

FACING OPPOSITION / Sunday School- November 15, 2009

Unifying Topic: A SUFFERING PEOPLE

Lesson Text

- I. Understanding The Suffering Of Christ (1Peter 4:12-14)
- II. Suffering Justly (1Peter 4:15-16)
- III. Glorifying In Suffering For Christ (1Peter 4:17-19)

The Main Thought: Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.(1Pt.4:19, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Life, tests us in many ways. How are we to respond to the trials and sufferings that come our way? Peter believed that those who suffer as Christians are to rejoice as they follow Christ even as the apostles did when they were arrested for teaching people about Jesus.

Lesson Aim: To help students appreciate the meaning of suffering in the Christian life.

Life aim: To teach how Christians are to maintain an attitude of faith, joy, and hope when they suffer for Jesus and to know that their suffering is for the glory and praise of Jesus, our Lord.

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- 4:12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:
4:13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.
4:14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.
4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.
4:16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.
4:17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?
4:18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?
4:19 Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

HISTORY:

- I. OUR DUTIES AS SUFFERERS FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS'SAKE (v1-6)
 - A. TO HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST (v1-3)
 1. Who suffered for us in the flesh
 2. No longer doing the will of the Gentiles
 - a. It is dying to self
 - b. It is doing God's will for the rest of one's life
 - c. It is being fed up with sin
 - B. NOT DAUNTED BY THE OPPOSITION (v4-6)
 1. They may think us strange
 2. They will give an account
 3. Follow the example of those gone before
 - a. Preach the gospel
 - b. that they might respond and escape judgment

Chapter 4:1-11: Since Jesus Christ has gained the victory, Peter urged his readers to rededicate themselves to God's will as long as they might live. He wanted to strengthen their resolve to continue to persevere. When we live for Christ, really live righteously and godly lives, the unbelievers of the world sometimes reject us and sometimes they really have an unseen desire to give up their way, but cannot, saying, that it's too hard for me. Therefore, they want little to do with pure righteousness and pure godliness. A godly life convicts them and demands that they live like God or else face His judgment. How can the believer handle and conquer such persecution? He should **arm himself with the mind of Jesus Christ**. What does this mean? **First, it means to die to self, deny oneself**. The person who suffers in the flesh has "*ceased from sin.*" When the world persecutes us, we do not want to suffer and bear the judgment of ridicule, mockery, and abuse of men. Now if we give in to the fleshly desires and go along with the world, we sin and doom ourselves. But if we arm ourselves with the mind of Christ, deny our fleshly desires and suffer for Christ and for the salvation of men, then, we deny sin. We do just what Christ did: we deny and live righteously. **Secondly, it means to do the will of God**, by doing it for the rest of your life. The phrase, "*lusts of men*" is plural, and gives the picture of the believer being pulled

every which way by different persons or groups; pulled to live like the world lives, fulfilling the desires and lusts of the flesh: houses, wealth, position, power, drink, sex, partying, recreation. God's will is for the believer to live pure and righteous lives and to focus upon proclaiming the gospel of eternal life to a lost and dying world. This is how we arm with the mind of Christ—having that same attitude as Christ suffered, instead of the lusts of men. **Third, it means being fed up with sin.** The believer's life is divided into two parts: his old life and his new life. In his old life, he sinned enough. He has already followed the desires and lusts of the ungodly (Gentiles) enough. He had already worked the will of the ungodly. He had already walked after them, walked just as they walk, and enough is enough. V3 mentions six sins they have walked in:

1. Lasciviousness- shameless indecency
2. Lusts- strong desire, craving, passion
3. excess of wine- drunkenness affecting one's senses
4. revellings- carousing, drinking parties, orgies
5. banqueting- drinking parties
6. abominable idolatries- worship of idols

Fourth, it means to bear the strange look of the world. When we give up sins like lewdness, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, etc., those in the world may think it strange. They often ridicule, mock, and withdraw from him because he no longer shares with them in the things they used to do. And scripture is clear: *Christ is ready to judge both the living and the dead 2Tim.4:1.* **Fifth, it means to follow the example of believers who have gone before.** God will judge the world. This is the reason the gospel had to be preached. Those to whom the gospel was preached prior to Peter's writing, heard the judgment and conviction of the gospel while they were living, and they in turn accepted; they will escape the judgment to come. Now they live with God, possessing the life God desired for them—eternal life, living forever and ever with God! Because everyone will give account of his life to God, Christians preach the gospel. We do so to enable people to give that account joyfully rather than sorrowfully. These verses are a strong encouragement to endure suffering. Christ has assured our ultimate victory, and to turn back is to incur God's punishment. We are to arm ourselves with the mind of Christ in these ways.

