

The Suffering Christian (2)

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back now to 1 Peter chapter 1 and today we're going to look at verses 6 and 7. 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 6 and 7.

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 and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Well last time we looked at the way in which Peter deals with suffering in terms of the attitude that we must take to it, the suffering in the experience of a Christian.

Why is it that in a Christian life we have suffering is what we're going to look at this morning, looking at the necessity of suffering.

We saw last time that from chapter 4 suffering was not misplaced, it's not something accidental, it's not something that doesn't really have a proper purpose to it in a Christian life.

[1 : 10] And today we're looking at the necessity of suffering, looking at how it's stated there as if necessary. Now that's not questioning whether or not it is necessary, the if there doesn't mean perhaps it's not necessary, it actually just states that in this it is in fact necessary.

And that's one of the difficulties that we find, doesn't it, in our trying to come to an understanding of suffering in the Christian life and where in fact it's placed and why it's placed there.

It's one thing to accept that it is there, it's another thing to accept that it must be there. Because in the experience of the suffering itself, it's not as easy sometimes to actually come to the conclusion, well this is actually necessary.

But that is what this is saying to us. It's not something that God has chosen as an afterthought, it's not something that comes into our experience simply through our own doing, and therefore it's not there of necessity.

It's actually something that fits into God's program, God's way of dealing with us as we'll see today. It's necessary because of the way that God is preparing His people for a certain destiny, for this inheritance that is incorruptible, that is undefiled and unfading.

[2 : 35] And in order to actually prepare them for that, He uses suffering in His own particular way, so as to fit them out for that inheritance, for that final destiny.

And in doing so, it's important that, we saw last time, that it's both a matter of attitude, as Peter deals with the subject, he deals with the attitude that's important on our part, but also there are associations with different other aspects of salvation, association with the sufferings of Christ, for example, they're linked into that.

And we're not looking at that today, but the attitude part of it is, as we said last time, we have to really come to see it's not misplaced.

But attitude also, of course, involves knowledge. You can't have a certain attitude towards something unless you've got some specific knowledge of it.

And what Peter is directing us to, in terms of the sufferings of the Christian, is that we need to have a knowledge of the way that this fits into God's program, the way that God Himself actually sets it forth for us, as an aspect of His dealings with us.

[3 : 52] So the two things we have to keep in mind, in terms of our attitude, and come to get more knowledge of, is how this suffering in the Christian life, first of all, must take account of the glory to come.

The glory to come. And secondly, it has to take account of, as we've said, of being fitted out for that glory. In other words, as you see how Peter deals with this glory to come, with this inheritance, it's then that you're able to see something of the way in which God fits us out for that inheritance, including the way that suffering plays its own part in fitting us out for that glory, for that inheritance.

Now look at the inheritance that's kept for God's people, first of all, he says here in verse 4, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you, reserved in heaven for you.

Now the word inheritance, of course itself, draws our mind to something that comes to you by way of bequeathing, by way of a will, by way of somebody having passed away, and passing on those possessions that they were leaving to their descendants.

And the Bible uses it exactly in that way spiritually with regard to the death of Christ. Yes, it's certainly the resurrection of Christ that's mentioned there, but that of course forms part of this, this great interlinked action of Jesus in laying down his life and then rising from the dead.

[5 : 25] So through that great event, you have this great inheritance passed on to us. This inheritance that is in heaven, reserved for God's people, an inheritance described there as imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.

It doesn't matter what sort of inheritance you get in this life, in the ordinary course of things, but it's going to be subject to change, to deterioration in some way or other, mostly, if not at all times.

But what it's saying here is that this inheritance is actually, remains exactly as it is in its pristine condition. It's kept there for God's people and it's of a nature that it's undefiled, imperishable.

It doesn't have any possibility that any aspect of it will perish, will grow old, will deteriorate. It's undefiled, it's absolutely unspotted, pure, and it remains like that.

And unfading, it never loses its value, it continues to remain what it has always been. There's nothing in this life like that.

