

# Commit yourself to your faithful creator

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our reading this morning is from Peter's first letter, 1 Peter, and we're reading from chapter 4, from verse 12 to the end of the letter.

So, 1 Peter, chapter 4, from 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 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 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?

[ 1 : 09 ] 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.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings, who will also share in the glory to be revealed. Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.

Not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve. Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being an example to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

[ 2 : 26 ] Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

To him be the power forever and ever. Amen. With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God.

Stand fast in it. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ. Amen. If you choose to plan to be on your holidays in Scotland, well, perhaps you shouldn't be surprised if it rains for a significant proportion of the time.

[ 3 : 46 ] In fact, that's true across the UK for most of the year, isn't it? That we shouldn't be surprised by a rainy holiday. It might not be quite what you're hoping for, it might not be ideal, but it certainly should not be a surprise when it happens.

Not quite inevitable, but fairly likely, even predictable. Peter says that the same thing is true of suffering as Christians. Suffering may well not be what you're hoping for.

In fact, it shouldn't be what you're hoping for. But to be surprised by it is somewhat foolish. 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.

It should not be a surprise. It is not something strange. But it is an understandable question, isn't it?

An understandable feeling to be a little bit surprised, taken aback.

It's understandable Peter is not, you know, dismissive. Note he again addresses the recipients of his letter as, dear friends, beloved. Because on one level at least, it is a surprise, isn't it?

[ 4 : 57 ] Because whilst suffering and misfortune are normal in the sense that they can be universally expected, it's also true that suffering is an aberration.

That there's something within us that cries out in frustration when we experience this suffering because it's also true that these things are wrong. That they're symptoms of a world that is not as it should be.

Symptoms of a world that has fallen from how it was already created. And of a world that is not as it ultimately will be. Suffering feels wrong because there's something in us that is designed to long for the time when that suffering will no longer be.

To long for the day when there will be no more tears and no more pain and no more death. No more suffering of any kind. There's something in us that looks for that day and rejects, rebels against the fact that it isn't here now.

It feels wrong and aberration. But Peter is still very clear that because we are in this fallen world right now, because we are living in the last days, because our present circumstances are such as they are, well then suffering is to be expected.

[ 6 : 14 ] Even the great suffering that he characterizes as a fiery ordeal, even this is not a surprise to Peter, should not have been a surprise to those he wrote the letter to, and should not be a surprise to you or me either.

We're often inclined, aren't we? We're often inclined to live our lives with the avoidance of suffering as, well, probably one of our very highest objectives in how we choose what to do.

And if that suffering does come, well, we expect it to be over as quickly as possible. We expect to be able to deal with it and to move on and try and get back to normal as quickly as possible.

Well, Peter says our definition of normal needs to change a bit. See, his perspective isn't to move on as quickly as possible. He's not saying we should seek out suffering, but he's very clearly saying it shouldn't be a surprise, and even says, verse 13, that it is an occasion for rejoicing.

So, as we consider what he's telling us in these verses, there are at least three areas that are worthy of our focus. First, he says we participate in the sufferings of Christ.

[ 7 : 33 ] Second, he invites us to consider why we are suffering. And then third, his concluding challenge, commit yourselves to your faithful creator.

So, his objective here, as it has been for a while through the course of this letter, his objective is to reassure, to encourage these Christians in the face of suffering.

To see themselves as walking where their Savior has gone before. Even to see themselves participating in his very sufferings.

And it's in that that he says we may rejoice. So, why is suffering unsurprising? Well, one reason is because there's plenty of precedent for it.

We shouldn't be surprised because we've seen it happen before. If the sinful actions of wicked men were directed towards the only sinless man who ever lived, the only perfect human being, if their ire was directed towards your Savior, towards the one who went before, towards the one in whose footsteps you strive to follow, if their aggression was poured out on him, if they treated him that way, well, why would it be a surprise if your experience is similar?

[ 8 : 50 ] That's what happens when you choose to align yourself to a cause or to a party. You expect to be treated accordingly. You know, the decision might have been made by Mr. Johnson, but the other conservative MPs are not surprised that their constituents express to them their frustration over government policy.

They have chosen to publicly align themselves with that party. And their experience is affected by that allegiance. Now, whilst Christ's actions and policies are obviously infinitely better than Mr. Johnson's, whatever you might happen to think of him, even Christ's perfect life functions to raise the ire of others.

