

Suffering Well for Christ

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- [0 : 0 0] Amen. If you have a Bible, please turn with me to the second part of 1 Peter chapter 4. And we'll continue on. We'll continue on in our series in 1 Peter.
- But before we go into it, tell me if you hear the difference. I'm going to say the same statement twice. What have I done to deserve this? And what have I done to deserve this?
- It's interesting that the same phrase, spoken in different ways, mean completely different things. It's exact wording, but the emphasis is clearly off.
- What have I done to deserve this? You can picture somebody with a wonderful banquet or maybe, I don't know, it's like the third win in a row. They're enjoying life.
- But somebody's saying, what have I done to deserve this? Sorrow and heartache has gripped them. Although both sentences, they share this exact wording and they are different in emphasis, they both convey the same interesting truth.
- [1 : 0 8] Interestingly, this reveals something remarkable about the human heart.
- That we deep down believe that good behavior ought to be rewarded and poor behavior ought to be overlooked. We shouldn't be punished or suffer for the things that we do wrong.
- But not just any poor behavior, just my poor behavior. Those that wrong me, they deserve justice. Don't overlook them. Our friends, our family members, those that are closer, close to us, they get a pass too.
- But how about those that are on the wrong team? Are part of the wrong people? Or think the wrong way, vote the wrong way. They deserve what is coming to them.
- It's interesting that the sins of others is excusable. But when we sin, when we suffer, when we do things that are wrong rather, nuance should be considered before judgment is passed.
- [2 : 3 0] Understand the context. Of course I had to do it this way. It's understandable. So why do I bring this up? Peter will once again address the topic of suffering in order to answer a very honest question that many in the congregation in Asia Minor, but really it's a perpetual question that the church asks from generation to generation.
- And that is, why if I am following Christ, if I am doing good according to God's will, why do I have to suffer? Why should I suffer?
- If I am doing the greatest possible good, the New Testament, follow God's will, and it is the highest expression of good action we can do as human beings on planet Earth, why then, if it's the greatest good that I'm doing, do I suffer?
- Why should it not just lead to perpetual bliss and gifts and honor and blessings forever? However, doing good should mean getting good.
- So a text like this potentially seems backwards. And to be perfectly honest, it seems like a raw deal and maybe a dereliction of care by God to his children.
- [3 : 5 0] But before we pass judgment on the eternal, perfect, and just God, let's remember that God's word is always good news for us.

It is always, we put on a lens when we read the Bible, and we always read the Bible thinking, this is good news. One way or the other, whether I understand it fully, this is good news. It is a good news. That if we suffer for Christ, it is not an unfortunate reality, but a joyous, worthy act that we ought to rejoice in.

In fact, it's what the human heart longs for. What this text doesn't do is it doesn't defang suffering. It doesn't say that downplay suffering as if suffering doesn't hurt.

Suffering hurts. This doesn't make a kitten out of your tragedies and your difficulties. The pain, the difficulty of suffering, it's still real, but what it does do is it defangs it, for it puts suffering in a lower tier of control over our lives.

It doesn't dictate how we ought to live nor our eternity ahead. So this text will help us to understand what suffering is and then how we ought to handle it as God's people.

[5 : 14] So let's look firstly at what is the true nature of suffering for Christ. If you have a Bible, there's still, I think, four or five Bibles back there. You can grab one at any time.

If you follow along with me, that would be very helpful. But look with me at verse 12. And we'll continue to verse 16. It says this, 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.

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. That's like a busy body. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Peter quite explicitly says that suffering for Christian living and association with Christ, it's a good thing. There's no nuance at all.

[6 : 24] He says it's a good thing. Notice in verses 13 to 16, Peter makes mention of Christ three times or the name three times. We see it here. As you share Christ's suffering, he continues on.

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, he continues on in verse 16. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, he makes it very clear here that the suffering that he has in view is to suffer as somebody associated with Christ or doing Christ's will.

I'll say this right off the bat. That's an important observation. This isn't Peter saying that all suffering is to be rejoiced in. He is not making a blanket statement about suffering that somehow this is just a baptized version of some kind of stoic, stiff upper lip that Christians ought to keep.