[6 : 39] This is God's inheritance for His people, and as we'll see, it's related specifically to how we have to regard our sufferings. They are in fact related to this glory that is to come.

You begin looking at what's beyond this life. You begin looking at the way that it's actually kept for God's people, the very people who are suffering. Remember how He started this epistle.

It's to the elect exiles of the dispersion. They're scattered throughout all of these lands. And now He's saying they are suffering. They're really facing sometimes intense persecution as you read through the letter.

But this inheritance is theirs. They're despised by people. They're ridiculed by others in the world around them. They're being accused, as He says elsewhere, falsely of wrongdoing.

They're being scandalized and misrepresented. And yet He's saying this is their inheritance. It belongs to them. And you can throw that in the devil's face.

- [7 : 45] You can actually do that as you experience the suggestions in your mind that you're not really much as a Christian. You're not worth much.
- You're not really able to do very much. You're given all too easily. Who are you to actually present yourself as if you were somehow worthy to go out there with the gospel and present it to other people?
- You can say all of that is part of the temptations, the suggestive schemes of the devil and indeed of the world that he uses so readily.
- But you can come and throw this in his face and yes, where can you get me an inheritance like this? Can you produce something like this for me?
- Can you promise me that this will be my destiny? And of course, you can't because this is God's provision through the death of his son and through his resurrection.
- [8 : 49] Undefined, reserved, kept in heaven for you. You know, it's like probably these days when you go on to, if you're ever on to the main mainline trains, a lot of people now try and reserve their seats, understandably, and you go into, when you go into the train and you find all of these seats, if you haven't reserved your own, there's this little ticket on it with a specific number and it's quite frustrating sometimes, all of these empty seats but they're all reserved and you can't take them.
- It's tough if you haven't reserved them, well that's our own fault of course but what this is telling us is here is an inheritance and it's got a reserved ticket already on it.
- Nobody else is going to take it instead of us. It's there for those people who are presently suffering, who are presently being ridiculed, who are presently actually in a minority in many respects and yet this is their destiny.
- This is what they are being prepared for. This is what God has in store for them. It is kept for you, he's saying. Nothing less than that.
- And you always have to keep in your mind that this is our destiny. This is what God is actually preparing us for. But not only is the inheritance kept, so too are the inheritors, those who are going to inherit it, those who are going to come into the possession of it.
- [10 : 13] You see what it's saying, verse 5, it's reserved, it's kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
- Talking there about the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's how Peter in the letter often speaks about it, the appearance of something, the appearance of the salvation that's in Christ.
- When he comes it will be revealed then in all its splendor. But you see he's saying, you are being kept for this inheritance which is being kept for you.
- And the word there is a military term, it's a word, the word kept through, guarded as it's translated here is a good translation because it has that military ring to it.
- It's like a fort that's or a place that's defended and well guarded. That's what God is doing with his people just now. Yes, they're undergoing these sufferings and these trials and all that's associated with that.
- [11 : 16] But they are a guarded people. The sufferings cannot possibly overtake them. They cannot actually undo what is their destiny. They are being kept, they are being guarded by the power of God.
- Just think of that. Where did all of this come from, all of this creation that we see around us, all of the universe that you see, as you actually look out over our old world, as you look beyond that, as you look into the skies, as you see images that are from the most powerful telescopes and from the Hubble and all the rest of it, into the far reaches of the universe and then there's so much beyond that, we're told, that we cannot yet see at all.

The billions of galaxies. Where did it all come from? Who put it there? The power of God. Look at that empty sepulcher where the body of Jesus once lay.

Why is it empty now? Why is his body not in it? What caused this remarkable event to take place?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The power of God. The power that creates life, that sustains life. And that is what Peter is saying, is looking after you who are being kept by, guarded by, the power of God.

[12 : 53] Can you imagine something actually getting to overtake that power of God? Can you imagine any other power or any other ability coming to actually get through this keeping, guarding power of God?

Of course you can't. And it tells you, from that itself, it tells you that this suffering that they're meantime going through is not what's in charge of their life.