So we shouldn't be surprised when association with him, alignment to him, joining his party, as it were, when that association produces the same results. It's not surprising.

And Peter goes further, too. To rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Peter calls them to rejoice. And in so doing, he links this participation in Christ's suffering, he links that to participation in the joy when Christ's glory is revealed.

[10:14] In other words, he says, if you're not willing to be aligned with him now when it's hard, well, you shouldn't expect to be aligned with him in the future when it might suit you to be so.

Unless you share in his sufferings, you will not share in his glory. Why is that true? Why does one depend on the other? Well, it's not because he's, you know, kind of watching to tick it off, to see your dedication, to see did you suffer enough to be allowed to join in.

No, it's not that so much as that this participation in suffering shows where your heart truly lies, shows what you are willing to do in order to maintain that allegiance.

See, to be willing to suffer for the sake of that love, to suffer as we align ourselves with him, well, that shows that the love is more than skin deep.

If love is only love when it's easy, well, it's not really love at all, is it? Love isn't proven until it's tested.

[11:26] The question is, do you love Jesus when it's inconvenient to do so? If you don't love him in the midst of your sufferings, you do not deserve him in his glory.

Jesus said the same thing, didn't he? Matthew 7, verse 21, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Jesus expects this, doesn't he? That many a person will profess faith in Christ when it is convenient to them to do so, and might even do so perhaps thinking that they are being genuine.

But the question is, has that faith, has that profession been tested? It's when your will comes into conflict with God's will that you see where your commitment truly lies.

If you're only going along with God when it's what you already thought anyway, then you're not following God at all. You're just following yourself. And in the context of suffering, the question is, is your commitment ultimately to your comfort?

[12:34] Or is it to the holiness of God? The question is, will you suffer rather than sin? Will you keep yourself from the behavior which God has declared to be contrary to his will?

Or will you go along with what you believe will make you happy? Now, this applies to our response to temptation in general, in all areas of life. And it applies especially for Peter here, to how we respond to suffering for being known to be his.

So, my friends, if you look forward to future glory, if you want to be with God on that last day, if that's your objective, well, folks, the road to that glory, the road runs through the middle of pain and suffering, runs through the middle of the everyday trials of life, but especially runs through the middle of suffering for the name of Christ that Peter is talking about here.

And with that goal in mind, of striving towards the future glory, and the perspective that gives us on present suffering, with that in mind, Peter says in these verses, we have to consider why the suffering has arisen.

And I think he says this both as a warning and as a reassurance. The first part of the warning is quite obvious, isn't it? Verse 15, Folks, don't think that you can claim to be this sort of righteous sufferer.

[14:11] Don't think that you can say you're participating in the sufferings of Christ if the reason you're suffering is because you've done something terrible and you're being punished for it. You don't get to claim that mantle of righteousness if the reason you're in prison is because you killed someone.

I mean, that seems fairly obvious, doesn't it? But the final clause brings it home, or even as a meddler. Now, there's debate about exactly what Peter has in mind here when he talks about meddling, but it seems to kind of boil down to interfering in other people's business.

Now, interfering in someone else's business isn't the sort of obviously criminal activity that applies to the first part of the sentence. Meddling is much more every day, isn't it?

It's much more something that, you know, we as respectable people are likely to be involved in. And much more likely that it's dangerously easy to justify it to ourselves, to our peril.

Maybe you defend yourself in these circumstances saying, oh, I was only trying to help. It was all intended for the best. But folks, Peter says, if the reason you're suffering is because somebody

resents your busybodying ways, well, then actually you can't hold your head up high in that situation.

[ 15 : 33 ] That even if your intentions really were noble, and let's be honest, we often claim they were noble when they really weren't, but even if they were, even if the intentions were good, well, if people think you're meddling and that's what they're responding to, well, that isn't the kind of suffering that Peter is commending here.

If you're thrown into prison for theft, you don't get to claim you're participating in the sufferings of Christ. If people resent you and want nothing to do with you because you're poking your nose into their business, you don't get to claim that you're participating in the sufferings of Christ. Not all suffering is persecution. And sometimes we're too quick to think that it is. Folks, when people shun you, don't want to spend time with you at work, it's possible that it's because you're a believer. And it's possible that as we thought about last week, that part of the thing is that your refusal to join in their behavior tacitly condemns what they're involved in. That is possible. But it's also possible that you really haven't behaved well at all. It is possible that you're being punished there for genuine wrongdoing. And perhaps the subtlest, even when people are offended by you trying to share the gospel, it is at least possible even there that it isn't actually the gospel that they're objecting to and causing you to suffer because of it.

