

REJOICING IN SUFFERING

1 Peter 4:12-19

Go ahead and open your bibles to 1 Peter 4, were going to be reading vs. 12-19. Today we're going to be talking about suffering. But first, I want to start with 2 questions: 1-Do you know how much The Lord loves you? 2-Do you know the glory of God? What is the glory of God (to you)?

Might seem like strange questions to ask in a sermon about suffering, but it's very relevant. Because everything God does is motivated by His love and His Glory. So I just want us ponder this question as we dive into what God has for us in this passage today. Let's read 1 Peter 4 starting in vs. 12 (slides 2-5).

Let's pray for Gods help. Peter knows that this life is full of suffering. He knows that the Christians he's writing to are going to be tempted to shrink back in their faith as they encounter suffering and opposition, and so he's addressing it head on.

One thing that Peter makes clear in this letter is that Christians will suffer, because you are a Christian. Peters writing to a church that was experiencing some of that and they had the same desires and asking the same questions that we ask today. "Why is this happening? I want to be faithful! But I don't want to be treated this way. Why all the obstacles, why is it so difficult to obey and follow and trust you?"

See, Peter knows that it's during times of suffering we're most tempted to doubt and question God. "Why Lord? Why this, why are you allowing me to suffer? Are you there? Are you real? Are your promises real?" The temptation in the midst of suffering, pain, insults, rejection, mistreatment is to question if this is really real, if it's worth it. And the answer is yes.

Jesus warns His church several times in scripture about what it means to follow Him on this earth. And in reading Peters words to the church, if you know the story, you can hear Luke 22 in the back of His mind as he considers these thing.

In Luke 22 Peter falls away. He succumbs to the pressure of his own suffering and does exactly what he's telling us not to do. When Jesus was arrested and they were taking Him to the court, when He was being mocked and beaten, Peter denied Jesus 3x, and abandoned Him (after declaring his willingness to die) 3x somebody said, "Wasn't this guy with Jesus?!" And 3x Peter said, "No. No. No. And ran away."

This isn't text book teaching from Peter. He's been there, walked through the fire, experienced failure (nor is this a textbook sermon). But now Peter can say, as an experienced, mature Christian, "I know what it's like to be afraid, to want to give up, to question your faith, question the church, to wonder what it's all about, if it's really worth it."

"I know what it is to fall away. I know what it is to loose hope. I know what it is to succumb to your fears. But I've also learned that God is faithful. That He loves me more than I could have imagined. That Jesus is bigger, stronger, able and worth it." And so Peters main point in this passage is one of encouragement, to trust Him, remain committed, fight, endure, stand faithful.

"I know what it's like to walk with a faithful God-in failure and in faith-and I can tell you with full confidence it's worth it, God will be true to His word." And we have the same assurance that Peter had.

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We may wish for smooth sailing, “I want to follow Jesus but I’m hopping off the train before we get to Gethsemane station. I’ll take the blessings, favor, miracles. But I’ll pass on the suffering.” And there’s very popular teaching in the church that affirms this. That suffering is not God’s plan for his people.

And that’s a dangerous teaching for at least 2 reasons. 1-That’s not what the bible teaches and 2-when suffering does come, it sets God up as unfaithful or leaves us looking to ourselves to do better in some way to appease God.

But the truth is, Christian suffering is not an oxymoron. And like Jesus, that’s what Peter tells us, that we ought to expect it. Look at vs. 12 (slide 7). You gotta love straight forward Peter, “Why you surprised? Don’t be surprised when you suffer (slide 8), like it’s something strange.” Why would we be surprised by trials and suffering or think they’re strange?

Because as humans we don’t want suffering, right? But particularly for us, in 21 century western culture, we grew up on our rights to not suffer. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness-modern translation: To live my life the way I want without hinderance or opposition. Comfort and pleasure rule our desires.

I think too often we live more like American Christians than Christians living in exile in America. We’re taught that you shouldn’t have to endure pain, you shouldn’t be criticized, we’ve even started learning as kids that we don’t have to loose. That’s how the world trains us.