He is specifically talking about suffering in light of our association with Christ. And this is a really important thing. Firstly, like I said, because it doesn't approve of suffering in general, suffering is a bad thing.

In the New Testament and really the entire Bible is clear that that we are as God's people to work to alleviate suffering in the world, to see justice come forward, to see mercy extended, to have justice and mercy and love be the calling card of the church, especially as it pertains to the suffering that we see.

[8 : 03] Suffering is bad. It's really bad. And here, it's not like Peter is again giving a green light or saying that it is okay.

The second, it's important to remember that this suffering is specifically linked to suffering for Christ because we can at times as Christians develop a martyrdom complex.

We can see any oppression against our individual freedom as potentially Christian suffering and that's not the case. I'm probably wading right into mucky waters here but during the lockdowns over the past whatever, three years, the chronology gets kind of murky.

Christians weren't targeted for being Christians when the churches were closed. It was garbage in my opinion. I didn't like it. Obviously, I'm a pastor. I like when the doors are open and the seats are filled and it was very frustrating to see churches deemed non-essential but the LCBO and cannabis dispensaries open to the public.

It was frustrating but it wasn't an attack on Christianity. Mosques were given the same mandate. Kingdom halls of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindu temples, Jewish synagogues.

[9 : 30] That wasn't an example of Christian suffering. That's not what it has in view here and Peter is making it very clear that the suffering that we should rejoice in isn't the suspension of our individual rights.

By the way, that is a problem worth fighting. I'm not saying it's not a worthy fight but what Peter has in view here is suffering because we are Christians specifically with our association with Christ.

Another example that might help with this. Edith Stein was a German philosopher in the 20s and 30s. She was a Jewish woman who came to faith, became a Roman Catholic Carmelite nun.

And in the early 30s and into the mid-30s and farther on when Nazism took root, she fled to Holland.

Anyways, she was arrested, she was sent to Auschwitz and she was murdered beside her sister. And in the 80s, John Paul II beatified her.

[10 : 41] That's the first step towards making her a saint in the Roman Catholic faith. But there's controversy around it because why? Because she was sent to Auschwitz.

So did she, was she murdered? Was she a Christian martyr or was she another murdered Jew? If she was just another murdered Jew, lamentable, something to mourn.

But she wasn't necessarily a martyr for her Christian faith. Interestingly, and it's not for our discussion, I think there's a legitimate claim for her in the Roman Catholic religion to grant her sainthood.

But it's interesting to me that in the Roman Catholic Church, they go to great pains to differentiate Christian suffering from other kinds of suffering.

And you see the difference here. And Peter here has in view Christian suffering. Peter is making the point that suffering for Christ's name is the suffering that we ought to embrace.

[11 : 47] And he says it for three main reasons. The first, very quickly as we go through this first point, the first is that it tests our faith. We have seen this before back in chapter one, Peter writes in verses six and seven of chapter one when he says this, in this you rejoice, though now for a little while if necessary you have been grieved by various trials, verse seven, 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 and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We seem comfortable with God's good and sovereign plan when we are happy and things are going well. When the blessings are coming, we can quickly point out a God moment, and I kind of say that a bit facetiously, but I do it.

This is a God moment right here, whenever things are going well. But what happens when pressures and pains come? Our false trust in God is exposed as not being a trust in him, but delighting in the blessings of this life, but not the one who gives the blessings.

Do we say that it's a God moment when we suffer some kind of indignity because we proclaim and bear witness to the cross of Christ in our workplaces or within our homes?

If we get a slap on the wrist or potentially worse by HR because we are a bit too forward with our Christian faith, is that a God moment? Do we see that as a God moment? I would say I probably don't.

[13 : 31] I would struggle with that. Especially in June, it rolls around a lot of us, I mean I say a lot of us, I don't, but a lot of us as a congregation, we work in a secular environment and we have soft, sometimes hard pressure to support Pride Month.

What happens when we choose not to? Not that we're rallying against Pride Month, but that we just don't participate in it. Is it a God moment when we suffer promotion?