II. OUR DUTIES AS THOSE WAITING THE COMING OF CHRIST (v7-19)

A. TO PRAY, LOVE, AND SERVE (v7-11)

1. Because the end of all things is at hand...
 - a. Be serious
 - b. Be watchful in your prayers
 - c. Be fervent in your love for one another, which covers a multitude of sins
 - d. Be hospitable to one another without grumbling
 - e. Minister your gifts to one another as good stewards of God's manifold grace
 - 1) Serve speaking the Word
 - 2) Serve with the ability God provides
 - 3) Serve that God may be glorified through Jesus, in all things

All things are soon to be consummated; the climax of history is at hand. Jesus Christ is returning and He is returning soon. "Peter says *"the end of all times is at hand"*, so that they will not be fooled into thinking that judgment is a long way off or even that it will never come. What are we to be? Peter mentions **five things that the believer in Christ are to be:**

1. Be **sober**, clear-minded, serious, sound mind, in control of oneself, self-restrained. Get rid of the excess, the clutter that hinders you. Peter says that there's something vitally important coming and so get rid of everything that so easily entangles you.
2. Be **watchful** in your prayers--keeping the mind alert, active, controlled thoughts while praying for all things. "Watch" means to stay sober and alert and awake at all times; So that you will be free to pray. It is a calm and collected spirit that is conducive to the act of praying.
3. Be **fervent** in your love for one another. "Fervent" means to stretch and reach out; to strain and exert to the utmost degree just like an athlete in a race; to be put before all else. By expressing a deep love for others, we can be an encouragement to them to "carry on" and continue in their pursuit of godliness and love for others.
4. Be **hospitable**. Why? For love, care, ministry, close fellowship, and outreach without grudging it.
5. Be willing to **use your spiritual gifts** ministering as good stewards of God. "Gift" means the very special ability given to the believer by God. It is not a natural talent but a spiritual gift. No one else can look after or use the gift you have, you have full charge over it.
 - We minister our spiritual gifts when we serve by speaking the Word of God (teaching, preaching, exhortation, prophecy etc.).
 - We minister our spiritual gifts when we depend upon God to do the speaking, listening by His Spirit.
 - We minister our spiritual gifts when we serve so that God may be glorified in all things (visit, counsel, give etc). By living out our spiritual gifts we are bringing praise and glory to God not us.

To prepare his readers to meet the Lord soon, Peter urged them to make the best use of their time now that they understood what he had written about: arming themselves with the mind of Christ, not thinking it strange when opposition came, and be the believer in Christ as they pray, love, and serve looking for Christ return.

1 Peter 4:12-14: Understanding The Suffering Of Christ

B. TO REJOICE AND GLORIFY GOD (v12-14)

1. Don't think the fiery trial to come as some strange thing
 - a. Rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings
 - b. When His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy
 - c. You are blessed if reproached for the name of Christ
 - 1) For the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you
 - 2) On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified

Peter is reminding his readers of how sufferings fit into God's purposes so he encourages them to persevere with the proper attitude. The Christians were about to undergo intense persecution by the Roman government. Persecution is a strange thing he says. Why would God ever allow a person who believes in Him, who really loves and follows Him, to suffer persecution? This is especially true when persecution is fiery. This is the point of this passage. The 12th verse answers the Why! God allows it for one very basic reason: to test, try, prove us. This means at least **four things about persecution**:

1. It measures how strong our faith.
2. It proves our trust in God and teaches us to depend upon Him more and more.
3. It proves and strengthens our practice and endurance.
4. It proves our faith which attracts others to Christ.

The sufferings¹ of the early Christians were just what Peter says, "fiery!" Some had boiling lead poured over their scorching bodies; others had fiery red branding irons put to the private parts of their bodies; others were wrapped in the bloody skins of wild game and chased in a hunt by man and dogs; others were soaked with flammable oil and set aflame; others had their limbs torn apart from their bodies, one by one, both by machine and animals; torture chambers etc. We're often surprised by the intensity of the trial, the purpose, and the source of these trials. As Christians, we should not be surprised by trials—we should expect them. That's the first hard lesson about hard times!

Even in this persecution we are told to rejoice. No one likes to suffer. However, there is **a way to rejoice in persecution!** How? By keeping our eyes and minds upon two things.

