

Suffering with Christ

1 Peter 2:21-25

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, September 17, 2017

Well, you can go ahead and turn back in your Bibles to the book of 1 Peter. This morning, we're in a series called "The Suffering Church" - total opposite direction from last Sunday. We're talking about how the church should handle pain and suffering, how it should handle trials. Last week, we had a celebration. Now, this series is about something else. That was about a happy time. This series is about what do you do during sad times. Because seasons change, don't they? What goes up must come down. What you celebrate one week, you mourn over sometimes the next. Solomon said, "There's a time for everything, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." And we danced last week. This week, we're gonna talk about the time to mourn.

When I first came to Grace Fellowship Church, I remember thinking, "What am I gonna talk to these people about? They're from all over the globe and I'm from little West Tennessee, what would I have to say? And what are we gonna talk about?" And I thought, you know what we could talk about? We could talk about suffering 'cause no matter where you're from, you've experienced that, right? I mean, they're not all laughing right now. I know these people are not all dancing, some of them are mourning, so we're gonna talk about that. I also thought starting a church is hard work. You have to suffer in order to do that. I think one pastor said, "When you do ministry, you have to kill your darlings." And what he meant by that is that you've got to kill some of the idols or expectations you have so we can all be united and work together, and there's suffering in that as well.

And we could say it like this, if you want to look into the theology of this, Jesus suffered in order to start His church, and if He did that, why would we expect any different for us? He had to weep and mourn in order to get the church going. And if He had to do that, why would we be exempt? I told you the story about the man who asked, "Where was God when my son died?" And he was told "The same place He was when His son died." You see, God suffers too. He experiences pain like we do. In fact, you could make the argument that God experiences more pain because He killed His own Son. He put Him to death. So the pain He feels is more intense than the pain we feel. The loss He endured is greater than the loss we endure. If you ever feel forsaken, I promise you you've never felt forsaken like Jesus did. If you ever feel like God has abandoned you and turned His back on you, He's never turned His back on you the way He did His Son on the cross. That was something else altogether.

And He did it for the church. He did it for you and me which should endear us to Him. John Stott says it this way, he said "I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the cross. In the real world of pain, how would you worship a God who is immune to it?" He said,

I've entered many Buddhist temples and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, immune and detached from the world around him. And after a while, I have to turn away and I turn instead to the cross, to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure. Nails through His hands and feet, spear thrust in His side,

crown of thorns in His head and I thought, this is the God for me. This God is not immune to pain. Whatever else He is, He is not detached from the world around Him.

And I think we could all say “amen” to that.

You hear a lot of people say today, "I can't believe in a God who would do that to the people in Texas. I can't believe in a God who would do that to the people here in British Columbia, burn the province like this, spread wild fires everywhere." And while we can understand the sentiment, you need to understand God suffers too. You need to understand the God that we worship, the God that we love is not detached from the world around Him. He's not some divine watchmaker who wound things up and let them go. He's not a chess player up in the heavenlies playing chess with your lives in some kind of apathetic “I don't care” fashion. God cares. God cares more than you or I will ever know.

Rosa Price was a Jewish lady who survived Treblinka. It was one of the worst concentration camps in World War II. An estimated one million Jews died there, including Rosa's family. Her mother and brothers and sisters died there, and she said that every time the guards hit her, they said, "Jesus hates you," to this woman. Every time they whipped her or brutalized her, they said, "Jesus told us to do this to you because you're a Jew and Jesus hates Jews." And she said that for years she believed that. For years, she thought Jesus hated Jews. Until one day, she picked up her daughter's Bible and read it and she realized that Jesus was a Jew and not only was He a Jew, but He died for Jews – “To the Jew first, then to the Gentile.” He doesn't hate Jews, He loves them. And she said,

Suddenly, I couldn't find any more excuses for rejecting him. I read that Jesus was the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He didn't kill me, he died for me. He didn't kill my family, he died for my family and my people too. In fact, he loved us so much that he gave himself for us. How could I reject a Savior who loved me like that? How could I turn away from a God who offered me so much?

And friends, you can't get through suffering until you understand this, God loves you. He doesn't hate you, He loves you. He's not out to get you. He died for you, to save you. He gave himself for you. He offered you everything. You could search the religions of the world and I promise you, you will never find a God like this. You can go into the mosques, you won't find a God that loves like this in a mosque. You can go to the Buddhist temples, you won't find him there. You won't find this in Hinduism, you won't find this in Agnosticism, you won't find this in Atheism, you won't find this in a philosophy classroom on a university campus.

