

Comfort or Glory?

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[0:00] Father, I pray that the Spirit would touch our minds and our hearts, that you would communicate truth to us through your word, and that our hope and our faith would be increased through what you've given to us through your servant Peter.

It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen. Quick question for you. Are you tired of preaching on suffering yet?

I think at this point, Father Evans has preached five sermons through this 1 Peter series that touch on suffering. He took a break for the clergy retreat. Brian came in and preached a sermon on suffering.

So we've had our fair share. We've preached enough that there's some churches that would say, are you obsessed with the issue?

There has been a teaching that's invaded American churches in the last century that doesn't leave any room for suffering. They think their mission is to remove pain from the life of their congregation.

[1:28] That the only kind of people that we want in our church are happy people. People with smiles on their faces. There's a real problem with that, though, if you break down and take their teaching to the conclusion.

I see three problems with this. One is, it doesn't agree with the reality of the life of the people in the pews.

We've got real troubles within our congregation. I'm going to crib from Brian, but he mentioned this. We have people that have dealt with divorce, deal with cancer diagnosis, death of people within families. These aren't pain and suffering that you just rebound from.

You don't just get over. You don't just put on a smile and come to church. If we don't have room for suffering people within the congregation, then we don't have room for them.

[2:28] They don't come to be here. You feel like, oh, there must be something wrong with me if I don't have this happy smile on my face. The second thing is, it doesn't agree with the reality of Scripture.

Suffering is throughout all of Scripture. Not just 1 Peter, that Father Evans. It's not like you come to just 1 Peter, we get our dose of suffering. And then move on.

We find this in Genesis. We find this in the Psalms. We find this in the Prophets. We find this all through the Gospels. And we find this through the Epistles. If you want to eliminate suffering from the conversation of the Church, you've got to cut out about half your Bible.

The third thing I see is, it doesn't agree with the reality that our Gospel message is built around a suffering Savior.

Jesus was a man acquainted with grief. And he suffered. And we see this all throughout his entire ministry.

[3:34] So if a church has no room for Jesus, has no room for the Bible, and it has no room for the people within its pews, the question we have to ask ourselves, is it still a church?

And the answer is, no it is not. So if the Church of the Holy Trinity wants to continue to be a body that identifies itself with Christ, it better be comfortable with dealing with the concept of suffering.

Because it is going to be part of our daily life, week in and week out. And as we come to this passage in Peter, Peter is really to the application point of his sermon, where he is taking all the things that we've been looking at week after week, and he's driving it home.

Remember that this book would have been read like a sermon. They wouldn't have broken it up over several months like we have. They would have presented it in one sitting, presented it to the congregation.

And we're really coming to the point where Peter's taking all of these doctrinal concepts, all the theological truths he's talked about, and he's really taking this and placing it to where it actually meets their daily life, and where their experiences are.

[5:00] So if you have your Bible, I would encourage you to follow along. You can hold me accountable, and see if it actually says what I'm saying it says.

We come to verse 12, and Peter writes, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

The very fact that Peter here has to warn them not to be surprised means that they have a tendency to not expect what's coming on.

And I really think, as I was preparing this sermon, you have all the fears that you have when you get ready, when you actually submit yourself to the text, and you feel like, Oh, I'm not worthy of handling this text.

And I think, I'll come out, I'll be honest with you guys, I have not suffered a lot in my life. Okay? I have not had a major life crisis. I've not had a lot of these things that, like Brian listed in his sermon that we talked about.

[6:17] So when it comes to preaching a sermon on suffering, I feel unworthy, but I began to become aware, well, this is the, I am the audience that Peter is really writing to.

I think I'm the first person that's going to be surprised when suffering comes along. Peter is preparing them for something that is about to come upon them.

I want you to remember what we looked at in our first sermon with Father Evans in chapter 1. Peter writes in verses 6 through 7, He reminds them of what they're currently enduring.

I think that this is a level of trial that is in severity lower than the fiery trial. He reminds them, In this you rejoice, though now for a little while.

If necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise.

