

On the Right Track

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Keep your Bibles open at 1 Peter 4. They struggled.

It's funny, isn't it? Flat packs, they never kind of seem to work how you think they should. You get all your screws lined up. You study the instructions. You keep them with you.

But then this always happens. And you think, I must be doing something wrong here. I must be doing something wrong. Now, we're going to continue in the book of 1 Peter today.

It's written to Christians who are suffering for following Jesus. And there's not a threat to their life yet. There's a threat to an easy life, though.

Subtle suffering. That's what we've been calling it, isn't it? Sidelining, the slander for being a Christian. In this passage, you might see insults. Just those kind of low-level things that communicate to you, you don't really belong here.

[1 : 27] You don't belong. And we feel this, don't we? I think I mentioned this before, but it might be that at the Christmas due this year, because you're a Christian, now you're that weird grandpa left alone in the corner, in case you bring up all that God stuff again.

At the office, it's those subtle dicks. Are you actually going to live a bit? Are you actually going to come out with us? Just at least get a bit tipsy with us on Friday.

Just go back to verse 4 from last week. Verse 4, 1 Peter 4. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless wild living, and they heap abuse on you.

You don't join the banter. You don't believe the right things to get along. Always a few seconds away from getting cancelled. You love Jesus.

You follow him. You stick out. And this is what you get. This kind of flack. And all this makes us wonder, are we doing it wrong?

[2 : 35] Are we doing it wrong? Three reasons for that, I think. One, we didn't think we signed up for it. Two, we think we haven't got enough faith.

If I believed a bit more, well, my strong faith would mean that I wouldn't get this sort of suffering. But three, we thought we could be that one to toe the line between being that all-out-for-Jesus Christian and the cool Christian, the popular Christian, the well-liked Christian, the respected Christian that everybody likes.

So any subtle suffering we get, you might think, because I'm not winsome enough. I'm not tactful enough. I'm not kind enough. I'm not normal enough.

If I were just a bit more culturally relevant, if I didn't take this so seriously, if I was just a bit better socially in these situations with people at work, I wouldn't be getting this flack.

Are we doing it wrong? When it feels costly, what we need is reassurance that we are not doing it wrong.

[3 : 56] We are doing it right. Suffering for Jesus is actually the evidence you're on the right track. You are on the right track if you're suffering for Jesus.

Firstly, don't be surprised by suffering, he says. Don't be surprised. It's normal. Have a look at verse 12. 1 Peter 4, verse 12. Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something was strange or surprising were happening to you.

It kind of feels like the fiery trial. And we get those insults. That's what he means by the fiery trial.

We might think, what's happening to me? What am I experiencing this? Don't be surprised.

Verse 13. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ. This is revision from last week, if you were here.

When you trust in Jesus, you get everything he has for free. This is the wonderful thing about being a Christian, better than any world religion, better than any secular philosophy.

[5 : 08] You get salvation for free. You get heaven for free. You get sufferings for free. If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

That's what Jesus said. If you're following Jesus, you're following him to the cross. Jesus' sufferings come as part of a package deal in salvation.

Don't be surprised when you face it. It's what being connected to Jesus means. It's what we signed up for.

Now, can you imagine if you saw the RNLI and you saw them saving somebody, wow, I want to do that. That looks really cool. I want to do that. Saving people, great job.

I'll be looking like a hero. It would be ridiculous when you signed up and it was your first day and you got your first call out. He said, wait, I've got to get in that boat, have I?

[6 : 13] What? I didn't know I was doing that. I'll get CeCe. That's what I'd say. What did you think you were signing up for? The captain would say.

Christian, what did you think you were signing up for? Now, it's possible you're surprised at suffering because the pitch you heard about Jesus was actually a sham.

Believe in Jesus and everything will be fine. Have enough faith and you'll be fine. But for most of us, it's something a little bit more subtle, isn't it? Now, I heard a Christian tell this story of a man recently who, well, sadly, he died and he was at his funeral.

They were close friends. And he said about him, he was such a lovely man, a really good Christian man. And he spoke about Jesus at every opportunity. He was just such an on fire for Jesus Christian.

And do you know what? Everyone loved him and he was so popular. And he managed to toe that line. But kind of fitting in and being a Christian, hardly anyone can do that.

[7 : 26] And just his Christian friends loved him and his colleagues loved him. And then he said, do you know what's amazing thing about this man? Is that he doesn't exist. He doesn't exist.

I made it up, he said. Verse 12 and 13 say that this man rarely, if ever, exists. Look, you might be a newer Christian.

Maybe you're not in a position if you try to experience suffering right now because you maybe just don't see anybody. You're not around other people. But the normal experience in normal circumstances, which is most of us, is to suffer for following Jesus.

If you've never really experienced any flack, if it's never really been that hard to live as a Christian, that should surprise you.

What Jesus are you following? But for most of us here, we faced it, the subtle suffering.

