

Trusting God in Suffering 1 Peter 4v12-19

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[0 : 00] Good morning. So it's 1 Peter chapter 4 verses 12 to 19 page 1220.

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you, but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory is revealed you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet, if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now, if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to him in doing good as to a faithful creator. Amen.

Amen. Thanks very much, Mary. Well, let's pray.

Father, we thank you for this letter written thousands of years ago, written to a people to encourage them as they seek to live as your people in the world. And Father, we need to be encouraged today, for we also are seeking to live as your people in the world. Father, you know the needs of each one of us, the particular struggles that we face. And so we pray that by your Holy Spirit, you would speak into our lives individually and corporately so that we keep on going as a Christian, that we do not turn from you, but keep our gaze fixed upon you.

[3 : 18] So build us up and encourage us today. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. But Jesus had just shared a meal with his disciples and during the conversation spoke these words to them. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. Applying what Jesus had said to his disciples, the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy to teach the church. Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Now those two references summarise the message of 1 Peter. If you are a Christian, if you're a follower of Jesus, you must prepare to suffer. Either you have suffered, you are suffering, or you will suffer.

There's no escaping the hard reality that living for Christ in the world will mean you face hard and tough times. In fact, suffering is a normal experience. Look at verse 12.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you. The Christian life is a painful trial. It's the normal experience of life.

[5 : 16] Yes, Christians will suffer like everyone else. We get sick. We develop cancers. We're not immune from car accidents. Christians get caught up in hurricanes and wars. But on top of that, there is another layer of suffering that is unique to the Christian. And that suffering is, if you look at verse 14, are things like where we are insulted because of the name of Christ. Or verse 16, where we suffer as a Christian. So if you are a Christian, you will experience that people will push you out because you follow Christ and they will shut you up because you believe the truth of the Bible. So don't be surprised when your work colleagues ignore you because you obey what the Bible says about same-sex marriage or abortion. Don't be surprised when your college or schoolmates give you a hard time because you won't enter into a sexual relationship until you are married. Don't be surprised when your unbelieving spouse or family member thinks you're weird or odd because you say Jesus is more important than anyone else or anything else. And don't be surprised that should you move and live and serve in another country where it's illegal to be a Christian that you could be kicked out or worse, imprisoned or violently killed.

Suffering as a Christian is not strange. It's the normal experience of life. Now if we don't get this, when the suffering does come, you will be surprised. You will be taken off guard. You won't be prepared for it and you will want to give up. You will become confused and wonder where is God in all of this and why is he letting this happen. You will turn your back on Christ and his church. So, verse 12, Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you. So, rather than be surprised, we should take comfort that our suffering is under God's sovereignty. Look at verse 12 again. Dear friends, he says, do not be surprised at the painful trial or the fiery ordeal that has come upon you. So, the trial that's come upon you is not by mistake. It's not some random experience that we just have to put up with. No, all our trials are all under God's sovereignty. That means when people malign you, when friends leave you because you identify with Jesus, it doesn't just happen. It's all under God's control and all under his authority. Have a look down at verse 19. Do you see what it says there? So, then, those who suffer according to God's will or those who suffer according to God's plan. So, the trials that we face have been allowed by God and designed by God for our good. I'm going to say that again because that's something hard for us to take on board. The trials we face have been allowed by God, used and designed by God for our good.

[9 : 38] Now, we may find that hard to take in, but just think about it the other way around. If God is not sovereign over suffering. If God is not in control of these things, then what we're left with is with a God who is impotent, a God who is not powerful, who's there scratching his head wondering what to do with all these trials and struggles these people are facing. But if God is sovereign, He not only permits these trials, He has a purpose for these trials in our life. He not only permits them, but He has a purpose for them. And here's the first purpose. Suffering is the path to joy.