Matter of fact, I've told you before, I don't think anybody when they're dying says, "Give me a copy of a book from Friedrich Nietzsche." They want the Bible. They want to read about a God who loves them and that's what the book of 1 Peter is all about, it's about a God who loves you. It's about a God who gave everything for you, to the point that He won't abandon you when you suffer. He won't leave you in your pain, He goes through it with you. And I've just read 1 Peter 2:9-25 to you, so I'm not gonna read it again for the sake of time, but if you notice, as you read through this, Peter starts this off in verse nine by saying “You're a chosen race” or “a chosen people.” That's kind of how this section starts off. In other words, “God sets you apart, He

selected you if you're His...." Why? "...To suffer." That's what he jumps right into. That's why you were chosen to experience pain. And specifically, he wants you to do this in a God-honouring way.

He wants you, in verse nine, to proclaim His excellencies and abstain from your lusts. That's how he wants you to suffer, that's how he wants you to go through pain. In verse 12, he wants you to keep your behaviour excellent among the Gentiles and so they glorify God in the day of visitation. In other words, he wants you to be different from the world around you. He wants you to stand apart. He doesn't want to know you're a Christian by your T-shirt and some sticker on your car. Nothing wrong with that, you can have all that if you want it. He wants to know you're a Christian by how you handle a trip to the hospital, that's what this is saying. And he wants you to do it in several areas of life, he goes on and that in the passage. What I mean is, starting in verse 13, God wants you to suffer well in how you respond to the government. He says, "For the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority or to governor that's sent by him." In verse 18, he wants you to do this in your workplace. Kind of going from the general to the even more specific. He says, "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect."

Later on in chapter three, he's gonna get even more specific than that and he's gonna say he wants you to suffer well in your marriage as husband and wife. He says, "Wives be submissive to your own husbands, you husbands live with your wives in an understanding manner." In chapter five, he'll do this with the church, but all this goes back to the idea of being a chosen race. God has chosen you for this. This has been mapped out for you. This was no accident. This is no mistake. You weren't in the wrong place at the wrong time. You didn't have bad luck, God doesn't believe in luck. This was all part of His plan.

And to highlight this even more, in chapter 2 verses 21 through to 25, Peter talks specifically about the suffering of Jesus. As a parenthesis, or almost as a side note, as he's going through these different categories of suffering, he kind of steps back for a minute and he says, "Oh yeah, by the way, Jesus suffered too, and you need to do what He did." He wasn't in the wrong place at the wrong time. He didn't have bad luck. This was part of God's plan too.

If you want to tie this, connect this to our lives for a moment, Jesus knows what it was like to have a bad political leader. He had one of the worst. Pontius Pilate was just a puppet of the Roman Empire. If you read the account of the crucifixion, what does Pilate say? "This guys is innocent," and what do you read the next couple verses? "Oh yeah, let's just scourge Him and then crucify Him." Now, how would you like to have a leader like that? Wash his hands of Him and send Him off to his death.

He knew what it was like to have a bad church or a synagogue. Jesus goes home, preaches a sermon to the people of Nazareth in their synagogue and they try to kill Him. Now, imagine that for your hometown welcome.

He knows what it's like to have bad friends, all the disciples left Him at His arrest. He knows what it's like to have a bad family. His family members were some of the last ones to believe in Him. At times, they made fun of Him.

He knew what it was like to have a bad job. He was a carpenter. Some say a carpenter of stone. I don't know if that's true or not, but there's not a whole lot of wood in Israel. He may have been a carpenter of stone. But He was poor, we know that for sure. He didn't have a lot of money.

He had a bad death, which we're gonna talk about in a moment, but the point in this passage before we even dive into this, is that if God can bring good out of all of that, then He can bring good out of whatever you're going through this morning. Do you get that? If God can bring good out of the cross, then He can bring good out of your bad leaders or bad job or bad whatever. You could make the argument that the worst event in human history was the cross of Jesus Christ. That's worse than any evil you can think of, because at the cross, the only sinless Man who ever lived was executed.