[8 : 34] And this is here to reassure us. We think we're doing it wrong because we think I'm not normal enough, I'm not tactful enough.

And then that suffering surprises us. We think we're doing it wrong. Think about Jesus for a minute. I'm going to say that Jesus was probably the most winsome man there was.

And he got crucified. And we follow in his footsteps. So it doesn't matter how winsome you are, really. It doesn't matter how tactful you are, really.

It doesn't matter how relational you are, really. It doesn't matter how of a long run-up you give. It doesn't matter how normal you try and be. It doesn't matter how culturally relevant you try to be.

Living like a Christian will always bring flack.

You look different. You don't belong. So listen to Peter here. You're not doing it wrong. You're doing it right. You're on the right track.

[9 : 42] Don't be surprised. Keep going. But next, a little bit more reassurance. It's so unsurprising, in fact.

It actually acts like evidence. You're on the way to heaven. Suffering reassures us. And it reassures us of future glory.

Future glory. Have a look at verse 13. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed for.

Why? The spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Why rejoice when we're made to feel different? Why blessed when we're insulted? Verse 13.

Because you know that glory is coming. Verse 14. The spirit of glory and of God rests on you now. You have the spirit of glory.

[10:42] In other parts of God's word, the spirit, he's a down payment, a guarantee of heaven. When you're made to feel different, it's evidence that you're on the right track.

You have the spirit of glory, which leads to glory in the end. And we know how great that future glory is. Now, of course, there is actually a caveat in verse 15. So if you look at verse 15.

If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or a thief or any other kind of criminal, even as a meddler. You know, if we're suffering for not acting like a Christian, for not acting like a Christian, don't rejoice about that.

You know, if you're yelling at people in Aldershot Town Centre with your mic turned up at 11, don't rejoice in that. But if you're a street preacher who's patiently, lovingly proclaiming the gospel and you're still getting insulted, rejoice in that.

If you're a sideline at school because you're a Christian, rejoice in that. If you're the butt of the joke for bearing Jesus' name, rejoice in that.

[11:43] If you're called a bigot and an idiot for Jesus, rejoice in that. Suffering is that little notification that pops up to reassure you.

Suffering like Christ, you'll be resurrected like him. Have the spirit of glory? Well, you're going to enter glory. How counterintuitive is this?

Isn't this so counterintuitive? Suffering is, we see it, is so negative. And of course it is. In one sense, it is a result of the fall.

It's not a good thing in itself. We shouldn't go looking for it even. But when we see what suffering points to, it is a good thing. I remember when I recently became a Christian.

I was quite on fire for Jesus. And I was driving one of my friends home. And I just had the confidence to ask him, you know, so what do you think about God? What do you think about Jesus?

[12:49] Because I've talked to you about this before, mate. I really want you to know. And actually, this is quite hard for me, actually, but you're actually going to face judgment? And I, yeah, I felt really awkward saying it.

I just think, yeah, I do. I love you. I love you, mate. I really do. And I don't want you to face judgment. And all you need to do is trust in Jesus. And he'll forgive you.

And he'll wash away your sins. And you'll cleanse. James, calm down, man. Calm down. That's what I got. I don't want to talk about it.

You do your thing. I'll do my thing. So awkward. So uncomfortable. I felt like a disaster. But it was actually the moment of reassurance.

It was the moment for joy. I didn't know at the time. The moment you are called a bigot, or you're made to feel different, or you see that face that says, how can you believe that in 2025?

[13:53] Or you're sidelined, or you're left out, you're silently labelled. That is the moment you remember you have the spirit, you are on track for glory. That's the moment.

Blessed are you, Jesus says, when I will revile you, and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you, falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

A painful, awkward moment signals a great reward in heaven. We know how good heaven is.

Suffering is stop. Joy forever. Do you view those moments like that? Do you view them like that?

Or does it turn you away? Peter wants us to peel back the curtain and see it for what it is. That little notification of glory.

[14:57] You're on the right track. You're doing it right. And lastly, on the flip side, it reassures you of no future judgment.

Of no future judgment. This is the flip side of glory, isn't it? Have a look at verse 17. You're going to need to look at this one. Verse 17, for it is time for judgment to begin with God's household.

And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome of those who do not obey the gospel? And when you first read it, it sounds like we will face judgment. It kind of says judgment begins with us.

How is this supposed to be a reassurance? Well, the key is the word begin. But this verse really is here to reassure us. Okay, how is it? Well, I think we should have Mark 13 in the background.

Mark 13. What was that? Was that Jesus on the Mount of Olives? Peter was there himself. Jesus spoke about final judgment, but he also talked about not just final judgment in the end, but the beginnings of judgment.

[15:59] What he called the birth pains. And when a woman gets birth pains, you know that it's a sign the baby's coming. It's not the actual baby, is it? It's the sign of it.

