

Scarcely Saved

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[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads and pray. Heavenly Father, as we turn to your word now and hear what you have to say about suffering, we pray that you would humble our hearts, open us to your mercy, give us the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ that we might love one another better and that we might entrust our souls to you, our faithful creator.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, now I wonder if you could take your Bible and open to 1 Peter chapter 3.

We're going to start in chapter 3 verse 10, which is page 217 in the back part of the Bible. We sometimes poke fun of the good life.

I've been guilty of that in the pulpit here. We don't care the advertising agencies that make us think we deserve the luxury lifestyle.

But I need to say that 1 Peter is all about the good life. So, in 1 Peter 3.10, Peter says, He or she that would love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil, his lips from speaking guile.

[1 : 21] If you're not a Christian, you need to know we are not Christians because we hate life. We want to see good days. And this word good, the good life, comes back something like 15 times in the letter of Peter, more than any other New Testament book.

And I think we need help here. The good life, of course, that Peter speaks about is much more than what you see in the magazines. It's not a life filled with good things for 80 years.

It's not the superficial life that skips across the surface of everything or looks good from the outside. Good life is built on the good news of Jesus Christ, which is a different kind of life.

It's a living hope that permeates this life. And part of what makes a life built on Jesus Christ the good life is the way it deals with suffering.

This is the acid test, isn't it, for any view of life? Paganism, atheism, any kind of religious, any kind of view of life, the real test is what's it going to do with suffering?

[2 : 34] And there's a whole range, isn't it, the way different ideologies deal with this. There's a kind of an avoidance of suffering or a denial of suffering or the other extreme, there's an elaborate explanation of suffering and then all these steps of what you have to do to avoid it.

From fatalism to stoicism to progress to... I think the field in our culture is let's all be nice and avoid suffering. Now, the letter of 1 Peter doesn't do any of these things and like every other book in the Bible, it takes off the rosy glasses and puts them to a side and it faces suffering, I think, with a very bracing honesty.

There's no interest in answering the philosophical questions, why? Why are we suffering? Why God? Instead, what Peter does, as the rest of the Bible does, is it points us toward the cross where the Son of God is dying in agony, revealing to us a God who not only suffers with us, but suffers for us.

And there's no other book in the New Testament that says more about suffering than this book of 1 Peter. Over a third of the references to suffering in the New Testament are here in this little letter. I'm very conscious as we speak on this.

This is a personal and tender area. And Peter just doesn't give us three slick reasons for suffering or how to get over it. What he does is, he wants to help us not just live through it, but to use it.

[4 : 05] Not to waste it. Not just how to survive it, but how to have our suffering redeemed. Because it is possible to waste suffering.

A suffering does not automatically make us into better people. It doesn't automatically strengthen our faith. Don't we all know people who have been through difficulty and suffering and have fallen away from Christ?

Sometimes it does the opposite. And everything, Peter says, depends on our attitude. That's the point of these verses. Chapter 4, 12 to 19.

And it's probably important for me to say that the suffering here is not just the general aches and pains of growing old and living in a difficult world and dealing with evil. The suffering here is specifically Christian suffering.

So if you look in verse 14, verse 14, if you are reproached for the name of Christ. Or in verse 16, if one suffers as a Christian.

[5 : 06] And here is something that I learned this week. The suffering in 1 Peter is not physical violence. All the suffering in 1 Peter is verbal.

In chapter 2, the Christians are spoken against. In chapter 3, they are reviled, abused, and spoken, bad words spoken about them. In chapter 4, they are threatened and blasphemed and abused and reproached.

And I went back and had a look at it. There is no evidence of state opposition and persecution in this letter. Their property has not yet been confiscated. They are not looking at martyrdom.

They have begun to follow a very unpopular religion which has at its heart a crucified Jew who taught love other people, even your enemies, and don't take revenge which is a silly way to grow a religion really.

And in chapter 5, verse 9, we read that their suffering is exactly the same suffering that every Christian has to go through. See verse 9, resist him firm in your faith.

[6 : 16] Chapter 5, verse 9, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. Every single person who tries to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and live the good life, every single one of us, knows the unpleasant experience of having unfair things said about us because we are Christians.

