

## “How To Rejoice When You Suffer For Jesus”

1 Peter 4:12-19

Introduction: Why do the righteous suffer? This is a great question Christians have asked and pondered for centuries. The book of Job is about a righteous sufferer, one who anticipates the truly righteous sufferer, Jesus Christ. Following that line of thought, Scottish minister George MacDonald (1824-1905), I think, put it exactly right, “The Son of God suffered unto the death, not that men might not suffer, but that their sufferings might be like Him” (quoted in C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, vi). If this is true, and I believe it is, then God’s choicest fruits, fruits that feed and nourish us into Christ likeness, are often discovered in His garden of suffering.

First Peter talks extensively about suffering. The word occurs 19 times in its five chapters. Here in 4:12-19, the word occurs four times. Peter tells us suffering “test” us (v. 12). He also tells us they allow us to fellowship “in the sufferings of Christ” (v. 13). He teaches us they allow us the opportunity to “glory God” (v. 16). Finally, He reminds us that suffering for “the name of Christ” is “God’s will” that can increase our faith in the God who is a “faithful Creator” (v. 19). God uses them to make us more like Jesus. God uses them for our good and His glory. C.S.

Lewis said, Pain or suffering is “God’s megaphone.” What is God shouting to us in these eight verses?

I. Be reminded of God’s promises 4:12-13

Charles Spurgeon said, “Men will never be great in theology until they are great in suffering.” In other words, to think rightly about our God requires that we attend the school of suffering. Verses 12-13 teach us two important lessons as we begin our education.

1) God promises I can expect suffering 4:12

The phrase “Dear friends” (*ESV*, “Beloved”) signals a new section, though the theme of suffering is not new. The verbal form “don’t be surprised” is an imperative (Schreiner, 217). What should not surprise us? “When the fiery ordeal (*ESV*, “fiery trial”) comes among you to test you.” Peter may be drawing from Malachi 3:2-3. “Our God is like a refiner’s fire...who will “purify the sons of Levi.” This “fiery ordeal” probably is not a reference to the Neronian persecution that Christians suffered in Rome in A.D. 64. First Peter was almost certainly written before then. This is general suffering all Christians experience for following Christ. And don’t miss this, these “fiery ordeals” are actually sent by God “to test you.” It is not “as if something unusual was happening to you” (v. 12). This is how God works. Suffering

proves our faith, demonstrating its genuineness. Vaughn and Lea write, “Peter wanted his readers to see that God was permitting them to suffer for a purpose, that purpose being the refining of their faith and the overall discipline of their life” (p. 118). James 1:2-4 speaks similarly and says, “Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.” Peter reminds us that suffering is not unusual. God has multiple plans for using it in our lives.

## 2) God promises I can find joy in suffering 4:13

Verse 13 builds on verse 12. Don’t be caught off guard by trials, fiery trials, when they unexpectedly knock down the doors of your life turning upside down the routines of life. “Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ” (v. 13). Once again Peter draws upon the atonement of Christ and His sufferings on our behalf (3:18; 4:1). He draws particularly from 2:21 where he writes, “For you were called to this [suffering], because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” Because we follow Christ, we fellowship with him in his sufferings. Our sharing in his sufferings are not redemptive. They are purifying (see v. 17). They are preparatory. Sharing in the sufferings of Christ prepares us “so that

you may rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed,” when Jesus comes again. I delight in Calvin’s commentary on this verse, “Hence, then, is the whole consolation of the godly, that they are associates with Christ, that hereafter they may be partakers of the glory; for we are always to bear in mind this transition from the cross to the resurrection” (*1 Peter*, 134). First the suffering. Then the glory. “The first is mingled with grief and sorrow, the second is connected with exultation” (Ibid). So “rejoice and rejoice with great joy.” The glory of the second coming is on the way. Your suffering, you will discover, was worth it.

## II. Be reminded of God’s pleasure

4:14

Peter gives a specific example of the kind of suffering he has in mind (cf. 2:12; 3:9, 17; 4:4). You are known for being a Christian, a follower of Christ. And, you do not receive the applause of the world. “You are ridiculed for the name of Christ.” You are maligned, slandered, insulted, mocked, and made fun of because of your devotion and dedication to King Jesus. How am I to evaluate what I am experiencing? Peter has two words of encouragement.

