

Troubleshooting Our View of Suffering

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[0 : 0 0] for our good and for your glory we pray amen now again if you have your bibles and perhaps you can open them at the book of first peter and keep them open there at first peter chapter 4 and we're going to be in verses 12 to 19 just two more sundays in first peter this one and then keith will finish up our time in chapter 5 next week so first peter chapter 4 at verse 12 dear friends do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you as though something strange were happening to you but rejoice in as much 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 the spirit of glory and of god rests on you if you suffer it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal or even as a meddler however if you suffer as a christian do not be ashamed but praise god that you bear that name for it is time for judgment to begin with god's household and if it begins with us what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of god and if it is hard for the righteous to be saved what will become of the ungodly and the sinner so then those who suffer according to god's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good amen this is god's word for us today so what we're going to think about today as peter continues to take us to the theme of suffering is about troubleshooting our view of suffering and especially our view of suffering as christians now i am sure that we are most of us at least or probably all of us familiar with troubleshooting many times it is a modern day lifesaver isn't it your computer freezes or your washing machine won't spin or you find your phone is out of memory what do we do perhaps almost by instinct now we either go to our troubleshooting guide or we look up online for those set of questions that are given to us that logical working through of questions to identify the source of our problems ideally then to provide the simple fix what's the problem that peter is bringing to us he's bringing to us the problem of suffering suffering as a christian suffering because you are a follower of jesus now we've seen through this letter that that for the people that peter writes to that's that's things like insults and rejection and slander it's the beginning of opposition and perhaps the question that emerges is that why am i suffering i'm trying to be faithful to jesus why is this happening why should i bother being a follower of jesus if life becomes hard for me a few months ago i was recommending a book called evangelism as exiles it was written by a guy called elliot clark who'd spent over 10 years in the middle east and then came back to the states and having lived in a place where persecution was normal one of the things he was recognizing was that in the western church we really struggle we've got used to the idea of respect and perhaps we are struggling and sometimes fearful with this new reality that we tend to be ignored as christians our views are on the margins and we perhaps often find ourselves on the margins and that can cause us to be fearful and cause us to have questions and that's why i think first peter is so helpful for us as a church today as he repeatedly remind us about the realities of

suffering and how to respond so we're going to use verses 12 to 19 as a troubleshooting guide with some questions for when we suffer but before we get to that let me remind each of us of two important principles and that have governed peter's whole discussion of suffering and he's come back to it again and again throughout his letter the first big principle is that all of our suffering comes to us from a sovereign a wise a faithful a good god and father that's important to recognize we can see that in a couple of places chapter 3 verse 17 for it is better if it is god's will to suffer for doing good than for doing evil and then the last verse we just read chapter 4 verse 19 so then those who suffer according to god's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good so all our suffering passes through the hands of our sovereign wise and good god and also and he keeps reminding us of this christian suffering is always set in the context of the gospel of a suffering servant a suffering savior who gave his life in order to save his people to bring them to god

