

The Suffering Christian (1)

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[0 : 01] Let's turn together now to 1 Peter and the passage we read in chapter 4, 1 Peter chapter 4, reading again at verse 12. 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. Puritan Thomas Watson once said or wrote that the gospel ministry faced two great difficulties.

The first was how to make sinners sad and the second was how to make the saved happy. And that's very true, isn't it?

We are not naturally inclined as lost sinners to be sad over our sins, to mourn over our sins, to come to repent of sin. That's what Thomas Watson meant, that the gospel ministry faces that challenge of sinners being made sad.

But on the other hand, it's equally true. That it's difficult for us at times as Christians to be truly happy in the Lord. Not the kind of frothy or light sort of happiness that the world knows of.

[1 : 28] But the genuine solid joy that comes from being in Christ and knowing Christ. Because sometimes, in fact, quite often we let our outward circumstances, the events that happen from day to day in our lives, we let these sometimes get on top of us and get us down.

And one of the great objectives of Peter's letter here, the first Peter letter, is that second emphasis there of making the saved happy, or at least bringing those who suffer as Christians to see that they can still rejoice in the Lord, even amongst their difficulties and their triumphs.

That's what this letter is really addressing. Suffering Christians. Now we know that everybody suffers. It doesn't just mean that we're not just saying that it's only those who are Christians really that have suffering worth talking about.

Everybody in the world, to some extent, will suffer at some times. And there are plenty of people in the world who are not Christians, who are suffering perhaps sometimes even more than Christians have to suffer. So we're acknowledging that.

But the fact is that there are some particular distinctives about Christian suffering, and why Christians have suffering in their lives, and what Christians are to make of suffering in their lives.

[2 : 52] And I want to spend two or three or maybe four weeks looking at 1 Peter, and at the theme of the suffering Christian, and how Peter deals with this issue of suffering, and where suffering fits into the life of Christian people.

And you can divide the way Peter deals with it into two categories, really. First of all, we'll spend a bit of time looking at what Peter says about attitude.

This week and next time as well, God willing. The right attitude that we must have in regard to sufferings in the experience of Christians. And the second category is associations.

Attitude and associations really pretty much sum up how Peter deals with this theme of Christian sufferings. What sort of attitude we have with regard to it, and what associations does it have with other things that Peter mentions.

Because as we'll go through it, you'll see that he specifically mentions how our suffering is associated with other important topics, such as the sufferings of Christ, holiness of life, witness in the presence of the world, the hope of eternal life.

[4 : 15] All of these things are associated with this theme of suffering, and suffering as Christians experience it. So we're beginning with attitude, and today looking at that briefly, and then moving on to the first of those ways in which the attitude that Peter counsels us to have is commended to us in his writings.

A right attitude to Christian suffering, first of all then, and in general terms. It's crucial how we think, how we approach things, how we understand things, in order to have a proper reaction to them, or activity in relation to them.

And it's no different with regard to Christian suffering, or suffering as Christians. Peter is one of those people that you know, from what's said about him in Scripture, has learned the hard way. He wasn't a man who actually learned easily, easily, you might say. Sometimes even the words of the Lord fell on deaf ears as far as Peter was concerned. He just seems to have had that self-confidence that needed to be knocked about a little bit in order for him to really come to depend upon the Lord.

And he's writing here from the perspective of someone who knows what it is to suffer. Someone indeed who faced the challenge of the world that he was a Christian and he caved in.

[5 : 44] He didn't stand up to it. And because of that, his testimony here in this epistle is all the more valuable.

He's not talking from the perspective of someone who doesn't know anything about these issues. Somebody who never actually gave in to sufferings or let sufferings get on top of him.

He's talking from the perspective of someone who's been there and who's now bringing out, as Jesus in fact said to him, when you're recovered from your lapse, when you're recovered, when you turn around again, strengthen your brethren.

And he's writing this letter for the benefit of the church down through time so that we can learn from the things that he himself sets out in the epistle as to how we are to deal with the suffering.

So that's why he's saying, in the likes of chapter 1, verse 13 there, therefore preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded.

