

FIRST PETER

Lesson 4

Experiencing Salvation in Suffering

1 Peter 1:6-9

The basic theme of First Peter is suffering. No one who is normal likes to suffer, and the natural tendency of man is to want to rid himself of all suffering as quickly as possible. Suffering of any kind hurts; it is painful; it is distasteful to our human nature, but the Bible tells us that suffering is part and parcel of our Christian experience. Therefore, we have to come to grips with it.

God has ordained suffering because through it we find out whether our faith is genuine, and if genuine, we realize that through suffering our faith capacity increases, bringing spiritual maturity into our Christian lives. *“For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake”* (Phil. 1:29). Spiritual growth in a Christian comes in various ways such as: (1) an understanding of the doctrinal content of God’s Word; (2) application of God’s Word to real life situations; (3) appropriating the filling of the Holy Spirit; and (4) suffering to teach us to cling to God alone. As Christians we cannot escape suffering, and what God wants for us is not that we merely resign ourselves to it, but that we utilize the suffering as He intends it to be used in our Christian experience.

In 1 Peter 1:6-9, Peter is going to demonstrate that suffering is necessary for the Christian, and if the Christian properly understands the divine purpose in suffering, he may not want to get out of it too quickly.

EXPERIENCING THE JOY OF SALVATION (1:6a)

“In this”

These words refer back to what Peter has said in verses 3-5. He has spoken about the new birth which God caused by His own compassionate mercy which brought a living hope to the Christian that he will most certainly obtain. The inheritance is heaven itself. This heavenly inheritance is reserved by God’s omnipotence for the Christian.

Furthermore, God protected or put a garrison around every Christian to make sure that he reaches heaven where his salvation will be complete, total and finished. It is God’s omnipotence which also guards the Christian while on earth. His salvation is not an afterthought in God’s mind. It was planned from all eternity. Therefore, a Christian’s salvation is secure; it can never be taken from him. No circumstance of life can rob him of his heavenly inheritance.

“you greatly rejoice”

This goes back to 1 Peter 1:3-5. When suffering comes, we do not rejoice in it, but we have a triumphant joy, a joy which brings happy tears to our eyes as we contemplate our so great salvation in the midst of trials, testing and sufferings. Deep meditation on our salvation in Christ brings comfort and joy to the Christian while he is suffering trials. We

do not rejoice in the act of suffering but in the consequences of suffering—Christ-likeness and ultimately—heaven.

Notice that basking in salvation not only sustains Christians but makes them joyful; they are a happy people. A believer can have an inward joy and a happy countenance while in the midst of suffering. Through this he can make a dynamic impact upon the unsaved world which has no answer for suffering.

When John Wesley was asked by a group of rank unbelievers, “What is the difference between your Methodist people and the other people of the world?” Wesley replied, “Our people die happy.”

EXPERIENCING THE GRIEF OF SUFFERING (1:6b)

“even though now for a little while”

The first word we should note is “now.” Twice the word occurs in 1 Peter 1:6-9. Here in verse 6 it says, “*even though now . . . you have been distressed by various trials.*” It occurs once again in verse 8 where it is said, “*and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice.*” The “now” tells us that Peter is thinking about our present salvation, which is in contrast to the future salvation of 1 Peter 1:3-5. In verses 6-9 Peter is dealing with how salvation works out in our daily experience. He is answering the question, “If we have such a marvelous salvation, how come we have to suffer as Christians?”

We are told that these trials or testings, which are real, are only for “a little while.” In context, Peter is speaking about sufferings which come because of persecution due to the Asian Christians’ stand for Christ, but this can be applied to any type of suffering (physical or mental). Apparently he felt that these persecutions would not be for a long duration and would soon pass. However, even if these trials lasted for a whole lifetime, this would only be a short period when compared to eternity.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18).

“For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17).

Peter’s point is that a little suffering for a little time here on earth is nothing when compared to eternity where there will be no suffering, therefore we can wait patiently during suffering to enter into heavenly glory.

“if necessary”

Actually this is not the best translation. It should read, “since it is a logical necessity” or “since they are necessary.” It was a logical necessity that these Christians have trials and testings in this life. Suffering is not really an option for Christians. Some will suffer more than others, but all will suffer.