That's what the Bible teaches. We will be insulted, we will be slandered because we follow the suffering servant. It doesn't matter how nice you are. There will come moments in your life where there will be embarrassing things said to you and about you.

In fact, if you follow Jesus Christ, it puts you in the path of suffering. If you stand for him and live this good life, you will be disapproved of somewhere.

Jesus said, woe to you when all men speak well of you. If everyone's speaking well of you, there might be something wrong. So what do we do with this suffering as Christ's followers?

How do we not waste it? And Peter tells us we need to know two things. The first is this, we need to know that suffering is fire.

[7 : 31] If you look at verse 12 in chapter 4, down there on page 218, beloved, he says, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you as though something strange were happening to you.

Suffering, Peter says, is fire. The pain of verbal rejection, the nasty things that are said about you on the basis of your being Christian, it hurts like burning skin.

It stings. There's no avoiding this. And this week I read Christians in earlier ages who faced both verbal suffering and physical suffering and they say sometimes the verbal suffering is more painful than the loss of goods and physical suffering.

But the fire of suffering has a purpose in God's hands. And the Greek word for fiery ordeal is the word *puros* from which we get purify.

When you dig the gold ore out of the ground it's mixed up with all sorts of other stuff and you put it in the fire and you burn it until it is pure.

[8 : 50] And you know the old story which we've told here before, how does the goldsmith know when the fire is enough? How does he know when the gold is pure enough? It's when he can see the reflection of his face in the gold.

So it is with God. So the fiery ordeal for being a Christian is to refine and to prove us to show you and me who you really are and who you really trust.

Because suffering exposes that in a way nothing else really can. The Bible says our hearts are divided. We have all these different allegiances and we don't know it until we go through the fire.

All my allegiances and all my commitments to all sorts of things that I trust and all my idols I really have no idea how much I trust them and how much weight I put on these different things until I go through the fire.

Nor can I see how inadequate they are until I go through the fire. Calvin says my heart is like a factory that produces idols which I think is a great picture.

[10 : 00] You don't know what you really trust until you go in the fire do you? It's suffering that shows me whether I trust God whether I'm real in my faith or not.

It's an easy thing for us to say here this morning it may not be some of you may be going through the fire right now but it's an easy thing to say when we're not in the fire yes yes I completely trust God everything is going swimmingly but I really don't know how much I trust those other false things until the fire comes and what happens in the fire is then my faith in Jesus Christ begins to cost me something it's when my faith in Jesus begins to cost that's when the fire is doing its work if I stick up for Jesus and it may threaten my career or a special friendship or my status or my intellectual respectability or something else like that that's the fire at work separating out my faith in Jesus from my other commitments if your faith in Jesus costs you nothing that's probably what it's worth says the Bible but when it begins to cost me something that's very dear something that's very important

I then I begin to discover what it is I really trust am I a slave to these idols what is it that I really want do I really want Christ very searching isn't it I think this is saying that there are those who say they trust in Christ but when trust in Christ comes into conflict with our other trusts when it really costs us to trust him there are some who will turn away and rely on their favourite idols and waste their suffering and the evidence is usually someone who becomes increasingly angry and bitter towards Christ and towards Christians you see I want Christ and my idols I want both of them there in my heart don't I personal pleasure comfort the first class lounge status money sexual attractiveness whatever it is but the fire of suffering forces me to choose and that's when I know

Christ is worth depending on or not if when the fire comes whatever it is if it cannot take the heat if I cannot take the heat it must mean I'm resting on something other than Christ and I wonder if when we struggle with a sense of meaninglessness it's because one of our idols has died look back in chapter one for just a moment this idea of purifying verse 22 122 having purified your souls purified by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren love one another earnestly from the heart you've been born anew not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God you see the contrast verse 24 all flesh is like grass all its glory like the flower of the grass the grass withers and the flower falls but the word of the