Suffering is the path to joy. Look at verse 12. Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering. Verse 13, but rejoice. Now, how on earth are we meant to rejoice when you're spoken against for standing for Christian truth? How am I meant to rejoice when I'm being treated unjustly for doing what is good and right? Where's the joy in being hit? Well, read the rest of verse 13. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ. We are to rejoice not in the trials themselves. We're not jumping up and down and going, yippee, I'm getting opposed and I'm being insulted. We are to rejoice not in the trials themselves, but that we participate in, that we share in the sufferings of Christ.

In other words, we're to rejoice in the fact that what happened to Christ will happen to us. What happened to Christ is going to happen to us. Have a look back at chapter 1, verse 11. I think this will help us understand a bit more. Chapter 1, verse 11. It's a difficult verse, but it's talking about the authors, the writers of the authors, the authors, the authors who were writing about Jesus who was to come.

And this is what it says in verse 11 of chapter 1, the authors who were writing about Jesus who was to come. They were trying, verse 11, to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. So everything they wrote about was all pointing towards Jesus Christ who was going to come, who would suffer, and after his sufferings, glories would follow. So there we have it. There we have a picture that the path of Christ, the journey of Christ, would go from suffering to glory. So as we suffer like Christ, as we follow on this path, on this journey of following Christ, we will go on a path that will involve suffering. But we can rejoice as we go along that path because there is a glory that will follow. So go back to chapter 4 and verse 13. Let's read verse 13 again. Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed. There would be an exuberance of joy when his glory is revealed. So that means when you go through a painful trial this week as a Christian, you can be filled with joy today because you know that you will be overjoyed when Christ comes again. You know that the suffering we face today, the trials and the struggles we experience today are all going to be replaced with an inexpressible and glorious joy, an exuberance, an overjoy when Christ comes again. So you see, we do not need to fear the trials and the struggles we face. We do not need to fear the trials and the struggles we face. We do not need to fear the trials and the suffering we face. We do not need to fear the trials and the struggles we face. We do not need to respond with anger to other people because as I participate in the sufferings of Christ, as I walk the path of suffering, I know that my sovereign God is keeping me and is working through all of that to bring me to glory. So I can rejoice in my struggles today because God is with me and God is keeping me for what is to come.

[15 : 29] So, suffering is the path to joy. The second purpose, suffering is a sign that you belong to Christ.

First, look at verse 14. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ. You see, when we trust in Christ, when we commit our life to Christ, where we turn in repentance and trust completely in him, we are given, we are given, do you see what it says there in verse 14, the name of Christ. That means we now belong to the family of God. We're his special people. We inherit that name. We have Christ's name. We have Christ's name. That's our identity. Now, there are many blessings with that, but it comes at a cost. If you bear the name of Christ, that means you will be treated like Christ. Just as Christ suffered opposition, you will suffer opposition. But we're not to see that as a negative. Look at verse 14. It is a blessing. Verse 14, if you're insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed.

Now, how is suffering meant to be a blessing? Well, look at the rest of verse 14. You are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

[17 : 08] So, when you experience insult, when somebody laughs down at you because you believe the Bible to be God's word, the spirit of glory, that is the spirit that was at work in Christ, that same spirit that rose Christ from the dead, is the same spirit that is now resting on you.

So, the spirit that brought Christ through his sufferings, from his death to the grave and through the grave to glory, that same spirit affirms and reassures and is working in your life to testify with you that, in fact, you are God's children.

You bear the name of Christ. You are my people. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. of true discipleship. Suffering is the badge of true discipleship. In other words, when you suffer for Christ, it's a blessing because it's evidence that you bear the name of Christ.

Of course, we must make sure that our suffering is for the name of Christ and not for our sinful behaviours. Let's look at verse 15. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any kind of criminal or even as a meddler.

[19 : 12] Or as Mary read in her translation, a busy body. What a great, great term, busy body. Sometimes we suffer because we deserve to suffer.

Okay, it might not be a murderer or a high profile criminal. But we can all be busy bodies. We can all put our nose in where it oughtn't to be. We can all speak down at others with a sense of superiority.

And if we come across as a holier than thou, well then you deserve insults. You deserve to be slagged. If your behaviour doesn't match what you're preaching and claiming to be, well then you deserve to be ignored.