Has not taken over their life. It's something that itself is used by this God who by his power is keeping them. But you notice something else.

It's by the power of God through faith. Not because of faith. Not by faith in the sense in which it's by the power of God.

But it's not without faith. So that the two things are hand in hand. The power of God is the preeminent reason why they're kept.

[13 : 56] But they're not kept without themselves exercising faith. Without them continuing to believe and to exercise all that they're believing means in accepting what God is saying.

in living by trusting in this God. That's what faith is about. That's the crux of it. And he's saying here you're kept, you're guarded by God's power through faith.

You continue believing as the means by which you draw in more of God's keeping power and more of God's knowledge and teaching as he brings this to you.

It's through faith as well. And it's salvation for a salvation. It's not quite such a good translation. I think the older AV is better there because what it's literally saying there is kept by God's power unto salvation.

Unto salvation. Which means that the specific aim, the specific purpose, the specific end of this is the salvation. The salvation that's bound up in this inheritance and in Christ as our Savior.

[15 : 11] And you see what it's saying about it too. It's ready to be revealed in the last time. And that's itself such an additional detail as to make it so intriguing and so wonderful because the fact that this hasn't yet appeared is not due to the fact that God's not quite ready in preparing it yet.

It's there. It's prepared. It's actually complete already. This inheritance doesn't need anything added to it. It doesn't need any improvements.

It doesn't need any additions or extensions. It's absolutely ready. It's just waiting for God's timetable to be fulfilled.

But in itself it's ready. Ready to be revealed in the last time. Ready to be revealed when Christ himself in fact comes. So you see that's the glory to come.

And that's what makes that's where we connect the necessity of our sufferings or the sufferings of God's people with this glory to come. This inheritance that's kept for them that has such amazing qualities.

[16 : 25] This people who are themselves being guarded by God's power through faith unto the salvation. Now he's easing.

Though now as necessary. You are under these trials. Because for this inheritance you need to be specifically kitted out.

Made ready. And suffering plays its own place in that. As he says now that the trial of your faith. Though it be tried with fire as silver or gold is.

It might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Let's have a look at that secondly.

Fitted out for that glory. The glory to come involving the inheritance that's kept. Involving the people who are kept for that inheritance. And now being fitted out for that glory.

[17 : 26] Now he's saying something remarkable first of all in verse 6 at the beginning. In this you rejoice. And in this means everything he said there in verses 3 and especially in verse 4 about this inheritance.

It's reserved for you. You're being kept for it. The power of God is looking after you. The salvation is ready. In this you rejoice. You rejoice.

You have that's a word that's very strong. It's used in verse 8 as well. You greatly rejoice. In other words the sufferings that come into a Christian's experience are not contradictory to the rejoicing that they have in their salvation.

Their spiritual rejoicing in their salvation as they understand it to be prepared and ready and complete and waiting for them to inherit it. Their sufferings are not contradictory to that.

They don't sort of although sometimes we can lose sight of the fact that this glory is ready. That this inheritance is ready. That this salvation is ready there for us.

[18 : 36] The sufferings sometimes themselves can fill our minds and we begin to doubt and we begin to have questions but they're not themselves contradictory of the salvation of the rejoicing that we can have and do have in Christ.

In this you rejoice. Now that's a strange thing really isn't it? To have that combination in any one individual's experience.

To have at the same time very much aware of suffering trial that really get to your soul and yet deep down at the same time have a calmness and a peace and a rejoicing really as it says in the salvation that is in Christ for us.

Somebody once described it to me at a time of bereavement as having at the same time a bitterness accompanied by a sweetness a bittersweet experience if you like.

There's the bitterness of the grief, the bitterness of the sense of loss, the bitterness of that ongoing pain that inevitably accompanies the loss of a loved one and doesn't just disappear as we perhaps in a sense might want it to but nevertheless there is at the same time this sense of stability and this sense of having a joy in salvation even despite the fact that the sufferings outwardly are very much with us.

[20 : 19] And only a Christian can have that. You cannot experience that in that way at least unless we are already in Christ, unless we have this faith that is an aspect of how we are being prepared for this inheritance.

