

In September 2014 my life was about to change. I was getting ready to head to church and preach. Before leaving, my wife Charity came and showed me a pregnancy test; a positive one. We thought we were done with two kids but God had different plans. We scheduled our first appointment with the doctor and went in a few weeks later to confirm the pregnancy. I was overjoyed when I saw the healthy little baby on the ultrasound screen. But that was all about to change. The doctor twitched her hand and I said: "What was that?" She said: "Oh I forgot to look." After a minute she turned the screen around and announced that Charity was pregnant with twins.

Everything changed for us. We left the doctor's office in complete shock. Charity was put on "high risk" for her pregnancy. Another ultrasound was scheduled to take place in one month to monitor the progress. We began fervently praying for our unborn children. We shared the joyful news with our daughters, family and close friends. Normally we wouldn't share with others, but given the circumstances we coveted prayer for this new journey we would embark on.

Late October was our next appointment. The first step was to check on the babies. Upon first examination it was revealed we had lost one of the babies. As one baby grew, the other failed to develop. It was one of those extremely difficult times. We tried to pay attention but struggled to listen through tears and weeping. To us, we had lost one baby. But on the other hand, we still had a healthy growing baby. We left the hospital that day with conflicting emotions. We were suffering with the loss of one baby and overjoyed at the blessing God had given us with the other baby. The paradox of emotions was difficult to bear. We did our best to keep it together but tears constantly leaked out.

Have you had an experience in your life that was filled with a mixture of suffering and joy all wrapped in the same experience? Have you been in a place where suffering was present but joy did its best to overshadow the suffering? Have you noticed that this complexity of emotions is similar to our experience in the Christian life? The life of a Christ-follower is marked with suffering but filled with joy. If you're a believer, you've most likely experienced this paradox of emotions as you've followed Christ. It also seems that the longer you follow Christ, the more you understand this part of the Christian life.

Open your bible to 1 Peter 4. This morning we continue our series through the New Testament letter of 1 Peter, which we're

calling Exiles. Peter writes this letter to believers who are scattered throughout Asia Minor, or modern-day Turkey. He wants to encourage them to live for Christ and stay strong in the commitment they've made no matter what they encounter.

This morning we transition to a new section in the letter starting in 1 Peter 4:12. The previous section began in chapter 2:11 and ended with 4:11. Peter is returning to the subject of suffering in the life of a believer.

Joy Can Be Found in Our Suffering

This time Peter is going to address suffering from a fresh perspective, but which is closely related to what we've read earlier in the letter.

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. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name (1 Peter 4:12-16).

The fresh view on suffering is the joy that can be found while you suffer. Peter begins by addressing the readers as "dear friends." He made this same introduction in 1 Peter 2:11. He doesn't want them to be surprised by the fiery ordeal that has come to test them. Some scholars have interpreted the "fiery ordeal" to mean current physical suffering, but Peter makes no mention of current physical suffering. The language of fiery ordeal is similar to the beginning of the book where Peter writes to the believers about their faith being tested in the fire. He is not saying the suffering has come but that it will soon come. We know this because verses 14, 15 and 16 all say, "if you suffer."

Peter wants to prepare the believers so they are ready when the suffering comes. This is also good for us to study so we are prepared when suffering comes for those who follow Christ. Will you be prepared for the suffering? Instead of being shocked at the onset of suffering, Peter wants them to rejoice in their suffering. This sounds counterintuitive. How can or would someone rejoice when they are suffering? If you look at verse 13 again, Peter

instructs them to rejoice and be overjoyed. He repeats himself to make sure the believers are hearing what he is saying. Peter personally knows that suffering has a way to transform a person.

Peter had already suffered for Christ. After Christ's ascension, Peter boldly preached the name of Jesus. One afternoon, God used him to heal a man as he was traveling to the temple to worship. He and John then brought the man who once was lame along with them. As he stood in the Temple court that afternoon, he boldly shared about Jesus as the Savior of the world. Do you think Peter was tagged in Facebook photos for his sermon or interviewed by *Preaching Today*? No! He was arrested for speaking about the name of Jesus and thrown into prison for the night (Acts 4:3). Peter is more than qualified to write about suffering for Christ.

The first two verses set the stage for suffering and prepare believers to rejoice in times of suffering. The next three verses hone in on specific points of suffering. Let's look at the three things Peter writes about:

You're blessed when you're insulted for Christ

The first point Peter makes is to count an insult for Christ as a blessing. Peter uses the Greek word *ὀνειδίζω* (*oneidizō*) to describe the insult you may receive. This is the same word Jesus used in Matthew 5:11 when He talked about being insulted. ***"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"*** (Matt. 5:11-12). Take note that in both of these situations the insults hurled are because of the name of Christ. These are not insults about how you park your car, do your hair, or the clothes you wear. These verses are referring to being insulted for your commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

This might be a mindset shift for some of you. To be insulted this way is to be mocked for trusting in Christ. To be insulted like this is to have people denounce you for Jesus' name. It can come in verbal or written form. If this happens, you are blessed because the Spirit of God rests on you. I love how Peter makes a reference to the Holy Spirit resting on you. When these insults come, fear not because you're not alone. The Holy Spirit will be your protector in these times of trouble. You are blessed if this happens. Although you are cursed by men, you are blessed by God.