[6 : 45] He's talking about the mind, he's talking about the exercise of the mind, talking about the attitude, what sort of attitude you might have. Because if you don't have a right attitude to sin, to suffering, to any particular subject, but for example here, for suffering itself, if we don't have the right attitude, first of all, to begin with, then there's little hope that you'll actually get the actions right in relation to it.

You begin with the mind, you begin with the attitude, with the understanding, you then move on to the right action from that. And in order to have a right attitude to suffering, Peter mentions, as the rest of the Bible mentions, the importance of knowing the truth.

The importance of knowing the truth as God has revealed it. And that means, for you and for me, it's a thing we come back to again and again simply because it's so foundationally important.

We come back to it again and again and it's this, our view of the Bible itself, our view of Scripture, what we make Scripture out to be, what Scripture says of itself and whether we accept that or not. Because knowing God's truth means that you must have a correct view of the Bible in order to know that truth. Because let's face it, you're living, and I are living in days when all sorts of ways of distorting what the Bible really is and should be for Christians when there are so many of these views that hit you from all sides.

[8 : 25] I was just reading the other day somewhere on, it was a comment really, somebody had on a response to a blog somewhere, but this man was writing as a Christian or just responding a little bit, a small paragraph really in response to someone else.

But what he said was, let's keep the teachings of Jesus, but let's get rid of all that Paul stuff. Right? Do you see what's happening there? That's saying, well, what Jesus actually said, the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels, let's keep these by all means, but it's Paul that really distorted the Gospel.

He came up with all these things about justification by faith and all this legal stuff and all the views that he has of different lifestyles and condemns things like homosexuality and all the rest of it.

Let's get rid of all that stuff. But let's keep the teachings of Jesus. You see what's happening there? When parts of the Bible are just being pulled apart, when you come to the Bible and think it's just a series of books written by different people and you don't actually keep them necessarily together, what is the Bible?

What is this book? Who is its author? Where does it get its authority from? Is it from Peter? Is it from Paul? Is it from John? Is it from Isaiah?

[9 : 47] No, it's from God. If you don't hold Scripture together as a unity, as the Word of God, you've got a problem right from the start.

And that's one of the main things that's being attacked in our particular generation and day. The truth of the Bible, what the Bible is, and the authority that comes from that as God's Word is something that you need to maintain in your attitude, in your understanding of what the Bible is for and what it's about.

So you need to know God's truth in order to have that right attitude. Scripture is one. Yes, Peter wrote this epistle. Yes, Paul wrote Romans and Galatians and John wrote his epistles and his Gospels.

But ultimately, the authorship is God's. And when we lose sight of that, we're really in trouble. Because then, you can do this kind of exercise and just set Paul against John or against Jesus or whatever and pick and choose what you think is relevant for your day.

It's all one because it's all God-inspired, breathed-out truth. It's His will expressed in writing to us. [11:11] So a right attitude to Christian suffering is necessary, but in order to have it, you need to know the truth of God and for that, you need to have a certain view of the Bible.

Otherwise, it doesn't all fit together. So, there are two things that come from that in terms of an attitude. In 1 Peter is what we're now going to look at the rest of the study today that suffering in a Christian's life is not misplaced.

And then next time we'll come back to chapter 1 and see the second part of the attitude that suffering is actually necessary. You need to have both of these at the same time.

That Christian suffering or suffering in a Christian life is not misplaced. and at the same time it is in fact necessary as chapter 1 puts it, though now if necessary you are in heaviness or in various triumphs.

So, the second thing we're looking at the first of these now and that is that Christian suffering is not misplaced or suffering in a Christian life is not misplaced.

[12:21] Now, you notice what he's saying in verse 12. 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.

That's the first thing. It's not misplaced and this is how Peter is setting this out for us. It's not something out of place. It's not something strange. You must have that attitude towards it that sees this as not out of place.

Now, what does he mean by this fiery trial? Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial. When you go back to chapter 1 and verse 7 you can see very similar language used there where he says though now for a little while if necessary you have been grieved by various trials and then verse 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith more precious than gold that perishes though it is tried or tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory.

Now, that's really got the imagery of refining metals such as gold or silver and that's what you have to bear in mind with this phrase the fiery trial because the word fiery is not there expressing the intensity of the trial it's much more to do with the purpose of the trial.

