

Living Here, Longing for Home: Joy in Suffering

1 Peter 2:18-25

Read 1 Peter 2:18-25 together:

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 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. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 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. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Just Firings

You have probably heard some funny story about someone losing her/his job, and rightfully so, for dishonest or stupid things. One young man called in sick for his job at a store, claiming he thought he had suffered a stroke. Shortly after his call, his fellow employees and manager watched him load his pickup truck with beach gear and drive off with his girlfriend.

One server lost his job at a restaurant when he drank out of his customers' drinks to determine which was Coke and which was Dr. Pepper. Of course, this was done at the table in front of the customers!

We understand people getting fired for just causes...sometimes we deserve consequences for our choices and actions. But we live in a fallen world; not everything that happens to us is because of our choices.

- ? When you think of persecution, what comes to mind?
- ? How do you deal with suffering when you face it?

Suffering can be expected

Jesus was very forthcoming in telling His disciples that they would face persecution. He never promised a life of ease as His follower...no, quite the opposite. Yet, don't we all too often seem surprised by the tribulations of life?

- ? What does this teach us about the truth of the "health and wealth" gospel?

? If Christians are not meant to suffer, then why is there so much suffering? And why did Jesus warn us of coming tribulation?

Embrace Suffering

There is coming a time in your life when you will suffer! Not for choices, actions, or sins you've committed. Don't be shocked and don't be caught unprepared.

? What comfort does Jesus offer to His disciples as He tells them of coming tribulation (persecution)?

? What do you think Jesus tells us to take heart because He has overcome the world? What do you think He is referring to by this?

? How can we have peace in suffering?

His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God." Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

John 16:29-33

Since Jesus told us we will suffer; since it is His and the Father's will; we are to embrace suffering. Why?

It helps us identify with Christ

In Romans chapter 8:12-30, the Apostle Paul writes about our relation to Christ (as adopted heirs of God) and the future glory to be revealed to us.

? Why does Paul say (v. 17) that we must suffer with Christ in order to be glorified with Him?

? What does Paul use to compare to earthly suffering? Why is it so difficult to see earthly suffering in comparison to heavenly glory?

It helps us to be more like Christ

Peter goes on in verses 21-23 to remind us of our calling to suffering. Jesus never sinned; when He was reviled, He never fought back; and when He suffered, he did not threaten.

? If you are suffering because of your stand for Christ, how should the example of Christ encourage you?

When we suffer, we need to blame others less, speak less, and deflect less. Like Christ, we need to bear the cup that the Father asks us to drink. Unlike Job's wife, we need to learn silence in our sufferings. And we need to turn the other cheek rather than deflect our suffering onto others.

It helps us point others to Jesus

Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego there are times that God shows His power and glory to the unbelieving world through our suffering. By suffering well, the very presence of God can be acknowledged by those around us. We also display the peace we have in God when we suffer rightly for His cause.

? Have you experienced God revealing Himself to unbelievers through your suffering?

? Have you seen it in the sufferings of fellow believers?

Suffering gives birth to joy

The Scriptures remind us numerous times that no suffering is pleasant. We are also reminded of the joy we can experience through suffering.

? What does Jesus say about suffering in John 16:20-24?

Suffering reminds us that we desperately need the presence of Jesus! We need to be a people of prayer. We need the peace of Jesus ruling over our hearts and minds. We don't walk alone; Jesus is with us; His Holy Spirit indwells us, and His people band together in the unity of the Spirit.