It is also true that Christians do not suffer all the time. The suffering, while necessary, will not continue one minute longer than is needful for the Christian. Therefore,

we can conclude that suffering through trials and testings is the norm for a Christian and an important part of the salvation process.

Each Christian must remember that God either directly brings trials to the Christian or allows testing to come because suffering always has a divine purpose in view. *“So that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this”* (1 Thess. 3:3).

“you have been distressed”

Peter makes it very clear that suffering causes distress. The word means “grieved,” “heaviness,” or “tearfully sorrowful.” It speaks of mental anguish, not necessarily physical suffering.

These Christians were continually being mentally harassed by the unsaved world because of their positive testimony for Christ. This brought grief and anguish to them because they wanted to be normal people.

There is a real lesson for us here. These words indicate to us that the Christian faith is not stoical. When suffering comes, Christians are not necessarily to keep a stiff upper lip and show no human emotion. It is all right to be grieved, to be distressed, to the point of shedding tears. Suffering is painful and sometimes only tears can wash away the burden on a suffering saint’s soul.

“by various trials”

The word “various” means “variegated” or “multicolored.” “Trials” could be translated “testings.” This tells us of the different kinds and sorts of testings the Christian will face. In context, these Asian Christians were suffering hatred, suspicion, violence, slander and cruel social persecution from the unsaved world. The non-Christians were giving them fits about their Christian faith and did every conceivable thing short of physical persecution to get them to deny their faith in Christ.

Apparently, trials were coming at these Christians from all directions. They were ostracized in their communities; their businesses were boycotted; their children were refused admission to the best schools; some may have been reduced to poverty; some may have been sick because of malnutrition, and still others may have died because of poor medical treatment. These were various trials, and perhaps they were thinking about leaving Christ to get out of persecution. Yet, the Lord promises that true Christians will never be given more pressure than they can endure.

“No temptation (testing) has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted (tested) beyond what you are able; but with the temptation (testing) will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

You may still have doubts as to whether suffering is necessary. History buffs might say, “Was it necessary that through the history of the Church so many should suffer and die as martyrs? Why was it that seventy-five thousand Calvinists had to be massacred on August 24, 1572, St. Bartholomew’s Day? It appears that only evil came from it for France was lost to Protestantism. This land was turned over to Romanism and ultimately to infidelity. Did this massacre need to be?”

Yes, it needed to be. We do not see how God was working out His plan in such an ordeal; the intricacies of Divine Providence, more complicated than the most masterful game of chess, are too complex for us now. Someday God will make it plain to us; someday we will understand. Even now as we look back over history we can see a speck of the plan. After the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, thousands of Huguenots (French Calvinists) came to America to give it part of its rich Christian heritage.

EXPERIENCING GOD'S PURPOSE IN SUFFERING

“that (in order, for the purpose that) the proof of your faith”

God, in His sovereignty, either sends or permits testings and trials to come into the Christian's life to prove his faith as to whether it is genuine saving faith or a mere professing faith. The word “proof” means “to test for approval.” These trials come to test the authenticity of faith, whether it is true or false, genuine or unreal. All testings or trials have a definite purpose. These testings do not come from the hand of a capricious God, for He has a divine purpose in all suffering. He is testing our faith to help us understand that we are truly saved. Trials put our faith to the test, and as we are submissive to God and remain faithful to Him and are ready to have Him teach us the lessons He would have us learn in suffering, we demonstrate by our actions that the faith we have is a God-given, genuine faith.

It is not the testing of our faith that brings glory to God, but the fact that our faith met the test and has been approved. *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (James 1:2-3).*

Let us face it honestly, there will be suffering for all Christians. It is a tragedy that in their desire to make Christianity acceptable to the unsaved, preachers and evangelists often convey the idea that the Christian life is a bed of roses. They imply that if you want the solution to all of life's problems, if you want to be deliriously happy, if you want success, you just accept Christ and everything will be fine. Christians do experience joy and happiness, not apart from their problems, but in them.

It is quite possible that Christians suffer more than the unsaved. There are many naive Christians who feel if they just have enough faith they will be removed from all suffering. This is not the truth. In fact, what Peter is telling us is that suffering is brought by God to prove our faith, and if we have a divine perspective on this fact, then we never want to get out of suffering until God has taught us all the lessons He wants us to learn through the suffering. If we are constantly saying, “Deliver me from this problem or that problem, or heal me of this sickness or that sickness then we may be robbing ourselves of finding out whether our faith is genuine. In fact, what Peter is telling us is that if a Christian wants to get out of all suffering, he really does not have faith. Suffering has a purpose in God's plan and we must adjust ourselves to that kind of thinking. Instead of praying for the removal of suffering, we should utilize it so as to let God test the reality of our faith.

