

## Suffer for Good! – Part 2

1 Peter 4:12-19

Series: *True Grace - 1 Peter*

**Introduction:** Turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 4, 1 Peter chapter 4.

“In 1889, the pressure upon Hudson Taylor and his ministry in China was so great that he asked for renewed earnestness in prayer at home, saying, ‘It seems like as if every native Christian and helper as well as missionary were being assailed.’ Yet he and his co-workers were learning deeper lessons of the sustaining power of God. In a letter, Taylor wrote, ‘The cross does not get comfortable, but it bears sweet fruit.’”<sup>1</sup>

Beloved, that is what we have been hearing from Peter as well. The cross we are called to bear as followers of Christ does not get comfortable, but it does bear sweet fruit. Peter’s whole letter is written to a group of churches – some of which are suffering for being Christians, and some who are not. Those who are not yet suffering, can expect to have to suffer at some point for the sake of the name of Christ. That was part of what we learned last week from verse 12 – that would must have the heart attitude of readiness as Christians. We must expect that suffering shame for the sake of Christ will come at some point. And then we learned that instead of that being a thing which is a curse, this suffering is actually something to rejoice in because if we are sharing the sufferings of Christ then it is here that the Spirit of God is uniquely resting upon us.

And so this morning we come back to this text in 1 Peter 4 to learn of two more heart attitudes that we must have so that we might suffer for good. And by suffering for good I mean that we not only suffer because of doing good, but also that our suffering accomplishes something good. If that is to be true, then we must have the heart attitudes of readiness and rejoicing and righteousness and resolve. Let’s read 1 Peter 4:12-19.

As Peter addresses the hearts of these Christians he helps them process their suffering. In verses 15-18 he tells them that they should be suffering for righteousness, not for unrighteousness, and in verse 19 he tells them that when they do suffer for righteousness they must be resolved to entrust themselves to God.

### I. Righteousness (15-18)

- a. So, in verses 15-18 Peter tells them that they must have the heart attitude of righteousness. This is a simple summary of these 4 verses – that we should have the heart attitude of righteousness. By it, I simply mean that if we are going to suffer in this world, we must be determined to suffer for the right things. So, in

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Prosis, *Preaching Illustrations from Church History*, pg. 22.

verses 15-16 there is a contrast with the rejoicing and the blessing of verse 14. If we are insulted for the name of Christ, then we are blessed because His Spirit rests upon us in a unique way.

- b. But this is contrasted in verse 15 with a command that none of us are to suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. This negative command gives us pause when we suffer shame and reproach in life to stop and ask – why am I suffering? Harsh treatment from others should not cause us to question – “why do they persecute me?”, but rather, “what have I done to provoke this?” If what I have done is walked in righteousness as I followed my Lord, then I can rejoice. But if it is suffering for evil which I have done, then I must rightly bear my shame.
- c. Notice that he lists 4 sins as representative sins for which we must not suffer as Christians. And he starts with the worst and then works down to the least. So, the worst being murder, and then thievery, and then general wrongdoing, and lastly, meddling. He does not list murder and thievery here because he expects that some within the church are actually guilty of those, but he lists them because those are things that would actually carry a death penalty under Roman rule. In fact, there were Christians who were being framed for these things so that they might be put to death. This is the political tactic that the Sanhedrin took with Jesus, isn't it? They accused him of being a political insurrectionist and calling himself a king in the place of Caesar. They were leveling charges at Jesus which if they could in any way prove to be true then he would be put to death. And this tactic didn't end with our Savior. His followers faced this same political maneuvering of outlandish accusations. Peter is telling these believers that they must never actually be guilty of these things. Even if they are judicially leveled at them, they must not have any hint of these egregious sins in their lives.
- d. These big-ticket sins give way to the general “wrongdoing.” This would be anything that is actually wrong and sinful which disrupts society and for which you should suffer under the shame of society and the rule of law. But this too was being thrown at Jesus' followers. Like children at a pond who pick up every stone they can and throw them into the lake, so too the unbelievers will react at times in a way which unloads the beach of all the rocks as they try to land one in the boat of the Christian. This is what happened to Paul and Silas in Philippi when Paul cast the demon out of the slave girl. Her owners quickly turned the authorities against Paul and Silas because they were now losing money in the whole deal. They accused Paul and Silas of doing wrong, when in actuality they were doing everything according to God and His Word. So, Paul and Silas suffered beatings and imprisonment, but not because they did wrong, but because they were following Christ and proclaiming His gospel – and that got them in trouble and arrested. Peter is saying, if you are going to get harassed by the world and suffer shame, make sure it is not suffering and shame that you deserve because of wrongdoing.

