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Godly Living Part 5

The book of Revelation ends (chapter 22) with the thrice repeated statement speaking of the immanency of Christ's return. In vv. 7, 12, 20, we read, "And behold, I am coming quickly."

The expression "I am coming quickly" makes it sound as though Christ expected to come within the lifetime of John; but that is a misunderstanding of the expression. What is meant by "I am coming quickly" is that the next event on God's eschatological timetable is the Second Coming of Christ. We could translate the expression, "I am coming *suddenly*."

In the Old Testament at the time of Abraham there were many redemptive events that needed to take place before Christ would come as Judge of the world,

- The Exodus.
- The gathering of God’s people into a Theocratic nation.
- The destruction of this nation.
- The first advent of Christ.
- His sacrificial death.
- His resurrection.

All of these things were part of God’s redemptive program for His people. But with the ascension of Christ, nothing else needs to occur prophetically, redemptively, or eschatologically before Christ returns. From God’s perspective, Christ’s coming/the end of this world is the next redemptive event!

Now if you believe that, your view of the present world will be radically altered. In the scheme of things, what is going on in our lives right now — the burdens, the offenses, the threats, the posturing... ALL OF IT! — is incredibly insignificant when viewed in light of eternity and God’s redemptive program! And so, we read passages like 1 John 2 where John taught the brethren:

1 John 2:16-17a, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. AND the world is passing away, and *also* its lusts...”

In other words, don’t be consumed by the things of this world — its honors, its pleasures, its commendations! For all of these things are temporary! Paul reminded the Roman Christians lest they got caught up in this world:

Romans 13:12a, “And this *do*, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand...”

Accordingly, Christ taught His disciples when it came to their lives in this world,

Matthew 6:19a, 20a, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth... But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...”

Truly, because of the nature of this present world — that it, along with its burdens, concerns, and worries, is passing — that which occurs in this life is only important insofar as it equips us for the life to come! As Paul believed this, listen to how it impacted him when it came to suffering:

2 Corinthians 4:17-18, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while 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.”

From 1 Peter 2, it is clear that this too was the mind of Peter. He knew this world is passing! As such, he looked upon suffering and trial as significant only insofar as it equips the believer for the life to come!

1 Peter 2:21-25 is in the “application” section of 1 Peter. Recall, in 1 Peter 1:1-2:10, Peter lays the foundation upon which we are to live out our lives as servants of Christ. Then in 1 Peter 2:11-4:11, Peter looks at the different realms in which our service in Christ will bring us in this world and there makes application.

- In Relation to the State (2:13-17), what does godly living mean?
- In Relation to our Employment/Jobs (2:18-20), what does godly living mean?
- And now, in Relation to Unjust Suffering (2:21-25), what does godly living mean?

Now one must see that the inspiration for our current section came from what Peter just said in v. 20b, In the context of living in this world, “If when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.” — or as we saw, Peter literally says, “This is grace!” This is how and when the child of God comes to know the all-sufficient grace of God! Recall the words of Paul:

2 Corinthians 12:8-9a, “Concerning [his thorn in the flesh, Paul] entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from [him]. And [God] said to [him], ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’”

That is Peter’s point in vv. 18-20. When you and I suffer unjustly — when this world treats us with hostility and disdain — all that we have left is Christ and so His grace! It is this that prompted Peter to pen verse 21-15 where he turns to the topic of unjust suffering, specifically living under persecution! We begin looking first at the inevitability of persecution.

1 Peter 2:21a, “For you have been called for this purpose...”

At first glance, this is shocking! God saved us that we might suffer in this present age?! Yet when you and I consider, as we just did in the introduction, God’s perspective. Life in this world is momentary and brief, and yet what occurs in this momentary and brief life will impact how and where we will live the rest of eternity.

We are NOT put off or bothered to read that NOT ONLY is God’s best for us not in this age (it is in the age to come), BUT that God has purposed in this age that through our suffering we might learn the grace of God! We see this throughout God’s word.

Psalms 119:71: “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes.”

Hebrews 12:11, “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to

those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

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.”

