

The Triumph of Christ's Suffering Part 1

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:18

Code: 60-36

INTRODUCTION

A. Our Model of Enduring Suffering

1. Peter's theme

The theme of 1 Peter is living in the midst of suffering. Throughout the epistle Peter points to Christ as our model of enduring suffering and emphasizes the necessity of suffering in believers' lives.

a)1 Peter 2:20-21--"If when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 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."b)1 Peter 4:1--"Since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."c)1 Peter 4:12-13--"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation."d)1 Peter 5:1--"I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed."

2. Peter's readers

Peter wrote to people in the midst of difficult circumstances. Throughout his first letter Peter shows he was aware there were people who desired to harm his readers.

a)1 Peter 1:6-7--"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."b)1 Peter 2:12--"Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds . . . glorify God."c)1 Peter 3:9--Peter said his readers were not to be "returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead."d)1 Peter 3:13--"Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?"e)1 Peter 4:14--"If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."f)1 Peter 4:16--"If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed."g)1 Peter 4:19--"Let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."h)1 Peter 5:10--"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."

When suffering we are to keep our eyes fixed firmly on Christ, "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" (1 Pet. 2:22-23).

B. Our Model of Triumphing Through Suffering

Christ is also our model of how to triumph through suffering. We aren't simply to maintain a stiff upper lip in the midst of suffering and grit it out. Suffering is to be a time of victory and triumph for us. That's what we see in the life of Christ.

LESSON

First Peter 3:18-22 says, "Christ . . . died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also

He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him." The key thought is in verses 18 and 22: though Christ unjustly suffered at the hands of demons and men, He triumphed through the resurrection. Like Him we too will triumph over our unjust suffering.

I. THE TRIUMPH OF BEARING THE SINS OF HUMANITY (v. 18a)

"Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."

It's an incredible thought that One who was perfectly just would die for the unjust. Pilate was correct when he said of Jesus, "I find no guilt in this man" (Luke 23:4). The charges brought against our Lord were fabricated. The witnesses bribed and the conviction itself was illegal.

Yet Christ triumphed though such unjust suffering by bringing us to God. And though believers will never suffer as substitutes or redeemers, God may use their Christlike response to unjust suffering to draw others to Himself.

A. Christ's Suffering Was Ultimate

The word "also" at the beginning of verse 18 points back to believers. We ought not to be surprised that we suffer because Christ also suffered. When the Lord asks us to suffer for His sake, we must realize we are being asked only to endure what He Himself endured.

Christ endured suffering to the utmost point: He "died." In contrast, the writer of Hebrews said his readers had not "yet resisted to the point of shedding blood" (Heb. 12:4)--they had not suffered in an ultimate sense by dying for their faith. Some translations of 1 Peter 3:18 say, "Christ suffered" (e. g. , KJV) while others say that He "died" (e. g. , NASB, NIV). That's because some Greek manuscripts read one way and some the other. Nevertheless, the meaning behind each term is the same: Christ suffered ultimately in that He died.

B. Christ's Suffering Was for the Sins of Others

Christ died "for sins" (v. 18). When we as believers suffer persecution, criticism, or even death, we are sinners suffering because of the sins of others--whether hatred, anger, envy, or murder. Christ also suffered for sins, but as the sinless One who bore the sins of the world.

First Peter 2:22 says He "committed no sin." He never thought, said, or did anything evil. Rather, everything He thought, said, and did was perfectly holy. It was the sins of others that placed Him on the cross: of those who shouted, "Crucify Him," those who nailed Him to the cross, and more generally those of the whole world.

Romans 8:3 says that Jesus died "for sin" (cf. Heb. 10:6). He suffered as a sin offering because "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Just as in the Old Testament God required an animal sacrifice to picture the need to atone for sin, the New Testament presents Christ as the sacrifice who provided not a picture, but the reality of atonement for sin.

C. Christ's Suffering Was Unique

The phrase "once for all" (v. 18) translates the Greek word hapax, which means, "of perpetual validity, not requiring repetition" (W. E. Vine, The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, John R. Kohlenberger III, ed. [Minneapolis: Bethany, 1984], p. 809). For Jewish people that was a new idea--they had been slaughtering animals for hundreds of years to atone for sin. At Passover as many as a quarter of a million sheep would be slaughtered every year. But Christ's sacrifice was uniquely sufficient for all time.

1. Hebrews 7:26-27--"It was fitting that we should have such a high priest [Jesus Christ], holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need

daily, like [other] high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself." The New Covenant in Christ is better than the Old Covenant in Moses because it has a better sacrifice.

2. Hebrews 9:24-28--"Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him."

"It Is Finished!"

Unlike any other sacrifice, the atoning death of Christ need never be repeated. Some think Christ must be sacrificed again and again through religious ceremony. That happens in the Roman Catholic Mass. But that viewpoint is a direct attack on the unique work of Christ on the Cross. You can't sacrifice Christ repeatedly and affirm with Him, "It is finished!" (John 19:30).