and again we can see that a couple of places chapter 3 verse 18 for christ also suffered once for sins the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to god or how he begins chapter 4 therefore since christ suffered in his body arm yourselves also with the same attitude so we're invited to trust in our good god and we're invited to remember the reality of the gospel and a savior who loved us and gave himself for us and now we get to our specifics here we get to our four troubleshooting questions when it comes to suffering for jesus first of all what is my expectation that's be question number one secondly what is my attitude when that suffering comes thirdly what is my perspective on the suffering and fourth and finally what is my response what does life look like when suffering comes my hope is that this will be helpful for us perhaps laying a foundation perhaps we're not suffering right now for the sake of jesus and we hear some principles to apply and to reflect on for when that day comes but some of us will be right in the middle of that right in the heat of suffering for the gospel and again i hope that these truths will be an encouragement and if we're wondering it is faith in jesus worth it for not yet christians that hopefully this will a point us towards the reason why it's worth it even with suffering so let's get to our questions the first question what is my expectation and this takes us to verse 12 you can look down there at verse 12 and what we see peter say is don't be surprised by suffering dear friends do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you as though something strange were happening to you you gotta love peter's honesty don't you as he recognizes and he's not ashamed of the fact that suffering is normal not abnormal it's not weird if our friends think that we are weird because we're followers of jesus with this fiery ordeal image he goes back to something he's already used chapter 1 verses 6 and 7 the idea of suffering as a refining process we'll come back to that the reality that god is able to use suffering for his good purposes in our lives and so in a sense here is peter giving advance warning don't be surprised if following jesus brings suffering we recognize that if we think about the life of jesus we think about what happened when jesus came to earth we see the evil targeted jesus as an infant king herod tried to have jesus killed as he began his public ministry the devil tried to pull jesus off course from following god's will and as hostile forces came together to have jesus arrested and then killed on the cross we recognize jesus life was one marked by suffering and peter says remember we follow in his footsteps peter of course heard the words of jesus for example in john chapter 18 if the world hates you keep in mind that it hated me first a servant is not above his master so our most basic question is what do i expect peter says don't be surprised by suffering it's a challenge to us it's a challenge to us because we live in a very comfortable part of the world and we live in the culture of comfort makes us ask the question am i ready to count the cost for following jesus am i ready to share this as part of our message knowing that people like ease and leisure and pleasure nobody likes the idea of suffering and cost is this something that i'm going to share with someone as i share the reality of of the gospel that it might involve and it should involve suffering for jesus in different times and in different ways do we recognize that suffering for the sake of jesus is not a bad thing to avoid at all costs peter also gives us encouragement the encouragement that when we suffer we're not alone in the sense that it's not something that's unique and unusual for us rather it's normal but there's also the comfort of shared support what we are going through brothers and sisters in christ perhaps are going through too or have been through and so there is support and fellowship for us in our sufferings built into the church and even more than that we recognize that jesus does not leave us alone as we suffer for him i've been reading a book by paul tripp about church leadership and he says this he says at the heart of every hope that the gospel offers is a suffering servant jesus is our hope he's the center of all our hopes all our hopes are pinned on him and without his willingness to suffer even to death there would be no forgiveness there would be no church so we suffer we think about suffering we must never lose sight of what jesus suffered for our sake so that's the first question what's my expectation we're told not to be surprised by suffering second question what's my attitude and here peter using again very striking language says that we can rejoice in suffering for jesus in verses 13 to 16 now normally in about two weeks time our city would be so inundated by people coming from all over the country all over the world to run the edinburgh marathon and we can look back fondly on those days and the travel chaos that we used to have on a sunday morning when the when the marathon was on um i don't know if you've noticed i i spot them still occasionally the people wearing the blue t-shirts uh proudly saying edinburgh marathon finisher and sometimes they're like really old t-shirts sometimes they're just from a couple of years back whenever i see that my my thought is always how in the world has anyone put themselves through that

much suffering i was like no wonder they're wearing that if i managed to finish a marathon i'd be wearing that i'd be wearing the medal and everything it's a badge of honor isn't it if you complete that most grueling of races the t-shirt it's that badge of honor i suffered by finished as peter continues troubleshooting our view of suffering he uses really striking language in this section so verse 13 you see he talks about rejoicing in verse 14 he talks about being blessed in verses 15 and 16 he says it's not a social shame rather it should be a source of honor to suffer for jesus in other words christian suffering should be like that marathon t-shirt it should be a badge of honor for us as the people of god that we are so closely identified with jesus that we have the privilege of suffering for him now what does he mean and what does he not mean when he talks about this how can he call us to rejoice well let's have a look at the language let's look at verse 13 and think about what he says about joy rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed again he's calling to mind that as christians we follow in the footsteps of jesus jesus jesus life on earth was one of suffering first before entering into glory and that's where our joy is found that that will be our joy too that we will see and enjoy the glory of jesus in the glory of heaven and so we can have joy as we keep our eye on the prize as we remember future glory that's laid up for us we don't rejoice in suffering for suffering's sake we rejoice because there's a reward coming then in verse 14 he talks about being blessed and notice how he reminds us again of the nature of their suffering verse 14 if you are insulted because the name of christ you are blessed for the spirit of glory and of god rests on you there is blessing to be insulted as a follower of jesus it is evidence of faith the reality that the spirit of god lives in a believer that the glory of god is made visible that we get to bring glory to god as we suffer there's blessing in that again we remember that peter heard the teaching of jesus and no doubt peter is remembering words of jesus in the sermon on the mount at the end of the beatitudes let me remind you of what jesus said in matthew chapter 5 and verse 11 blessed are you when people insult you persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me so there's the qualifier that's always there because of jesus rejoice and be glad there's a rejoice word as well because great is your reward in heaven so there's blessing because there's reward because we're identified with jesus and because we have the spirit in us and then verse 15 and 16 we see that there's honor to bear christ's name now we recognize in verse 15 not all suffering it is good and honorable he says if you if you suffer for being a criminal for hating and hurting others or if you suffer for being a busy body that's meddling in the lives of others there's no honor in that rather that's that's a shameful thing for a christian but verse 16 however if you suffer as a christian do not be ashamed but praise god that you bear that name there is again there's no shame in suffering because you are a christian rather there is honor maybe not honor from the world but honor from god takes us again to peter's own example if you read acts chapter 5 it's a wonderful chapter of courageous faith peter and some of the apostles they've been arrested they've been told stop talking about jesus and they say well we can't we got to obey god not men and so eventually they're released but not before they've been beaten before they've been flogged and what's said of peter and the other apostles is that they they came back to the church and they were rejoicing why were they rejoicing after being beaten and imprisoned rejoicing because they've been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name to so honor jesus to recognize the privilege of being one of his is to be able to rejoice in suffering that's the attitude that we are to have but that's a hard attitude to have isn't it that's really hard to cultivate to have joy as we suffer for jesus is that a t-shirt i'm ready to wear as a badge of honor that will only be true if we see jesus is worth it only true if we understand all that jesus has done for us the bible is inviting us to see suffering for jesus as a gift of god's grace freeing us from focus on ourself and pursuing happiness in in self and now rather pursuing ultimate happiness in jesus our savior having our life centered on him we're being invited to see suffering for jesus as a source as a source of honor not shame think about that if someone else sees something of jesus in us if somebody else hears about jesus from us that should be a good thing we should be glad of that even if people don't respond well there's honor in that and of course he's reminding us always to see suffering for jesus in light of the gospel our suffering can seem hard seem all-encompassing until we think about jesus suffering and dying to forgive us suffering and dying to adopt us into his family suffering and dying to give us eternal life suffering and dying to show us the full extent of god's love for us and in that light then our suffering seems so small and temporary especially when we remember our reward is eternal and that takes us towards the third troubleshooting question which is this what's my perspective on suffering and here in verses 17 and 18 we are certainly being reminded that suffering for the christian it refines and not