[ 16 : 57 ] It's possible they're offended by the abrasive manner in which you spoke to them. It's possible that they resent something that you stuck alongside the gospel that took away from the good news of it and rendered null what you were theoretically trying to do.

It is possible that your suffering is because you are meddling or otherwise doing wrong. Now, it's also possible that the person objecting to what you've said is claiming to be offended by something else, but it actually is the condemnation of God's Word that has made them uncomfortable. It may not always be easy to judge what is going on in these situations, but we need to be cautious. Peter says, don't be too quick to claim that you are suffering for Christ when actually sober and careful analysis shows otherwise.

That's the warning of this consideration. But I think in this question of why you're suffering, there is also a reassurance, at least a reassurance sometimes that kind of brackets around the warning. Verses 14 and 16, if you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed for the spirit of glory and of God rests on you. And 16, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

[ 18 : 26 ] See, Peter's challenge, Peter's invitation, his call to rejoice in suffering. This call is on the basis that suffering as a Christian, suffering for the name of Christ, that this suffering is a demonstration that you are blessed.

It doesn't always feel that way, does it? But assuming that you have determined the validity of the cause of suffering, well then, you can rest in the knowledge that this suffering is a demonstration that the spirit rests upon you.

And a demonstration that you have been counted worthy to suffer, just as the apostles rejoiced for that reason in Acts chapter 15 and verse 41. The call to rejoice, the call to count yourself blessed. This thinking at blessing is not because of something innate in the suffering itself. This isn't, you know, masochism. No, Peter is not focused on that kind of innate to the experience. And actually, he's not even here focused on the opportunity for character improvement that suffering presents. I mean, that point is made elsewhere in Scripture. It's absolutely true that suffering does give that opportunity.

[ 19 : 44 ] But what Peter's thinking about here is that you are blessed by the presence of God himself. You are blessed in these circumstances because the spirit of glory and of God rests on you and that you know that to be true because of this experience.

suffering for the name of Christ is evidence to you that you do indeed bear the name of Christ, that you truly are a Christian.

When you suffer for it, you can see that it is true. It's evidence of future deliverance. It's a promise of future joy. It's a promise of the ultimate joy, the greatest joy a human being can experience. That is what awaits us in the presence of Almighty God in the new heavens and the new earth. When he comes and he remakes and renews all things and when no longer are people paralyzed. When we all run and jump and leap for joy. When we see not only the glory of creation but we see our Savior face to face. When our sorrow is turned into dancing.

[ 20 : 56 ] That is the joy that Peter sets before us as our future hope. and the knowledge of that future joy even enables present joy.

The joy of the end of all things is in some sense brought forward. It is front loaded into the here and now that we can start to experience that even in the very midst of suffering because it is evidence of the presence of God with us.

And therefore in that knowledge knowing the presence of God with you well then those who suffer those who suffer can rightly and confidently commit themselves to their faithful creator verse 19 and therein continue to do good.

Let me clarify the language of that to commit yourself this isn't in the sense of dedication this isn't a decision to a particular course of action I'm committed to finishing this marathon no matter how hard it might get it's not quite commitment in that sense that would be a commendable attitude but it's not Peter's point here this is commit in the sense of entrust yourself like you commit your funds to the bank you trust the bank to look after your money or you commit someone into care it's a trust it's a placing into the authority of another it's depending on someone else to look after to provide to care Proverbs 16 3 says commit to the Lord whatever you do and he will establish your plans commit in that sense hand over entrust entrust your plans to God he will establish them entrust yourself to your faithful creator says Peter commit themselves commit their souls entrust yourself to the one who will deliver you from death to the one who will preserve your soul my friends the truth is that even the most intense suffering possible even the most intense suffering that anyone on this earth has experienced even that most intense suffering can only ever harm your body your soul will continue after death safe in the father's hands no one else has power over that and in this commitment in this trust in this committing yourself to your faithful creator in so doing you again walk in the footsteps of your savior just as the participation in suffering is to walk in his footsteps so too to commit yourself to your creator is to follow after him