Sometimes we deserve to suffer. And if we do something wrong according to the law, we deserve to be punished for it.

However, verse 16, If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

[20 : 17] You see, the world may shame you. The world may laugh at you and mock you. Family may think you're silly for being here this morning.

But in the trial and in the hardship of those times, we can praise God that, yes, I bear the name of Christ.

Because your suffering is a sign. It's evidence. That we belong to Christ. Suffering, as Bonhoeffer said, is the badge of true discipleship.

So, the purpose under God's sovereignty is that suffering is the path that brings us to joy. And suffering is a sign that you belong to Christ.

And a third purpose, that suffering is God's means to purify the church. Look at verse 17.

[21 : 24] For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God. Now, we know from what we've read earlier that there is a judgment to come.

Have a look back at chapter 4, verse 5. There is a judgment to come. Chapter 4, verse 5. You see, at the final judgment, when Christ comes again, he will sort out who is for Christ and who is against Christ.

Those who've placed their confidence in Christ will enjoy glory and those who've rejected Christ will suffer hell.

The judgment to come, that future judgment, will sort out who are God's people and who are not God's people. But, look what it's saying here in verse 17.

It is time for judgment to begin with the family of God. So, the judgment that is to come starts now and it starts with God's family, God's people.

[22 : 43] This judgment is unique to Christians and it's like a testing from God. That's what the judgment means in this context. It's a testing from God.

So, God allows and uses the trials and the sufferings that we go through to test us to see who are the true believers and who are the false believers.

It purifies the church. Now, let me illustrate this from two other passages of Scripture to try and grasp and understand what's being said here.

The first one is Mark's Gospel, chapter 4. So, keep your finger in 1 Peter and go back to Mark's Gospel, chapter 4.

Mark, chapter 4. Mark's Gospel, written by Mark, is actually an eyewitness account of Peter.

[23 : 46] So, Peter was the eyewitness of Jesus and saw and heard all that he did and he recounted his story to Mark and Mark wrote it down. So, that's the connection between Peter and Mark.

But here we have in Mark, chapter 4, a well-known parable, the parable of the sower. The seed being planted is like the good news of Christ being spread and taught to different people.

Now, let's pick it up in verse 16. So, the seed, the good news of Jesus is being spread around and he explains it like this, verse 16.

Others, like seeds sown on rocky places, hear the words and at once receive it with joy. So, it's like people hear the good news of Jesus and it appears that they respond to it, they receive it, they listen.

They may even start meeting with other believers. They might even be baptized. But, verse 17, But since they have no root, they last only a short time.

[25 : 00] When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. You see, a time will come in their lives where they will face some kind of opposition and they opt for comfort and safety rather than going the path of Christ.

So, you see, God allows and uses the trials we go through to test who are the true believers and who are the false believers.

The second reference that I want us to go to is in 1 Peter. So, go back to 1 Peter chapter 1. 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 7.

So, it's a similar theme to what we've been looking at. Let's pick it up actually in verse 6. He's been talking about the trials and the struggles. He says, verse 6, In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you've had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

Now, why have these trials come? Verse 7. These have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

[26 : 41] So, our faith will be refined. Our faith would be proved genuine through the trials. You see, our response to suffering proves the genuineness of our faith.

If we keep going, we're of Christ. If we turn away, we're not of Christ. So, the sufferings that we face, the trials we go through as God's people, is God's way of purifying His church.

Now, why does God work in this way? Go back to chapter 4, verse 17. Chapter 4, verse 17.

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God. And if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

In other words, he's saying this, it is better to suffer now for a while as a Christian and prove that your faith is genuine than to suffer eternally as one who is opposed to Christ.

[28 : 01] that's what he begins to unpack in verse 18. Let's read verse 18. It is hard for the righteous to be saved.

Now, salvation is not hard for God. God can save anyone. It doesn't matter what we've done in our past, what our sin might be. There is no sin so great that God cannot deal with.

salvation is not hard for God. But for the Christian, it will be hard to face the trials of life. He's never saying it's easy.