### 1) I am blessed for honoring Christ

Ridiculed for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? “You are blessed!” God has “counted you worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name”

(Acts 5:41). Could Jesus' words in Matthew 5:10-12, in the Sermon on the Mount, be in the back of Peter's mind when he wrote these words? "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you." God honors those who honor him.

## 2) I experience God's Spirit for help

Peter points to an important spiritual truth for those of us who suffer for the name of Christ. We are blessed in a very specific way. We are blessed "because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." Verse 14 is trinitarian through and through! The Old Testament source is Isaiah 11:1. The world ridicules me and God gives me more of Himself through His Spirit to sustain me. The Spirit that rested on Jesus now rests on me (Schreiner, 223).

Alan Stibbs is our help and teacher at this point: "Jesus was sealed from above as God's Christ – He was anointed – by the coming to rest upon Him of the Spirit of the Lord (see Jn. i. 29-34; cf. Is. xi. 2, lxi. 1). So, His people, who bear His reproach and suffer for His Name, are owned as His by a special anointing or manifestation of the Spirit of God. Similarly in Old

Testament times the tabernacle or temple was marked as God's dwelling place by the coming of the *shekinah* or 'glory' of the Lord, symbolically visible as a pillar of cloud or fire (see Ex. xxxiii.9, 10, xl. 34, 35). It is such special manifestation by God of His Presence with His people of which the persecuted are here assured (cf. Jn. xiv. 23)." (*1 Peter*, TNTC, 160).

### III. I am reminded of God's parameters 4:15-16

Verses 15-16 are a study in contrast. They are not difficult to understand. Verse 15 describes the ways of an unbeliever. Verse 16 describes the Christian and once more does it in the context of suffering.

#### 1) I do not honor God when I suffer because of sin 4:15

Suffering for sinning is not commendable and receives no praise. When you suffer for doing wrong you deserve to suffer. Peter makes his point with a short list, four to be exact, of what we might call egregious sins. These are illustrative and not exhaustive. Peter admonishes his readers to not suffer for things like murder, thievery, evil-doing and meddling (*CSB* may read as "as one who defrauds others"). Warren Wiersbe notes, "not all suffering is a "fiery trial" from the Lord....If a professed Christian breaks the law and gets into trouble or becomes a meddler into other people's lives, then he ought to suffer" (*1 Peter, Be Hopeful*, 134). Sin deserves to be punished, both in this

life and the life to come (v. 18). And do not forget, we may not commit these sins in action, but it is still sin if it takes place in the heart (see Matt. 5:21-26 and the words of Jesus).

2) I do honor God when I suffer for my Savior 4:16

Verse 16 speaks directly to the follower of Christ and once more the subject of suffering for our King. “If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in having that name.” You bear the name Christian. You bear witness to him wherever you can and whenever you can. Your witness is not always well received. In fact, most of the time is isn’t. How do you respond? Grow quiet? Deny you follow Christ? Compromise your witness and convictions? Act like you are ashamed of Christ?! God forbid! Don’t be ashamed of Christ, be proud of Christ! “Glorify God in having that name.” Confess him. Honor him. Praise him. Follow the wisdom of that old song sung by missionaries for decades, “I’ll tell the world that I’m a Christian – I’m not ashamed His name to bear; I’ll tell the world that I’m a Christian – I’ll take Him with me anywhere!” What an honor! What a joy! I will glory his name no matter what, even if I have to suffer.

IV. Be reminded of God’s purging

4:17-18

Verse 17 begins with the word “For,” making connection to the previous verses. Verses 17-18 are somewhat startling. On careful inspection, the connection and meaning becomes clear.

1) God rightly judges the saints first

Using eschatological language calls our attention to the fact that the future has invaded the present, a common New Testament theme. Peter declares, “For the time has come for judgment to begin with God’s household.” The breath of God’s judgment is blowing across the world. No one will escape. The language of the verses reflects temple language and Ezekiel 9 and Malachi 3. Believers, “God’s household,” experience judgment first via a pruning and purifying. Their judgment, as the saved of verse 18, is a judgment of mercy, grace and sanctification. It is also a judgment of fiery purifying and severe pruning. Our salvation is not to be taken for granted. We are the righteous because of our union with Christ but we have been “saved with difficulty,” by the skin of our teeth as we say. The story of the salvation of Lot from Sodom (Gen. 19:15-26) provides a perfect word picture. Never presume on your salvation. Both our salvation and sanctification required the brutal death and shed blood of God’s Son.

