

Suffer As A Saint

1 Peter 3:8-14

8 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 9 Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. 10 For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; 11 let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” 13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, (1 Peter 3:8-14 (ESV))

The words of God that fill the pages of this Book are able to convey, so many different and varied messages of truth, speaking singularly about every matter and circumstance that could ever come to mankind throughout all of time and eternity. God is that wise and His word is that comprehensive.

Some bible scholars will strongly emphasize the author, here the Apostle Peter, and attribute much of what He says and how he says it to the personality and to the “writing style” of that person. But may I remind us again that Peter did not actually write these words, and neither did the Apostle Paul write the words attributed to Him, and neither did any of the other named writers of scripture. Yes, these words came through the minds and the experiences of each of the writers and they “penned” them for us, but the words themselves actually came first from the Holy Spirit, and those words then continued through the minds of the writers on to us in these scriptures, without change or error. Simply put, the Holy Spirit uttered every word and meaning into and through the mind, soul and spirit of these writers. And for that reason, every word and meaning is the very breath of God and is absolutely infallible and trustworthy. (2 Tim 3:16)

And here, through the hand of Peter, God has given us some special counsel concerning the matter of “suffering” and in particular, how we as believers, as “saints”, are to respond to suffering.

Over and over again throughout these Books of 1st and 2nd Peter, the Holy Spirit gives both warnings and assurances regarding this matter of suffering, and the response that we are to have to it. And the warning is for us to not be surprised when it comes to us, but instead expect it and to be prepared to give a “Godly” response.

May I take a moment here to remind us that “suffering”, though it most always is painful is not to be counted as always being bad or wrong, something that we are to make every effort to avoid at all costs; because if we take that stand, that attitude, then we will surely miss out on the many benefits and blessings that sufferings can also provide to us.

And I understand why most people who would hear the words I just said, that “sufferings can have blessings and benefits interwoven within them,” will think that surely I must have something wrong with my thinking. But not so at all.

Yes, for the person who does not have the Holy Spirit residing within them to guide their thinking and their attitudes, they will most always see suffering of any kind, whether it be physical, or emotional, or spiritual as being negative and wrong, something to be avoided at all costs, quickly seeking help, quickly taking a pill, quickly defending themselves and their positions when accused or attacked for something they have said or done, desiring always to be quickly and immediately relieved or vindicated or whatever other remedy will take away their suffering.

But may I encourage you and me, and all those who have placed their faith and trust in Christ, all those whom these scriptures call “saints”, that suffering can and does, very often, provide great benefits and blessings, and not just to the one who is suffering, but also especially for others on whose behalf you or someone else might be suffering. We see no greater evidence of that than when Christ suffered and died on our behalf, paying the penalty and suffering the death that we ourselves deserved and should rightfully have suffered.

To put it simply, yes, suffering most often does have its origins in some form of sin and sinful behavior, brought on by “the world, the flesh and the devil”. And solely in their hands, suffering can be very miserable, even catastrophic, and can seem to be useless, having no gain or purpose. But when God inserts His loving hand into the circumstances of His saints, suffering can produce great benefits and blessings. Painful yes, and sometimes miserably so, but worth all the suffering it brings because of the good things it accomplishes.

A favorite verse that I reach for in times of suffering is Colossians 1:24 which tells us to “fill up behind that which is still lacking in the sufferings of Christ”. In other words, yes, while Christ was with us on the earth He suffered greatly to bring us salvation. But He also still left many other things for you and me to do. And as these words clearly indicate, some of the things, perhaps most of them will involve suffering. And we must

not try to avoid that suffering, but instead, we must reach forward and willingly embrace it.

That is why I have entitled this message, “Suffer As A Saint”, because as believers, as “saints”, your and my responses to the sufferings that come our way should be, must be, so very different from the responses and behaviors that the unbelieving world experiences.

Over the past few weeks, I have had reason to revisit the scriptures that tell about the suffering of the old Servant Job, a man whom God described as “blameless and upright”, but yet it was God’s will that he should suffer, enduring misery that few men could have ever borne, and lived, sufferings of all kinds and to all measures, physical, emotional and spiritual. At one point, Job bemoaned that “life is but a few days and full of troubles”. And certainly, from his perspective that was so. And we too can agree, with some of our days worse than others, but them all having some measure and some form of trouble and suffering filling their crevices.

As for Job, he remained faithful to God, resolutely declaring, “though He slay me yet will I trust Him”.