- e. It is also not to be a shame you deserve because of meddling. This is the bottom part of Peter's sin totem pole here. This is a compound word in the original which combines the word for something which pertains to someone else – something which is not your own, it is foreign to you – and the word for overseer or bishop. So the idea of meddling is the idea of overseeing something that is not your business to oversee. It's hard to know just exactly what Peter is pointing to, but he seems to be saying that they ought not suffer for sticking their noses into the unrighteous living of the world around them by calling non-Christians to now act like Christians. Maybe because these believers had recently been converted they were prone to zeal for godliness, and this zeal would extend to the ungodly culture around them. Instead of just being holy because God is holy, they also wanted the world to act in holy ways as well. And so, being vexed by the world's evil behavior, they may have been especially passionate about calling out the world or the government's sins. Peter says here that they should not be surprised when they suffer for that kind of meddling.
- f. So, this would be like what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 5. So he says there in verse 9 – “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler – not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.”
- g. And so, if we as Christians take the morality of the Gospel of grace and apply to those who do not know the new life of Christ, we are setting ourselves up for meddling in affairs which are not ours to change, and this will cause us to suffer. Peter says, we ought not suffer for that. Rather, like Paul says in 1 Timothy 2 we are to lead a peaceful and quiet and godly life, dignified in every way. And if we suffer for doing that, then we can rejoice because we are blessed.
- h. And that is the contrast in verse 16. We are not to suffer for the sins of verse 15, but if we do suffer as a Christian, we are not to be ashamed, but we are to glorify God in that name. The suffering of verse 16 is defined by the name “Christian.” For as common a word as it is in our vocabulary, it is actually only used 3 times in the entire Bible. In Acts 11:26 it first appears as a simple description of where the title came from. It was in Antioch that the followers of Christ were called Christians. And this was not a compliment from those who invented it. It was a derogatory name – as we see in our text. It was an identification which could cause you great trouble in the world. That is what happened to Paul in almost every town he went into. And eventually he was arrested in Jerusalem and placed in Roman custody. In Acts 26 he has the opportunity to defend himself before

Herod Agrippa and so he proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ as being the reason for the chains around his wrists. And Agrippa, in a declaration of great protest said – “in a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” This was not a positive question. It was dripping with sarcasm about the shame and the plight of those who are known as Christ-followers. That is what Peter is telling his beloved churches here in 4:16. The world will try to shame you with the name, Christian. In fact, to the world, there is nothing worse than suffering as a Christian. Why would you willingly suffer the suspicion and the vitriol of others simply so that you can be faithful to God? That is what is behind every act of persecution, from the smallest to the greatest. The ungodly are convinced that those who claim to follow Christ will actually not follow Christ if it means being a social outcast or suffering some physical harm or financial loss. They are convinced that a little bit of pressure will fix the Christian from his insanity. A little shame should change their minds – the world thinks. But Peter says, rather than be shamed by this, we ought to glorify God in this. We ought to remain faithful and obedient and holy and blameless, and the name for which we suffer will be the name which is revered and magnified. God will be extolled when we willingly suffer for walking in righteousness especially when it will cost us the most from the world around us. It is here that we are most like Christ, and it is here that God is most glorified in us – when we share in the sufferings of Christ.

- i. That is the story of John Hus – the great 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Century reformer. Because he refused to look to any other authority than the Scriptures and because he refused to confess any other Savior than Christ alone by grace alone received through faith alone – he was seen as a threat to the Church and so he was condemned to die. They presumed that by shaming him they could get him to conform to their soul-condemning theology. But he refused. In the process of condemning him to burn at the stake they put a paper crown on his head with three devils on it and the title, “Leader of a heretical movement.” Hus responded to this shaming by saying, “My Lord Jesus Christ, for my sake, did wear a crown of thorns; why should I not then, for his sake, wear this light crown, be it ever so ignominious?”<sup>2</sup>
- j. This is the heart attitude of righteousness. A willingness to suffer for following Christ in righteousness. These commands of verses 15-16 give way to the explanation of verses 17-18. The suffering of 15-16 is inseparably linked with the judgment of verses 17-18. And the link is the word “for” at the beginning of verse 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? And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

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<sup>2</sup> Prorise, pg. 23.