Avoid suffering for sin

Peter gives us a second thought on suffering. Believers need to avoid suffering for their sin. Not all suffering is in the name of Christ. Peter lists a handful of sins here: murder, theft, crimes, or being a meddler. We know what each of these words mean but the word meddler is an interesting word used here. It means busybody or to be involved in other people's business. It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It's never used in the

Septuagint which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. In fact, it is never used in Greek literature before Peter uses it here in 1 Peter!

Can you think of a time in your life when you suffered for your sin other than what is listed? Let me give some examples. What about the person who cheats on their expense report at work, gets caught and loses their job? Then there is the person whose marriage is struggling and they turn to the bottle and not the Lord. They end up damaging relationships instead of investing in the one relationship that heals. Or the person who habitually lies. In fact, they have lied so much they can't tell the truth from the lie anymore. Their lying has resulted in a loss of all true friends.

Let me ask a blunt question: Have you distorted the truth to think that you're suffering for Christ when you are really suffering for your sins? I think that Peter lists blatant sins to help distinguish the difference between suffering for Christ and suffering for foolish mistakes. Each person makes foolish mistakes; that is unavoidable. You are probably not suffering for these blatant sins listed here, but make a note not to suffer for any sin. The lesson we learn is to make a commitment to be filled with the Spirit and avoid the temptation of sin, any type of sin.

Do not be ashamed in your suffering

The final instruction Peter shares is not to be ashamed when you suffer. Once again, Peter says: "If you suffer." This helps affirm that the suffering hadn't begun yet. Peter's words are instructional to help believers prepare for the suffering that will come. The Apostle Paul wrote a similar instruction to Timothy. He encouraged him not to be ashamed of the Gospel but to suffer with him for the sake of God (2 Tim. 1:8). Earlier in Paul's life, he wrote to the church in Rome. He stated that he wasn't ashamed for the name of Jesus (Rom. 1:16). In fact, Paul knew that in the name of Jesus there was power!

Allow this encouragement from Peter and Paul to be an encouragement to you. If you've found yourself ashamed for your commitment to Christ, change that shame to praise. Praise God when your co-workers mock you for not participating in the sins of the world. Praise God when you hear someone poke fun at you for your commitment to the Gospel. When people say things that could discourage you allow that to be fuel for you to praise God and encouragement to be steadfast in your commitment to Christ.

You can find joy in suffering if you take the words Peter says and apply them to your life. Commit this truth to your heart. You might want to memorize the words and allow them to strengthen you as you prepare for the suffering to come.

The five verses we just read can be summed up like this: Don't be surprised when the suffering comes but rejoice as you participate in the suffering of Christ. If people insult you for Christ, you are blessed. But make sure you aren't suffering for your sin.

If you do suffer for Christ, don't be ashamed but use this as an opportunity to praise God!

Suffering and God's Judgment

Peter continues writing about suffering and switches to talking about God's final judgment.

For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And,

"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" (verses 17-18).

The "For" in verse 17 reaches back to the idea of Christians suffering in verse 16. Peter wants to keep the same train of thought but share more on the subject. Some Christians have a problem with the idea that judgment will begin with God's household. Peter could have written about those who have rejected the message of Christ, but he chose to begin with those who have accepted the truth of Jesus.

This line of writing is similar to what the prophets wrote in the Old Testament. Ezekiel, Zechariah, Amos and Malachi all have similar statements in their prophetic books. And Jeremiah, Zechariah and Malachi each write about the fiery ordeal and God's judgment beginning with His people. Peter seems to have this perspective in mind as he attempts to encourage the believers in Asia Minor.

When we look at what the Old Testament prophets wrote and what Peter has written, we see that the grammar is the same but the theology is different. Let me explain. In the Old Testament, the judgment talked about was an annihilation of God's unfaithful people. The people in the Old Testament were living lives of sin and God's judgment was to come because of that. But what Peter is writing about is a purification of God's people, a purification that will prepare them for the final judgment. The difficulties that God's people encounter are designed to purify and refine believers so they will be ready to receive their final reward.

Then Peter quotes directly from Proverbs 3:34. He uses this to restate what he has just written. What does it mean when Peter writes: **"It is hard for the righteous to be saved."**? It is not hard for God to save people; that is not what he is writing. You can also translate **hard** to mean **difficult**. This is a continuation on the thought of suffering. The believer will endure suffering in this life. That suffering will be difficult. The suffering may be difficult now, but it will be worthwhile when Christ returns. I love what C.S. Lewis writes on the topic of suffering: "Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free-wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself." There will be suffering, but suffering for a believer refines you.