1. Remember when we suffer, **we are sharing in Christ's sufferings**. Christ was rejected by men because He lived and proclaimed the righteousness and salvation of God. If we are doing likewise, we become identified with Christ, who is the very Son of God. In our deepest devotion possible, the very sacrifice of ourselves for the cause of God and His glorious salvation becomes His glory. *John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, so that in "Me" you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."* Can you see that doing strong trials, focusing on God relieves the strain and brings a peace that you can't even understand.
2. Remember when we suffer, **we shall be greatly rewarded when Christ returns** in glory (1Pt.1:4). We can triumph in trials because they will lead us to a deeper level of joy at His coming. *Matt. 5:10-12 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of "Me." Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. "There are rewards, and all of this is not for nothing. There is a purpose and God knows the purpose!*

Four results of Christian suffering:

- 1) Joy w/Christ—(1Pt.4:13 "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.)
- 2) Fellowship w/Christ—(Phil.3:10 "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings,")
- 3) Glorified w/Christ—(Rom.8:17 "...and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.")
- 4) Reign w/Christ—(2 Tim.2:12 "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.")

Whether our sufferings are relationally difficult or physically painful, Peter tells us that we are sharing the sufferings of Christ, and we're blessed (a special closeness, a oneness with Christ; the spirit of glory and God rest upon us) so we

¹ Foxe's Book of Martyrs by John Foxe

should rejoice. The Holy Spirit actually causes a glow of God's glory to shine in and through the believer's body. It is the same glory that shone upon Stephen's face when he was martyred. It is an anointing, a consciousness so deep that it cannot be experienced apart from some severe experience of suffering. We may not rejoice in the trial itself, but, we can rejoice in the ultimate good that will come out of it. The believer honors God and proves that Jesus is the Savior of the world by standing up for Him.

1Peter 4:15-16: Suffering Justly

B. TO REJOICE IN SUFFERING (v15-16)

2. Glorify God through such suffering
 - a. Do not suffer as a murderer, thief, evildoer, or busybody
 - b. Do not be ashamed for suffering as a Christian

Do not bring suffering and persecution upon yourself by breaking some law or doing some evil thing. If a person violates the law of the land and harms others, then he will suffer. This is not suffering for Christ's name! "*Suffering for Christ*" means that a person is persecuted because he is living and proclaiming Christ, not because he is a lawbreaker. Make sure you aren't suffering because of some sin on your part. Do not be ashamed for being a Christian*. Peter felt ashamed when he denied the Lord in the high priest's courtyard, but he learned his lesson and stopped feeling ashamed therefore urging his readers not to feel ashamed. The Christian is to take a stand for Christ and stand firm, honoring His name!

NOTE:

*The name Christian was given to the early believers by unbelievers. It was a name of decision, ridicule, and mockery. Early believers called themselves "*brothers*", "*believers*", "*disciples*", and "*saints*". Apparently they didn't call themselves Christians until much later. It is used only three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; 1Pt.4:16).

1Peter 4:17-19: Glorifying In Suffering For Christ

C. TO TRUST IN THE WILL OF GOD (v17-19)

1. The time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God
 - a. If it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?
 - b. If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will ungodly and sinner appear?
2. Let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him
 - a. In doing good
 - b. As to a faithful Creator

Scripture clearly shows persecution is used by God as a judgment upon believers. Judgment, in fact, must begin in the "*house*" or "*church*" of God. What does this mean? When things are going well for the believer, he tends to feel more and more secure in himself or tends to partake of the world more and more. Perhaps he partakes of only little tidbits of the pleasure and possessions of the world; does not consecrate more, and concentrate, or focus on God like he used to, does not pray and worship nor fellowship and commune like he used to. He becomes somewhat contaminated and polluted with a sense of self-sufficiency and worldliness. When this happens, God has to do something to awaken the believer. God can use persecution as a means of judgment, as a means to stir the believer to clean up his life and draw closer to Him. Think about it: When a believer is persecuted, to whom can he turn? God is his only Deliverer!—turning from self and the world, and putting his focus, and concentration back upon God! The point of this persecution is as a purifying judgment, as a means of chastening and cleansing of the life of the believer because the anointing is only to be used to glorify God! Now is our time of fiery trial (1 Peter 4:12); the ungodly will have their fire later. The fire we endure now purifies us; the fire the ungodly will endure will punish them. We must always remember that there is never any punishment from God for us in our sufferings, only purification. For the Christian, the issue of punishment was settled once and for all at the cross, where Jesus endured all the punishment the Christian could ever face from God.