Thomas Schreiner describes it this way:

Suffering, in other words, is not a detour by which believers receive the inheritance to which they were called. It is God’s appointed means for receiving the inheritance. (Schreiner, 2003, p. 141)

We see it in the passage before us. Consider the greater context:

- When you and I consider the kingdom that lays before us:

1 Peter 1:4a: the “...inheritance [which is ours] which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away...”

1 Peter 1:4b: the inheritance that right now is “reserved in heaven” for us!

1 Peter 1:5: “...the salvation ready to be revealed at the last time.”

- When you and I consider that “a proven” and so “tried faith” on the part of the child of God in this age will result in Christ giving us “praise, glory, and honor” at His second coming, 1 Peter 1:7b.
- When you and I understand that though we have trials and difficulties in this age, nevertheless it is through these trials and difficulties that we come to understand truths “into which angels longed to look”, 1 Peter 1:12b.
- When you and I come to recognize that the best and chief reward that God has planned for us will NOT be seen or enjoyed until we enter the New Heavens and Earth, 1 Peter 1:13.
- When you and I see that when we came to Christ, we received in this age the greatest gift God could give to any person- a relationship with the Lord and so the promise of our being built up in Him in time and eternity (1 Peter 2:4-5) such that believing in Him we will never be disappointed (1 Peter 2:6).

We will both understand and accept the teaching of the text before us that through the trials and difficulties of this life, God has ordained that we should come to know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. v. 20). Wayne Grudem wrote:

The knowledge that we have been called to a life which will include some unfair suffering, while it may at first dismay us, should not ultimately unsettle our minds. We should not of course seek suffering (Matt. 6:13), but when it comes we may even 'rejoice' (1 Peter 4:13; Jas 1:2), knowing that in it God will draw us near to himself, and we shall know the fellowship of Christ who understands our suffering, and 'the spirit of glory and of God' (4:14) will rest upon us. (Grudem, 2009, p. 137)

In light of this, with Peter we confess that this is the environment and so context out of which God raises up spiritual giants — godly men and women of whom this present world is not worthy! That is why “we have been called for that purpose.”

Now if there should be any question at this point — any hesitancy to adopt or endorse this teaching — Peter reminds us that God Himself lived in light of this truth when He walked the earth, leaving us an example to follow.

Its Chief Participant and so Our Pattern, v. 21b.

1 Peter 2:21b, “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.”

This passage says two things. First it says that in Christ's first advent our Lord “suffered for you/us.” The word Peter used here for “suffering” (πάσχω [*paschō*]) denoted more than simply dying (as in Christ's cross). It denotes the humiliation of abuse and so the threats, insults, and discrimination which accompanies persecution. Consider how Peter uses this word in this epistle. Peter wrote,

1 Peter 4:16, “...if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed...”

We know something of the suffering that God's people endured at this time — as the persecutions that were inflicted against Christians under Nero are legendary. The sufferings were much more than just physical; they involved the infliction of pain for the amusement of the onlooker. As such, they were designed to be humiliating, dehumanizing, treacherous, and cruel. The word Peter used to describe this is πάσχω (*paschō*) — the same word used when he wrote, “Christ suffered for you”!

It goes a step further. Peter wrote:

1 Peter 3:14, “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness...”

Here the word is used NOT of a suffering in spite of wrong-doing, BUT of a suffering because of right-doing — which introduces an element of psychological abuse. Generally speaking, we live by the adage that if you want to avoid persecution in this life, do good. Yet at this time in Peter's day, God's people were suffering *BECAUSE* they did good!

That is the idea behind the suffering referenced here of Christ! Yes, He suffered on the cross. Yet we must see that this suffering involved His entire life as well as His person — physically, emotionally, and spiritually! In His first advent, Christ truly was:

Isaiah 53:3b, “...A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief...”

Yet — and this brings us to the second point Peter is making that Christ “suffered for YOU [and me]”! With this, we rightly think of the cross and Christ’s sacrificial/substitutionary death.

Galatians 1:4, “...gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age...”

1 Peter 3:18a, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, in order that He might bring us to God...”

Again, we rightly think of Christ’s sacrificial death on our behalf when we read, “...since Christ also suffered for you.” Yet Peter here is thinking of more than Christ’s sacrificial death. Christ “suffered for you [and me]” NOT ONLY to forgive our sins, BUT to give a pattern for us to follow!