2) God ultimately judges sinners last



Christian's have been saved and their suffering is sanctifying. Tragically, the unsaved anticipate a different suffering, a suffering of eternal judgment and damnation. Those who "disobey the gospel of God, the gospel concerning His Son," have rejected their only hope. "What will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" Verse 18 "restates the truth of v. 17 in proverbial form. Indeed, Peter virtually quotes Proverbs 11:31, "which reads, "If the righteous will be repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and sinful" (Schreiner, 228). The judgment of unbelievers is certain, eternal and horrific. Revelation 20:11-15 calls it the lake of fire and the second death. It is conscious and it is forever. What will become of the ungodly and sinners? We really don't have the words to describe how terrible it will be. That is why we preach the gospel taking it to all peoples that they might be saved.

#### V. Be reminded to God's plan

4:19

Those who suffer for faithfulness to Christ can rejoice. They are actually experiencing a difficult but genuine blessing of God. It gives them an opportunity to experience His presence in a unique and special way. It provides us the privilege to glorify God in the name of Jesus. God also uses suffering to purify us as He prepares His Church for the glorious return of Christ. But, there is one more thing. All of this is the will of God as verse 19 makes clear. So, don't worry. God has got this.

### 1) God is in control: it is His will

Peter begins verse 19 with the phrase “So then” (*ESV*, “Therefore”). Verse 19 sums up the argument that began in verse 12, but in a sense, it provides a summation of what began all the way back in 3:17. If you suffer for Christ never forget, it is “according to God’s will.” He planned it and He has a purpose in it. Romans 12:2 teaches us that God’s will is “good, pleasing and perfect.” And as Schreiner says, “all suffering passes through his hands (cf. 3:17)...nothing strikes a believer apart from God’s loving and sovereign control” (p. 229). With God there are no accidents, only divine appointments. There may be pain in your suffering, but there is also purpose in your suffering. There is a plan, and that plan is perfect.

### 2) God is the Creator: He is still working

Suffering for Christ is God’s will. He purposed it. He planned it. Therefore, “entrust [yourself] to a faithful Creator while doing good.” This is very similar to 3:17. You are suffering? Remember the suffers of Christ! He perfectly fulfilled the Father’s will. He did good in Gethsemane and on the cross suffering all the while. He is our example. Walk in his footsteps. And, trust God your faithful Creator every step of the way. Keep doing what is good and right. He is at work with you and in you. Calling God “a faithful Creator”

draws attention to His sovereignty and power over all things including suffering. Calling Him faithful reminds us we can trust Him, depend on Him, know He will be there and give us exactly what we need in that moment. I like the way John Piper concludes this section of 1 Peter. The way he takes us to the cross is so very fitting. ““Entrust your soul to a faithful Creator.” The purpose of good theology is to build and sustain great trust in God. In all Christian suffering Satan is seeking to devour faith (1 Peter 5:8-9). God is seeking to test and refine faith (4:12). God’s great purpose in all our suffering will be accomplished when we do what Jesus did in the agony of the cross when he cried out (Luke 23:46), “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit.” He entrusted himself to a faithful Creator. According to 2 Corinthians 1:9 God’s purpose in suffering is to cause us to rely no longer on ourselves but utterly on him who raises the dead.” (“The Holy Spirit Will Help You Die,” (6-10-84)).

Conclusion: I alluded to a portion of the hymn earlier, but it is a wonderful and fitting conclusion to this study. It was written by Baynard Fox (1932-1982) around 1958. “I’ll Tell The World That I’m a Christian.” The first verse reads:

“I’ll tell the world that I’m a Christian-  
 I’m not ashamed His name to bear;  
 I’ll tell the world that I’m a Christian-  
 I’ll take Him with me anywhere.  
 I’ll tell the world how Jesus saved me,  
 And how He gave me a life brand new;  
 And I know that if you trust Him,

That all He gave me He'll give to you.  
I'll tell the world that He's my Savior,  
    No other one could love me so;  
    My life, my all is His forever,  
And where He leads me I will go.”