So when you go through difficult things what do you fight for? Don’t we fight for relief, comfort? Do all we can to get out of the situation, or at least ignore it? Turn on the TV, work, eat, drink. I don’t want to talk, deal, think about it. I want relief, I want it to be gone.

Really what we’re saying is, “I want my way, not what God’s doing. I want my comfort restored not my holiness restored.” (which is really saying) “I prefer the world and it’s lies over Jesus life giving, sacrificial love and plan for my life to glorify God.”

But the call to follow Jesus includes the call to suffer, and so we need to adjust our understanding and expectation of suffering and we do that by pressing into the gospel; what God has done and who we are. The gospel grounds us but suffering shakes us.

When we suffer, our flesh tells us “God isn’t real, He doesn’t know, doesn’t care. The way I live doesn’t really matter, it’s fine under the circumstances? Are God’s ways really better?” Suffering tells us, you don’t deserve this, so that’s ok.

Don’t stay in that difficult marriage-it’s too much work, too painful. Forget about everybody else, they don’t care about you anyway, just focus on you. Life’s hard, it’s ok to have those drinks you know you can’t handle; it’s ok to spend some time after hours with that woman/man; a little pornography’s fine. And while you’re thinking it’s ok, your legs are being taken out, loosing your footing, forgetting Him.

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Suffering shakes us, but the gospel grounds us. The gospel informs and (by the Spirit) changes our view of our life and this world so that God is most important. So that our flesh/emotions are not only brought captive to God, but through this process He is actually changing our desires toward Him and His glory.

The gospel tells us that the world isn't what it's supposed to be because of sin, including us. The gospel tells us that we needed Jesus to come and die for us in order for us to be reconciled with God. That God's Kingdom has come in Christ and is being advanced through the church. And a day is coming when sin and death will see defeat and all things will be made new.

But for now, the effects of sin are still real, the world is still not yet what it's supposed to be. The gospel reminds us of that, and Peter reminds us that even in spite of that, God is using our suffering to advance His will in our lives, to make us holy as He is holy.

But in a world of suffering, if our minds are not regularly reminded and trained in the gospel, it's easy to give ear to the world. So, as followers of Jesus, let's be reminded of the path Jesus took, look at Matthew 20:18-19 (slide 9).

This is the suffering of our Lord. And we're called to follow Him? So Peter says, don't think of suffering as strange, don't be surprised by it. And then He takes it to a whole other level in vs. 13-14 (slide 10). Rejoice in your suffering! (slide 11) This may seem strange, but here's what Peter's saying.

One of the big themes of this letter is that, as believers, we live today in light of what we know to be true about tomorrow. Because we know our future is secured in Christ, we know we have an inheritance from Him and we know our eternity will be with Him in His glory, so we can rejoice that we get to share in the sufferings of Christ, not as hopeless, but as producing a glorious future.

Peter's saying, rejoice now (privilege of sharing in Christ's suffering) so that you can rejoice more when He's revealed. A revealed joy is a joy that's been in the crock-pot of time waiting to be savored. Like when I go home and my wife's been cooking and when I open the door and smell it, mmm, that's gonna be good. You savor the aroma and look forward to the taste. There's a joy now, but a greater joy to come.

There's joy now in believing, in obeying, in anticipating, and there's a greater joy when the things we hoped for and believed by faith become a reality. It's a joy that leads to joy that says, it wasn't in vain. And there's a picture here from Isaiah 11:1-3 about Jesus coming and the Spirit of God resting on Him as a verification that He was sent by God.

And that same promise is given to you. Jesus said, "I have to go but I'm sending the comforter; Let not your heart be troubled, I won't leave you as orphans, I'll send you my Spirit; I'll never leave you or forsake you, I will always be with you." If you're a believer, God has given you His Spirit. We forget that sometimes. We don't suffer alone. You have the Holy Spirit dwelling with you, encouraging you, pointing you to Jesus, leading you in His ways, giving strength, comfort in your darkest days.