D. Christ's Suffering Was Comprehensive

1. 2 Corinthians 5:14--"The love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

2. 1 John 2:1-2--"If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." The Old Testament sacrifices were limited to a certain person, family, nation, or time. But the sacrifice of Christ was a propitiation for all sin, satisfying God's righteous requirement.

3. John 3:16--"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

4. John 6:37-40--Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life."

Christ came to provide salvation for all who would come to Him.

E. Christ's Suffering Was Vicarious

Christ suffered as "the just for the unjust" (1 Pet. 3:18).

1. 1 Peter 2:24--Christ "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."

2. 2 Corinthians 5:21--"He made Him who knew no sin . . . sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

3. Hebrews 9:28--"Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him."

4. Acts 3:14-15--Peter said to those at the Temple in Jerusalem, "You disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life." Christ, the holy and righteous One, took upon Himself the full penalty due the unrighteous. He was the perfect, full, and final sacrifice for sins. Even extreme suffering can be triumphant.

F. Christ's Suffering Was Purposeful

Christ died "in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18). Christ's purpose in gathering up our sins on the cross and enduring

the darkness of death was to open the way to God. God demonstrated that truth symbolically by ripping the Temple veil from top to bottom, opening the Holy of Holies to immediate access by all worshippers (Matt. 27:51). As priests, all believers may come into the presence of God (1 Pet. 2:9; Heb. 4:16).

Hebrews 6:20 says that Jesus entered the heavenly Holy of Holies "as a [pioneer] for us, having become a high priest forever." He entered to bring the elect into communion with God. The Greek verb translated "He might bring" (prosag[ma]o; 1 Pet. 3:18) states the purpose of Jesus' actions. It was often used to describe someone's being introduced or provided access to another. The noun form of the word refers to the one making the introduction. There were officials in ancient courts who controlled access to the king. Once convinced of a person's right to access, the official would introduce that person into the king's presence. And that's exactly the function Jesus performs for us now. As He said, "No one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6; cf. Acts 4:12). He came to lead us into the Father's presence.

CONCLUSION

Jesus' suffering led to the triumph of bearing the sins of humanity. He's not a fairy Godmother or a super-psychiatrist, but the One who introduces men and women to God. Those whom He ushers into the Father's presence all have a loathing of their sin, a desire to be forgiven, and a longing know God. Those attitudes are the work of God in drawing us to Christ (cf. John 6:44). A response to the gospel message thus begins with a transformation in attitude toward sin and ourselves.

Beyond that initial change in attitude is the transformation brought about in every believer at the instant of salvation. Christ didn't die just to pay the penalty for sin: He died to transform us.

Deserted by most of His followers, Christ hung in darkness and agony on the cross, crying out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). Those were moments of incredible rejection and hostility borne by our Lord. Yet out of those very circumstances He triumphed by atoning for sin and providing a way for men and women to be introduced to God and transformed. It was a triumph He Himself would soon proclaim (1 Pet. 3:19-20).

That triumph shows us that if we go through unjust suffering with the right attitude, it may lead to the salvation of others. It also shows us that if we suffer for righteousness' sake and commit ourselves to God, we too will triumph as Jesus did.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is the theme of 1 Peter? Explain?
2. How did Peter show he was aware there were people who desired to harm his readers? What kinds of harm does Peter mention?
3. Suffering is to be a time of _____ and _____ for believers.
4. What is the key thought in 1 Peter 3:18-22?
5. How might God use our Christlike response to suffering?
6. When the Lord asks us to suffer for His sake, we must realize we are being asked only to endure what _____.
7. For whose sins did Jesus die?
8. What is the meaning of the Greek word hapax? In what way did that word express a new idea to Jewish people?
9. The sacrifice of Christ was a propitiation for _____.
10. Christ suffered as the _____ for the _____ (see 1 Pet. 3:18).
11. Christ's death shows that even extreme suffering can be _____.
12. What was Christ's purpose in gathering up our sins on the cross and enduring the darkness of death?
13. What attitudes does God produce to draw a person to Christ?

Pondering the Principles

1. A Christian can be content in the midst of suffering even as Christ "for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame" (Heb. 12:2, NIV). The Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs wrote, "Grace gives a man an eye, a piercing eye to pierce into the counsel of God, those eternal counsels of God for good to him, even in his afflictions; he can see the love of God in every affliction as well as in prosperity. Now this is a mystery to a carnal heart. They can see no such thing; perhaps they think God loves them when he prospers them and makes them rich, but they think God loves them not when he afflicts them. That is a mystery, but grace instructs men in that mystery, grace enables men to see love in the very frown of God's face, and so comes to receive contentment" (The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964 reprint], p. 60). Do you see with the eye of grace the value of suffering in your life?

2. Christians are not simply cleansed of their sin--they experience a drastic change in their relationship to God. Thomas Watson wrote, "It is one thing for a traitor to be pardoned, and another thing to be made a favourite. Christ's blood is not only called a sacrifice, whereby God is appeased, but a propitiation, whereby God becomes gracious and friendly to us" (A Body of Divinity [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958 reprint], p. 174). If you claim a changed relationship to God through Christ, that's to say you are His friend and favorite--though once you were His enemy. When others examine your life, do they see a person who behaves as a friend and favorite of God?

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