

Victory over suffering

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[0 : 00] The reading is from 1 Peter, chapter 1, verses 1-16. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's select exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of God.

The Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood. Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

In all of this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

[1 : 39] Though you have not seen him, though you have seen him, though you have seen him, you have seen him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him, and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing, when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Even angels longed to look into these things. Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

[3 : 10] For it is written, be holy, because I am holy. Amen. Thank you so much, Norma, for the reading this morning.

So this morning we're in 1 Peter. Peter, an apostle who had spent time with Jesus through his ministry and had seen and been with the risen Lord Jesus.

And he's writing to these people who had not seen the Lord Jesus. And he said to them, who having not seen, ye love.

And you know, the words of Jesus said, Blessed are those who have not seen, but who have believed. And that's because the work of the Holy Spirit has worked in their lives.

They have seen through the opening of their eyes by the Holy Spirit. They have seen, first of all, that they are sinners and they need righteousness because the judgment of God is upon sin.

[4 : 32] And they have seen that Christ is their righteousness and he is their only hope. And they have come as a people to trust in the Lord Jesus.

And you know, to the majority of people, they don't see anything much in the cross. They devise ways through possibly the world or whatever.

They've worked their own way to try to hope that they'll get there in the end. But there's only one way. And that way is through the cross and resurrection of Christ, through trusting in him and what

he has done.

And, you know, it's a precious thing for those who, by the Holy Spirit, have their eyes open to see the power of God at work.

And Peter is writing to these people who'd experienced that power of God in their life. But now they're going through some difficulties. There's problems and suffering and trials.

[5 : 46] And his message to them is this. That even though they have suffering and trial in their life, there is victory. There is victory. And that's what he wants to bring them before them in this.

And, you know, Peter is not a fellow that was immune to suffering. You know, we can think of Peter. And we can say he's well suited to speak on this subject because Peter was in prison.

And he was due to be executed the following day. And we see Peter there sleeping soundly in the prison between two guards. You know, he could trust in God in all those situations.

The Bible tells us that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. And there's varying degrees in that.

I think if we went out to some foreign country, way out beyond, we would find maybe severe utter persecution, which would result maybe in our death or whatever.

[6 : 50] It would be maybe a terrible persecution. And then when we come to Ireland, we see that things are changing a bit in Ireland. But we have a country that is very acceptable.

And you could say, like, we have very little persecution. And we can kind of come to the fact that conclusion that, well, there's no persecution here really as such.

But I think we have in some way undertones of persecution. Because when you trust the Lord Jesus, you're going to face something.

You're going to face because you're going to be going the other way to the way the world is going. So it's wrong to think there's absolutely nothing. You know, I know a man that I think he felt that way.

He felt there was, well, there was no persecution or anything around Skibbereen. He came through the Holy Spirit, came into his life and revealed to him that he was going in the wrong direction and that he needed Christ.

[7 : 55] And so he came by the power of the Holy Spirit to believe in the Lord Jesus. And I suppose he was a fellow that he was downtown most every second night anyway.

And he had a particular premises that he was going into. And just because the power of the Lord came on him, for no other reason, he stopped going to that place.

But one night he needed to meet someone and they were in that pub. So he went in there and he opened the door.

And it was a bit like here this morning. Everyone was chattering mad. And, you know, we just say, we're going to do the first hymn for people to quieten down. Well, that pub, when he opened the door, the noise of the pub came to at him.

And all his old friends were in there and people that knew him. And all the noise came towards him. But when he opened the door and stepped in, the whole place just went silence.

[8 : 53] You could hear a pin drop in that place. And that happened in Skibreen. That, you know, there was such a reaction to the change that had been in him that it quietened everyone in that place.

And he didn't think that his life, there was much of a difference for people to see. But obviously the people did see that there was a difference in his life.

And 1 Peter 4 and 4 tells us, we didn't read this morning, but it tells us that they will think it's strange that you don't run in the way you used to run.

There's something strange about a Christian in comparison with the average people. There's a broad role of people running in a certain direction. But the Christian has changed by meeting the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit and through the work of God the Father in them.

You know, I started reading 1 Peter 1 with today in mind. And the words of an old preacher that I heard somewhere came to mind and it said, if you're ever preaching a message, read it, read it, read it, read it, read it.

[10 : 17] So I did that. I read it, read it, read it, and I read it again. But the next time I read it, I said, that sounds completely different. Well, the reason for that was that I made a mistake.

I was in 2 Peter 1. Chapter 1. But when I looked up at the page and I saw 2 Peter 1, I also saw a note up there and it said, the difference between 1 Peter and 2 Peter is this.

That 1 Peter is talking about going out the door into the world. And 2 Peter is talking about coming in to the church.

It's when you go out there, you have a battle out there. There is a battle in one way or another. It could be your health. It could be anything. But there's a battle out there. And there'll be a certain amount of resentment with your belief in Jesus.