And here's the point Peter's making here. If God can bring beauty out of those ashes, then He can bring beauty out of anything. If He can bring good out of that, He can bring good out of your life.

I know when you're suffering, you often wonder, "Why is God doing this to me? Why is He putting me through this?" And that's a good question, but you could just as easily ask "Why did God do that for me? Why did He put His Son through this?" And the answer is, He did it because He loves you, He cares. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning. If you're taking notes, I want to look at several ways to follow Jesus in your suffering. That's what this passage is all about. It's about following Jesus in suffering. You're not gonna die for the sins of the world, that's not what this is comparing it to, just suffering in general. Here's some ways to follow Jesus and walk in His footsteps in your suffering.

And the first one is this: you need to follow His calling. The first way to follow Jesus in suffering is to follow His calling. Jesus said that suffering would be part of your calling as a Christian. It would be part of what you signed up for. I don't know about you guys, but I don't like buying something or getting in some kind of a contract and then finding out later there's a little bit of fine print down below. Anybody like that? Okay, well, let's talk about the fine print this morning. When you became a Christian, you signed up to suffer. They say you can't jump into a puddle without getting mud on you and you can't pick up a cross without getting splinters. And this is how Peter starts this off.

If you look in verse 21 of chapter 2, he says, "for you have been called for this purpose since Christ also suffered for you." The word "for" or "for this purpose" is placed at the front of the verse to tie it back to all Peter had said so far. You suffer with the government, you suffer in the workplace, you suffer in marriage or whatever else you're going through. "For you have been called according to this purpose." This is what is expected of you. This is what God called you to.

The word calling in Greek is the word *kaleó*, which means "to summon someone or to invite them to something." The word "church" actually comes from this Greek word. The church is the people who have been invited to the kingdom. We're the ones who have been summoned there. "And this is what you've been summoned for," Peter says, "you've been summoned and invited to suffer - to experience the same kind of pain Jesus did."

Just a couple of verses on this so you can kind of get the perspective of this in Scripture. 1 John 3:13 says, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you." Why? Well 'cause it hated Jesus. You guys get you follow a crucified Saviour, right. You don't follow a Saviour who left this world with banners and streamers in a parade. He died on a rugged cross. And if the world hated Him, it will hate you. If it killed Him, it will kill you. Later on in 1 Peter 4:12, it says the same thing "Beloved," you can just turn over there if you like, but it says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, as though some strange thing were happening to you. There's nothing strange about this," Peter says. There's nothing unusual. It happens to all of us. It's the common law to the Christian." 1 Thessalonians 3:3 says, "Do not be distressed by these afflictions, for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this." So now Peter starts talking, or Paul starts talking about destiny. But the point is that, this is your calling. And you need to own that if you're going to suffer well. You need to know this is what is expected of you.

I've met so many Christians who were shocked, I mean completely shocked, because their co-workers said something nasty to them when they share their faith. They can't believe it. They just ... they fall to pieces. I mean, I've done that. Or they get blown away because the next-door neighbour snapped at them because they told them they were going to hell. Let me ask you, when you told your neighbour they were going to hell, how did you think they were gonna respond? Either they're gonna shake your hand and say, "Thank you. I enjoyed hearing that." Adrian Rogers said, "The problem with preachers today is that no one wants to kill them anymore." We can say the same thing about all of us. No one wants to kill us anymore because we're not willing to suffer. Peter says, on the front end here, "This is what you signed up for." I quoted John Stott to you earlier, but he has a lot to say about this. Let me give you another quote from him. Here he says,

The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict half-built towers, the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people who still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, the so-called nominal Christianity. In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent but thin veneer of Christianity. They've allowed themselves to become someone involved enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great soft cushion. It protects them from the harsh unpleasantness of life while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism.

Does everybody know what escapism is? It's the idea you can escape reality by going into fantasy. You can escape pain by running off into fiction, movies or sports, or whatever you pick. Let me tell you, the Bible does not teach escapism. It doesn't tell you to run anywhere. It doesn't tell you to escape anything. It tells you to count the cost, take up the cross, and follow Christ. One author said, "When Jesus bids a man come, he bids him come and die." That's your calling as a Christian. That's what you agreed to. Listen, you can't follow Christ in everything, but you can follow Him in suffering. You can't walk on water and stop a storm like He did, but you can get slandered. You can get mistreated by your co-worker for sharing the Gospel. You can unite with your Saviour in that. You can't heal the sick or cure the blind, but you can put up with an

angry boss or a corrupt leader. You do that, for you have been called for this purpose. You do that because that's what you've been invited to do.

