this phrase to speak on us being like Christ in our thoughts...maybe! Many people even use this verse to prove that we no longer sin because we have Christ’s mind, therefore it’s impossible to do so...I-----I don’t think so... And in all this interpretations they miss one key word.

We! We have the mind of Christ. Not I. Not You. Not individual—no—not ever.

As believers we are interconnected and each one of us contains a piece of God’s image. I have something none of you have, and vice versa. The only problem is when I become isolated, independent, self-sufficient. I therefore deprive you of something you need—me! You deprive me of something I need—you!

Whoo...just smashed our culture in the face, eh?

Our culture trains people to isolate: social media, video games, movies, bars, universities and study philosophies, cubicles, desks, lockers, your own room, your own house, your own car. You catch my drift. This is wrong. For Satan knows that when we lose each other we lose a bit of Christ. We can’t see Him fully. See there are people like me in the body who are endowed with musical gifts, teaching gifts etc. And if I were to embrace all of these people based on *preference*, I would ignore the rest of you. But there are also people who hold incredible wisdom in craftsmanship, organization, experience, Biblical knowledge etc. that I need! They need me and I need them. They have a piece of Christ that I need if I’m going to be all I can in Him—His image.

Brothers, in trials....

In suffering...

How important is this? It’s crucial.

During trials and suffering Satan wins if he isolates you because he cuts you off from the complete mind of Christ. Sure you have the Bible and I’m a WORD guy. The Scripture is beautiful and it is God’s pure truth. But in it it tells us about the importance of each other. If you withdraw and go away alone when you need “time” you’re a heretic...you’re unbiblical. You’re hurting yourself and you’re hurting the body. Not only are you cutting yourself off from what you need...Christ’s fullness...you’re also depriving the body of what they need...to serve...to bless...to have compassion...to come up alongside you and hold you up. That builds everyone up.

When someone’s sick in the hospital, have you ever seen how many different machines there are hooked up to that one person....different manufacturers...different mailing

addresses. It's a picture of the body of Christ. When there's sickness, we need everyone from different backgrounds, mailing addresses and giftings to come around that person and help them heal. It's what we were made for.

And you know what else it leads us to...? Humility. Also, mentioned in vs. 8-9. When we are there for each other we are forced to see that we too are subject to the same weaknesses. When we are dependent in some regard on the body—your family—and you see that you're interconnected...it makes you humble.

You can't look down on them, for you don't want them to look down on you. You can't look up to them in idolatry and vice versa. In that moment you see humanities failings and it fills you with compassions, tenderness and love for them and for yourself. You need God, and so do they. Suffering does two things when it comes to this. It's cause and effect. It causes us to see what God wants us to see...our familial bond...our unity...our dependance. And it affects us by driving us to seek this familial bond out. The more we seek it out, the more we find we need it.

You know what...it's in this that we become stronger.

Worship God in unity...and worship God in word and action.

Vs. 10-12 For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Is this a jump? It seems like a jump from unity. But it's not. You know how Satan seeks to divide you from each other? Well this is one of the ways he does it—words. “Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me.” You heard that? Bull! Correct: “Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will destroy me.” Not only the words we speak to one another, but to ourselves.

It also seems like a jump from suffering. But not for Peter. He implores us, that if we want to see good days, we better harness our tongues. There's something about what we say that can heal us of our suffering or bring about even more suffering.

These people are suffering ya'll! Isn't that when you find that your words do the most damage? You start cussing, you lose your patience, you say something that you regret, you gossip, you slander, you malign, you self-deprecates, put yourself down...cynical...negative...hopeless... It's true of me. But the thing is, it can't be true of people who are righteous and who seek to shine. The whole world is filled with words of destruction; if you're filled with words of the truth, you're going to stick out. Like a SWEET THUMB you're going to stick out.

God teaches some very important things about our words in the Bible. Understanding His perspective on this is going to teach you a lot about unity and the *precepts* for relationship. It's also going to teach about the importance of what you say. This will

help get you through suffering, and alleviate it as well. Words can be uniters or dividers. I'm going to give you a quick theology:

Your words frame your world. They set boundaries for your life. The borders you set with your words become the things that destroy you or keep you safe. Proverbs 13:2 says, "A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth". When someone says something about you, do you repeat it? Well you just agreed with it. Your heart is like your house and you just took down that part of your fence and let that dwell on your property—in your bed—in your refrigerator.

Christianity is called the great confession. We see that words are like magnets. They draw whatever we say with our mouth and believe in your heart. (Mark 11:22-24). Think about that. Whatever comes out of your mouth is what you will draw to yourself. Ever notice that? People who are self-deprecating, negative, mean, and hostile in their words, may even think in their minds that they are getting people's attention. They're crying for help, and deep down they want you and I to love them. They are hurting.