These verses can also prompt a person to think more about personal evangelism. Have you thought about that question before? What will happen to the ungodly? Let that question bother you this week. Allow this question to take up space in your life as you encounter others this week. When you see people at work, the store, the coffee shop, your lunch spot or in your neighborhood think about what will happen to them in the end. Instead of only being concerned with yourself, think about those around you and their final outcome.

Peter never gives an answer to his question in verses 17 and 18. But the Bible tells us elsewhere what the outcome of the ungodly and the sinner will be. Their outcome will be eternal separation from Christ (Matt. 25:41). The Bible tells us that those who reject Christ as their Savior will experience weeping and gnashing of their teeth (Matt. 25:30). Allow these words from Peter to prompt you to share the love of Christ with others. If you've placed your trust in Christ, don't keep that to yourself. Others need to hear the truth. You have people in your life who need the joy of Jesus. We can conclude from these verses that it's better to suffer a little now for Christ than to be separated from Him for the rest of our lives.

Trust God as You Suffer

Peter wraps up this section with a concluding comment on this topic of suffering in verse 19.

So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Listen to *The Message* translation of this verse: "So if you find life difficult because you're doing what God said, take it in stride. Trust him. He knows what he's doing, and he'll keep on doing it." Peter does his best to distinguish the difference between suffering for God's will and general suffering in life. When you suffer for God, you can commit yourself into the loving hands of God. Interestingly, this is the only time in the New Testament where God is referred to as the Creator.

This morning I wanted to show a clip from the movie, *End of the Spear*. But as I reviewed the movie clip, I concluded it was too graphic to show here. A group of five men had a strong desire to share the Gospel with the Waodani people in Ecuador. The Waodani were known for their savagery. They were a violent group of people who had no contact with the outside world. They were known for spearing their enemies and spearing all outsiders.

Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, Nate Saint, Pete Fleming and Jim Elliot lived as missionaries in Ecuador. Using a small airplane, they were able to locate the Waodani village and Nate Saint found a safe place to land the plane nearby. They waited and hoped that they would be able to meet the people and share the love of Christ with them. After four days of waiting, one man and two women came to visit them. The missionaries shared

a meal with them and felt like the contact was positive. They asked the Waodani to bring more people next time. The missionaries waited for two days and then two women emerged from the jungle. As the missionaries approached them, they felt the women looked unfriendly. At this point numerous men rushed them and speared all five missionaries.

These men suffered death in an attempt to share the hope of Christ with the Waodani people. They committed themselves to God as their faithful Creator. But their murders weren't in vain. After receiving the news of the death of their husbands, some of the relatives of these men went to live with the Waodani. They were able to share the love of Christ with these vicious warriors and ended up winning many of them over to Christ. It's a moving story of suffering according to God's will and entrusting one's life to God. Listen to what Elizabeth Elliot, the wife of Jim Elliot, said: "We want to avoid suffering, death, sin, ashes. But we live in a world crushed and broken and torn, a world God Himself visited to redeem. We receive his poured-out life, and being allowed the high privilege of suffering with Him, may then pour ourselves out for others." If you take one thing from this sermon please know: Christians can rejoice in suffering by entrusting themselves to God.

Peter also instructs the believers to continue to do good. Many of you are doing good. We have so many people in our church body who are serving on Sunday mornings. We have WBS and Men's Fraternity leaders. We have Community Group leaders. We have people who serve outside of our church; there are those serving in the Tenderloin, serving in downtown San Mateo with immigrants, and with people who are trying to find sobriety. These are just a few of the ways so many of you are doing good. Keep it up! Keep doing good; the world needs to see that.

The topic of suffering for Christ can be a difficult one for the church in America to grasp. The American church hasn't experienced suffering like believers in other countries. In fact, we live in a free country when it comes to religious belief. In other places there is more of a line in the sand that people need to be aware of. As we think about the words of Peter, we too must prepare for the suffering that will come for following Christ. The times the church has grown the most is when the church has suffered the most. Suffering has come but there is joy to be found. Peter is right that our suffering refines us. It's not that we want to suffer or that we invite suffering but when we suffer we can entrust ourselves to God.

On Monday of this week we celebrated our son's second birthday. It was a joy to watch him run around. It was great seeing him laugh with his family. It was a blessing seeing him eat cupcakes with his friends. There are times when we still think of the suffering we encountered during his time in the womb. We still miss the other baby. There are times our kids ask about the other baby, tell us how much they miss it, and it's tough. God has brought us through this painful time in our family life. I'm not saying we suffered for Christ in this loss. I am saying that we suffered. Many of you have suffered in your own unique way. And in our situation, the joy has outweighed the loss we experienced. My experience has taught me that God is faithful and we can rejoice in our suffering by trusting ourselves to God.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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