Lord abides forever see every idol every allegiance I have apart from Jesus Christ is grass it will not take the fire it cannot take the fire and that is why suffering shows me the value of my faith in Jesus Christ it's only the gold which will endure you know what happens when you put grass in a fire burns up and I see the inadequacy of my intellectual respectability or my building my career or whatever else it is I think that's what Peter means in 417 when he says the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God and if it begins with us what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God it's fire it's suffering that demonstrates the futility of building our lives on grass and I think we need to have compassion on those around us who are building their lives on grass because it's an inadequate foundation and I think we need to rejoice that God has shown us

[14 : 43] Jesus Christ the only rock on which I build he's the thing of greatest value and worth he's the only thing that will take me through the fire he's the only thing the only one who is most precious he's the only one who gives me a life that begins now and is going to outlast all suffering and the end of this world suffering is fire that's the first thing Peter wants us to know secondly he says suffering is fellowship this is a lovely move you see because suffering not only shows us the reality of Christ it actually moves us and brings us closer into fellowship with him that's what Peter is saying in verse 13 rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings that word share is the word fellowship communion rejoice in so far as you have communion fellowship in Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed it's very important see Christians don't enjoy suffering we don't take joy in the suffering we're not

Christian we're not masochists the joy is not so much that God is going to make us into better people the joy is not so much that we'll outlast it in the end the joy is that in the suffering God draws me more closely into fellowship with Jesus Christ I learn that he really is more than anything that I need and there's a particular ministry where he shares his fellowship with me in the suffering as all the other gods and all the other grass is burned away I learn to trust on Christ alone not in my head but in the reality of my experience and don't you find this as people have gone through trial and suffering again and again and they say it's Christ who holds me up I have this supernatural strength is this not part of what God is doing to us as a church New Testament's very bold about this in

Philippians the apostle Paul says I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings becoming like him in his death a couple of years ago I broke some ribs and for those of you who have never had the experience of breaking your ribs I need to tell you it moves you into a very exclusive club and when you meet someone else who's broken their ribs you find out they've broken their ribs there's this knowing look sense of fellowship fellowship and suffering together and I use that illustration because that is not what it is to have fellowship with Christ in our sufferings it's not that I identify with Jesus because he had a pretty rough go of it it's that in the fire as I walk through the fire Christ comes and walks beside me and shares something of himself that he would share in no other way he shares his very spirit with me that's the point of verse 14 if you're reproached for the name of

Christ you're blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you it's great isn't it it's not pie in the sky hang on it's tough now it'll all work out in the end this is a present gift of the Holy Spirit to us now in the fire and when you are abused and when you are assaulted insulted in the name of Christ it feels like a storm and everything all the dust gets stirred up and the thoughts spin around and Peter says you can rest you can rest on Christ and the spirit rests on you right in the middle of the fire so you see suffering doesn't stop our fellowship with Jesus it can strengthen our fellowship with Jesus it makes us conscious of his presence there is a there is a special ministry of the Holy Spirit confirming Jesus drawing us into fellowship with him when we suffer

Jesus this was Jesus experience and I think that's why Peter says don't be surprised don't be shocked when you suffer as a Christian you know we follow we follow someone who went to the cross and we began our Christian life by taking up the cross it ought to come as no great surprise and I know some Christians say well you know if only we could be more like Jesus we wouldn't suffer so much if only you know instead of being the target of persecution if we could do such obviously good things people would think well of us if only we could do that brilliantly generous act that would change our public status people wouldn't pick on us so much you know if we could solve all the problems of the city if we could house all the homeless if we could relieve the debt and feed the world's poor people wouldn't be so nasty to us there are two problems with that the first is that the reason we share our resources with others with the poor the reason we care for those who are homeless is not to be liked because it's the right thing to do and this is what God commands of us but even more relevantly for this section the second problem is that the more things we do the more we do things in the name of Christ and the more like Christ we do them the more unacceptable we will be to others if you want to be loved by everyone you are going to have to get rid of the