But do they get attention?

NO!

Usually people give them what they DON'T want. They ignore them, isolate them and reject them. Their words are creating boundaries and allowing the very thing that they want to stay out, and are letting them in. Prov. 11:17 states that, "a man who is kind benefits himself, but a cruel man hurts himself. Ultimately hurt people hurt. The reason they are the way they are is because there's shame there, and they act as if they don't want good to come to them. They do, but they don't. It's odd.

This is why there is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him. Why going out? That seems opposite. I mean if you put bad food in your body it seems it defiles you, right? That's external? Right. Wrong.

Someone used this analogy. They took a glass full of water and broke it with the hammer. They asked the crowd full of physicists to state why the water was on the floor. Assuredly, they gave all their scientist answers—gravity, equal and opposite reaction etc. But the pastor said, "there's water on the floor because there is water in the glass." Brilliant.

You can't help but observe the vileness around you. It's everywhere. However, once you lose guard on your heart and start to speak the vileness out, it shows you've embraced it and taken it into your heart. The reason the vileness pours out is because theirs vileness in the glass. The reason a person drinks, cusses, sleeps around over eats, self-deprecates, cuts, overworks, stresses, worries etc. is because that's what's in them. It's not externally someone or something else's fault. It's you.

Remember Prov 18:20-21. When we speak, even the devil hears and will try to put things in your path to try to get you to stop or change what you are saying, in other words

make you waver. Get that! The devil can't hear your thoughts he can only hear your words. When he sees your words, he can infer upon what's going on in your heart and he capitalizes on it.

On the contrary, we enlarge our borders with our words (Isa 54:1-3). In Ezek 37:1-10 God told Ezekiel to prophesy (speak to) the bones (problem). The only way for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. When a problem comes into your life, speak the word of God against it. We have to use God's WORD as our weapon. We have to use praise as our weapon.

Praise is the greatest weapon of all. Think of it...in the middle of suffering too. What is praise to the devil? It's defeat, that's what it is. If he sees his whole arsenal go down through our praises he's utterly frustrated. When we praise God and choose to fill our heart with Him, then our attention is on . Again it's like your house—your territory. Everything bad stays outside the fence and you only embrace and think upon the things that you let through your gate—thoughts of Him, beauty, hope, salvation, kingdom.

Now I'm not saying be a DENIAL Christian and don't help those in need because you don't want to deal with it. Praise is higher than this. Praise embraces and reveals the goodness of God, and when the heart's house is filled with treasure there is no room in the wall to wall display for evil to dwell. Satan knows this, and he can't do anything about it. Again, remember Satan can't create anything. He can only work with what you give him. He can only twist and deceive, not create. If there's nothing there to work with then he can't create havoc out of nothing. You're disabling him.

Peter is telling this to the scattered Christians because he knows the human tendency. We all tend to isolate and not unify in trial, and we all tend to use our words in not so right ways as well. Not only this, but our actions soon follow suit as well.

Vs. 10-12 says, "Keep from evil—seek peace and pursue it." Again this is huge to our dealing with suffering. Peter once again is going to piggy back off our unity and our words, and he's going to add one more thing that will help us persevere through suffering in order to gain victory—action.

Primarily I think I deal with suffering defensively. That means when suffering, temptation, trial, sin or anything "wicked seeming" arises, I'm on the defensive. I'm staring at the problem, consumed with the problem and I'm doing everything I can to walk around the problem. The only thing is, when your eyes are looking toward something, where does your body tend to go...toward what you're looking at right.

Well in the midst of our trial we're focused on the problem, then that's where our words will go, that's where our time will go and that's where our actions will go. It's not good.

But Augustine, a famous monk and probably the greatest contributing theologian to church history could not defeat his own struggle with lust, God led him to Romans 13:14 where it says "make no provision for the flesh, but rather clothe yourself with righteousness." Up until that point Augustine was on the defensive. He was simply trying to say no to his flesh, while almost comedically that's all he was thinking about. It

doesn't make sense. But when he realized that defeating sin is "Offensive," it changed everything. Augustine realized that the only way to defeat sin was to fill up with righteousness. This is how you defeat sin and honor Christ.

When you turn toward righteousness you are positioning your back toward sin. You're not turning toward sin to try and defeat it because then you have your back to righteousness. Does this make sense? Well, Augustine devoted himself to the study of Scripture, discipleship, righteous living, monastic life etc. He poured himself into the things of God and found that all of sudden his flesh had no place to sit anymore. He was too full. "He truly made no provision for the flesh."