[7:22] I want us to really think about this word coming up, glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Peter, right at the beginning, looks at these smaller trials that they're enduring and reminds them that it points forward to the future glory that is given when Jesus returns to establish his kingdom forever.

I'm going to suggest, right up here at the front, that Peter has argued through the entire book that suffering is a universal human condition.

It is the one thing that unites all of us together. When we look at the book of Hebrews, and the adult Sunday school just looked at this passage not too long ago, we covered and we looked at the suffering of Jesus in chapter 2.

And I would encourage you to be at the adult Sunday school class because I learned a lot during this section that we covered.

But we saw Jesus suffering, and we saw that Jesus became human to know suffering in order that that suffering would connect him to man.

[8:38] And that suffering had a purpose. In Hebrews 2.9 it says, we see Jesus crowned with, again, glory and honor because of the suffering of death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

However, I want to be clear that while Peter says that suffering comes to all of mankind, there are different types and there are different qualities of suffering.

Not all suffering is created equal, and not all suffering is good. One type has to be better than the other. Verse 13 says, rejoice insofar, or rejoice when, you share Christ's suffering that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

And there is that word glory again. This is the good kind of suffering. The suffering that points to the glory of Christ. This is the eschatological fullness of suffering.

And that's a big theological word, but it simply means it's the glory that Jesus brings when he comes and establishes his kingdom. We acknowledge this every week when we recite the Nicene Creed following the homily.

[10:18] We say, he will come again in glory. We affirm this. This is what we point forward and we look towards.

When we come to Christ, we give up our comfort to pursue glory. nobody is going to look back at their Christian life standing in the presence of Christ and celebrate the comfortable life they had. No one will remember that. Our history books are not full of people who were comfortable. Right? Do we remember them? I'm sure I'm going to go home.

The Jets aren't playing today. But I am going to go home and probably make myself comfortable after service and sit down in my chair, have some beverages, and watch football.

My kids are not going to look back at this afternoon and celebrate upon my death that awesome day that Dad went home and made himself comfortable.

[11:26] I pray that if I am going to be a good testimony to them, know that the things that they would remember about me are the times that I suffered for their behalf to help them be more and more like Christ.

And those are the things that I would want them to look back and remember. We remember suffering because suffering means there's something of value on the line.

Peter writes in the next epistle, The day of the Lord will come like a thief and the heavens will pass away with the war and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved and the earth and the works that are done in it will be exposed.

When Christ returns, our works or the type and the quality of our suffering can only be revealed upon the arrival of Christ.

Christ is the one that reveals the quality of our suffering. Paul writes about this in Corinthians, right, when he speaks of that which will burn up wood, hay, and stubble, that which will remain metal, precious stones, those things built upon Christ.

[12:50] Again, a suffering linked to Christ. I think that many times we speculate about the cause of suffering in other believers' lives. Sometimes Christians can be a little judgy that way.

Many times we're like Job's friends where we speculate and say, eh, Corleen must have had that thing come in her life because she didn't attend church enough or she missed the ladies' luncheon or we have these speculations.

No, the reality is we have a righteous judge who comes to establish the quality of suffering and when he comes, all that which was not worthy or valuable will be burnt up and the only thing that will be left is that which was done for the sake of Christ.

I think that there is in this life a single litmus test for the quality of suffering. In verse 14 we see if you are insulted for the name of Christ you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

This is a really interesting thing to meditate on because this is what we see played out in our actual existence in our daily lives.

[14:12] The spirit rests upon us when we suffer according to God's will. We see, I don't know if this measures up with your Christian experience, but what I have found is the most godly saints, the most holy people, the most powerful prayer warriors are in my experience been those Christians who suffered the most.

Have you guys seen this? There is a man in my past whose prayers changed my life. His name is George.

He died a year ago. For the last five years he hasn't been able to make it to church because he was 98 when he passed and his health had deteriorated.

Every Sunday he stayed home and prayed for the church throughout the entire time service was going on. George buried three wives during his life.

Raised, I believe, four children on his own on a farm. I think George may have been the most godliest man I've known.