If it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? They will never be allowed to appear in God's presence; they will never be acceptable to God. Their judgment shall be terrible; they shall be eternally doomed from the presence of the Lord—forever and ever separated from Him. Christians can rejoice that the sufferings they face in this life are the worst they will ever face, throughout all eternity. We have seen the worst; those who reject Jesus Christ have seen the best of life, their eternal existence will ever see.

Peter again draws a distinction between those who suffer according to the will of God and those who suffer otherwise. Not all suffering is the will of God. Peter concludes and introduces a command. He must keep on doing good, and he must commit the keeping of his soul to God. "*Commit*" is to deposit; to entrust into the hands of a trusted banker or friend. God can be trusted. He will not fail. It is the very Word Jesus used when He said, Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. (Luke 23:46). If we commit our souls to Him, no matter what men may do to us, God will save us. He

will fulfill His plan and purpose in our lives—either He delivers the believer through the suffering or else on home to be with Christ forever. We can gain much insight from Peter’s letters to the Christian facing opposition. We learn that suffering is inevitable. All will suffer, whether for good or evil in some way and god is glorified.

SUMMARY:

Some Christians feel surprised when other people misunderstand, dislike, insult, and treat them harshly when they seek to carry out God's will. Peter reminded his readers that this reaction is not a strange thing but a normal Christian experience. Their persecutions were fiery (burning) ordeals in the sense that they were part of God's refining process and were uncomfortable. It was for their testing, (proving), to manifest their faith, that God allowed their sufferings. We can also rejoice in these sufferings because when we experience them we share in Christ's sufferings*. Those who partake of Christ's sufferings will be exceedingly glad when His glory is revealed.

NOTE:

* Our present experience as we suffer for Christ's sake is similar to a pregnant woman who feels discomfort and even pain as she anticipates her due date. When she gives birth, however, joy at the delivery of her child replaces the pain that she felt during her pregnancy.

Similarly we groan now, but the hope of future joy should encourage us to hang on. In the meantime, they are blessed because the Spirit of God rests upon those who glorify Christ by their suffering. However, we should not take comfort in suffering that we bring on ourselves for sinning, only suffering that we experience because we take a stand with Jesus Christ. As God's judgment draws near, those who do not obey the gospel have no hope, whereas those who suffer according to God's will can commit their souls in doing good, for He is a faithful Creator. The combination of “faithful” and “Creator” reminds the believer of God's love and power in the midst of trials so that they will not doubt His interest or ability. **First**, God allows us to suffer to demonstrate our character (v12). **Second**, those who identify themselves with Jesus Christ will share in the sufferings of our Savior (v13). **Third**, our sufferings will be an occasion of God blessing us (v14). In addition, **fourth**, our suffering will glorify God (v16). Peter then redirected our perspective on suffering by reminding us of the time and intensity of our sufferings, compared with those of unbelievers (v17-18). **Finally**, he concluded with a command to commit the keeping of their souls to God; trust and do right (v19). Peter thus, encouraged his readers by revealing God's perspective on their sufferings.

We're not facing the same oppositions as some in other countries are coming up against, but we do face oppositions when we speak the Word of God to unbelievers; while living righteously; when loving those who are unlovable. So don't be surprised, don't be caught off guard, commit your soul to God and receive the peace and joy while going through. What is God doing to us in our present suffering? He is testing our faith and He is judging His household. Rejoice now, that at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exceeding joy.

APPLICATION:

Whatever is opposing us we must maintain an attitude of faith. As we trust God, we may suffer. Suffer knowing that God allowed it, and He is well able to deliver. Pray with an attitude of faith.

ILLUSTRATIONS:

After understanding the suffering of Christ, knowing He is our example, we can know that our suffering cannot be compared—*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us Rom.8:18.*

There is a time when we are called into account with God. God wants Christians to deal with their sins now. Our Christianity was vibrant and alive to us at one time. We shared our faith. Then someone soured us. Someone discouraged us and we lost heart. We stopped an ongoing fellowship with the Lord. We felt justified because we were not appreciated. Since we are not dealing with this now, God may have to deal with it.

Shame keeps us from sharing our faith. If so, we have lost our self-confidence as a Christian and suffer within. Remember, strong Christians share their faith, for we are only strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. We can soar in the face of fear because our identity is wrapped up in Him. Our grasp of our position in Him is so powerful that nothing and no one intimidates us. Rejoice in knowing that God is with us as we suffer for Christ's sake!

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