“being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though it be tested by fire”

Now Peter compares a tested faith to the process of testing gold. He gets this comparison from the Old Testament where the proof or trial of faith is frequently compared to the testing of gold by the process of smelting or refining by fire (Psa. 66:10; Jer. 9:7; Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:2).

Gold is the most precious metal, but faith is even more precious because it is eternal and gold will perish. As gold is tested, proved and refined by fire, so faith must be proved and refined by the fire of trials and suffering. As the heat of fire separates dross (impurities) from gold, so all alloys must be separated from faith to prove it genuine, real and true.

In light of this gold processing illustration, we are forced to translate “*the proof of your faith*” as “the tested residue of your faith,” that faith which remains when all impure alloy has been burned away. It is not the trying of our faith which brings joy; this, in fact, could bring grief. It is the product of testing that causes joy. God uses the adversity in our lives in order to purge out the elements of our lives which need to be cleansed away and leave behind a faith which is pure and genuine.

Testings not only proves our faith genuine but also purifies our faith from remaining sin. Through suffering the Christian matures spiritually as his capacity for faith increases. The goal of all testing in suffering is to become more Christ-like in our experience. Rough gold has many impurities in it and these must be removed before the gold is pure. Peter must have had in mind the ancient goldsmith who would put gold ore into a huge crucible and heat it to a very high temperature. The ore would melt, and the impurities would float to the top. As the impurities would come up the goldsmith would flick them out with something like a flat spoon. He would continue to do this until he could see his own reflection in the melted gold.

Peter says suffering is like that. It purifies our faith. God brings suffering into the Christian’s life to bring these impurities to the surface. All Christians still have much sin in them. They are a mixture of faith and flesh, good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness.

Through suffering, a Christian must come to grips with his own sin and shortcomings in order that these may be put away so that the face and character of Jesus can be seen in him. God desires Christ-likeness and holiness for the Christian. The pressures and trials of life are allowed by God to refine the believer’s faith and to bring the impure aspects of his life forth so as to rid him of them and to mature him spiritually. God uses suffering to take us to the end of ourselves and to bring us to the place where we have no ability or strength to cope. At that moment we stop trusting in ourselves and turn to the Lord, who is our strength. We learn that He supplies everything we need to face the crises of life. It is only in the crucible of suffering that we learn to truly trust God.

“may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Testing are allowed by God to mature the believer spiritually, for we grow most when suffering. Through suffering our faith will be shown to be genuine and acceptable to Christ, and this tried and approved faith will redound to the praise, honor and glory of Christ at His Second Advent. This tested faith of the Christian will merit an eternal reward.

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12).

**EXPERIENCING THE INEXPRESSIBLE JOY OF LOVING CHRIST BY FAITH
(1:8)**

“And though you have not seen Him, you love Him.”

These Asian Christians had never had the opportunity to see Jesus in the flesh as did Peter, but nevertheless, they loved Christ and looked continually for His appearing. How is it that Christians can have such a great love for Christ when they have never seen Him? It is a supernatural work of God that brings men to the place of loving Christ when they have never even had a glimpse of Him.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 16:13-17).

In fact, the strongest attachments which have ever existed on earth have been for this unseen Savior. There has been a love for Him stronger than for father, or mother, or wife, or sister, or brother, or husband, or home, or country. This love has been so powerful that multiple thousands have been willing to bear the torture of the rack or the stake. This love for Christ has been so mighty that multiple thousands of youth with the finest minds have left the comforts of home and a civilized society to go tell a world of heathen about the Savior's life, death and resurrection. This love has been so strong that unnumbered multitudes have longed, more than for all other things, that they might see Him and be with Him and abide with Him forever and ever.

The only answer to the fact that Christians love this invisible but real Christ, when they have never seen Him, spoken to Him personally, or even seen a picture of Him (for we do not have the foggiest idea from Scripture what He looked like) is that God has miraculously revealed Him to us through His written Word.