[15:33] I think his prayers were some of the most powerful I've ever seen. and the man knew suffering and I believe that suffering brought him close to Christ and I believe the spirit of Christ rested upon him and blessed his daily life.

We don't see this kind of anointing of the spirit come upon us when we suffer for being a sinner. Right?

We don't walk with the spirit with that same closeness when we suffer as Peter's going to mention for being a thief or a murderer. We don't have God's power present within our life when that kind of suffering happens.

So that's why I can clearly say there's two different kinds of suffering one is definitely superior and it's the suffering that for the name of Christ which draws us closer to him.

This is the same Holy Spirit of which the Apostle Paul writes we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory.

[16:44] There we have glory again. even in the ministry of the Holy Spirit now it still points forward to the glory of Christ.

Every part of this Christian life, every part of this church experience points to the glory of Christ. The second category of suffering, verse 15, let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.

See, we have an ability, an uncanny ability, to be Christians that develop a martyr complex without reason. I have seen this all the time.

For those of you that don't know me well, for my 20s, for 11 years, I worked nights at a warehouse near here. And I usually had a fear when a new co-worker came and announced he was a Christian, because there was a 50-50 shot of where things were going to go.

It's always a dicey proposition. There always seemed to be this tendency for people to blame their own stupid mistakes on people don't like me because I'm a believer.

[18:10] I saw this multiple times throughout the years. Think of one man that would shut down the entire operations on a floor, pull two or three people around, and have a conversation about what whatever it was he wanted to have a conversation about.

Yankees, Mets, Dolphins. And when he would be confronted by his supervisor about the fact that both he and the people that he was talking to were being paid to do something that didn't involve sports, he would usually end up blaming it on, well, man's just got it out for me.

Because he knows I'm a Christian. Well, I didn't hear any witnessing going on during any of these conversations he was having. He was doing exactly what Peter is warning against.

There's a suffering that we endure for our own sinful mistakes. And we all continue to make these sinful mistakes, and there will always be part of our suffering that we endure.

This is not a good kind of suffering. This is a suffering that should educate us, it should help us learn what our mistakes are, and it should help us learn what kind of practice, what kind of things we should do as believers, and what things we should not do as believers.

[19:42] Peter moves on in verse 16, and speaks about suffering as a Christian. He says, Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him, again, glorify God in that name.

And we see suffering balanced out with glory. Now, as I studied this text, I found this passage pretty interesting, because it points to what kind of suffering the congregation that Peter dresses endured, and what they were about to endure.

Are any of you fans of the BBC series Sherlock? Anybody? Okay. All right. I have a couple here.

We tend to be an odd bunch, because if you end up, nobody likes that show just a little bit, right?

We tend to really like it. He's got a practice where he, it's Sherlock Holmes, which should be fairly obvious, where he goes to his mind palace when he can't figure out something, and he takes all the clues and he reconstructs what happens in his mind and figures out what actually happened.

This is kind of interesting, because we have here scripture kind of as our mind palace. It has all the clues. We might not know the name of the exact congregation this is written to, but all throughout scripture we have these little hints given to us through both Peter and Acts we see.

[21:27] Within this verse there are several things that are really interesting. So let's look at these clues really quick and see if we can learn a little bit about the suffering that this group endured.

First thing I like to point out is that we have the word Christian in this verse. And this is one of only three times the word Christian is used in the entire Bible.

Which is just a really fascinating thing when you think about it. We use it so commonly in how we refer to ourselves. We speak about things being Christian or not Christian all the time. In the New Testament it only happens three times.

One is in Acts 11.26 where outsiders begin to refer to Christians as or refer to these followers of Jesus as Christians. The other time is when Agrippa says to Paul, in a short time would you even persuade me to be a Christian?

And this third time is here in our verse today. Where again Peter refers to an outsider persecuting this church as Christians.

[22:39] Christians. The word Christian is really used here as an outsider's label for these followers of Jesus. And while we use it almost every time we use it with a positive note, as you read these three references, there's nothing that feels overwhelmingly positive when outsiders use it for Christians.