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And He points us to our future, the promise, that more is to come, the promise is the Glory of God. So, remember that you belong to God, He loves you, you belong to Christ, you have the Spirit of God and so, when you suffer, suffer for Him, no longer in sin. Look at vs. 15-16 (read 12).

See, everybody's gonna suffer. It's either going to be because you follow Jesus or as a consequence of sin. Let it be for Christ, not for sin. Remain faithful and suffer for "that name" because suffering in that name is preparing us for the future we're living for, preparing us to see His Glory revealed. This is Peter's theology of suffering. Look at vs. 17 (slide 13). This is why this matters.

God has a purpose in our suffering (slide 14), and that purpose is sanctification, purifying/refining the church. So let's have a quick bible study to know what this is talking about. Peter's referring back to Ezekiel 9 and Malachi 3, he's talking about God judging His people. This judgement isn't punitive, it's purifying, cleansing, and intended to restore.

What would happen is, the people that God chose, loved, made a covenant with, committed Himself to, prospered, and protected faithfully, even when they were unfaithful. These people would reject God, turn from Him and worship the idols of the surrounding nations, and dilute themselves into the world. They would leave the fountain of living water and go after broken cisterns that could not hold water.

But God is a holy and righteous God, and He's jealous for the worship of His people and the glory of His name. And Ezekiel 9:6 is a picture of God purifying His people. He starts at the temple and works His way out to the camps. Malachi 3 is a similar picture of God starting with His people, the church.

Now, when we talk about judgment, it doesn't typically concur up feelings of love. The normal response is fear, and in some ways, rightly so. But this judgment toward the church is different from the eternal judgment of sinner's. I want to read a quote by Ray Ortlund that I think is helpful (slide 15-16).

Judgement is different for His people precisely because we belong to Him, we're in Christ, He already incurred our judgment for sin on the cross and emerged victorious! This judgement, though painful for a time, is by grace and is making us more and more able to see, love and experience His glory. God loves His people. He loves you enough to use sufferings of many kinds to change you at the core, that your very desires and who you are would be transformed to be like Him and to love His glory.

He created us to reflect Him and to live for Him. We're His people in the world. We're the source of knowledge of salvation, the world rely's on us to know who He is. But how can we show them if we so easily leave Him for worthless idols, don't know His glory? How can we accurately, genuinely show the lost world how our God loves and what His Glory is really like? God purifies His people for His glory.

But he goes on, look at the last couple verses, 17b-19 (slide 17-18). If judgment begins with the church what will it be like for those as God moves out to those who don't obey? If the righteous are scarcely saved, what happens to the ungodly? Now, "scarcely saved" doesn't mean, barely make it into heaven. He's saying it's difficult; this life, being faithful, obedient. Doesn't come without a fight.

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The Christian life's not a walk in the park. It's more like being forged in the refiners fire. If that's the case for us, what about the ungodly? This is very unpopular to talk about, but it shouldn't be in the church. Listen, scripture tells us that God is a consuming fire. God is a consuming fire.

He's not your co-pilot, not your homeboy, not one of many options. He's a holy God that created you in His image. And it is a dangerous thing, a reckless thing, an impossible thing, to live and go before this holy, living God without Jesus. You will not stand.

See, we're all going to experience the consuming fire of God sooner or later. The difference is, Christians walk into the fire with Jesus and are refined, the sin, dross is burned away and what's left is useful materials of humility and holiness. But without Jesus, the sinner is simply consumed.

But God offers salvation to everyone. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes on Him will not perish but have eternal life. He loves you, His desire is that none should perish. But it has to be His way, it's the only way.

But if the Son came into our world and lived for you, and took your sin and suffered and died for it on a cross of shame. If we say we don't want that, if we reject that, we will be consumed by the Lord on the day we stand before Him. If all we have is us, it's not enough, we will be eternally separated from Him and everything good.

But Jesus is our hope. Jesus is our righteousness. Jesus is our mediator with a holy God. And so we have hope, we have confidence. And we can walk through this life/suffering remaining faithful, following His ways, and confident that His ways lead us to life and joy!