Although you could take the word fiery to indicate something really intense something really painful and of course trial may be really painful and may be really intense but the reason Peter is using this phrase this fiery trial when it comes upon you what he's saying is the trial that's coming upon you the trials you face and experience as a Christian have a purpose they're not misplaced in your life because they have a specific purpose and the specific purpose is to do with refining you with purifying you with making you a better person with cutting out from your life things which you and yourself want to have cut out it's for purifying refining purifying it's a kind of crucible if you like just as you find metal put into a vessel of some kind that you can call a crucible or in a laboratory you have a crucible where stuff is put and then you put a fire under it in order to smelt off or whatever the impurities that's what it's like

[14:50] Peter is saying for Christian suffering it's not misplaced because actually it's a fiery trial it's a trial that purifies there's something about it in God's purpose that he uses and will have us to use in order to purify to refine our lives to get rid of more and more of the dross of sin the dross of self that we all actually have so that's why he says here as though something strange were happening to you it's not he says as if this didn't belong in your life as if it wasn't proper to have such suffering in your life and of course that's very often how it feels isn't it especially when it is a more intense type of trial and especially when you feel isolated as a Christian under that trial that you're going through especially isolated if you think that nobody else really has precisely the same set of circumstances or trial to yourself the isolation the sense that you are really just unique in all of this makes it feel a lot worse and what Peter is saying is even then don't think that suffering in your

life even of that kind even if it feels like it's nobody else's but your own don't feel that it's strange it's not out of place don't think it doesn't actually belong properly in the life of a Christian don't be surprised as if it was something strange something out of place something foreign in your life as a Christian remember the way

Jesus addressed the disciples in the gospel of John as we find it in chapter 15 of John where he prepared the disciples for what would happen especially after he himself had gone and in chapter 15 he dealt with the way that they would face opposition but he put it in very strong terms from verse 18 if the world hates you know that it has hated me before it hated you if you were of the world the world would love you as its own but because you are not of the world but I chose you out of the world therefore the world hates you remember the word that I said to you a servant is not greater than his master if they persecuted me they will also persecute you if they have kept my word they will keep yours also but all these things they will do to you on account of my name because they do not know him who sent me now you'll notice in that something very commonly mentioned in scripture and Peter in fact has it as we'll see in his epistle as well and that is that the words of Jesus there to the disciples set out two very different outlooks the outlook of the world and the outlook of the Christian but they're not just different outlooks they're actually conflicting outlooks they are at war with each other they are in conflict with each other don't he says be surprised if the world hates you and that's what

Peter is picking up don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you don't be surprised thinking this is something strange in your experience something that doesn't belong because you're now a Christian if he said as Jesus said if they kept my word they'll keep yours if they hated me they hated you you have to be careful of course in analyzing the statements like that because you mustn't just inevitably think that as a Christian everybody's going to absolutely hate you that's not the case is it people respect you at times if you take a Christian stand even if they are not Christians even they don't agree with you there are still nevertheless people who will respect you for your stand but what Jesus was saying is you cannot actually avoid the fact of that clash between your values as a

Christian and the values of the world because they're opposites they're in conflict and in that conflict you get opposition you get hatred you get the trials that come upon you and they are there to test you to refine to purify they're not without purpose they're not out of place they are meaningful they are actually there with God's purpose behind them so they're not misplaced so it should not be a surprise but then he moves on to something else instead he says rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings there's one of the associations that we mentioned earlier Christ's sufferings are connected to the sufferings of a Christian rejoice in so far 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 if anyone suffers as a Christian let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in that name or on that account could be as well now this is where it gets a bit difficult how can a trial how can suffering how can it actually be a situation in which there is a reason for rejoicing how can that provide for us a reason for rejoicing he's not talking here about rejoicing in the midst of sufferings but what he's really saying is rejoice in the fact that you are suffering for Christ and that's much more difficult than to say well yes you've got your sufferings but they have nothing to do with your rejoicing Peter says they have because you're sharing Christ's sufferings and you're looking forward to when he actually returns and comes back so these are the keys that he gives us to understand something of how our suffering should be a reason for rejoicing as he says in verse 13 there because first of all he says you're sharing [21 : 43] Christ's sufferings now again you've got to be very careful that you're not going too far with understanding what that means because when he says you're sharing Christ's sufferings he obviously does not mean that in every sense the sufferings of Christ are the same as those of Christians Christ's sufferings were as the bearing of our sins required so his sufferings were associated with the bearing of our sins he was bearing the penalty of our sin he came to die this cursed awful death of the cross and the spiritual death associated with our sins that caused the sufferings of Christ to be far beyond what you and I will ever know in our sufferings but they are the same from this point of view that the sufferings Jesus suffered were due to his representing of his cause and God the Father and God the Father's requirements in the presence of human beings that's the cause that