When we are whispered at behind our backs? When we don't include our preferred pronouns in our signature page, or our signature on our email?

Is it a God moment? Peter here is saying that yes, it certainly is when we suffer, and that we shouldn't be downcast and broken about it.

He says this in verse four, sorry, verse 13, but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

[14 : 50] It is a tough thing to be a Christian in the secular world, and I've said this in the past, I'll say it again, I have a far easier time being a Christian pastor at a coffee shop or with my neighbors or wherever it may be, because my job in some ways is not on the line, yours is.

Potentially, you guys have to deal with this more than I do. Nevertheless, it says rejoice. Rejoice.

And it's coming not from this proud, like, beat-his-chest type of man. Peter is the same guy who had this rock-solid faith tested and failed miserably.

What did he say? Those loser disciples, they will fail, they will fall away, but not me. I will follow you to the death. Bravado.

And the second a bit of pressure was applied, he gave it up. I do not know the man. I swear to God, I don't know the man. Literally, calling a curse upon himself.

[16 : 03] Nevertheless, verse 13 still rings true. It says rejoice. Like everything that claims to have integrity, testing is needed. It might seem unfair, but testing is needed for our faith.

A bridge, a boat, a barbell, all items cannot withstand the pressure and stress. If they cannot withstand the pressure and stress, they provide a false sense of safety and assurance, and they pose a risk to us and to those around us.

likewise, likewise with our faith. The good Lord, he tests our faith in the cross of Christ, not from a place of insecurity, but as if God needs our approval and he is this insecure, jealous husband that is just testing and it's very, it's exposing his insecurity, not our lack of trust, but rather it comes from a God who is abounding in mercy and love.

Why does he test us? Because he wants our faith to be sure. Because we will put our faith in other things and when we put our faith in other things, they will crumble and we will suffer. But when our faith is in the cross of Christ truly, and it often is when we are facing those pressure points and the struggles, then we grip that cross so tightly and it becomes for us the very foundation by which we will live this life with joy and thankfulness and mercy and love.

We can say literally, come hell or high water, I am secure. This tells us also that the Christian faith is one of integrity.

[17 : 49] Are we here for good morals? Are we here on Sunday for good morals? We want our kids to have good morals. are we here for friendly people? Are we here for the wonderful angelic voice of the worship leader on this wonderful Sunday?

Or are we here for the risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Are we here for him? Does this faith inform our weeks, our months, our years?

Do we fashion our lives around worship? Are we valuing the eternal king of kings above all else? I had a conversation earlier in the week about how the Christian calendar is a blessing for us in the midst of a secular world because it fashions our life not around the economy but around worship of Christ and of his life.

The calendar, I've said this in the past, that it begins with the preparation of Christ being born. It continues on to, I'm speaking in kind of broad strokes here, his passion, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and then we do it all over again.

Our lives, are they fashioned around the king of kings? If we want to grow in our faith and devotion, we must be prepared for suffering. But make no mistake, our lives will be richer, not poorer, they will be more robust, they won't lack, they will be more satisfying, not less satisfying, than anything else that we substitute in Christ's stead.

[19 : 31] And suffering will expose our false messiahs, our false gods, our false foundations. So what does he say? Going back to verse 13, what does Peter say?

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, so it tests our faith. What else does it do? It doesn't just test our faith, although it certainly does that.

It assures us that we are united with Christ. Notice verse 13, but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

Steve mentioned in his sermon last week when he talked about participation in Christ, it's this idea that when we put our faith in him, we are united to him in his mystical body, the church, but it also means that we, our destiny is Christ's, so we suffer like Christ, but we will also enjoy the resurrection of the dead like Christ.

So that when we suffer for him, it is a sign that we are of him. It is proof. It is a pledge that Christ makes for us, again, cause for rejoicing.

[20 : 49] All of this, finally, what else does it do? It brings glory to God, for we value him to the uttermost in a world that values self above all. So, verse 16, if you could look with me briefly here, it says, yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

We glorify not a slightly better power than the earthly powers, but I preached a couple weeks ago, the cosmic victor over everything, no power, no principality, no spirit is greater than him.