destroys again going back to that that picture from verse 12 and back to first peter chapter 1 let me read verses 6 and 7 of first peter 1 you can turn there if you have your bible in all 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 so peter uses this image for the church to think about suffering imagine a furnace and that process of applying fire and heat to a metal ore in order to burn off the impurities so that we might be left with pure

[20 : 19] metal with solid gold that purifying process and when we think about that being applied to a person's life that brings a lot of heat that sounds uncomfortable but there's promise the end result is pure gold so peter uses this picture in this section to say that that suffering that's the heat and we remember of course that suffering comes from god's wise and loving hands as he purifies and tests his people with the result that those who pass the test those who have true faith are those who are saved so let's bear that in mind as we follow the logic of verses 17 and 18 verse 17 says for it is time for judgment to begin with god's household remember malachi 3 when the lord came where did he come first the lord would come to the temple where would the refining the testing process begin it would begin among among among the levites and the priests and now judgment will begin with god's household new testament language for the church god has this work of testing this fire of testing now for the people of god and notice in our section there is a contrast drawn between god's household also in verse 18 known as the righteous and those in verse 17 who do not obey the gospel of god those who reject the gospel and verse 18 the ungodly and the sinner so two different people groups types in view and the key point for us to recognize is this that yes peter says christians suffer and are tested in this life and that is to use the language of verse 18 that's heart simply put the the road of the christian faith which involves suffering for jesus it will not always be easy it is heart but the final outcome is that we are saved yes there is pain but there is great gain those hard experiences that we go through those those fires of testing to use the imagery is the worst that christians will ever face we will never face a worse judgment but rather we look forward when our faith is in jesus to an eternity of joy and peace and without suffering that's the perspective we need to have that yes we suffer now but we will not suffer then rather we have joy to come but then the flip side as peter gives this solemn reminder to reject jesus to say no to his forgiveness his point is that if if christians suffer now how much worse will judgment be for those who reject the gospel who say no to jesus that won't just be temporary that will be eternal eternal loss and not gain so our perspective on suffering for jesus matters so much it matters that we recognize it's not punishment it's purifying it's not a sign that we've been abandoned and forgotten by god but rather he is testing us for his good purposes even when we can't necessarily always see that it's important that we take this long-term view of suffering that we would be ready to suffer now for jesus because we long for eternal glory recognizing that to say no to jesus