Christians represent that's the cause that they're involved with they're standing for the same things as Christ stood for the truth of God the holiness of God the demands of God the requirements of God the things of the kingdom of God you're sharing Christ's sufferings from that point of view in that sense therefore you're regarded as a privilege you remember Peter and John and other apostles in the early chapters of the book of Acts and they're describing themselves there as people who counted it a privilege to suffer for the name of Christ they counted it a privilege why because they were sharing his sufferings because they were connected to the sufferings that he endured because they were presenting the same God and presenting the principles and the values and the kingdom of the same God you hear often people saying having been in conflict in a wartime situation especially in an intense battle and have come through it maybe some of their colleagues were lost in the battle but you'll often hear survivors saying what a privilege they counted it to have shared with brave men in that particular battle or that particular victory and when they're interviewed to this day you'll find people saying it was such a privilege to have shared it with these brave people I counted my privilege to have been with them and that's really what Peter is saying if you're suffering as a Christian one of the things that you have in your attitude in order to deal properly with that suffering is you counted a privilege because you're sharing it with your Lord you're actually engaged in the same type of sufferings from the point of view that we've explained as Christ himself was don't think it something out of place or strange instead rejoice because you are sharing Christ's suffering isn't it a privilege for you and for me to be associated with Christ in the stand that he took in God's name that's what he's saying and the next thing is that rejoice because if he says you're insulted as a Christian for the name of Christ you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you now that's reminiscent isn't it it's something that reminds you of a very important Old Testament feature and that important Old Testament feature is the way the cloud of God's glory above the mercy seat within the Holy of Holies constantly existed in the very midst of Israel as a people remember that's how it's described how the tabernacle was set up the outer court and then the inner holy place and then the innermost Holy of Holies where the blood of atonement was sprinkled by the high priest once a year and in that Holy of Holies you had that particular furniture as God had specifically required it to be made you had the ark of the covenant above it the mercy seat and then the cherubim and between the cherubim this cloud the Shekinah it was called in the Old Testament Hebrew the Shekinah cloud that rested there that represented God's presence God's holy presence with his people in the midst of the people and this language of Peter is very reminiscent of that except he's now saying the spirit of glory and of God now that it's the same spirit the Holy Spirit is what he means by that described in these two ways the Holy Spirit is the spirit of glory God's glory and indeed the glory he gives to his people too but he's the spirit of God so the Holy Spirit as the spirit of God as the Holy Spirit as the spirit of glory rests upon you in the way in which similar to what you find in the Old Testament except it's now something that every single believer or believers together as Christians experience and isn't it an amazing thing that Peter is actually saying what was true in the Old Testament within the Holy of Holies that nobody saw but the high priest it's now true of not just

[27 : 45] Christians but suffering Christians God has his resting place there God's spirit rests upon you has made his home in your life therefore don't think that suffering is out of place because God's spirit has come and actually made his home there where the suffering exists and if he's pleased to dwell there then it must be a privilege for us to suffer as Christians for him and that's why he's saying here that we are not to be ashamed if anyone suffers as a Christian let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in that name it's commonly understood by or believed by theologians that Peter was the source of Mark's account in the gospel of the ministry of Jesus that he and Peter were close and that

Peter had divulged details to Mark that he then set out in what we find in his gospel whether or not that is indeed the case or not it's certainly the case that Mark wrote about Peter in a way that shows how he did not actually stand when he was challenged as to being a Christian in chapter 14 of Mark and at verse 68 you find the account of Peter in the courtyard just at the time before Jesus was sent away to be crucified one of the servant girls of the high priest came and seeing Peter warming himself she looked at him and said you also were with the Nazarene Jesus but he denied it saying I neither know nor understand what you mean the servant girl saw him again and began to say to the bystanders this man is one of them but again he denied it after a little while the bystanders again

said to Peter certainly you're one of them for you're a Galilean but he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear

I do not know this man of whom you speak and immediately the cock crowed a second time Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times he broke down and wept he was ashamed to have been pointed out as a Christian as a follower of Christ but when he realized the immensity of what he had done and the sin and the wrong that he had done denying his Lord he broke down and wept and now he's making up for it now he's writing about it if any man suffers as a Christian if any man has to suffer being accused of being a Christian or whatever the suffering is about let him not be ashamed in other words what he really means by that is don't think badly of being a

Christian just because there's suffering or this type of suffering involved in it don't think the suffering is out of place don't hide being a Christian don't feel ashamed of it instead glorify God in this name or on this behalf of Christ give glory to God so you see he is saying it's not misplaced and it shouldn't therefore be a surprise it's a testing purifying trial it's not misplaced it should be a reason for rejoicing one because we're joined to Christ in it and joined to his sufferings two because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us and three because when Christ is revealed you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed and one of the things we'll see in other studies as well in

Peter on this topic of Christian suffering is the importance of keeping our focus on eternity on the things that come at the end of the journey not on the things merely that accompany us on the journey so that you look out from the sufferings and not treat them as if they're out of place but nevertheless look out beyond them and fix your eye upon the things that are coming on the things of eternity as he begins as we'll see next time in chapter one speaking about this inheritance that is reserved that's kept in heaven for you who are being kept through the power of God through faith waiting for this to happen waiting for Christ to come and for you to come to actually occupy that inheritance meantime he says you are experiencing sufferings as necessary in the present time but what he's saying again and again is keep your focus on the things of eternity keep your focus on the things that are future on the things that are ultimate so that he says when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice and be glad that really means you may rejoice with exaltation with the highest rejoicing he's really packing the words together he said something remarkable back in chapter 1 as well about rejoicing in the meantime though you don't see

[33 : 43] Jesus now you love him and though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory obtaining the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls but that phrase you rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory it's a joy that belongs uniquely to a Christian because of their relationship to God and to salvation and it's a joy therefore that you cannot very adequately put into words it's a joy that properly does not belong to this world it belongs to the next it's full of glory and what Peter is saying in chapter 4 is if the joy that you have now is inexpressible if you can't put it into words easily and if it's full of glory if it has that touch of glory in it already what's it going to be like at the end of the journey that's what he's saying isn't it so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice with exaltation with the highest form of rejoicing sufferings in this present time are not out of place in a Christian life and from what Peter is saying in the ultimate sense the rejoicing that awaits

God's people at the end of the journey it will in a sense be all the more deep and lasting and filled with glory then because these rejoicing that rejoicing was preceded by the sufferings of this present life it's an amazing thing that you appreciate joy if you can put it that way all the more when it comes after a period of sorrow there's a sense in which the sorrow itself makes the joy all that more enjoyable and would not have the same element of rejoicing or joy in it but for the suffering that went before it and that's how it is for the Christian as Peter is saying as well when Christ returns when his glory is revealed and as you're looking forward to that now already beginning to rejoice in Christ already having a real rejoicing in him but when all of the suffering is over when you've gone through these periods of battle and of trial when the fiery trial has done its own work in God's purpose then you're going to rejoice with exaltation and the suffering you have now has made its own contribution towards that rejoicing the suffering

Christian the right attitude and in that attitude suffering is seen as not out of place let's pray Lord we bless you for the way in which you teach us in your word how we should regard the suffering that accompanies being your followers in this world we will ask oh Lord that you would enable us to

continue to persevere in that Christian life by faith and help us we pray as we go onwards in that journey of faith to face the sufferings that are entailed in it in that spirit of resolution that we will come forwards to look in anticipation at the joy that awaits your people and enable us Lord to believe in these great facts that your word sets out for us help us we pray to rejoice in you daily and help us to see that in the sufferings that you people go through help us to see that they are indeed joined to your own and therefore help us to count it a privilege to suffer in your name we pray this for your glory sake amen amen time and therefore to we pray to no our prayer any