Here, the birth pains of judgment aren't the judgment. They're the sign of it. And what are they for us? What are the beginnings of judgment? It's not punishment. It's a purifying judgment. We've seen that already in 1 Peter. That was the verse that Mike read right at the start. Jesus says it's persecution. This passage, subtle suffering.

And this is Peter's logic. Either you face the birth pains now, or you face the far, far worse judgment later.

For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household, and if it begins with it, if it's a hard road of purifying suffering for us now, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel later? [17:01] Answer, very bad. Jesus calls it hell. So there is a warning here, of course.

If you don't walk that hard road now, it will be unimaginably worse later. But this is mainly a reassurance, okay? So ask yourself this question.

Have I walked that hard road? Have I faced that subtle suffering? Yes. Okay. Well, then that shows you you will only experience the purifying judgment, which is good for you, and you will never face the punishment judgment later.

Never. Never. The road we're on reassures us of no final future judgment. Now, we've heard of the kind of 4 a.m. moment.

Have you heard of the 4 a.m. moments when you wake up in a cold sweat and you doubt, you know, am I going to be safe on judgment day? Am I really a Christian? This is something I've made up, right? But more common is the 2.36 p.m. moment.

[18:16] It's just what I'm trying to say. What I really mean is, you know, wherever you are at work, or it's that kind of random moment of subtle suffering that you face and you think, God can't be on my side.

He's angry at me. Do you ever think like that? God doesn't like me because following Jesus has been costly. It's not being cosy. It's been costly. But again, it's the moment that shows us God is on your side.

Your experience in the birth pains, the beginnings of judgment. So it shows God does love you. He has already taken your punishment at the cross.

And it reminds you one of the most wonderful things about being a Christian. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. I've trusted Jesus.

I'm safe forever. If you're not trusting Jesus today, you're so welcome here. But look at how good this is. Do you know real assurance?

[19:20] Do you know real safety? A Christian can know real safety. We're going to sing this a bit later, but it's those moments that Satan may buffet and trials might come that is the proof that we can say, it is well, it is well with my soul.

You can only know that if you've accepted Jesus' free offer of salvation today. Look, the road is hard, but then reassurance.

There's future glory. There's no future judgment. So we start with that question.

Am I doing it wrong? Now, when I face subtle suffering for my faith, am I doing it wrong? Is this what I signed up for? Am I believing enough?

Am I being winsome enough? Am I being winsome enough? Now, there's someone at Grace Church Guildford, just over in Guildford, who spoke at a men's breakfast yesterday.

[20:29] I wasn't actually there. Someone filled me in. So I might not have all the details perfectly right, but it's basically there. So he's a pilot, and he was telling his story of when he trained in the RAF.

And he said that there was lots of kind of laddish banter, big kind of drinking culture. And he was kind of a big part of that. But then he became a Christian.

And he wants to follow Jesus. He loves Jesus. So he puts all that away. Did his team like that? No. He became the target of the banter. But you know how this story kind of really sticks in my head? Because while they were all drinking, well, he'd kind of bring some snacks instead to keep himself occupied, you know.

And apparently, while they were sitting there with pints in their hands, he was sitting there with some carrot sticks. See that image? Pints, carrot sticks. It's just one image, isn't it?

[21:29] But, and we'll face different things to this. Maybe what you think is more grown-up things to this. But it's one image that shows the cost of following Jesus. The flack you get.

And I'm sure he would have wanted to give up. I'm sure he thought, am I doing it wrong? Well, what did he need to hear with his carrot sticks in his hands? Not fitting in, not sleeping around, not being part of the drinking culture.

What do we need to hear tomorrow when this might happen to us and we face our version of it? We need reassurance.

You are on the right track. Suffering is normal. It's the moment that signals a wonderful future. No condemnation. All glory. It's hard.

Peter gets that. So let's listen to what he leaves us with in verse 19. Have a look at verse 19. So then, those who suffer according to God's will, it's all God's will this is happening, should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good.

[22 : 43] Your creator's with you through it all. He hasn't left you in the dark. He hasn't abandoned you. It's all in his hands. Keep going. Keep being a Christian. Keep following Jesus.

Keep trusting him. You're on the right track. Entrust yourself to him. Commit yourself to him. He's in control. Entrust yourself to him.

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, these times that we've been thinking about feel really hard and it is the hard road and we want to follow our Lord Jesus.

And sometimes we don't really feel like we're doing it right, but thank you for this passage which reassures us and comforts us and helps us to know that those moments are moments to remind us of future glory.

and of no judgment. Please, Lord, help us to just trust you. Help us to live according to your will. In Jesus' name.

[23 : 45] Amen. Now we're going to sing that song that I said it is well in a moment and it's those trials that we can actually say that, isn't it? But first, we're going to have a time to reflect silently.

You can sing along if you want, but we're going to listen to a song called Sovereign Over Us and it's about God being sovereign in a trial. He's with us and in those times, actually, because he's sovereign, we can commit ourselves to him.

Amen.