That leads to another way to follow Jesus in your suffering. You need to follow His example. It's kind of the gist of this whole passage, but you need to follow His calling and you need to follow His example, which means essentially what we've been talking about. You need to do what He did, walk in His steps, copy His behaviour. Several years ago, quite a bit ago now, I don't know if you guys remember this or not, but everyone started wearing WWJD bracelets. Does everybody remember those things? If you want to see one, my wife still has one on her backpack that she has from high school. I don't know how my wife does it, but she preserves things from high school. And she has one of those bracelets, you can check it out. But it was the what-would-Jesus-do bracelets. And people would go around asking it. I think it's, what, it's 20 years ago now? Boy, I'm getting really old. That they would ask, "What would Jesus do? What would Jesus do with this? What would Jesus do with that?" as if it was some big mystery, as if we had no idea. See, Peter says, "This is what Jesus would do. He would suffer. There's no mystery to it." You could call them the WDJ, what-did-Jesus-do, 'Cause we have that here in the Scripture.

It says in verse 21, it says, "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 'Who committed no sin nor was any deceit found in his mouth.'" That phrase, that last phrase there, "Who committed no sin nor was any deceit found in this mouth," it means just what it says: Jesus suffered without sin. I showed you guys the bottle. (I've been banned from bringing the bottle back in here by the way ... "You're gonna do the bottle again, are you?") I shook the bottle, water came out 'cause water was in it, remember that? With Jesus, the bottle was clean, right? And it says here that when He suffered, clean water came out of it. And God expects us to do the same thing.

To show you this, Peter gives two word pictures in verse 21. The first is that of an example or a *hupogrammos* in Greek, from which we get the word "grammar". It literally meant "under grammar." It was a writing tablet that children would put under their grammar books to help them learn how to write. They would literally trace over it and learn their letters that way. That's what Jesus did for us. He became our under grammar or our tablet we could trace over in our suffering. You want to know how to suffer? Read the Gospels. It will tell you how to suffer. Peter also says, "since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps."

That phrase "follow in His steps" means just what it says. Jesus suffered so you could walk after Him. The disciples, back in that day and age, they couldn't listen to their teacher on the internet or on the radio, so if you wanted to follow a teacher, you had to literally walk behind him everywhere he went. There was no other way to do it. So, Peter tells us to do that here. The story is told of a group of boys who wanted to see who could make the straightest line in the snow and so they said, "Let's all walk to that tree over there and come back again." And they did that, and when they came back, they noticed that one boy's tracks were straighter than the rest of them. He walked in a perfectly straight line and they asked him, "Well, how did you do that?" And he said, "Well, I looked at the tree." He said, "The rest of you guys looked at the snow." Said, "I looked straight ahead, you guys stared at your feet." This is what Peter's saying, if you want to learn how

to suffer, you look at the tree. If you want to walk in a straight line, you look to Christ, you don't look at your feet.

When you counsel people who are suffering, it's common for them to talk a lot about themselves, and that's okay because they're hurting and they've got a lot going on and you need to hear it, but you've also got to be careful to steer them in another direction, because you don't want them to lose sight of the tree. You don't want them to lose sight of Christ. What I mean is, when you're suffering, you can get so caught up in "Was I good enough today? Did I do enough today?" that you forget it's not about you, it's about Him. It's not about your good deeds, it's about His good deeds. They start asking, "Did I have enough faith? Did I pray enough? Did I read my Bible enough? Did I go to church enough? I, I, I, I, I, I." And let me just tell you, you didn't. You didn't do enough. But that's not the point, He did. So, you trust in Him, you look to Him, you walk after Him. The way this is worded, you look to Christ as your example in suffering, but you can tell, there's more going on here.