In this you rejoice if need be, though you have now for a little while if necessary, as necessary you have been grieved by various trials.

That's now what Peter is focusing on. He's bringing these trials and our going through them into relation with what's ahead, with what God has prepared for us, but how he's now preparing us for that.

And suffering has its own place in that. It's not the only thing God uses, but it has its own place. It is a prominent place. And you see he's calling it various trials.

Various trials. It's not an emphasis on just how many trials, on them being numerous trials. They don't have to be numerous trials in order to be really difficult trials.

[21 : 31] The word actually means variegated or multicolored sometimes. It's not the number of the trials that's mentioned, that's in view, but the variety of them.

There are a whole variety of trials in a Christian's experience. Trials that come from within themselves, from ongoing sin in his working in the flesh.

Trials that come from the temptations that the devil brings to us. Trials from facing the world and interacting with the world. all kinds of trials.

Trials from people, trials and relationships. All kinds of trials, variegated trials. That's what Peter is saying.

And that's sometimes what makes it all the more difficult. That there are various trials. If it was just the same trial all the time, the same kind of trial, we might get used to it and we might become accustomed to it in a way that would be ready for it next time or know how to deal with it.

[22 : 46] But there are varied trials. They actually go from one type to another. And that sometimes makes it all the more difficult. And yet, it's that precisely that Peter is saying that belongs to God's preparation of us for the inheritance.

Because he's saying, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith or the trial of your faith that it might be found, though it be tried like gold is tested in the fire, might be found to result in praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, the trial that's mentioned, the testing that's mentioned there is obviously something that is portrayed by or pictured by what happens to precious metal like gold.

That's what he's got in mind there. More precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire. And there are two things involved in that. There's the actual testing itself to see if it's the genuine article.

And not only that, but there is the refining process as well that actually brings about the final pure product. So, if you think of gold, and certainly in the old days you would have gold in a crucible and heated, and the impurities then are removed from it bit by bit until you're left with the 24 carat gold.

[24 : 22] I don't know much about these processes, but something like that is involved in it. You have to have the fire, the heating up of the element that burns off the dross, the impurities, and eventually you're left with the pure metal.

And so it is with the Christian's experience. There's actually the burning away of the impurities, and then you're left with the pure article ultimately, as you think of perfection, what God is going to achieve.

how do you know that gold is genuine gold? Well, you have to put it to the test. You have to have ways of testing it. And how do you know that the testing is actually over when you've got the final product there as the 24 carat gold?

And he's saying that's really, in a sense, what God is doing with these sufferings. He's burning away the dross. He's taking out the impurities. And it may not seem to us at times that that is really happening very effectively.

You might still say, well, there's a lot of impurity yet that remains to be taken away as far as I can see in my own life, as far as I can detect in my own experience. There's still such a lot there that I wish wasn't there.

[25 : 38] There's still so much there of the filth of sin, of the defilement of sin, of those sinful thoughts and those sinful conclusions and these questions that are sometimes really bordering on being arrogantly defying God.

And yes, God is saying, I know all that's why there's still such a thing as suffering in your life. Because I need to burn away these impurities.

I need to bring about this final pure product and this is one of the main features of the way I do it. It is that the tested genuineness of your faith, the faith through which you are presently living your life as a Christian.

That faith, how does it actually, how does it, how is it proved to be genuine? By being tested. By being tested. And Jesus himself made that clear.

That the faith that he gives to his people, to his disciples, can only be seen to be genuine, real faith. proper trust in him if it's put to the test and when it's put to the test.

[27 : 00] And the parable of the soils, or the parable of the sword as it's usually called, is one of the best illustrations of that. The different types of soil in receiving the seed, and yet only one out of the four types produces lasting fruit.

And Jesus makes it clear that in the case of the thorns particularly, the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, they choke the seed.

It doesn't come to its final flourishing as it should. It dies off. It's killed out. It's not genuine faith.