And as you come in here, you have to watch what happens in here. You're in the family of God. It's a wonderful place. But we have to be true to the word of God and what is said and what is preached.

[11 : 24] And 2 Peter deals with that. So Peter is writing to Jews and Gentiles, a vast area. It mentions the places like Galatia, Cappadocia, and Asians, and so on.

And he's writing to Jew and Gentile in a wide area. Now we're people from different parts of West Cork, but I think this is a wider area that he's talking about here. But he mentions there a place called Pontus.

And it just reminds me, whether there is a connection or not, I'm not sure, but it's the same place. But on the day of Pentecost, there was people in Jerusalem and they were far from Pontus.

When the Holy Spirit descended on tongues of fire and they came out speaking in foreign languages. And there were people from all different areas.

People heard their own language. And there was people there that day from Pontus. And it's quite possible that some of the people that were there that day from Pontus when Peter spoke, that they are some of the people that are receiving this letter from Peter.

[12 : 42] That day, the Holy Spirit came upon that people that heard. And there was 3,000 people came to trust in the Lord that day.

And the work of the Holy Spirit today is the very same. You know, it might be one person today would come and what a wonder that would be.

What an amazing thing and a glorious thing for them and for us and for the future. And in heaven they would be rejoicing. The work of the Holy Spirit that happens today, he changes people's lives. And you know, in verse 2, he talks about, I have the King James Version, but it says, elect according to the foreknowledge of God. And the work of salvation involves the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We're elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through the sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. So the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are involved in salvation.

[13 : 59] We're elect according to the foreknowledge of God. The Holy Spirit brings us to a place where we see Christ clearly as our only way. And his blood was shed for us.

And we apply in obedience to that, the blood of Christ to us. And we know that that is our hope. That the risen Jesus is our hope. And that he paid in full in his blood for us on the cross, so that we could have peace.

And Peter goes on to say, peace and grace be multiplied to you. And you know, he speaks here and he tells them that, King James says, they're strangers.

He said to them, you're a stranger in the world. To the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, and so on. He tells them they're strangers. And in chapter 2, verse 11, he calls them strangers and pilgrims.

And in verse 9, he calls them a peculiar people. A people that are different. And what is so strange about believers is this.

[15 : 13] That we're living on earth just like everyone else's. But we're belonging to a heavenly kingdom. And we have a new hope. And we're going out into a battle, which might be very obvious to us, or maybe not so obvious to us.

But it's there. And you know, Peter went out. And he thought he was equipped. But he ended up denying Jesus. But the thing is that Jesus had warned him in advance.

And he had prayed for him. In Luke 22, verse 32, Jesus said to Peter, Satan desires to have you, to sift you as wheat.

But I have prayed for you. And after you've been restored, strengthen the brethren. And that's what Peter is doing here. He's strengthening the brethren.

He's feeding us. And he's giving them and he's giving them and us encouragement that there is victory in no matter what you're facing today.

[16:21] It might be persecution. It might be family. It might be health. It could be lots of things. But there is victory, especially when it comes to your battle that you have as a person that's been changed by the Lord going out into the world.

There is victory. And Peter doesn't say, this is the way to escape. One time I was doing a bit of karate and this black belt.

And I said to him, what is the best way to defend yourself? And he said, run. And you know, Peter's not telling them the best way to escape suffering is to run away from it.

But he's saying the best way is this, to see it through the lens of Christ's resurrection and your identity with him and the future glory that is yours and mine in him.

And you know, when I look back, I look back to a time when I really felt I was in the furnace of difficulty in my life.

[17:37] And Shirley as well, we went through a really bad, difficult patch. And you know, in my experience of it, I feel that I was going through this and it was a time when I was clinging on to God.

But it was a time also when I felt that I was being challenged and maybe there was an accusing voice in my head saying, you're going through this because God is absent.

God has, you know, you're not really who you are. But as I cried to God in that difficulty, I found that God was a real help in that time of trouble.

And you know, it was a funny thing that there was a great closeness with God through that. And you know, even since that time many years on, I have met people that have asked me different things about the Lord.

And it was in relation to the fact that at that great time of victory, of difficulty, they saw something of victory in the way that we got through that.

[18:57] And they knew that God was a part of that. And he asked questions. So although people may think you're strange in some ways, that you don't run with him in the way that you do, God may be taking you through something that will actually show people that the realness of God is shown when you're up against it.

And I think, you know, Isaiah 48 and verse 10, it speaks about, you know, that it's the nation of Israel, but it applies to us as well that, you know, God says, I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.

And how difficult a place that has to be. No one wants to be there. But if God is there with you, you'll get through it. And, you know, Peter says, in relation to the suffering that these believers were going through, in verse 6 he said, you know, in verse 6 he says, Don't know for a season, if need be, you're in heaviness through the trials you're having.