He's not just an example, He's also a substitution for your suffering. He's also the One who saved you. So, you can see this, if you do a study of the names of Jesus in the Bible or the different titles for Him, you see a large number of them tie in directly to the concept of suffering. And what I mean is when you look at your Bibles, you see Jesus is called "Emmanuel" or "God with us" to remind us that He is with us even in our suffering, even when times are bad. He's called the "Alpha" and the "Omega" the beginning and the end to remind us that He's always with us. Listen, He'll be with you at the start of your trial, He will be with you at the end of your trial. And He'll be with you every day in the middle. He's called the "Redeemer" or the one who bought us back from sin. And listen, if He can buy you back from sin, He can buy you back from anything. He's called the "Advocate" or the one who steps in for us. He stands up for us. He's the "Deliverer" or the one who rescues us. He's the "Counselor" or the one who comforts us. He's the "Light of the world" because He shines in the darkness. He's the bread of life. Some of you are suffering so badly this morning that you can't eat steak, you need bread. You can't stomach anything heavy right now. Let me tell you, you don't have to. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." You can just come to Him for bread. Bread is the thing that you can live on the longest, right, the most elemental part of our diet. That's what Jesus came to give you.

I was talking with a man in Indiana about this outside the courtroom (and the courtroom is a wonderful place to witness). You want to talk about a judge, there's one right in there. You want to talk about the law, well, we're surrounded by the law in a courtroom. And I was called up for jury duty and I was talking with this man and I told him I was a pastor, and we got to talking about spiritual things. It was a great conversation. And he eventually said, this was interesting, he said, "I don't think I'm good enough to be a Christian." He said, "I don't think I have what it takes." And I said, "Well, are you good enough to eat bread? Then you have what it takes." I said, "Are you good enough to drink water? Jesus is the water of life, then you can be a Christian." Listen, friends, the point of all this is that Jesus is enough for you in your trials. He's enough for you in your pain. You don't have to go someplace else, you don't have to turn to alcohol or drugs or sex, you don't have to turn to your good deeds and self-righteousness, you just have to turn to Christ. He's your example, He's your substitute, He's your hope of eternal life.

Charles Spurgeon said that when he was saved, the preacher couldn't make it there to the church service due to a snowstorm, so an elderly deacon spoke and he said, he had an old English accent, he said, "It don't take much work to look at something." He said,

Look, it ain't walking and it ain't lifting and it ain't throwing something. It ain't picking something up off the ground, it's just looking. And anyone can look, a dog can look, a fish can look, a caterpillar can look, a snail can look, and so can you. Do you want to be saved? Look to Christ. Do you want to go to heaven? Look to the Saviour. He's enough for you.

That's the Christian religion in a nutshell, isn't it? Does everybody get that? Listen, if you understand this, you understand the whole faith. It starts and ends right here, and it leads to another way to follow Jesus in your suffering.

You follow His calling, you follow His example, and you follow His judgment or we can say the judgment of God. You follow God as your judge, not in a hopeless way, but in a hopeful way. I'll explain this, but believe it or not, a judge can be your friend. When you are wronged, the judge makes it right. When you are accused, the judge defends you and Peter says "God does that here. He makes it right when you suffer." If you read on in verses 21 through 23, just kind of getting the flow of this, he says,

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, "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.

That phrase, "who committed no sin nor was any deceit found in his mouth," in some of your Bibles, you'll see that in capital letters. That means it's a quotation from the Old Testament from Isaiah 53 which is known as the Suffering Servant chapter. And that chapter tells us how the Messiah will suffer and die. It was a very important chapter to the New Testament because every New Testament author quoted it or referenced it at one time or another. And here, Peter does that to tell us how we should suffer. We should do it without sin like Jesus did. We should suffer without any deceit or reviling or threat in our mouths. And then he says, "Jesus entrusted Himself to Him who judges righteously". That phrase "judges righteously" means judges correctly, an impartial judge. We should entrust ourselves to God because He is an impartial judge. He will do the right thing with our suffering. Justice will be served in the courtroom of heaven.

Stepping back from this for just a minute, this part of the letter was probably hard for Peter to write because he had seen Jesus suffer. Now, you and I talk about Jesus suffering. We're 2,000 years after the fact. He actually saw what he's writing about here. He saw it first-hand. He would eventually deny Jesus three times and abandon Him altogether. But before Peter did that, the New Testament tells us he was in a courtyard of the great high priest, which means He saw Jesus' trial. He saw His mockery and abuse at the hands of the court. He saw His beating, he saw the high priest slap Jesus and call Him a blasphemer. He saw the guard strike Him on the face and

say, "Hail, King of the Jews." And he writes about it here to say that we should suffer the way Jesus did without any revenge or retribution.