That's offensive, and that's how you defeat suffering, trial and temptation. You don't fight it directly by looking at it. It's too strong for you. You can't. You fight it indirectly by seeking righteousness so avidly that soon you're overflowing with Jesus and there is no room for Satan to work.

Remember, he can only work with what you give him. He's not God. He's just crafty. He's not even very smart—I mean he can't even create. But he's deceptive because he gets you believing that he can.

Vs. 13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,

Perfect love drives out fear. If you're not looking at them, you aren't afraid of them. This is the offensive idea.

When do you freak out in regards to a spider? When you see one, right? Well you weren't scared previously before. You were unaffected—going about your day, doing dishes, playing with the kids, until you LOOKED at it. Then your day stopped, you're up on the couch, swinging from the ceiling fan, freaked out—dehabilitated.

Again, the advice...the Bible's answer. Do good. If you're zealous for doing good, you're not even going to see evil. You might run into a trial because of the good things you're doing, but it's not effective in stopping you.

Vs. 15, "but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy,"

Dedicate yourselves to the separateness of Christ. You will be different. Be a rebel—a rebel with a cause.

Some of you like to be rebels. The only problem is, you're walking around with tats, smoking weed, back talking your parents, ignoring your kids, disobeying authority, shunning government, deceiving, spending your money on yourself, refusing to listen etc. whereas anyone can do that. That's easy. You're not a rebel you're a wuss.

Man up. Be a real rebel. Do what's hard. Do the right thing! Rebel against fear by doing what is good. You are shunning wicked suffering, by focusing on praise. You are

defeating self-deprecation by Holy affirmation. You are overriding suffering with LIGHT. RIGHTEOUSNESS ALWAYS GETS THE VICTORY. You're not helpless in all of this. God's light is stronger and brighter than your present darkness. So stop acting in a way that indicates He's weak or absent from your situation.

Next verse: "always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

Why would you have to defend right action? It's because people are going to see your ludicrous behavior in the midst of suffering and wonder how you do it. You know what happens, it gives you a chance to share Jesus—your hope—your strength—your joy—your reason. So suffering is not only going to give you a chance to do the right thing, say the right thing, and value the right thing, but you're also going to be a witness through it all.

The famous old saying says "share your faith at all times, when necessary use words." This is how it works, but don't stop there. Don't use it as a crutch. Don't cut this scripture short. In this passage it's talking about actions and restraint. Both. You have to define yourself not only by what you're against (Restraint), but you have to display what you're for (Action, Righteousness). Live a life that demands questioning (restraint), but also live a life of action. And when people ask you about your actions, give them an answer—with your words.

It's about your actions, but remember, it's also about your words. They have to go together. They validate each other.

- IN THIS WAY: **16**having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. **17**For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Huge people...just huge.

This is the kind of worship and Christ-light that is created in unity, action and word. This is what Peter is trying to get across to us. In the midst of all the suffering that's going on, he's continuing to provide us options—ways out. It's through our unity to one another, our words, and our actions. Peter is saying, don't let the suffering steal your unity and isolate you from the family of God. Don't go off in your room by yourself, don't cut yourself off from church, don't self-deprecate and spiral into depression meds and suicide. Don't let your words get the best of you and harm others as well. Don't act on your foolish impulses to lust, drink, overeat, overwork, check out, or simply turn and do evil in retaliation. And don't let suffering get you thinking you're defenseless, because you're not—live righteously.

...now in closing...pre-closing...

I'm not just kidding I'm serious, Peter ends with this odd tag about Christ appearing to spirits in bondage to proclaim his death—in the time of Noah.

What an odd tag!!!?!?!?

It doesn't seem to fit...It didn't seem right to me either until I started to try and understand Peter's train of thought here.

In verses **18-20** it says this, "or Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water..." Let's stop there for right now.

I'm going to give you a real quick theology lesson here in order to illustrate the point I believe Peter's trying to communicate to the scattered church amidst their suffering. This also contains truth and encouragement about your suffering as well.

In this passage, I believe Jesus, after his resurrection, went to declare His victory over the demons and that the spirits in this passage. You say, "Why do you...why do you say demons?" Because these spirits were in...what?...prison. They were in prison. Now this could not be a message of salvation to demons, why? Because demons can't be saved. By the way, nowhere in Scripture are the souls of men ever said to be imprisoned.

Now his message here was not a salvation message, it was a *kerusso*, it was a heralding of triumph. You say, "Well why would He go and herald a triumph to a bunch of demons?" Well this all has to do with suffering, so stay with me.

There are loosed Demons and bound demons in Scripture. Regardless of their state, they are all at odds with God, and they have been since the beginning. However, this verse is speaking of the bound demons. Jude verse 6, "Which ones, Jude, which ones were put in the prison?" Well he says, verse 6, "And angels who did not keep their own domain but abandoned their proper abode He has kept in eternal chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day." This verse refers us back to Genesis during an instance when the demons overstepped their domain.