Christians. We don't see anything that says that the unbelievers in Antioch were excited that these Christians were in the group. Agrippa isn't necessarily antagonistic towards Paul, but I wouldn't say that he's overwhelmingly excited about the prospect of being a Christian.

And here in our verse today, we see that the culture is hunting out Christians and persecuting them, which certainly tells us that they're not using the term positively.

So that's really interesting. The phrase that we use so commonly was actually used by outsiders as they began to kind of recognize that followers of Jesus are different than we are and should be handled differently.

The second clue we have goes back to 1 Peter 1.1 where he addresses the letter to Pontus, Galatius, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

[24 : 09] Peter does not address Rome. If the fiery trial here is persecution from Caesar, that does not make sense.

Because Caesar does not persecute the churches located in this area during this time. The Caesar at the time would have been Nero. So we're very familiar with what Nero did to Christians in Rome. But this is a church located far away from Caesar. While Nero did begin persecuting the church at this time, it wasn't here. The other clues we have are other passages of scripture that address believers.

I think one of the clearest, the most similar other congregation we have is that addressed in Hebrews. The author of the Hebrews tells his audience, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

The church did not endure to the point of martyrdom. Elsewhere, the author of the Hebrews says, but recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partnered with those who were treated, for you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

[25 : 45] We see a congregation that endured the realities of a culture that began to shut them out. They began to shut down marketplaces, to drive people out of homes, not yet to the point of martyrdom, but this was a grassroots movement against Christians.

So we have different kinds of persecution, even within the accounts of the New Testament. We have those headed up by wicked leaders, Caesars, Neros, and we have those that represent an entire culture turning against them.

As we come to a national election, a lot of our fears are on our national leaders who we choose to be president.

We have concerns about that, and I think that's a just thing, but we need to remember that within that, that only represents one gateway of suffering. It's only one way Satan is to get at us.

If George Washington were to be resurrected and elected president, underneath the platform of reestablishing Christian values, all those things that we would celebrate, we have to represent the fact that we are still at odds with the culture, the grassroots culture around us.

[27 : 08] It's just surprising. Jesus said this, right? He said, do not be surprised that the world hates you. It hated me first. The question is, is the church going to be surprised when this suffering comes upon us for naming the name of Christ?

Christ? I had experience this year, and I'm going to hide the details to protect the innocent parties. Someone close to me is on a board, a civic board, that has an employee, a low-wage employee, who works this job to help feed her family.

And this employee took a stand where she made a commitment that she would not allow pornographic material to be distributed to minors.

You know, that doesn't seem like that's that brave a position. It wasn't that brave a position 10, 20 years ago. Certainly, you know, the nonsense that was going on wouldn't have flown in any cultural avenue that happened when I was a teenager.

[28 : 25] I just know that. This person that was close to me overheard after the employee had been reviewed for the incident, we've got a real problem.

This person's faith is getting in the way of their job. That stand that seems so insignificant is probably going to cost this individual money that they need.

And I don't think that this is going to be just an obscure happening in the years that come that are coming for us. I believe these things are becoming more and more common as we take a stand for Christ.

We will suffer because the culture has turned against us, because it represents another kingdom. Things that we're The chapter 2 and 3 commands that we've seen through our series are normal, everyday things that we should be doing as believers.

Nothing when Father Evans preached through chapter 2 and 3 and he said, be subject to every human institution, honor everyone, be subject to your masters, have unity of mind, humble minds, don't repay evil for evil.

[29:45] These aren't really remarkable things that we're supposed to be doing. But those are the exact things that are going to open us up to suffering, especially as we work out in businesses, as we deal with our families.

Many of us have either close family members or extended family members that aren't Christians. As we interact with our government, these are daily commands. So, Peter closes this section of scripture with one last admonition, one last encouragement for his audience as he finishes this section on suffering.

We'll look down to verses 17 through 19. I'm going to make a little bit of an observation.