Napoleon Bonaparte said,

Alexander, Caesar, Charlemange and myself have founded empires, but upon what did those creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone established His empire upon love. I have inspired multitudes with such an enthusiastic devotion that they would have died for me . . . but to do this it was necessary that I should be visibly present, with the electric influence of my looks, of my words, of my voice. When I saw men and spoke to them, I lighted up the flame of self-devotion in their hearts. Christ alone has succeeded in raising the mind of men toward the Unseen, that it become insensible to the barriers of time and space. Across a chasm of eighteen hundred years, Jesus Christ makes a demand which is beyond all others, difficult to satisfy. He asks for the human heart. He will have it entirely for Himself. He demands it unconditionally.

“and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”

We believe in Christ because God has revealed Him to our faith in the Word. Our Lord made it very clear that there is a special blessing for all those who believe in Christ and

have never seen Him physically “*Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed’*” (John 20:29).

Contemplation of the impeccable character of Christ, His death to forgive our sins, His resurrection to give us eternal life, His ascension to be our High Priest, gives the Christian a joy which cannot be uttered in words. It is a loving faith relationship with the person of Christ who gives us the strength to endure suffering. We can tolerate suffering if we see Christ in it, and if we are assured suffering is making us more Christ-like. This joy and glory belongs only to a true Christian and no one else.

It may be said of Christians that they do, in fact, rejoice; they are a happy people and this is manifested in an inward joy and an outward happiness. Non-Christians often think that Christianity makes a person sad and melancholic and that Christian living is a life of gloom and doom. There are some Christians who have melancholy temperaments, and they are not happy in anything.

Some people who only profess Christ but do not possess Him will give little evidence of joy. Their problem is not too much Christianity but not enough of it. Yet, true Christianity does make its possessors inwardly joyful and outwardly happy. Ask any number of sincere Christians of any denomination, and they will tell you that they have a joy which they never had as non-Christians. They will tell you that however much wealth they may have possessed, or however much fame, honor and power they had before men, or however deeply they involved themselves in the pleasure of sin, they now have a solid and substantial peace, joy and happiness as Christians. There are simply no words to express the joy Christians have found in their love of Christ and the certain hope of heaven.

EXPERIENCING IN PART OUR FINAL SALVATION (1:9)

“obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”

Those Christians who continually love Christ and who persevere in faith toward Him will most certainly receive the final salvation of their souls (whole person) in eternity. This verse looks at the present and ultimately to the future. We are being saved now from the power of sin and we experience this by faith; we will be completely saved from the presence of sin in the future at the Second Coming of Christ.

The word “obtaining” is an interesting one. It was used of competitors in athletic games who carry off prizes or presents (a wreath crown) upon being victorious. Christians who persevere in the faith will be victorious and they will obtain for themselves by God’s grace the final phase of their salvation which was promised them the moment they believed in Christ. It is this confidence that gives a person comfort and an assured hope when suffering.

CONCLUSION

Christian, do you believe 1 Peter 1:6-9? If you do, then you will not be so quick to ask God to remove you from suffering. You may certainly ask Him to remove it, but if He does not, it should not put you into a tailspin. He is using this pressure of suffering to take the sinful impurities out of your life and make you totally dependent upon Christ for everything.

When sufferings come, ask God to remove them only when the lessons He wants you to learn from them are completed in you. When you clearly understand that God has a

divine purpose in your suffering, then you can make peace with it and utilize it to stretch your faith capacity and mature you spiritually in Christ. With a divine perspective, you can say as Job, *“When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10)*.

Suffering can become a friend to you to drive you to Christ. Ignatius, an early church father who suffered in a Roman prison said, “My chains are spiritual pearls.” He understood that there were lessons in life he was to learn which could only come through suffering.

If you are not a Christian, then what is your answer for suffering? Does it happen by accident? Are you a victim of capricious events? What about your final suffering at death? Do you have an answer for it?

There are no answers for suffering; there are no answers for evil; there are no answers for death, except in the person of Jesus Christ. He suffered to the maximum in His death for sin and He rose victorious over death. He is the only answer. Believe in Christ. Trust your soul to Him. Receive Him into your life. You will never see Christ by the naked eye in this life, but you can see Him clearly through the eye of faith. Place your faith in Him alone to save you and take you to heaven. Then, and only then, will you get the answer to suffering, evil and death.