is to face the prospect of eternal misery we recognize through the teaching of the bible that jesus has come to destroy evil that jesus has come to destroy sin all that's wrong with the world all that's wrong in our hearts jesus has come to deal with that and he will return to deal with that once and for all but even right now there's a refining process going on in the hearts of his people that jesus is working renewal in us right now and that process will be complete when he returns and so we need to have that perspective so that we might trust god to do his work in us even when that involves suffering our final troubleshooting question is this one what's my response what am i going to do when suffering comes how am i going to live peter urges us to trust god and do good it's there in verse 19 so then those who suffer according to god's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good peter and his troubleshooting guide has told us suffering for jesus is normal not strange suffering for jesus marks us out as his so it could be cause of joy and not despair suffering for jesus is part of god's work in us so we can persevere and not give up and now he takes us to this final question when suffering comes which way are we going to go how are we going to respond for exploring christianity is this our response we're ready to make when we think about verse 19 and in light of suffering as we've lived as christians for years when suffering comes are we ready to keep going in this pattern one that we would trust god commit ourselves to god commit ourselves to his care recognizing two things that peter draws to mind here one that we commit ourselves to our faithful god the one who's faithful to his promises faithful to his people faithful and true to his own character and that he is a faithful creator he's in control he knows us he

knows what's best for us he can be trusted he knows what he's doing so we commit ourselves to our faithful creator and we continue doing good which in this context means keep on living for jesus even if that brings us into more suffering remember that's the thing that brings the suffering is doing good so we trust god and we continue to love and serve jesus love and serve others well challenging isn't it can i entrust my life to god in the bad times and in the good times can i trust the character of god and especially can i trust the character of god as i see it revealed in jesus can i entrust my life to god as i remember the gospel as i remember all that jesus has done it's really interesting peter uses the same language of jesus himself in first peter chapter 2 and let me read again first peter 2 and at verse 21 to this you were called suffer for doing good to this you were called because christ suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps he committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth when they hurled their insults at him he did not retaliate when he suffered he made no threats instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly jesus entrusted himself to his father and he invites us as his people to do the same to trust him and continue doing good so peter's been helping us to troubleshoot our response to suffering peter's realistic and the bible is realistic that suffering will come for the people of god and that's why he spends so much time on the topic with these young christians our culture and most likely our natural temperament would make us want to avoid suffering would make it perhaps hard for us to learn lessons to see that god can do something good as we suffer and so peter has looked always to keep us close to two big truths about the fact that our suffering comes from our god and our god can be trusted and he's faithful and he's wise and he's good and that jesus suffered for us jesus came as god's answer to sin and suffering jesus gives the hope of a world without sin and suffering jesus gives strength today to respond well in our suffering so when we think about suffering for jesus name is it something that we will expect be ready for ready to see god's purpose in it to have that right perspective on it and will we commit ourselves to our faithful creator to jesus our savior and continue to do good let's pray for his help in that let's pray lord god we recognize that that no suffering in and of itself is enjoyable but we thank you that you are a wise and a good and a faithful and a trustworthy god and that if it is your will that we suffer for the sake of jesus you have good purposes behind that so we pray that you would help us to be ready to commit ourselves to you our faithful creator that we would be committed to living for the glory of the lord jesus because we recognize all he has suffered in our place to bring us salvation that in light of the gospel it would seem a small thing and indeed it would seem like a great act of worship for us to suffer for the sake of the lord jesus help us to respond well we pray prepare our hearts so that when suffering comes that we might live for you we pray in jesus name amen now we will hear as we close a hymn i will wait for you out of the depths i cry to you in darkest places i will call incline your ear to me and hear my cry for mercy lord were you to count my sinful ways how could i come before your throne yet full forgiveness meets my gaze i stand redeemed by grace alone i will wait for you i will wait for you on your word i will be life i will wait for you surely wait for you till my soul is satisfied so put your hope in god alone take courage in his power to save completely and forever completely and forever one by christ's emerging from the grave i will wait for you i will wait for you on your word i will rely i will wait for you surely wait for you till my soul is satisfied now he has come to make a way and god himself has paid the price that all who trust in him today finds healing finds healing in his sacrifice i will wait for you i will wait for you on your word i will rely i will wait for you surely wait for you till my soul is satisfied i will wait for you i will wait for you through the storm and through the night i will wait for you surely wait for you for your love is my delight let's stand together for our closing prayer which is drawn from some of mooses final words as he blesses the people of god deuteronomy 33 verse 12 let the beloved of the lord rest secure in him for he shields him all day long and the one the lord loves rests between his shoulders the eternal god is your refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms amen who five

Thank you.

[35 : 50] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.