[20 : 48] Jesus factor in your life simple as that I mean he was sinless he was morally better than all of us put together and if he was the target of hostility and suffering he was the target precisely because he did the will of his father in heaven that's why he was despised and when you begin to follow him puts you into the target listen to these words of Jesus John 15 this I command you to love one another if the world hates you know that it has hated me before it hated you if you are of the world the world would love its own but because you are not of the world 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 persecute you if they kept my word they would keep your word also but all this they will do to you on my account because they do not know who sent me that's why the basis of joy is not the suffering itself but the fellowship that we have with Christ in the suffering do you remember this was this was Peter's experience wasn't it remember on the night before Jesus was betrayed he was the one disciple who openly denied Christ after loudly declaring he never would and then on that day beside the lake after

Jesus had risen from the dead Jesus restored him to fellowship and commissioned him to ministry and then when the book of Acts opens we find Peter boldly proclaiming and living the good life there in Jerusalem to great popularity and to wide acceptance Acts 2 Acts 3 more acceptance Acts 4 opposition begins and Peter is arrested and taken before the council and he's threatened what does he do he goes out and keeps preaching they say stop stop speaking about this Jesus Christ and his resurrection he keeps preaching and so in chapter 5 he's arrested again and he and John are then flogged and we read this they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name and every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ it's great isn't it because Peter proved in his experience that it's

Christ who can go through the fire it's Christ who can take the heat and that's how he learns not to waste his suffering so here is what the passage puts before us suffering is fire and suffering is fellowship and Peter gives us two lovely applications one just before the passage and one at the end of the passage which I'd like to leave with you to think about today they're two spiritual disciplines and they come to us in the context of suffering the first is a household discipline now look back at verse 8 in chapter 4 above all hold unfailing your love for one another since love covers a multitude of sins practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another as each has received a gift employed for one another as good stewards of God's very grace I think Peter says this because of the context of suffering and it gives an added poignancy to these words we are to love one another in two ways one is to show one another hospitality this word means having people into your home and some of us are not in the position to be able to do that that means you need to receive invitations and go into other people's homes this is very important for

Christians this is very important for a church which is being spoken against because of its following Jesus Christ being mocked and insulted because I think it's in our homes where we are able to live out that fellowship with one another and to speak the words of Christ to one another and to say to each other I see the gold in your faith and we are to love one another secondly in how we approach our gatherings I think suffering presents us with unique temptations doesn't it you know each of us has our own favorite escape sins self-pity isolation I'll give up on prayer I'm the only person in my position nobody understands me Peter is saying when we are the target of reproach for Christ we need to keep gathering weekly with our brothers and sisters and the attitude that's going to move us forward is not I'm going to come and have other people meet my needs I'm not going to wait until someone will reach out to me I come with a purpose and intention of serving the needs of others totally different way of coming to church coming praying

Lord help me find a way to serve the needs of someone else in this church today and I think the hospitality the discipline of hospitality and the discipline of trying seeking to help one another not only transforms our Christian gatherings but helps us in our suffering that's the first that's a household discipline and second and quickly there is a private discipline in the last verse of chapter 4 therefore Peter says let those who suffer according to God's will do good there's the word again and entrust their souls to a faithful creator I think this is the only place in the Bible God is called a faithful creator it's a great picture isn't it he knows the stuff of what I'm made of I mean he he knows me through and through he's not the source of my suffering because he knows me he will redeem me and he will redeem my suffering we're not in the hands of those who despise us we are in his hands and this word entrust means to deposit something very precious into someone else's hands you know what it's like when you go to someone's place and they have a new baby and they bring you the baby and give you the baby and disappear into another room so I love that experience and there you have this precious trust to care for the baby until they come back hopefully quickly but Peter says what we hand over to

[27 : 55] God is not the life of someone else but our own lives we are to make a deliberate and intentional and conscious and ongoing action of entrusting ourselves and our souls to his care and to his protection it's this is a daily ongoing thing to to give over ourselves to place ourselves on the on the person of Jesus Christ and entrust ourselves to our faithful creator and when we go to him in the midst of suffering and when we entrust ourselves to him he says to us I made you I know what it is to suffer my son suffered for you to redeem your suffering in fact you're doubly mine you're more precious to me than you know you're more precious to me than you are to yourself keep going keep doing good I'm very able to keep you and hold you until the end amen so you you you you you you you you