The opposition we endure makes following Jesus hard. That's what it means there when it talks about it is hard for the righteous to be saved. It's going to be hard to follow in the path of Christ.

Christ. So, if it's difficult now, look at the rest of 18, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

[29 : 06] So, let me put it to us this way. If you're here this morning, and you have not yet repented and committed your life to Christ, and you're not yet willing to suffer for the name of Christ, the reason might be, the reason why you have not yet committed to Christ, is that you want to save yourself a lot of trouble.

By not committing to Christ, you will escape suffering. You will keep your friends. You may get that promotion at work.

You may have a more comfortable life. You will avoid being pushed out and shut out. But, look at the end of verse 18, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

You see, you may escape suffering now by not turning to Christ, but you will not escape the eternal suffering that awaits those who refuse Christ today.

it is better to suffer now for a while as a Christian and prove that your faith is genuine than to suffer eternally in hell as one who is opposed to Christ.

[30 : 33] So, you see, God uses the trials and the struggles to purify his church, to show up those who belong to him, to those who are his true children.

So, God's purpose through our suffering is to bring us to joy, to assure us we belong to Christ, to purify us so that we will meet with God forever.

how should we respond to this? Well, suffering Christians should commit themselves to God.

Look at verse 19. So then, in light of all of these things, the response is this. Those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good.

I'm sure like you, as I think, if I were God, I would do things differently.

[31 : 46] If I were God, I would not allow Christians or anybody else for that matter, to suffer. I would make things easier in life if I were God.

But in case you didn't know, I'm not God. And neither are you. I didn't create this world. I didn't speak this universe into existence.

God didn't consult me or ask me for advice about how life should work. I'm a fragile human being who lives but just a moment, dependent on God for life and breath.

so, verse 19, I will entrust my life to my faithful creator, God. The God who created me, the God who saved me, the God who sustains me and will keep me for glory.

I will commit my life to my faithful creator. I will place my life into his sovereign hands, yes, I've got questions, yes, there is so much I don't understand, but I will place my life into my faithful creator because he is working good for me through the suffering.

[33 : 20] He brings a joy to my life. He brings an assurance that I belong to him. He purifies me so that I am ready to meet God.

so I no longer have to fight against the suffering. I can now, as a follower of Christ, embrace the suffering that may come into my life.

I can, look at the end of verse 19, continue to do good. When I'm insulted, I can bless in return.

When you suffer injustice, you can love in response. When you're shut out, you can bring good into their life.

Why? Because God is sovereign over my suffering and over your suffering. He is my faithful creator. He is your faithful creator who will keep you for glory.

[34 : 26] So, dear friends, my beloved, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

But rejoice. Rejoice that you participate in Christ's sufferings. Praise God that you bear his name today and commit your life to your faithful creator and keep doing good.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Our Father, we have so many questions. So many questions about suffering and hardship and trials, the general day-to-day sufferings we face, but also the suffering we face as a Christian.

God's salvation. And yet we turn to you, our faithful creator, and we commit our lives to you, trusting that you have our life in our hands from beginning to end and for the duration of our life on this earth.

[36 : 10] trusting that you are bringing us on a journey where we can be filled with joy and one day we'll be overjoyed when Christ comes again.

We walk the journey knowing that we are your children, that we bear the name of Christ. we are your special people. And we walk the path knowing that through the difficult and hard times, you are

purifying us, chipping off the bits and the pieces that need to be taken off, making us more like Christ every day.

Father, thank you for the way in which you work. thank you that you are bringing us to your eternal home and we entrust our lives to you afresh.

Amen. We're going to sing. It's a good old hymn.

I like old hymns because they speak good truth. Not that the new ones don't, but here we go. When peace like a river, attendeth my way when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say it is well, it is well with my soul.

[37 : 45] Whatever the struggle we may be in, because he is sovereign over everything, we can say it is well. May this be a cry of our trust in our faithful creator God.

let's stand together as we sing. Let's stand together as we sing.