- k. The judgment beginning at the house of the Lord is the suffering for the sake of the name of Christ in verse 16. And this suffering will judge us in the sense that it will prove who is genuinely Christ's and who is not. This judgment will result in our salvation in the sense that this is the hard road which leads to eternal life. We do not earn our salvation through our suffering, but we must pass through the fires of this affliction if we are to enter the narrow gate. This is a salvation which does not remove us from the trying of our faith, but rather it is a salvation which delivers us safely through the trying of our faith.
- l. This is what Jesus described in Mark 4 in the parable of the different soils which lays out the different receptions that the Gospel will receive in the hearts of mankind. In explaining the seed that fell on the rocky soil Jesus said, "when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away." So, the truth presented by Jesus is simply reiterated by Peter. We will face some form of tribulation or persecution on account of the word. And verse 18 admits that this is difficult and hard. It is a salvation through the fires of testing and the righteous will be barely, or scarcely, saved. This means that they will be saved with great difficulty. This is not speaking about the outcome, but the process. The outcome of our salvation is settled in Christ alone. We are saved, we are being saved, and we will one day be completely and fully and finally saved – and all of this will be because of Christ. But the process is hard. The righteous are barely saved, or scarcely saved, as they walk through the fires of affliction to test the genuineness of their faith. Many fall away from the faith and thereby prove that they were never truly born again.
- m. Peter is borrowing language and ideas from the Old Testament here. And this is no surprise to us because that has been his M.O. this whole letter. Whenever he is explaining something he is either directly quoting or clearly alluding to some part of the Old Testament. He built his understanding of the Gospel and the life it produces upon the foundation stones of the Old Testament. And so here he leans hard upon two prophetic texts for language and for the idea presented. He borrows direct language from both Ezekiel 9 and Malachi 3 to make his point here. Both of those texts are prophetic texts describing the unique appearance of the glory of the Lord or of the servant of the Lord coming to God's people in a unique way. And the purpose for this coming in both texts is judgmental. God is judging his people for their lack of faithfulness to His covenant and he brings judgment upon the people and this judgment begins in both texts at the house of the Lord – the Temple. This judgment acts a validating and purging agent as God's people are proven either to actually be His own faithful ones through the judgment, or they are proven to be faithless pretenders. Those who are disobedient and faithless are then judged with the fires of condemnation before the holy God.

- n. So, Peter is borrowing those ideas and that language here to say that judgment begins at the house of the Lord. But in this case it is the Church which is the New Testament Temple of God in this age of grace. It is no longer a building built with stones, but it is a spiritual structure built with the spiritual stones of believers. Peter is saying that the judgment of the Lord always begins at His own house, with his own people. The difference between Peter's readers and the recipients of Ezekiel and Malachi's prophecy is that Peter's readers are suffering because they are being faithful to the Lord. The OT people were suffering judgment because they were walking in ungodliness and idolatry. But the Church of Asia Minor was suffering, and would suffer, because they were faithful to their Lord. They were suffering as Christians. But Peter's point is similar – God's judgment begins with His people as fires of testing to test and prove His own. The affliction of the world pass through the hands of God and are ordained for our validation as His very own people. And then there is coming a day when these fires of suffering which test believers will become the fires of judgment which will condemn those who disobey the gospel of God. This is the worst kind of unbelief – the kind which refuses to bend the knee to the Savior of mankind. The kind of resistance and resolve which refuses to admit personal sinfulness and personal condemnation. The kind of resistance which might even claim some kind of belief in the Gospel, but underneath the surface the current of their heart is counter-Gospel as they persevere in their rebellion against God.
- o. Peter quotes Proverbs 11 in verse 18 to make the point that if the righteous are saved through such difficult and through the purifying flames of affliction, how much worse will it be for those who are not saved through those fires, but who are condemned by those fires! As difficult as it is to suffer for the name of Christ, it is so much more eternally worse to suffer the condemnation of God outside of Christ! Therefore, we should be confidently pursuing righteousness even if it will cost us much in this life. For this righteous faith in Christ will prove genuine through the fires of affliction and this will result in our salvation. And for this we can rejoice!

## II. Resolve (19)

- a. Then in verse 19 we are called to the heart attitude of resolve. This verse is a summary statement of all of verses 12-18, and some have even said of the whole letter Peter writes. "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." Those who suffer in verse 19 are parallel to those who are saved in verse 18. In other words, those who are saved by the suffering of Christ will be those who will also share in those sufferings to prove the genuineness of their salvation. This is a suffering which is according to God's will, which means that this is ordained by God and is worked out by God, according to His design. This statement is the summary statement of verses 12-18. So, Christians suffer according to God's will when they are tested by

fiery trial in verses 12 and 17, and when they share in Christ's sufferings in verse 13, and when they are insulted for the name of Christ in verse 14, and when they suffer as a Christian and not as an evil-doer in verses 15-16. This is suffering according to God's will. In other words, this is what will happen to the Christian. God has ordained that you will be tested by the fiery trials of opposition. It may be the simple word against you in the workplace because of your faith in Christ. Or it may be the imprisonment or the closure of your business or the fine against your Church because you refuse to capitulate to a godless culture's demands. When that comes, whether big or small, know that this is not some random act of satanic attack, but that this has passed through the hands of almighty God. He has approved it and ordained it for such a time as this. Through this suffering of affliction He is working out your salvation as you walk in holy contentment and faith-filled obedience.

