**Rejoice to Participate in the Sufferings of Christ**

May 10, 2020

1 Peter 4:1-19

Key Verse 4:13 “But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

We all dislike suffering and I am no different from anyone else. But we have to face suffering in life and turning to God’s Word guides us on how to endure it. Sometimes we suffer for doing wrong, and sometimes we suffer for doing good. We will experience both kinds of suffering in the Christian life. When we suffer for doing wrong, we should repent and go to Lord Jesus and change from our ways. Sometimes we are following Jesus and doing good and suffer as a result. How do we respond to this? In 1 Peter 4, Peter encourages disciples of Jesus who are being persecuted for the sake of Christ. He encourages them to live holy lives and rejoice to participate in the sufferings of Christ.

**First**, suffering to live a holy life. A struggle we all face is living a holy life before God. When we were still in our sins, we just lived for the sake of pleasing our flesh and did sinful activities. Once we accept Jesus’ amazing grace and forgiveness of sins, we are accepted as righteous by God. Then begins our struggle to live a holy life. We may be tempted to go back to our old ways, however, let us put away these things that unbelievers do as holy children of God. Peter notes that we have “…spent enough time in the past doing these sinful and reckless activities” (3). Some time ago, I engaged in some sinful activities and I am ashamed of them. After repenting of these activities from the past, I still have to remind myself to stay away from them and follow Jesus.

We sometimes encounter opposition from others while trying to be holy. Look at verse 4. “They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you”. We may get called names like “goodie two-shoes” or “the religious type,” but we shouldn’t be concerned about being made fun of. Peter says in verse 5, “But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” We should turn away from sinful activities because we have received Jesus’ amazing grace. We have temptations to engage in this behavior, but we know we are ashamed of things that lead to death. Paul says in Romans 6:20-23, “When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Let us go to Jesus for help to live holy lives.

**Second**, suffering is a test of faith, refining by fire. There are times in our lives when we will suffer for doing good and suffer for the sake of Christ. We may be doing good and living a life pleasing to God, but when we preach the gospel and participate in the building of the Church, we may encounter some form of suffering and persecution. Then we should remember that we are participating in the sufferings of Christ. How should we endure this kind of suffering? What should our attitude be? We should have the attitude of Christ when suffering in the body (1). 1 Peter 2:24 says, “‘He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.” Christ suffered for our sake and His body took upon our sins so we could be righteous before God (1 Peter 3:18). By having Christ’s attitude, we are able to overcome the power of sin and live for the will of God instead of our own evil human desires (2).

Look at verse 12. “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” Peter notes that we should not be surprised in suffering. For the Name of Jesus, we may be persecuted by the world who does not know Jesus. Jesus tells His disciples that they do not belong to the world and are chosen out of the world. Jesus also says they will be persecuted as a result of being his disciples: “Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.” (John 15:20-21). If our Master, Lord Jesus was persecuted, we as servants of Jesus will be persecuted by the world also.

Peter also compares suffering to a test, a trial by fire that refines our faith. Describing trials in an earlier chapter, Peter says, “…These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:7). We know that God is pleased with our patience and our endurance and He will reward us. One comfort that I have is that God is there with us in the middle of suffering and God cares. He sees us and understands our pain. Oftentimes, in the middle of suffering, just having someone with us is comforting so we know we are not alone. God strengthens us and comforts us, and gives us hope in the middle of suffering. When God saw Hagar’s pain and suffering, and cared for her, Hagar gave the name “You are the God who sees me” (Genesis 16:13). Jesus is our High Priest, who understands our suffering. We can go to Jesus in the middle of our suffering. Hebrews 2:18 says, “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