And all of a sudden, we're connected to him and we give him glory and our lives are hidden with him. This gives him glory, it gives us great cause for rejoicing.

So that is what it means to suffer, the true nature of suffering for Christ.

But then, how do we suffer well? If that's what suffering for Christ looks like, how do we suffer well? We're looking at verses 16 and 19. Look with me. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

[22 : 01] For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God. And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

And, quoting Proverbs 11 here, if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Verse 19, we'll close it off with this.

Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. Interestingly, and I'm not going to comment further than this, this is the only time in the New Testament that God is explicitly called creator, faithful creator.

So how do we suffer well? Notice first that we are not to be ashamed. For the Christians in Asia Minor, being a Christian would have risked shame upon their family and upon their individual lives.

It meant not participating in the practices and values of the culture. We see Peter alluding to this, maybe not even alluding, just saying it explicitly. Earlier in the chapter, Steve mentioned it, chapter 4, verse 4, this is what it says.

[23 : 14] With respect to this, they, that is the pagans, non-Christians, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.

For the residents of Asia Minor, the original recipients of this letter, and for us today, we will not be ashamed of Christ only when we fully see the full extent of our idolatry, and we face evil face on, and we understand what evil truly is.

Like the evil one, like Satan in the garden, he knows how to clothe evil in goodness, and dress up all sorts of horrendous debauchery, and make it look like wonderful amounts of self-expression.

But if we understand truly that the lure and promise of our culture is not the most fullest, most free, most satisfied we will be, but rather the very decay of our souls, then we will see Christ truly for who he is.

When we see Christ for truly, we see Christ truly for who he is, it is harder for us to venture back into the other culture, the other age, the other arena, and find true joy that we've first found with Christ.

[24 : 55] And therefore, to be ashamed of Christ after we enjoy him and see him for who he truly is and see the opposite, that it is decay, we will not be ashamed.

Our flesh is weak, shame comes, but if we truly value Christ, we value him and we adore him over all things, we will not be ashamed.

Throughout the Bible, this dilemma is juxtaposed as the fear of man versus the fear of God when we struggle with honoring Christ over honoring the age that we live in. But hear these words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 10, 28 to 33.

He says this, And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?

And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not. Therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.

[26 : 03] Be wonderful if he stopped at verse 31. But he hits hard with verse 32 and 33. Listen to this. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge before my father who is in heaven.

But whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my father who is in heaven. They are very sobering words. Friends, do not be ashamed of Christ.

If we deny him on earth, he will deny us before the father. So then how do we value and love and proclaim Christ so that we are not ashamed of him?

I think this is where suffering exposes that for us. It exposes for us our false gods like we've talked about. But it also exposes for us the false narrative and promise of our age so that we can see the truth of Christ in its brilliance.

That's how we suffer well when we treasure Christ above all. Our text also tells us that we can suffer well if we have eternal judgment in view. The Matthew passage alludes to this.

[27 : 14] But look with me again at verses 17 and 18 of chapter 4 of 1 Peter. For it is time for judgment to begin in the household of God.

And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome of those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Like other parts of Peter, we could spend a few weeks looking at these two verses.

Peter, it's like he packs it in real dense. But just a couple comments. Firstly, as the creed affirms, both Christians and non-Christians will experience the judgment of God.

Because we're Christians doesn't mean we are, we don't experience God's judgment. Yes, we don't experience God's judgment in terms of we are judged to be sinners without redemption.

We are clothed in Christ. So therefore, our judgment is a judgment to glory. But we still will be judged. And just like how the kingdom of heaven will come in its fullness at the end of the age, but we experience it now in part, so too with the judgment of God, that there is a final judgment.

[28 : 24] It will come. It has not come yet. But for the people of God, we experience it in part now. What do I mean? The judgment of God throughout the scriptures is described as a consuming fire that both purifies and condemns.

The same purifying fire for the Christian, it purifies our souls. The suffering for the faith that God wills is a refining fire that sifts out who are truly his and purifies the faith of the faithful.

Think of, and it's used a ton in the Bible, you have a bunch of ore, but the smelter, he melts it down at the right temperature so that the dross, the impurities are melted away and the precious metal remains.