Notice v. 21 again, “...Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an EXAMPLE for you to follow in His steps.” Do you remember Christ’s words to His disciples in the upper room? He said, “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...” (John 15:20a). Well, Peter here is taking this to another level. Not only will we be persecuted because our Lord was persecuted. BUT we are going to encounter persecution because Christ in His first advent laid this pattern down for us to follow!

Notice the term “example.” The word is ὑπογραμμός (*hypogrammos*) which literally means “to write under.” It refers to a pattern placed under a sheet of tracing paper so the original images could be duplicated.

In Christ’s day, to teach children to write, teachers would draw lines lightly on a parchment which then the child would trace. In fact, the word eventually came to be used of walking in someone’s steps as it is here used, “...leaving you an example to follow in His steps.” Peter Davids commented:

Thus we are like a child placing foot after foot into the prints of his father in the snow, following a sure trail broken for him. But this trail of Christ includes suffering, not for our sins (he has already suffered ‘on your behalf’ in that respect), but as part of the pattern of life to which he has called us. (Davids, 1990, p. 110)

Truly, Christ came to this earth and suffered on account of our sin NOT ONLY to redeem us from our sin, BUT ALSO to give us a pattern of what healthy Christian living is all about! We see this

same teaching elsewhere.

John 13:15, “For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.”

Christ uses the term ὑπόδειγμα (*hypodeigma*) which refers to “the original” as opposed to a copy! Among other things, that is what Christ came to do and be: A demonstration of the original man — what man/woman was meant to be! We see it further in Paul’s writings.

Romans 8:29a, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son...”

The word for “image” is εἰκών (*eikōn*), from which we get our English word Icon. In the Greek, the word was used of the mold, pattern, or standard of a graven image.

From all of this we conclude that in Christ’s coming the Lord deigned to give sinful man the standard for what it means to be a man — a true man — as opposed to an animal which is what sin makes an image bearer. And so, if you want to be a real man — a true man — we need only look to Christ and His example.

- Righteous living as a servant of God in a godless world.
- A godly response to false accusations.
- How He spent His time.
- What burdened Him.
- That for which He prayed.
- And so much more.

Here though, the emphasis is on His example of suffering! Christ came to this world to suffer on account of sin. As such, God’s plan when it comes to His children in this world is that they too suffer! during His first missionary journey, Paul frequently told the brethren:

Acts 14:22b, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

Philippians 1:29, “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”

2 Timothy 3:12, “And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

So, we have been saved in order to suffer in this present life. However, I want to remind you of what we already have learned from past studies. One of the reasons God ordains suffering in the life of His children is to remind them of the bitterness of sin, and so to make His grace more precious to us! Recall the teaching God gave His people through Hosea.

Hosea 2:5-6, “For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has acted

shamefully.

For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give *me* my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.' Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. And she will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but will not find *them*. Then she will say, [and here is the loveliness of grace] 'I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now!'

It is clear from this that God wasn't against His people for their sin; He was for His people against their sin! And so, He ordained trial and difficulty to open the eyes of His people that they might see the true nature of sin and so the loveliness of grace! William Secker put it this way:

To be impatient with our affliction and patient with our corruption is to be angry with the medicine which heals us and in love with the poison which kills us! Beloved, it is sometimes a mercy to us that God removes outward mercies from us! He never wounds a saint to kill him but to heal him! (Secker, 2012 (1660 Facsimile))

We see this in the story of the prodigal son. The boy preferred the pleasure of sin over the joy of living as His father's son. So, what happened? He was sobered by his suffering.

Luke 15:14-18a, "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be in need. [yet he wasn't broken yet, and so...] And he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving *anything* to him. But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him...'"

Listen to the testimony of David...

Psalms 18:4-6, "The cords of death encompassed me, and the torrents of ungodliness terrified me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. [There was a time in David's life (in fact, many times) when the monarch faced severe trial and difficulty. What effect did this suffering have on him?] In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God for help; [and what happened?] He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry for help before Him came into His ears."

We could go on and on quoting verse after verse — all of which teach the same as the text before us: In Christ, suffering has been sanctified such that now it is the divinely ordained means to keep us from our sin and so to prepare and so equip us for heaven!

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