- b. Therefore, he can and should be trusted. That is the command of verse 19 – entrust your soul to God, your faithful Creator. This word for “entrust” is a different word than the normal one for trusting God. It is the word for depositing something for safe keeping. It is what someone would do with a precious possession before they went on a long journey. In Peter's day they couldn't just take this money or this precious family heirloom to the bank and deposit it for safekeeping, but rather they had to find a neighbor or friend or relative who could keep watch over it in their absence. This means that you would be especially concerned to find someone who is proven to be of good integrity and capable of protecting something of great value. Well, almost counter-intuitively, Peter tells us that the God who ordains and wills this suffering is the One who is to be that safe deposit of our souls. His ordination of hard things for us to bear does not make him our enemy or put him in opposition to us. Rather, we are still his beloved! These afflictions are for our good and His glory and they are expressions of His love for us.
- c. Peter also says that he should be entrusted with our souls because he is our faithful Creator. This is the only time in our NT that God is called our Creator. The idea is all throughout each book, but this is the only time in the NT that it is specifically stated. The point is that we should entrust ourselves to the One who created us, both physically and spiritually, because He has made us and He knows us and He will keep us. So, even in the worst of suffering that might come our way we can lean fast upon the one who formed us in our mother's wombs – who fearfully and wonderfully made us from the moment of conception. We can know that he planned our every moment and that His thoughts toward us are more than could ever be numbered. Though he may slay us with present affliction He can be trusted with constant confidence.
- d. This is what Jesus models for us in Luke 23:46 in his final words on the Cross of Calvary – “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” Luke records that Jesus

said this with a loud voice! It was not a cry of exasperation or of defeat, but a cry of victory. Jesus had not been defeated by the Cross, but had faced his affliction and suffering and had been faithful to his task and was confident that his Father would validate His work through the Resurrection. He is giving himself in full trust to His heavenly Father.

- e. As the ultimate Giver and Sustainer of life – both physical and spiritual – God can and must be trusted. And you will know if you are entrusting yourself to this faithful Creator God if you are continuing to do good even though it will cost you more suffering in this world.

**Conclusion:** in 370 A.D., Basil of Caesarea became the bishop of Caesarea. At this time, the emperor Valens was promoting the doctrine of Arianism, which denies the divinity of Jesus Christ. Valens commanded the praetorian to offer to Basil the alternative of conforming to the Arian Creed, or of resigning his bishopric. Modestus accordingly summoned Basil, who appeared before him with his customary composure and dignity. At first the prefect addressed him courteously, but, finding that he was inflexible, changed his tone, and angrily asked Basil what he meant by persisting in his obstinate disobedience to the emperor's will. Basil answered, "Because his will is inconsistent with that of my Sovereign Lord, and I cannot worship any human creature, being myself a subject of that Lord."

Modestus passionately inquired if Basil had no fear of the penalties that was in his power to inflict – confiscation, exile, torture, even death itself. Basil smiled as he replied, "What are such threats to me? He who has nothing to lose can scarce fear confiscation, and I have no possessions save these mean garments, and some few books. Neither does he fear exile who counts no spot on earth his home, being here but a pilgrim and a sojourner, seeking a safer place of rest. Heaven is my home. Nor do I fear torture – my frail body would endure but little – you could strike but one blow and my pain is past – I should but depart sooner to Him, for Whose service I am willing to live, and after Whom my soul yearns.

Modestus expressed his astonishment that Basil dared to speak thus freely. Basil answered, "Perhaps you have not met a Christian bishop, or under such circumstances you would have found the same conduct. In matters of this world we would be the humblest and gentlest of all men, and would not exalt ourselves against a prince or any other man. But when God and the things concerning Him are involved, we overlook all else, and fix our eyes only on Him. And we rather glory in fire and sword, torture and prison, in such case. Therefore, threaten, and insult me as you will. Tell the emperor that nothing shall induce me to disobey my Master, or to assent to an heretical and impious creed."

Reporting his lack of success to the emperor, Modestus said, "We are conquered by this bishop, whom no threatening can shake, no arguments move, no promises allure. Timorous or mean men

may be wrought upon, but as for him, except by open force, we have no chance of conquering him.”<sup>3</sup>

Beloved – may that be true of us all our days. May the world say of us – we have no chance of conquering them, except by open force. Let’s pray.

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<sup>3</sup> Prose, pg. 39-40.