In fact, to highlight this, the word "suffering" here, "While suffering He uttered no threats" is a continuous verb. We don't really have this in English, but in Greek, you had a verb that says "Jesus' suffering happened in the past and the effects carry on into the present," which means His suffering was really bad. The effects lasted a long time. It's been said the only man-made things in heaven are the nail scars in Jesus' hands and the holes in his feet to remind us of this; this was terrible. And through it all, it says, Jesus kept entrusting Himself to God. That's an ongoing verb too. It means He did this over and over and over again. He kept praying and worshipping and thinking on the things of heaven. And here's why and here's the point of this verse: Heaven will take care of this. Jesus (you could think of this way) ... Jesus didn't get justice on this Earth, at least not the first time He came, but He will have justice in heaven. And one day, He'll have justice when he returns.

And if you are going to suffer Biblically, you need to do the same thing. You need to leave the suffering in the hands of God. Martin Luther said "I've held many things in my hands, and I've lost them all, but whatever I've placed into God's hands, that I still possess." God loses nothing you give to Him. He forgets none of it. We forget our prayer request in a couple of days, right? He remembers them. God knows what you prayed about five years ago. Some of you don't even remember what car you drove five years ago. God remembers what you prayed. And He will take care of it. When George Crawford was with us last week, he quoted Jonathan Edwards a couple of times to say that when you're reviled and insulted unfairly, give it to God, because He will take far better care of it than you ever could. When you have cancer, give it to God, because He will take far better care of it than you ever could. When you have a bad boss or politician, give it to God, because He will take far better care of it than you ever could. You could look at it another way, if Jesus couldn't get through the cross alone, what makes you think you're gonna get through cancer alone? If He couldn't get through Calvary alone, what makes you think you're gonna get through a bad boss, or a bad job, or a bad marriage alone?

So many times when we suffer, we want to take things in our own hands and we only make it worse, amen? The former heavyweight boxer of the world James Tillis, says the first time he went to Chicago, he put his suitcases down and looked up at the skyscrapers and said, "I'm gonna conquer you, Chicago." And when he looked down, his suitcases were gone, somebody stole them. It took me a minute too, but I thought that was pretty good. Some of you are handling trials like that this morning. You're saying, "I'm gonna conquer this thing. I'm gonna beat it." And when you look down, it's just a total mess. Right? Peter says, put your problems in God's hands and He won't lose your suitcase. Give your suffering to Him and He will take care of it.

The Puritan Thomas Watson said, "The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel." Listen, friends, you're not gonna do any fetching if you don't do any praying. You're not gonna call on any angels, if you don't call on God. So call on Him, reach out to Him. Pray, worship, think on the things of heaven when you're suffering and entrust yourself to God. You may not be able to fix it all right now. He can fix it, in His time, in a manner of His choosing.

And that leads to a final way to follow Jesus in your suffering, and that is to follow His shepherding or His guardianship. You follow His calling, follow His example, follow His judgment or the judgment of God, and you follow His shepherding.

"Shepherd" is another word for guardian or protector. Day in, day out, the shepherds guarded their sheep. They were like a night watchman always on duty. Jesus does that for us. Peter says in verses 24 through 25, "And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

As Peter is describing what Jesus did on the cross, he says, "He bore our sins in His body, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." He saved us, in other words. He spiritually healed us. And then he quotes from Isaiah 53 again to say, "For by His wounds you were healed, for you were continually straying like sheep."

Sheep are notorious for straying. They wander off all the time, I think it's been said they don't really have ... sheep aren't stupid animals, but because of some of their issues, they seem kind of stupid. They don't really have a sense of natural direction. You can throw a cat out in the woods ... I'm not gonna make any comments about how wise that might be. I'm not a big fan of cats, but don't, please don't ... I'm getting in trouble, it's not in my notes. So ... but cats will find their way home, that's all I'm saying. You got to take them really far out in the woods, 'cause they will come back. Take them over to Alberta or something if you have to, but they have a sense of natural direction. Dogs have that, sheep don't have that. Sheep wander off, get lost. You go a mile down the road with a sheep, he won't find his way home. And therefore, they stray all the time. Several years ago, some Palestinian shepherds fell asleep when they were supposed to be watching their sheep and when they woke up they were all gone, disappeared. But they could hear them bleating from a nearby cliff and when they walked over to the cliff, they saw that every one of the sheep had jumped off, one right after the other to their death. A matter of fact, the ones on top of the pile were still alive 'cause they landed on the soft wool of the ones below and they were crying out from the bottom of this cliff.