**Third**, through suffering we come to know Jesus more. In our sufferings for Christ, we can understand Jesus’ sacrificial love a little more. On the cross, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34) Through His sacrifice, Jesus became an eternal source of blessing for all who believe in Him. Hebrews 5:8-9 says, “Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” If we suffer for the sake of Christ and building up the Church, we can, on an infinitely smaller scale than Jesus, become a source of blessing for those we save through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Fourth**, rejoicing in suffering so we can be overjoyed when Jesus’ glory is revealed. Let us read our key verse together. “But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (13). Peter goes on to say that we should rejoice in this suffering. From a worldly perspective, this may not make sense. Rejoice in suffering? But we rejoice knowing we are participating in the work of building up the Church, of preaching the gospel of grace and God’s truth. We rejoice in our living hope, as Peter describes in 1 Peter 1:3-4, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.” We rejoice in our imperishable inheritance. This living hope gives us strength to endure and rejoice while looking forward to our coming salvation. And we know that God who is faithful, sees this and will reward us. In Matthew 5, Jesus says, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The apostles experienced this persecution and suffering as did many Christians who preached the gospel throughout history. In Acts 5:41, the apostles rejoiced even after suffering physical punishment for Jesus, “…rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name,” and they continued to preach the good news of Jesus being the Messiah. Paul encountered persecutions and suffering for the sake of Christ, but was not ashamed of them. Instead, he also rejoiced. Paul writes in Colossians 1:24, “Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.”

Polycarp was the bishop of the church in Smyrna, one of the seven churches in Revelation. At the age of 86, he was threatened and persecuted for believing in Jesus. He was told that if he denied the Name of Jesus, he would be spared but if he claimed the Name of Jesus, he would be burnt up. Polycarp stood firm and said, “For 86 years I have been His servant, and He has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” They burned him and when the fire didn’t burn him completely, he was stabbed.

Considering this in our own strength and body, this might seem overwhelming or cause us to fear. For me, the fear and dread of possible suffering overwhelms me. Sometimes I suffer with irrational anxiety. But Peter reminds us we are not alone when we participate in the sufferings of Christ. Instead, the Holy Spirit is with us. Look at verse 14. “If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.” When Stephen was being stoned, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and was even able to forgive those who were stoning him. “But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). In his letter to Timothy, Paul reminds Timothy that he has suffered persecutions but talks about God’s faithfulness, “…Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them” (2 Tim. 3:11b). He goes on to say, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). We are strengthened, when we remember the Holy Spirit is with us in these persecutions.

For me, my anxiety is one form of struggle. Sometimes it feels like it is too much or that it will be too long before it goes away. However, God’s grace helps me every day and comforts me. I can see areas of growth in me through this struggle and I am working towards recovery by God’s mercy and grace. It is not an easy road and I’m not always progressing forward, but God is with me, step by step. Others throughout history have had other suffering. But if we suffer for the sake of Christ, we are blessed and God will be with us. God is faithful and I know one day all my anxiety will be gone. Revelation 21:4 says God will dwell with us and “‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” Whatever suffering or pain you are going through, one day it will be no more. I pray we can hold onto this living hope. I pray we can remember God is faithful and will restore all things, and that we will endure our temporary sufferings. I have many people to thank in our church and my family who have helped me and comforted me, and I pray that I and all of us, by God’s grace and goodness, do good and serve others in suffering.

In the middle of suffering, we may be tempted to despair, but we should look to Jesus and pray for comfort in our present sufferings. And we need to keep perspective by looking forward to Jesus’ coming glory. We can rejoice knowing that Jesus’ glory will surpass our current suffering so much that it is not even worthwhile to make a comparison. For me it helps to remember how great the glory of Jesus will be. Imagine comparing a drop of water to the world’s oceans. The coming glory due to Jesus will be even greater than this. As Paul says in Romans 8:18, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” What comfort this is!

This chapter concludes with Peter encouraging those who suffer for God’s will to commit themselves to God, who is faithful, and to continue to do good. (19) We may suffer in life, but through Jesus, we can be refined, know Him more, rejoice in our sufferings, and look forward to our living hope. We can endure suffering when we remember that we are participating in the sufferings of Christ, and we will be overjoyed when Christ’s glory is revealed. We know we are not alone in our suffering and the Holy Spirit is with us, comforting us. We know God sees our pain and suffering and is faithful. He will reward us and these present sufferings pale in comparison to the love of Lord Jesus and His glory when He is revealed.

Lord Jesus, help us to be strong and remain in Your grace. Help us to be bold in faith and participate in Your suffering for the sake of building up the Church and eagerly and expectantly wait for our reward, where You will say, well done! I pray Your peace comforts us in our struggles. I pray in Jesus’ Name. Amen.