Jesus Christ who on the cross cried out father into your hands I commit my spirit and when he had said this he breathed his last that was Jesus dying thought his dying confidence that his spirit was safe in the father's hands Peter put it another way earlier in the same letter he entrusted himself to him who judges justly that was Jesus own confidence and that can be your confidence too that can be your confidence in the face of terrible suffering to know that your faithful creator holds you so my friends if you don't have that confidence well this is the challenge today entrust yourself to him today be warned by the preceding verse verse 18 it is hard for the righteous to be saved if that is so what will become of the ungodly and the sinner implication is clear is it not see folks if you know that the truth is that you haven't been willing to suffer insult and inconvenience for the name of

[ 25 : 04 ] Christ if you know that you haven't actually chosen suffering over sin but have done quite the reverse you have been willing to do what you know is wrong because it is easier even if you know you've been the very one who has been insulting others and causing the suffering of those who claim the name of Christ even to you if you have not entrusted yourself to your faithful creator today is the day because Peter uses a present tense command here an ongoing instruction for those who first read his letter and still a command for this very moment today commit yourselves to your faithful creator however far short you have fallen however much you have rebelled against God however unwilling you have been to suffer the call is the same entrust yourself to your faithful creator why do that well because his are the only safe hands he's the only one who can care for you perfectly and he promises that he will he's a good and merciful

God maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness rebellion and sin yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished be warned and entrust yourself to your faithful creator and finally finally notice the context in which this instruction is given where is it that Peter says entrust yourself to your faithful creator it is a command for those who suffer see very often very often I at least and I imagine many of you very often we think when everything is going swimmingly when the sailing is smooth then we think God has his eye on the ball he knows what he's doing it's comparatively easy isn't it to entrust yourself to God when all is going well when the sun's shining when you feel happy when you feel at peace it is then comparatively easy but it is so much harder when the walls are closing in isn't it when you feel trapped by the situation when the pain is difficult to bear the physical pain the emotional pain the spiritual anguish see in those moments it looks like

God's dropped the ball doesn't it it feels like his hands are trembling like he might lose hold of you at any moment at those times we naturally inclined to ask questions about God's character to ask about his intentions it's hard to trust God when we're suffering even if we know the suffering is

deserved it's hard to trust him in that moment and it's harder if the suffering is indifferent a product of natural causes when God starts to look capricious or negligent and it's harder still when the suffering arises precisely because we have been faithful when it feels so wrong when it feels like we're owed a reward for our hard service when the suffering is unjust when it arises precisely because we have lived obediently to him it's the most natural thing in the world to ask questions to say God what is going on to think that he does not have us our every instinct in that moment cries out we must grasp control ourselves we must exert our authority we must lash out against the cause of pain we must do whatever we can to put this suffering to an end and Peter says no Peter says in precisely that situation when it is the most difficult to do so you must relinquish control you must commit yourself to your faithful creator you need to trust not in yourself not thinking that you can fix it you need to trust in your creator because it's the only thing that works you have to trust the one who made not only all things in this abstract amazing though that is but the one who made you the one who truly does know best the one who as creator is also sustainer ordering things in every moment of every day exactly as he intends he is the only one who is trustworthy the only one who is ultimately dependable not you not your husband or your wife not your parents not your best friend entrust yourself to no one but your faithful creator and as you do that well to continue to do good will be the natural result as Peter concludes to continue to give a reason for the hope that you have to persevere in love and hospitality and speaking and service that we looked at last week to avoid sin even when it results in suffering these things are possible are even natural in so far as we have handed ourselves over to our faithful creator to depend on him not on our ability to order things the way that they should be because you have committed yourself to your faithful creator that is our hope that is our strength that is our source of life God himself at work in us let's pray Lord God we confess to you that we so often look at our circumstances and judge you on the basis of them instead of looking at you instead of depending on what we know of you instead of trusting what you have said and judging our circumstances on the basis of what we already know of you we confess that we often get this wrong and we ask that you would equip us as your word that we have considered together this morning as it continues to turn around in our minds that it would strengthen us in dependence upon you that you would enable and equip us to trust you in all things that we might commit ourselves and you commit ourselves even for the first time to our faithful creator to the one who does hold all things to the one whose hands are perfectly trustworthy grant that we might know you well enough love you enough that we might trust you in this way amen