Peter says here that Jesus will never fall asleep on you. When you're straying or wandering off. When you're struggling with a problem in life or a trial, and you want to sin, and you want to give in, and you want to attack and lash out. "He will never leave you or forsake you," that's what he says here. He will not let you jump off to your death. There's times when you suffer so badly, and you look up to heaven, and it feels like you're praying to a cement wall, and you can't figure out what in the world is going on. And you start questioning, "Is all these Christianity stuff worth it?" Peter says when you are in the midst of that kind of pain, you have a Guardian of your soul.

Maybe to say this another way, we talked about the love of God a moment ago. God's love is infinite, which means there's never a time when God's gonna look at you and say, "Boy, that's enough. I've had enough with you, we're done." Which I rejoice in that, cause I think in my mind, I think I'm gonna go to heaven and after about a thousand years, Jesus is gonna say, "That's enough, I can't do this anymore. It was fun for the first thousand years, but you have

gotten on my nerves. You're done." He won't do that. It's an infinite love. He's an all-powerful Shepherd. Nothing will stand in His way of guarding and protecting you. Listen, here's what it all boils down to, friends. God has given you everything you need to suffer well. He's given you everything you need to handle pain. He's held nothing back from you, He's been generous beyond belief. You don't have a stingy God. When He gives, He gives lavishly. When He saves, He saves completely, and that's what this passage is all about. He's given you a calling, and an example, and a judge. He's given you a Shepherd, and a Guardian, and a friend. He's been a rock to you, and a light, and a deliverer, so that you will lack nothing. You have all you need. He has chosen you to suffer, and He's showed you how to do it, and here he says, He will go through it with you. He'll never leave you alone.

A famous musician tells of a time when his house burned down in a fire and he lost everything. He says that their belongings, their possessions, pictures of the family, everything they had burnt down to the ground. But he said this (this musician was a believer) ... and he said, "One thing you learn in a time like that is that with Jesus, the bottom is solid." When you lose everything and Christ is all you have, you learn there's an end to it, because Jesus is standing at the end. He puts His arm out, His nail pierced arm, and He says, that's enough, this suffering will go no further. He will go to the bottom with you, He will go through the pit with you. And you can know that it's safe, because He is there, and He does it because He loves you. There's no other reason. You're not giving Him something that He lacks, you're not scratching an itch in His soul. He loves you. He cares about you. Whatever you're going through, He goes through it; whatever you're suffering, He suffers. Won't you believe in Him today? Won't you trust in the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls? You'll never find another God like this. You'll never find another Saviour.

It's been said that the Bible is a book that if man could've written it, he wouldn't have, and if he would have written it, he couldn't have. You can't make this up. The depth of the love of God. Let's pray and thank Him for His love and care for us this morning.

Father, I kind of come to You this morning praying the same thing we prayed earlier and that is, my words, or our words, can't express the depth of what we're reading about here. The fact that not only would You become one of us, but You would suffer and die for us and then, after dying for our sins, You write in this Word that You'll stay with us to the end. I don't even know what to say to that. Maybe silence is the best thing.

Lord, I pray for those who are here this morning, who are suffering, and they read this passage and they say, "I'm going through all kinds of stuff right now." Lord, I pray that they would know that they have someone who loves them far more than they can imagine in Christ. Thank you for what Your Son has done. Thank you for the way that He's reached into this dark world with us and gone down to the bottom to teach us that it's solid. Lord, I pray for those who are lost this morning that they would know that the love of God is not extended if they don't believe. They have to trust in Christ. There is no other way, they have to look to the Saviour. And I pray they would know that just as Your love is infinite, so is your punishment infinite for those who do not trust in You. Oh draw them to the Saviour this morning.

Father, thank you for this great love. May we be a church that proclaims it every week. May we be a people that go out into a dark world and never stop talking about it. There really isn't anything worth talking about next to this. We pray for Your help in being witnesses in a dark world. Father, thank you for Christ, thank you for the time we've had this morning to speak of Him. May You be glorified in it, we pray in Jesus' name, amen.