

1 Peter Chapter 4C “Suffering Pilgrims”

Throughout the years, I have walked down many a dark path beside the precious saints of God who were stricken, smitten with overwhelming trials and tragedies. I have sought to remain steadfast in prayer throughout those seasons of heartbreak and disaster and I have been compelled to weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn.

- From the devastating diagnoses, all the way to the graveside of a 2 year old who battled cancer every single day of her short life
- I have stood by the side of the surviving spouses and weeping parents of children who have committed suicide.
- I have rejoiced with those who have overcome cancer and prayed by the bedside of numerous saints as they slipped from this life into their eternal reward.

More times than I care to remember those suffering saints and surviving family members have looked me in the eye and asked, “WHY would God allow this to happen to me?”

In my experience, those whose theology had been shaped by what is mistakenly called Christian Television have been among the most bitter and confused individuals that I have ever encountered in a season of suffering.

- When the circumstances of this life wreak havoc on their errant theology and the foundation of their faith is shattered they often became embittered and angry.
- This is not at all the response that God calls true believers to display.

A Brother in Christ, that I have just recently come to know, was sharing his concern voicing his disillusionment with the difficult trials and hardships that he was enduring. My response to his confusion captured his attention: As he looked me in the eye, I said to him:

- “I consider it one of my most important responsibilities as a Pastor to prepare the Lord’s people for seasons of suffering.”
- He looked at me in the same way that my beagle, Spike used to look at me? (Tilted head, ears perked up) Say What?

Contrary to popular belief, the fiery trials that we face are NOT a sign of God’s absence; in fact: I believe that they may actually be a sign of His nearness, evidence of his very presence. Yes, His presence! Consider the words of the prophet Malachi.

Malachi 3:1 **"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.**

- The name Malachi means “My Messenger” and here in verse 1 Malachi is speaking of John the Baptist, who would come to prepare the way of the Lord.

- Listen to how Malachi describes the presence of the Lord:

2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.

- The presence of the Lord among his people is like a refiner's fire and a fuller's soap. He comes to cleanse, to purify his people as a refiner purifies Gold and Silver.
- He stokes the heat in the furnace of affliction so that the impurities, deeply imbedded within his people are released and what remains is purified.
- This is a work of God that is revealed throughout the Bible.

Proverbs 27: 21 The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and a man is tested by his praise.

- We see this same idea in Psalm 66:10, Isaiah 1:25

Isaiah 48:10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.

- We encountered this same concept months ago when we studied Chapter 1:

1 Peter 1: 6 In this (the inheritance that awaits us) you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

- As you can see, Scripture consistently affirms the fact that trials are the crucible in which our faith is refined.
- Like the refining fires that purify precious metals, God uses the fiery trials that we face to transform us into His image.
- As we continue on in 1 Peter chapter 4, Peter repeats himself in order to prepare the people of God for suffering.

OUTLINE:

1. Expect Suffering.
2. Exult in Suffering
- 3 Evaluate Suffering
- 4 Entrust All Suffering to God

1 Expect Suffering:

1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

- Addressing the “beloved” sheep of God’s fold with compassion and tenderness Peter tells them NOT to be Surprised, not to be shocked or astonished (ZENIZO) by the

fiery trials they are facing as if something strange, something novel were happening to them.

- God, WHO has redeemed us and brought us to himself considers our souls of much greater value than Gold, and just as Gold is refined by fire, so our lives are refined by the fiery trials that we face.
- These difficulties that God allows into our lives are not meant to consume us, they don't come to destroy us; on the contrary they are uniquely designed to purify us so that we reflect God's glory.
- As long as we live in this body of flesh we will continue to endure that refining process. Let's take a minute to reflect on the refining process.
- When Gold is discovered, in its original state it is often mixed with silver or platinum or other minerals like quartz.
 - And when all of those elements are placed in the furnace, a separation occurs that couldn't take place without intense heat.
 - The lighter elements rise to the surface where they are easily removed.
 - In the same way, we who belong to God carry the treasure of His Spirit in jars of clay. We are a mixture of that which is precious and that which is common or earthy.
- The heat of hardship, the turmoil of trials and the sifting that takes place in our suffering serves to transform us into the image of Christ.
 - This is God's plan for us and Peter calls us to exult in it.

