

"FROM SUFFERING TO GLORY"
1 Peter 3:13-5:14

NIV MEMORY VERSE: 1 Peter 5:7

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Suffering ... Not a pleasant subject, but something that we are all familiar with. I imagine if we could go around the room and share our stories that everyone here has experienced suffering at some time or another. The thing about suffering is that if you can hold on and be patient, it leads to HOPE. And Hope will not disappoint.

Well, that's been my week and my month lately ... Struggles and suffering, but I'm hanging on. There was a time that I suffered way more than this, and the Epistles (Letters) served as my guide or road map back to peace and sanity. I wasn't sure my life would turn around, but it did.

→ When you consider the world environment during Peter's time, it's easy to understand that he understood about suffering. Peter wrote this letter to encourage believers who would likely face trials and persecution under the Emperor Nero. During the first century, Christians were not hunted down and killed throughout the Roman Empire. They could, however, expect social and economic persecution from three main sources: the Romans, the Jews, and their own families. All would be likely misunderstood, some would be harassed, and a few would be tortured and put to death.

The legal status of Christians in the Roman Empire was unclear. Many Romans thought of Christians as members of a Jewish sect. Because the Jewish religion was legal, they considered Christianity legal as well - as long as Christians complied with the empire's laws. However, if Christians refused to worship the emperor or join the army, or were involved in civil disturbances, they might be punished by the Roman authorities.

Many Jews did not appreciate being legally associated with Christians. Jews occasionally harmed Christians, drove them out of town, or attempted to turn Roman officials against them.

Another source of persecution was the Christian's own family. Under Roman law, the head of the household had absolute authority over all its members. Unless the ruling male became a Christian, the wife, children and servants who were believers might well face extreme hardship. If they were sent away, they would have no place to turn but the church. If they were beaten, no court would uphold their interests.

Peter may have been writing this letter for new Christians and those planning to be baptized. He wanted to warn them about what lay ahead, and they needed his encouraging words to help them face opposition. That's why this letter of 1st Peter is still helpful for any Christian facing trials.

None of us is exempt from catastrophe, pain, illness, and death - trials that, like persecution, make us lean heavily on God's grace. For today's readers, and students of the Bible like yourselves, the theme of Peter's letter is HOPE.

➔ Learning From Noah - 1 Peter 3:18-22

This section of chapter 3 presents 3 different ministries.

- The Ministry of Christ,
- The Ministry of Noah, and
- The Ministry of Christians today.

Jesus Christ had a real body, soul, and spirit. He was not God inhabiting a man; He was the true God-Man. When He died, He yielded His spirit to the Father. So on the cross, our Lord suffered and died. His body was put to death, and His spirit died when He was made sin. But His Spirit was made alive when He yielded it to the Father. Then according to Peter, sometime between His death and His resurrection Jesus made a special proclamation to "the spirits in prison."

Who were these "spirits" that He visited? And what did He proclaim to them?

Some say these "spirits in prison" were the spirits of lost sinners in hell to whom Jesus brought the good news of salvation. Some argue that the word 'spirits' is used to describe angels or demons, not human beings. And nowhere in the Bible are we told that Jesus visited hell, where these lost human beings would be sent. So it couldn't be them.

Others say, when our Lord yielded his spirit to the Father and died, at some time between death and resurrection, he visited the realm of the dead where he delivered a message to spirit beings, probably fallen angels who were somehow related to the

period before the flood. That message was probably a declaration of victory over Satan and his hosts. The world before the flood was unbelievably wicked, and no doubt these spirits had much to do with it.

Which leads us to the ministry of Noah. The patriarch Noah was held in very high regard amount Jewish people in Peter's day, and also among Christians. He was linked to Daniel and Job, and there are many references to the flood in the Psalms and the Prophets.

Noah was a man of faith who kept doing the will of God even when he seemed to be a failure. This would certainly be an encouragement to Peter's readers, and to us. If we measured faithfulness by results, then Noah would have a very low grade. Yet God ranked him very high!

But there is another connection: Peter saw in the flood a picture of the Christian's experience of baptism. The early church practiced the baptism of immersion. It is a picture of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism meant a clean break with the past, and this could include separation from a new believer's family, friends, and job. Candidates in the early church were interrogated carefully, for their submission in baptism was a step of consecration, and not merely an initiation right to join the church.

The Great Flood pictures death, burial and resurrection as well. The waters buried the earth in judgment, but they also lifted Noah and his family up to safety. The early church saw the ark as a picture of salvation. Noah and his family were saved by faith because they believed God and entered into the ark of safety. Sinners are also saved by faith when they trust Christ and become one with Him through baptism.