I think I read this text incorrectly my entire life up till about Thursday night when I'm thinking through this. Because when you read scripture, when I was a kid I had seen a picture of the Apostle John, a painting of the Apostle John, sitting on the island of Patmos, undisturbed at his desk, just writing away in quiet.

And when I read scripture I think of it in flowery and eloquent language. And I kind of forgot who wrote this section. Peter wrote this section of scripture.

[31:21] Peter was a big, burly, fisherman, sufferer. I don't think he was trying to be kind and flowery.

And you know what else? I don't think he was trying to be comforting. He wasn't trying to comfort his audience. And this is the exact idea. If I see someone suffering, I try to comfort them.

I don't think he was trying to comfort them. He lived the hard life of a day laborer in Galilee. And he transferred into the harder life of an apostle.

And I don't think he was that concerned about their feelings. I used to read this as comforting. Now I just read it as encouraging in the same subtle understanding way a drill sergeant intends to be encouraging.

I have never served in the military. I've never had the pleasure of myself of experiencing a drill sergeant face to face. How many people have?

[32:28] I know Father Evans has referenced it. Was he terribly concerned about your feelings? Not so much.

Those of you who have served though, enjoy a fellowship and a companionship that I will never have.

Across branches, across time served, there is, I've watched this, you guys connect in a way I don't have access to. You know why I don't have access to it?

Because I didn't endure the suffering that you did. I don't have a right to have access to that. The only way that you have a right to that is to endure that suffering.

And that suffering is not meant to destroy you, although I'm fairly certain, we talk about this in teen class, we talk about tear gas drills for a little bit, no relevant stuff.

[33:36] You might have thought that that was designed to destroy you at the time, but it was designed to train you and prepare you for a future glory.

And I believe that you have earned that glory because you have chosen to serve someone that was not yourself. Peter's not really concerned about their feelings here.

He's more concerned about their survival. That is meant to boot camp, is meant to train you and prepare you for something, for a glory that does not, is not centered on you.

Because of the suffering, a suffering that you do not endure for your own sake, the sake of others, you have a type of glory that a civilian like me doesn't have.

It's a different type of glory. You know, there's another type of glory I don't have access to. The glory of a mother having a child. Right?

[34:41] Is there suffering involved in bringing a child into the world? I remember being a young, naive, stupid 20-year-old preparing to have our first child and going through the childbirth classes, Lamaze videos, and the teacher in the video says, at this stage, you will experience some discomfort.

And I thought, well, I've experienced some discomfort before. This cannot be that bad. On December 7, 2001, I realized that the bill of goods didn't match what was actually received. That there was something we left mild discomfort behind very quickly. But the reality is that for mothers, the suffering that is endured passes away and is forgotten and is replaced by the glory of a child.

And that glory is one that lasts, the suffering was that one that doesn't last. Peter reminds them of exactly this thing. This is what this last section of verses is saying.

He says, you guys think you have it so bad because of the suffering you endure. You think it's so tough? Think about all those people who are damned to hell around you suffering and what they have to look forward to.

[36:22] And the answer is there is no glory before them. He writes it is time for judgment, it is time for suffering to begin at the household of God.

If it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? Of course, the answer is their entire being and existence faces destruction and reality of hell.

If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? He reminds them, if you think you have it so tough, look at the people that are dying around you without Christ. Your suffering is not unique from them, and when it is, it points forward to the future glory of Christ. He reminds them and closes saying, therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will, entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good.

He reminds them not to complain, but take the reality of suffering as an opportunity to worship Christ. Remind you that in a few weeks, we renew our focus on the Christian year.

[37:42] We start the season of Advent where we look forward, we remember Christ's coming as a child, and we look forward to the coming of Christ. We recognize that we are a body that suffers together.

I'd like us to remember when we have that suffering in our midst, especially during this Advent season coming up, that we take the opportunity to remember that we, our lives, our conduct, our worship, our singing, our preaching, our teaching, all these things are meant to point towards the glory of Christ.

That's the end goal of this whole thing that God calls the church. I'll close with a short prayer from Apostle John at the close of Revelation. He who testifies to these things says, surely I'm coming soon.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.