So there is a season that you will go through, or you may need to go through, or God needs to carry you through that season. It's going to be difficult. But, you know, you can even rejoice in that season and in that difficulty.

And in strengthening the brethren, Peter gives them four facts in four verses to help them and us in a battle that is out there that we face.

[20:39] And they are, number one, that we have a living hope. We've been singing it this morning. What wonderful words that we were singing. That we have a living hope in verse 3.

And we have an imperishable and unfading inheritance in verse 4. And in verse 5, we have God's power is at work for us.

And in verse 2, we were chosen according to his foreknowledge. We have God's plan for us. So we have a living hope.

We have an unfading inheritance. We have God's power for us. And we have God's plan for us.

And that living hope that we have in verse 3 is centered on the resurrection of Christ.

He is alive. He is real in your life. Come with the power of the Holy Spirit. Ask him into your life. He will be with you no matter what you face.

[21:40] You have a certain sure hope in this life when you have Jesus in your life. And you have an inheritance that is imperishable, uncorruptible.

And, you know, it's a certainty because it's kept in heaven for you. You know, we can see the uncertainty of the world. We can see in a week how much people have panicked.

But, you know, for the Christian, there's absolute certainty because our hope is in the living Christ.

And, you know, God's power is at work in us.

And that's in verse 5. And verse 5, it tells us that that's working through faith. God has given us that faith that we need to put into action.

And I think if we're getting caught up in other things, then our faith is getting weaker. And we need to be strong in the faith, knowing that nothing is impossible for God.

[22 : 43] Because God has brought us through the most difficult of circumstances. And he will bring you through what you're facing today or tomorrow. And, you know, the Bible talks about rejoicing here in verse 6.

Rejoicing in the trials you face. You know, that seems very hard. But it is possible. I have, in my own experience, experienced the joy in the time of difficulty.

And James 1 and verse 2, he says, Consider it pure joy when you're going through these difficulties. That's hard to comprehend, but it's real.

And that's what the Bible tells us about that. And that can be ours. Because what God is doing in trials that come our way, he's bringing us through.

He's refining us with fire. But he's causing us as well in the difficulty to really get to know him. And to find that he is there at the toughest of times.

[23 : 48] And no matter what we face, he will be there with us. And, you know, there's an inexpressible joy that we get in difficulties. Verse 8.

Which is also ours in good times, of course. But we have God's plan then for us. We were chosen according to his foreknowledge. God has picked us.

He has a plan for us. And before the foundation of the world, he chose Jesus to be our way to heaven. To be the only way to heaven. And this morning, if you're depending on any other way, you're not going to make it.

But Jesus is the way. And that is a way that is certain and sure. And a hope that you can have. And, you know, it said that he was chosen before the foundation of the world.

And Peter tells us, for you. It was for you. It was for me. We can take it for sure and for fact and by faith today. And, you know, it's such an amazing plan that God has.

[24 : 54] That, you know, the prophets, we can look back and we can look back to the cross. The prophets were looking forward. And they were looking to the one who was coming. And they were looking to God's plan.

And they were searching diligently all about this. And it says even the angels, they long to look into it. And it's so amazing, the plan of God. And it's so vast and so enormous that we'll never, ever get to the end of it.

And, you know, it's so amazing that God should look upon me or you in our such a helpless state and so far gone. And yet, through Christ, bring us into that living hope and sharing in his resurrection.

And sharing in God's power in our life. And give us that in life when we were without hope. Hope. He gave us hope. And we have hope all the way to glory.

And there will be glory at the end for all of us who trust Christ. Because he is sure and certain when there is so much uncertainty around. And, you know, we go out and we'll face whatever we'll face.

[26 : 05] Suffering. There's a season in the furnace of affliction that might be behind us. It might be before us. Or maybe it's with us right now. Or maybe, as I say, things are going well for you.

Thank God that things are going well for you. But wherever you stand right now, you're in God's plan. And, you know, you're here at this time to hear this message this morning.

For such a time as we're facing in this country and in the world. You're here now listening to what God is saying for a reason.

That he has a plan for you. And you're here for such a time as this. And, you know, verse 13 tells us to stand up and to step out as who you are in Christ.

Your identity is in Christ. You have four realities that have been presented this morning to take away. And they're there to encourage you. And to set your mind for action.

[27 : 08] You know, we're called to action. To be believers for Christ. And to stand up in a world that doesn't know him. And, you know, he is holy. God is holy.

And that puts a demand and a certain emphasis upon our life, certainly. That because he is holy in every way.

And it's he who called you. That we are to be holy as he is holy. We are to be holy in our life. And, you know, that will speak to other people.

Who may think we're strange. But they will see something in our life. Of what Jesus is doing in our life. And the application this morning, I think, for us is to be encouraged. We have four facts to take with us away. But the message is to stand up. And, you know, Christ has done all this for you. You are to keep going this morning.
[28 : 05] In Christ. Amen. Amen.