Baptism itself is not what saves us. It is only a symbol or figure of what does save us. Only the blood of Christ can save the sinner. However, baptism does save us from one thing: a bad conscience. Peter told us that a good conscience was important to a successful witness (vs. 3:16), and part of that 'good conscience' is being faithful to our commitment to Christ as expressed in baptism.

→ Peter was sharing lessons that we need today.

- 1) Christians must expect opposition. As the coming of Christ draws near, our well-being will incite the anger and attacks of godless people. We must be careful that our suffering is because of well-doing, and not because we have disobeyed God's Word.
- 2) Christians must serve God by faith and not trust in results. Noah served God and kept only 7 people from the flood, yet God honored him. Jesus appeared as a total failure to the world when he died on the cross, yet His death was the supreme victory!

- 3) We can be encouraged because we are identified with Christ's victory. This is pictured in baptism. It is the baptism of the Spirit that identifies a believer with Christ. It is through the Spirit's power that we live for Christ and witness for Him.
- 4) Our baptism is important. It identifies us with Christ and gives witness that we have broken from our old life and will. The act of baptism is a pledge to God that we shall obey Him.

If a believer is to have a good conscience, he must obey God. The important thing is that we vow our devotion to Christ and make it a definite act of commitment. It is in taking up our cross of commitment daily that we prove we are true followers of Christ.

→ **Living for God** - 1 Peter 4:1-11

Peter described 4 attitudes that a Christian can cultivate in his lifetime if he desires to make his life all that God wants it to be.

A Militant Attitude Toward Sin: The picture is that of a soldier who puts on his equipment and arms himself for battle. Our attitudes are weapons, and weak or wrong attitudes will lead us toward defeat. Outlook determines outcome, and a believer must have the right attitudes if he is to live a right life. (On this point I think my dad and Warren Wiersbe must have talked to each other.)

- Think of what sin did to Jesus.
- Enjoy the will of God.
- Remember what you were before you met Christ.

A Patient Attitude Toward the Lost: Unsaved people do not understand the radical change that their friends experience when they trust Christ and become children of God. They do not think it strange when people wreck their bodies, destroy their homes, and ruin their lives by running from one sin to another! But let an alcoholic become sober, or an adulterous person become faithful, and the family thinks he has lost his mind!

We must be patient toward the lost, even though we do not agree with their lifestyles or participate in their sins. After all, unsaved people are blind to spiritual truth and dead to spiritual enjoyment. In fact, our contact with the lost is important to them since we are the bearers of the truth that they need.

An Expectant Attitude Toward Christ: Christians in the early church expected Jesus to return in their lifetime. The fact that He did not return does not invalidate His promise. The important thing is that we shall see the Lord one day and stand before Him. How we live and serve today will determine how we are judged and rewarded on that day.

→ Peter gave "10 Commandments" to his readers to keep them in balance as far as the Lord's return was concerned:

1. Be sober
2. Watch unto prayer
3. Have fervent love
4. Use hospitality
5. Minister your spiritual gifts
6. Think it not strange
7. Rejoice
8. Do not be ashamed
9. Glorify God
10. Commit yourself to God

An expectant attitude toward Christ's return involves a serious, balanced mind and an alert, awake prayer life. The test of our commitment to the doctrine of Christ's return is not in our ability to draw charts or discern signs of prophecy, but in our thinking and praying. If our thinking and praying are right, our living should be right.

➔ **A Fervent Attitude Toward the Saints:** If we really look for the return of Christ, then we shall think of others and properly relate to them. Love is the badge of the believer in this world. Especially in times of testing and persecution Christians need to love one another and be united in heart.

This love should be "fervent." The word pictures an athlete straining to reach the goal. It speaks of eagerness and intensity. Christian love is something we have to work at just the way an athlete works on his skills.

Christian love must also result in service. Each Christian has at least one spiritual gift that he must use to the glory of God and the building up of the church. We are stewards. God has entrusted these gifts to us that we might use them for the good of His church.

➔ **Facts About Furnaces - Or Life in the Fire - 1 Peter 4:12-19**

Peter explained about a special kind of persecution - a "fiery trial" - that was about to overtake the entire church. It would not be occasional personal persecution, but official persecution from those above them. To that point in time, Christianity had been tolerated by Rome because it was considered a sect of Judaism, and the Jews were permitted to worship freely. That attitude would change and the fires of persecution would be ignited by Nero, and then by the emperors that followed.

Peter gave the believers 4 instructions to follow in the light of the coming "fiery trial."

1) **Expect Suffering:** Persecution is not something that is alien to the Christian life. Throughout history the people of God have suffered at the hands of the unbelieving

world. Christians are different from unbelievers and this different kind of life produces a different kind of lifestyle.