2 Exult in Suffering

1 Peter 4: 13 **But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.** 14 **If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.**

- Here in Chapter 4 Peter focuses on those trials wherein we suffer for our faith.
- He tells us to rejoice because our sufferings are in essence a participation in the suffering of Christ. Now Friends, that doesn't mean that Christ's suffering was somehow insufficient for our redemption.
- When we are persecuted for righteousness sake, we share in Christ's sufferings, When we suffer in our proclamation of the Gospel we share in His suffering. Because we have been made one with Him, because we are His body, abiding in a Spiritual union with Him, so we share in Christ's sufferings.
 - **Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting me?**

Peter's call to exult in our suffering is NOT a call to deny our circumstances; rather it is an invitation to celebrate our union with Christ.

- Peter actually experienced this kind of joy for himself:

IN Acts Chapter 5 the Apostles were boldly proclaiming the Gospel in the City of Jerusalem and the Lord was confirming their word through signs and wonders. Many who were sick and afflicted were brought to the Apostles and all of them were healed.

- Of course the Pharisees and Sadducees responded to the Apostles preaching in the same way they responded to the Lord Jesus. We pick it up in verse 17

Acts 5:17 **But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy 18 they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.**

- But that very night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors saying:

Acts 5: 20 **"Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."**

- As you might expect, the Apostles obeyed the Angel, they went out into the street and continued their proclamation the Gospel.
- Imagine how they felt, having miraculously escaped from prison, only to be arrested again in the same streets, involved in the same crime for which they were previously incarcerated.

Acts 5:26 **Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. 27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."**

- And Peter, emboldened by the Holy Spirit proclaimed the Gospel right there to the Sanhedrin.

Acts 5: 33 **When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men.**

- With Great wisdom, Gamaliel warned the Sanhedrin saying: We need to keep away from these men and let them alone. IF their work is the work of men, then it will amount to nothing like all the rest of the insurgents. BUT

Acts 5:39 **but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" So they took his advice,**

- BUT, for good measure, they had them beaten and once again charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus any more. NOW listen to the reaction of the Apostles after being beaten for the testimony of Christ.

Acts 5: 41 **Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.**

- My Friends that same joy that Peter experienced on the day when he was imprisoned and flogging for preaching the Gospel is the joy that HE now invites us to embrace.

- As the days grow darker and opposition to the Gospel continues to rise in our own generation we pray that OUR manner of living would be worthy of the Gospel and that we may be able to rejoice when we are called to suffer for Christ's sake.
- Listen to Paul's words to the Philippians:

Philippians 1: 27 **Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,**

- When we stand firmly before our accusers in the boldness that comes by the Holy Spirit, it is a sign of their impending destruction and a confirmation of our salvation.

3. Evaluate Suffering

NOT all suffering qualifies as **"Suffering for Christ."** Some of our hardships stem from our own foolishness and should not be considered suffering for righteousness. Whether we want to admit it or not, there are times when suffering comes into our lives as the rightful consequences of our misbehavior.

- Peter encourages us to be honest with ourselves when we seek to evaluate the source of our suffering.

1 Peter 4: 15 **But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.**

- Just to be clear, rotting away in prison for murder, extortion or any number of crimes is not suffering for Jesus.
- In my experience as a volunteer Chaplain at the Berks Co. Prison, I found it very difficult to find a man who would actually admit that he was guilty.
- Everyone had a story, some kind of justification as to why he was "suffering" and it was rarely ever His fault.
- It's easy for us, as sinners to fall into the trap of self-pity and blame our suffering on our circumstances or our environment rather than take responsibility for our own actions.
- I believe it is only by the work of the Holy Spirit that we can see the depth of our own depravity. Only by His gracious work that we are able to cry out to God in humble repentance, believe the Gospel, be saved and truly transformed.