And that is what the purifying judgment, the fire of God does. It purifies us. So therefore, the flames of persecution, when they come, they become the pledge, not just of a purified faith, but a proof that being united in Christ, our future eternally will be with him.

It is, in a sense, the beginning of God's judgment unfurling, first for the church. It's proof that the spirit of God resides once again in his temple.

[29 : 45] If you remember in previous weeks, the temple imagery is used by 1 Peter to describe us, the church, and the spirit of God resides within the temple. The fire of God, so to speak, resides within the temple.

It is proof that we are of Christ. It's costly and painful. This is why Peter references Proverbs 11 here. Not to say that salvation is impossible, but that it comes at a high cost.

That Christ has bought us at a high cost. Remember 1 Peter 1.19, it says the very high cost of his very blood. Finally, how do we suffer well?

And this is what we'll wrap things up with. We can suffer well when we entrust our souls to Christ. This might be something you write out on a little cue card or something, write it on your mirror.

This is what it says, verse 19. Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls, not to some indifferent person, but to a faithful creator while doing good.

[30 : 56] To a faithful creator. Here's a troubling truth for us. Us who are self-reliant folk. Our ability to safeguard our soul is nothing compared to how God can safeguard our soul.

Our ability to look after ourselves is nothing compared to how God can look after ourselves. Our ability to conduct self-care is nothing compared to what God can do in our hearts.

Providing true care. Self-care is okay. Just to be clear. Go to the Nordique if you need to for a little me time. All right? No problem.

Nevertheless, what is the Nordique compared to the eternal bliss of glorification that Christ offers to us? We have this problem where our self-reliance causes us not to enjoy life better, but to suffer in a way that is just, that the suffering is not meant for us.

Yes, we are to suffer as we embrace Christ, but he promises that we will, our suffering will then be the source then of our joy and our love and our mercy that we extend to others.

[32 : 21] So friends, the very act of relinquishing our souls to Christ is the most sure and safe thing we can do for ourselves. Remember that Christ is the one who commands us to obey him, to suffer for him, but not as somebody who sits back on an armchair to watch, but as the one who suffered as well and also entrusted his soul to God the Father.

If you can flip back with me to 1 Peter chapter 2, 21 to 25, it's almost like an anthem that Peter is proclaiming, and he says this starting in verse 21.

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

This is a rehearsal of Isaiah 53. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued. Here it is. Another cue card verse, right there.

That's who we suffer for, the one who suffered for us. That's who we obey when we entrust our souls to the faithful creator, because he entrusted his soul to the faithful creator.

[34 : 00] And the faithful creator did not let him down and did not let him see eternal decay, but rose him from the grave to eternal life. And that is our future. So therefore, we can be sure, friends, that if we entrust ourselves to Christ, he will not abandon us.

We are not destined for the rubbish heap, or the grave, or utter loneliness. Instead, our souls are safeguarded. And the imagery, interestingly, is it is given, it's to give somebody who is integral and trustworthy something in trust to hold on to for the future when we will then receive it back.

That we are entrusting our souls to the most integral, trustworthy being in the entire cosmos. Friends, the fact is, our good behavior is nowhere close to being good enough, and our bad behavior is far greater and more dire than we would like to admit or even imagine.

We cannot hope to escape God's just judgment. Let alone know him as friend. Yet through Christ, this is our reality. It is our future.

It's our sure hope. Let us pray. Father in heaven, we thank you that you have called us to suffer and truly follow in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who suffered on our behalf, entrusting his soul to you, Father, and that you did not disappoint.

[35 : 37] So, Father, as we lay our lives down for you, suffering as Christians, for being associated with Christ, Lord, give us great courage. Help us to not be ashamed. Help us to live for your glory.

Help us to see this as a great blessing in our lives. And, Lord, help us to entrust our souls to you. Lord, we thank you that you will never let us down. Lord, bless the rest of this time together.

Help us to walk in the fullness that you have called us to walk in. Lord, we want to be your ambassadors. We want to be the people that are a godly representation of you here on earth as resident aliens of heaven.

Amen. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.