

Glory Through Suffering

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:21

Code: 60-28

INTRODUCTION

The theme of 1 Peter 2:21-25 is the suffering of Jesus: "for you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

Peter emphasizes two categories of truth in 1 Peter. One is the blessings of the Christian: identification with Christ and its resulting privileges. However, to keep us from assuming our blessings as Christians will result in our being loved and respected by the world, Peter also emphasizes that we will suffer. In fact, 1 Peter clearly shows that those most blessed in the faith suffer the most.

The Christian life is a call to glory through a journey of suffering. That's because those in Christ are inevitably at odds with their culture and society. All Satan-energized systems are actively at odds with the things of Christ. The apostle John said a person can't love both God and the world (1 John 2:15), and James said that "whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). That makes the Christian a problem to the society in which he or she lives.

Peter's readers knew both the blessings of life in Christ and the suffering of persecution. They were "scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1). Peter knew of their plight and wrote to comfort them and everyone else chosen by God for salvation, explaining that along with privilege comes suffering.

LESSON

Peter's model of how to respond to suffering was Jesus Christ. Jesus' attitude toward suffering is to be our attitude.

I. CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO SUFFERING

Verse 21 begins with the phrase, "For you have been called for this purpose." The connective "for" points back to the last part of verse 20: "If when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God." Christians are to endure suffering because it pleases God. Verse 21 amplifies the idea by stating that Christians are specifically called to suffer.

That shouldn't surprise us. Peter had just said that Christians "are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that [they] may proclaim the excellencies of Him who [called them] out of darkness into His marvelous light" (v. 9). Our dark world resents and is often hostile towards those who represent the Lord Jesus Christ. That resentment and hostility may be felt at certain times and places more than others, but it is always there to some extent.

II. CHRISTIANS ARE MATURED BY SUFFERING

A Christian's call to glory necessitates walking the path of suffering. First Peter 5:10 explains why: "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." Suffering is God's way of maturing His people spiritually. He is pleased when we patiently endure the suffering that comes our way. Suffering is a part of God's plan to prepare His people for glory.

A. 1 Peter 1:6-7

"You greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." God allows suffering as a validation of our faith. It also produces patience, though patience is a quality we won't need in eternity--there will be no reason for impatience there. Yet beyond those benefits, suffering increases our capacity to praise, glorify, and honor God--and that's something we will use throughout eternity.

B. James 1:2-4

"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." James focused on the present--suffering matures and conforms Christians more to Christ's likeness in this life. Peter focused on the future: suffering enhances the believer's ability to function in glory.

III. CHRISTIANS ARE BROUGHT TO GLORY THROUGH SUFFERING

A. 2 Corinthians 4:17

Our "momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all

comparison." While suffering does make us stronger now--it makes us able to endure with patience, increases our faith, teaches us to trust God, and leads us to depend on Christ and His Word--it also affects how we will function later. That's why Paul went on to say our focus isn't on the now but the future: "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (v. 18).

B. 2 Timothy 2:12

"If we endure, we shall also reign with Him." The greater our endurance through suffering, the greater our eternal reward, which primarily is the ability to glorify God.

IV. CHRISTIANS ARE IDENTIFIED WITH CHRIST IN THEIR SUFFERING

Christians are identified with their Master because like Him, they suffer to enter their glory.

A. Luke 24:25-26

Christ said to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Our Lord had to explain that future glory required that He suffer. We're to expect the same.

B. Hebrews 2:10

"It was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings." Jesus was the author of our salvation, bringing us to glory through His suffering.

C. Hebrews 5:8-9

"Although [Jesus] was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered; and having been made perfect, He became to all who obey Him the source of eternal salvation."

D. Matthew 10:21-24

Our Lord warned, "Brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. . . . A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master." A disciple is like his teacher and a slave like his master. Since Jesus suffered, all His disciples can expect to suffer also (cf. John 13:16).

CONCLUSION

The path to glory for Christ was the path of unjust suffering. That's our path also. Our Lord endured suffering with perfect patience and was exalted to the highest point of glory. He is our example of how to respond to suffering.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is the theme of 1 Peter 2:21-25?
2. What two categories of truth does 1 Peter emphasize?
3. First Peter clearly shows that those most blessed in the faith _____ the most.
4. What did John and James say about loving the world? How will effect a Christian's attitudes toward the society in which he or she lives (1 John 2:15; James 4:4)?
5. Why shouldn't the fact that Christians are called to suffer be surprising to us?
6. Suffering is God's way of _____ His people spiritually.
7. In what way will suffering be useful to us throughout eternity?
8. How does suffering identify a Christian with his or her Master?
9. Our Lord is our _____ of how to respond to suffering.

Pondering the Principles

1. Often we see suffering in the world and philosophically shrug it off as a condition of living--there seems to be nothing special about suffering because so many people, both good and bad, suffer. But the Puritan John Arrowsmith wrote, "There is as much difference between the sufferings of the saints and those of the ungodly as there is between the cords with which the executioner pinions a condemned malefactor and the bandages wherewith a tender surgeon binds his patient" (cited in The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations, edited by I. D. E. Thomas [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977], p. 289). Do you see your own suffering as God's special dealing with you to bring you into greater glory?
2. We often treat suffering as if it's to be avoided at all costs, yet it's often the best display of a life transformed by Christ. Robert Murrey McCheyne, a Scottish minister of the previous century, said, "There is a great want about all Christians who have not suffered. Some flowers must be broken or

bruised before they emit any fragrance" (cited in More Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians, edited by John Blanchard [Welwyn, Eng. : Evangelical Press, 1986], p. 315). Do you view afflictions, trials, and sufferings as things to be avoided, or as the greatest opportunities to project the fragrance of a transformed life.

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