But there is a term that seems to be out of place here in verse 15 and that term is **"meddler."** Peter says, **"None of you in the church should suffer as a meddler."**

- This word describes a person who is an agitator, a troublemaker or a busybody.

- As plain as I can make this, there are times when suffering comes into our lives simply because we're annoying! We stick our nose into other people's business, we express our opinion with great zeal, when no one asked for it.
- We stir up trouble between brothers; we pass on questionable information without checking the facts.
- There are people who experience mistreatment in their own lives because they enjoy meddling in the affairs of others. Peter tells us that is not suffering for righteousness.
- We would do well to heed the advice of Solomon in Proverbs 17:

Proverbs 17:28 **Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.**

- I suggest we try living a quiet life and see if our circumstances improve.

As believers we need to be wise and discerning, there are times when our suffering is the result of our own foolishness; BUT there are also times when suffering comes into our lives simply because we belong to Christ. IN vs 16 Peter says:

1 Peter 4:16 **Yet if (Or When) anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.**

When suffering comes into your life as a result of your allegiance to Christ you should not be ashamed, instead you should make it your goal at all times to glorify God. How do you do that? Peter points to Christ as our example in Ch.2.

1 Peter 2:20B, **But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.**

- When we suffer persecution for the name of Christ we can glorify God by responding in a Christ-like manner.
- We must not take vengeance for ourselves. (Like Liam Neesen) We must simply entrust ourselves to the one who judges in perfect righteousness.

It's only natural, when we suffer persecution at the hands of the ungodly to cry out, "God aren't you going to do something about this? Are you going to let them get away with this? When will you bring your judgment on our enemies?"

- Throughout the Bible I believe there is a pattern to God's judgment.
- He judges his own people first before bringing his judgment upon the ungodly. Peter states that pattern clearly for us in verse 17-18.

17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

- In the book of Habakkuk God informed the prophet that he would use the Babylonians to inflict His purifying judgment on the People of Judah.
- Habakkuk couldn't believe it.

Habakkuk 1: 12 Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.

- Common God, I know we are bad but they are worse than we are!
- Eventually Habakkuk understands the plan of God and although the future looks grim, He is able to trust in the Lord and rejoice in the face of judgment.

Habakkuk 3:16 I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us. 17 Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

- The judgment of God may come through invading armies, through war and famine, through poverty, hunger or sickness. Nevertheless My JOY will be in the God of my salvation. I will entrust myself to HIM.

4 Entrust Our Suffering to God.

1Peter 4: 19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Peter sums up his final thoughts on the suffering of God's people with words of comfort, assuring us that all of the suffering that enter into our lives must pass through the sovereign hands of our faithful creator.

- Knowing that He is good, that he is all knowing and all powerful we can by faith entrust our souls to his hand and continue to do those things that are good.

APPLICATION:

Just last week I was verbally accosted by a very angry man who blamed all of the troubles in our nation on Christians.

- WE are the people who are ruining America. Our narrow minded hatred has brought a great division in the nation.
- We don't care about the poor and oppressed. WE are unenlightened, backward people who live our lives in the foolish mythology of the Bible.

- I found it very interesting that the more I responded in gentleness, humility and truth the more angry and out of control this man became.
- I walked away a bit shaken but thanking God that the very week that I am teaching on 1 Peter 4 I actually get to live some of the principles that I am called upon to teach.

This week as we celebrated Thanksgiving, I was reminded of the suffering that was faced by the Pilgrims who fled religious oppression, making the treacherous journey from Europe in search of a land where they could worship the Lord in Spirit and in Truth.

Friends I believe that the closer we draw to the day of God's judgment, the more intense the fires of purification will become for the church.

- I believe with all of my heart that God is already at work purifying His Church and we need to prepare ourselves for the refining fire.

1 Peter 12:12 **Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.**

13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.