- Genesis 6:1, we're way back now in the time of Noah. "It came about when men began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them," listen carefully, "that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, they took wives for themselves whomever they chose. Then the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with men forever because he is also flesh, nevertheless his days shall be 120 years, the Nephilim were on the earth in those days and also afterward when the sons of God came into the daughters of men and they bore to them, those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown."

You say, "What in the world is this?" I'll tell you what it is. Sons of God are demons,

sons of God is a term used in the Old Testament to refer to angels. And what you have here is fallen angels who came down, took on human bodies in some kind of form, cohabitated with women and produced a generation of Rosemary's babies...if you remember that story. Some kind of a demonic hybrid. They wanted to pollute humanity and leave it unredeemable. By the way, people of this time would have known this well from the book of Enoch which was a book circulated during this time.

Vs. 20, "When the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah during the construction of the ark in which a few, that is eight persons, were brought safely through the water."

Oh, now we know when it was, it was during the time of...what?...of Noah. So there is a prison filled with bound demons who have been there since the time of Noah and they were sent there because they overstepped even the bounds that God has established on their own wickedness. And it was during the time when Noah spent 120 years building an ark.

During this time evil was total, God drowned the demonic activity. God flooded the world because of the completeness of the evil, depravity and wickedness. So these demons have been in prison for a long time. When Jesus came to the cross, the demons and all of hell thought "We've won," and all those demons in the pit might have thought that somebody got the keys from Jesus, namely Satan, and they're down there hoping this might be the moment of their release. In the midst of this, Jesus shows up, and Col. 2:14-15 tells us of the possible tone of his message to them: "This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

This is key in the midst of suffering, for what causes havoc in the world? People, sin and demonic activity. These demons were sitting in prison just salivating at the idea of getting into the torturous action. They wanted to help in causing the Christians to suffer. By stating Jesus testimony to them, Peter is reminding believers that they are already victorious. No matter how evil Nero's persecutions and evil must seem, those in that day would have been much more aware than even you or I of the atrocities that took place in the day of Noah.

If Christ is victorious and was victorious even in the days of Noah, then there is and will never be any suffering that's too great for Him. There's hope in remembering His victory.

We're almost home: **Vs. 21** "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Peter launches into another seemingly weird statement amidst all this suffering—theology of Baptism. But if you think about it, baptism is an extremely timely subject to mention for baptism is a proclamation of an inward reality. We show through our

plunging below the water and rising again, that we were killed with Christ and reborn in Him. Therefore, baptism is a visual testimony, proclamation and symbol of this—that the demons lost.....it's sarcasm.

I really believe Peter is using sarcasm here. He's rubbing it in the imprisoned demons face. That's what Baptism does. It's a proclamation of victory. It's a God-LIKE sarcastic slap in the face to the plot of evil. This is comedic. Peter, in the same way Christ heralded his victory over the demons, is imploring us to do the same. I don't know Peter well enough to infer this, but could it be possible that he broke out of his denominational support hose and did a jig? Did Peter dance when he said this? Did he scoff?

Oh man. I do. I love it; all of this. Peter is telling these suffering people in the midst of it all to stand up and take a bow in the middle of the enemy's boos, hisses, fruit throwing, and violent upheaval. He's telling them not to be proud in their flaunting, but to be humble—yet flaunting just the same.

Brothers and sisters, we need to flaunt our unity, our words and our actions. We need to lavish praise, our proclamations of victory openly, symbolically, baptismically, and evangelistically.

If you don't get the victory, you can't live with authority and righteousness triumphs in the darkest of places (Noah, Sodom and Gomorrah). We need to go back to I Peter 4 and "arm ourselves with this same attitude." We need to arm ourselves with this same strategy.

We need to worship in unity and excel in our love for each other. We need to live offensively toward evil in our actions rather than defensively. We need to need to do in our words and our actions. Through it all, my friends, boldly proclaim His victory openly for the world and the demons to hear. Peter gives us almost a comedic end to all this hopelessness. He's saying, the curtain to this drama has already been closed. Laugh and celebrate in victory. Let your words, your actions, your celebration together in unity, and your expressions of testimony reflect your joyful understanding that it's finished. You've won.

In a side-step sort of way, Peter is telling all these people in the midst of their stuff, to lay it all down and do a jig. Do a dance. Play a little ditty. The Lord who triumphed even over the dismal suffering in Noah's day is big enough to conquer it in our present day. In the cross we rejoice in our victory. It's been won. It's been paid. Let's act it out, speak it out and let our joy bring us together.



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