Here, in these Books of 1st and 2nd Peter, the suffering seems also to point to every kind and measure of suffering, physical suffering, emotional suffering and spiritual suffering. And while most of us contend most often with physical sufferings, injuries, diseases, cancer and more, the suffering that seems to be the focus of these particular scriptures are more of a spiritual and emotional nature? And that is where we will focus the last few minutes of this message today, on sufferings of a spiritual and emotional nature.

May I read again these words of today’s text, beginning in verse 8 and going on through verse 12.

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (1st Peter 3:8-12)

On the surface, these words might seem to be just words of encouragement, intended to guide us to always do good thing and have good responses. But not so! They are

that yes, but God is also giving us these words because we are already saying and doing the wrong things that these words warn about.

I have personally witnessed events of suffering having to do with these exact conditions, a Christian couple, each of them strong believers in Christ, but having deep and difficult problems in their marriage, and each clearly violating most all that is being spoken about in these words. Instead of being filled with unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind, towards one another, they are instead caught up in pain and suffering that each is inflicting upon the other, though they should be “one” in their marriage, there is no unity of spirit or heart, each feeling so sorry for themselves that they have little room left for sympathy toward the other one, no brotherly love, no tenderness of heart, and especially, no humility, each quickly responding back to the other returning “evil for evil”, “reviling for reviling”, neither receiving a blessing from God because neither is being obedient to Him.

Both of these dear souls are speaking deceit and half-truths, always slanting every statement to their own defense, both crying, crying, crying, suffering, suffering, suffering wanting desperately for the other one to change, but not willing themselves to change, or willing even to acknowledge that they themselves are in need of change.

And again, may I emphasize that these are two of the stronger believing Christians that you could know. But they suffer, suffer, suffer, hurting so much that they are blinded to their own sinful responses and behaviors and cannot see a clear way out of their dilemma.

At this same time, while I am involved with this dear couple, I am also involved with another suffering family, one in which the husband battles with severe depression, struggling daily to just keep his head above water emotionally, daily crying out to God for relief, but finding little; so self-absorbed with his own suffering, though he can clearly see how his behavior is utterly decimating his wife and children, he cannot see an acceptable way out of his dilemma.

In my counseling with the couple who are suffering through their marriage difficulties, neither of them can see how such simple instructions as these given here in our text could “fix” their marriage,

have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

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speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. (1st Peter 3:8-11)

This dear couple, especially the wife, keeps expressing to me that “It just isn’t as simple as words like this put it. But folks, this is God saying these things. And He is saying that it really is as simple and as easy as it is given here.

Here, God is saying in the simplest of terms, “stop being self-centered and be willing to give of yourself to others, “die to self” and “be one”, have unity. Instead of despising the other one, have sympathy, brotherly kindness, a tender heart. Humble your heart and mind and esteem the other one better than yourself. Be obedient and stop returning evil for evil and reviling for reviling, just “die to self” and stop your arguing.

For this dear couple, much of the problem lies in the refusal to forgive past sins, some of which took place many, many years ago.

They seem to believe that their bitter words will somehow cut deep enough to change the other person, that if they stop their tirade even for a moment, and be nice, the other one will never change. They are not able to hear the voice of God saying, “I am not asking you to change that other person, I am asking you to change yourself.”

God is saying to them, “Have unity, be one with each other, be sympathetic and have a tender loving heart”.

And to the depressed one, God is saying, “Stop centering your thoughts on your self, think first of others, especially your beloved family members. Put their needs ahead of yours.” To which the depressed one seems almost always to respond, “Can’t you see that I want to do that, but I just can’t. No matter how hard I try, I just can’t”.

Folks, I confess that I really don’t know how to help any of these folks except to tell them what God is saying to them. As here in these words, if they will just do these very simple things, then they will stop suffering and they will begin to prosper in all that they want to do.

May I again emphasize that these words from God are tender words from a loving Father given to His beloved children. And as His children, we really are different. We should no longer live and behave as those in the world “who have no hope”. We have every reason to succeed and no reason at all to fail.

And may I add one more thought! Because God is our loving Father, He will not give up on us. As a loving Father, He will pour forth whatever it takes to change us and bring us back into His loving fold . . . and sometimes that is very difficult and painful.

Listen to these loving words in Hebrews 12!

⁵ . . . have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” (Hebrews 12:5-6 (ESV))

And verse 11 . . .

¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:11 (ESV))

One final thought as we close . . . God’s words, His instructions and guidance, have a very special power within them, the power of His Holy Spirit. And in those times when you are struggling and suffering and you think that such simple answers as these would never work for you, let me assure you that they will. They absolutely will! And your life and your circumstances will change dramatically for the good with each and every obedient effort. So then,

⁸ . . . all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” ¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, (1 Peter 3:8-14 (ESV))