2) Rejoice in Suffering: I am one who doesn't like tattoos. I mean no judgment on anyone, but I simply don't care for them. However, in my 20's this section of 1 Peter was "tattooed" onto my heart. I was 25 years old and in one very fast year, I gave birth to my first born, my parents sued each other and I was called to testify in court between them, and my husband of 5 years left me for another woman. Our home was in foreclosure, I had to put the baby in daycare and return to work, and I lost half my body weight from depression. I was physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted. That was a fiery trial! Then I read Peter's words, "Rejoice in your suffering." I learned to dwell in those words, and eventually to love those words.

Literally Peter said, "Be constantly rejoicing!" In fact, he mentioned joy in one form or another 4 times in vs. 13-14. The world cannot understand how difficult circumstances can produce exceeding joy, because the world has never experienced the grace of God.

Peter named several privileges that encourage us to rejoice in the midst of a fiery trial:

- Our suffering means fellowship with Christ. - It is an honor and a privilege to suffer with Christ and be treated by the world the way it treated Him. Not every believer grows to the point where God can trust him with this kind of experience, so we should rejoice when the privilege comes to us.
- Our suffering means glory in the future. - Suffering and glory are the twin truths that are woven into the fabric of Peter's letter. The world believes that the absence of suffering means glory, but a Christian's outlook is different. The trial of our faith today is the assurance of glory when Jesus returns. This was the experience of our Lord, and it shall also be our experience. However, it is necessary to understand that God is not going to replace suffering with glory, rather He will transform suffering into glory.
- Our suffering brings to us the ministry of the Holy Spirit. - Verse 14 can be translated "for the presence of the glory, even the Spirit, rests on you." The reference is to the Shekinah glory of God that dwells in the tabernacle and in the temple. In other words, suffering Christians do not have to wait for heaven in order to experience His glory. Through the Holy Spirit, then can have the glory now.
- Our suffering enables us to glorify His name. - Our authority is in the name of Jesus, and Satan hates that name. Every time we are reproached for the name of Christ, we have the opportunity to bring glory to that name.

3) Examine Your Life: In the furnace of persecution and suffering, we often have more light by which we can examine our lives and ministries. The fiery trial is a refining process by which God removes our impurities and purifies us. There are several questions we should ask ourselves as we examine our own lives:

- Why am I suffering? - Is it a result of my own choices or truly because I am a believer?
- Am I ashamed or glorifying Christ? - If I seek to glorify God, then I can not be ashamed of Christ.
- Am I seeking to win the lost? - We need to be concerned about the lost sinners around us. Our present fiery trial is nothing compared with the flaming fire that shall punish the lost when Jesus returns in judgement.

4) Commit Yourself to God: When we are suffering in the will of God, we can commit ourselves into the care of God. Everything else that we do as Christians depends on this. ... This was the course I choose during that fiery trial in my mid-20's. I committed myself to God and his ways. And God has been faithful. And I am eternally grateful.

➔ **Being a Good Shepherd** - 1 Peter 5:1-4

Times of persecution demand that God's people have adequate spiritual leadership. If judgement is to begin at God's house, then that house had better be in order, or riot will fall apart. This explains why Peter wrote this special message to the leaders of the church, to encourage them to do their work faithfully.

➔ **From Grace to Glory!** - 1 Peter 5:5-14

Peter knew that a fiery trial was about to occur, and he wanted the entire church family to be prepared. As he closed his letter, Peter gave the church 3 important admonitions to obey if they were to glorify God in this difficult experience.

To confess, I'm struggling with a fiery trial right now. These 3 admonitions are a guide and encouragement to me now, just as they were during that difficult year long ago. (It's ironic that every lecture I prepare ends up being a life lesson and encouragement for me, at just the right time. The Holy Spirit is so amazing that way.)

Here's those admonitions:

Be Humble - Peter commanded all believers to submit to God and to each other. One of the benefits of this kind of relationship with God is the privilege of letting Him take care of our burdens. We need His inward peace if we are going to triumph in the fiery trial and bring glory to His name.

Be Watchful - One reason we have cares is because we have an enemy.

- Respect him - he is dangerous.
- Recognize him - he is a great pretender.
- Resist him!

Finally, Be Hopeful - Peter closed this letter on a positive note and reminded his readers that God knew what He was doing and was in complete control.

→ No matter how difficult the fiery trial may become, a Christian always has hope. Why?

- We have God's grace.
- We know we are going to glory.
- Our present suffering is only for a while.
- We know that our trials are building Christian character.

BE HOPEFUL! The glory is soon to come!