But where it is, the trial actually does its work, and it comes to produce more. Something like the illustration of the vine in John 15, where he says, I am the true vine, and my father is the vine dresser.

You are the branches, he says to his disciples. You are the branches. You are united to me. And the vine dresser comes along and does what seems to be damaging to the vine.

[28 : 13] He prunes it right back at the proper time of year. He prunes it right back so that he takes away all of this wood that seems to be such a waste, and that seems to be so unproductive, and so unlikely really to benefit that vine.

Why is he doing it? So that it might bring forth more fruit. The next season proves it. You don't see it at the time, but at the proper time, you see why he did it.

You see the skill and the expertise of the vine dresser that brings about the fruit in his own time by his method. It does work.

That's what God is doing. By these various trials, your faith is being tested so that it may in the end result, he says, so that it may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In other words, he's still keeping the imagery of the gold being refined and what he's saying now is this is really the end product that we've arrived at. The refining process is over.

[29 : 27] The suffering has in fact done its work as God has used it, as you have used it, through faith, under his power, so that it might indeed be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In other words, at the return of Christ. This is where all of this will come to a head. All of this will be revealed in the way in which it has worked towards this particular end.

glory and whose honor is this? Well, if it was glory and honor, you might think that the glory and the honor really belongs to those people who have come through this difficult time, through this suffering, and that they are now actually displaying glory and honor.

And of course it's true that God's people will be glorified, that they will be in the brilliant luster of that glory, that they will be honored, that honored by God.

But if you take the word praise, as well as the other two, you can see that this is actually something that applies to God. That is His praise and His honor and His glory that will be then on display.

[30 : 52] The sufferings have done their work as He has used them. And as God's people then appear in that inheritance and as they themselves come to inherit that inheritance and glory that's now being kept for them while they're going through these trials, when all of that is done and when Christ appears and when the end of all things is at hand, then we will see how to God's praise and honor and glory, the sufferings of the Christian have done their work while they were in this life.

In other words, there's an incentive here and it's in fact, you might say one of the, if not the main incentive, why we need to accept the necessity of sufferings and why we need to accept that they must be part of our Christian pilgrimage and why we must accept that God knows exactly what he's doing.

What do I mean by that incentive? Well, this, think about it, that God's people, through having been safely delivered through these sufferings and having these sufferings produce in them this final end product of bringing praise and honor and glory to God, you can now say, if that's what it's going to lead to, if my God is going to receive such glory and such honor and such praise through what sufferings will produce ultimately in my life, then the sufferings are necessary.

Then the sufferings are things which I need to accept and persevere through and overcome and use not just for my good and for my progress and for my ultimate glory, but especially for his and his praise and his honor and his glory.

The necessity of sufferings, difficult to accept at times, but as we link them to those great issues that Peter links them to, the glory to come, the inheritance kept, the inheritors being guarded, the power of God through faith, the trying of our faith, the testing of it for genuineness, the ultimate outcome, and the way it will bring praise and honor and glory to God.

[33 : 44] It's then that we are able to say, at least in a measure with the psalmist, Lord, it has been good for me that I've been afflicted, that I might learn your precepts.

Let's pray. Lord, our gracious God, we thank you for your wisdom, the wisdom by which you arrange our lives in the way you do, the wisdom that has purposed that there should be such trial and affliction and suffering in them.

We pray for grace, O Lord, that we might continue to reflect upon and apply the teaching of your word in regard to those experiences. We pray that you'd help us through afflictions, that afflictions of whatever kind may prove to be for us means by which our lives are cleansed, by which we will seek to continue to give praise and honour and glory to you meantime and seek the outcome in that final praise and honour and glory to your name that will be manifested at the day of Christ.

Help us to be especially thankful that we are kept by your power and that we know that your purpose is at work in all that you do in the life of your people.

Grant that today, Lord, if we should be yet outside of those who have come to place their trust and their confidence in you. O Lord, give us grace, we pray, that we may do so, and that we may therefore know that even the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us.

[35 : 33] Hear us, we pray now, and forgive our sin for Jesus sake. Amen.