

Walking with a Victorious Limp

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I just want to say again this is a privilege and just an honor to be here. Megumi and I want to personally thank you for sending Dan Iverson, sending Craig, sending Linda Karner. I mean, because of these missionaries my wife was baptized in Oyumino Christ Church. Because of that church I was trained and am being sent to Westminster and am hoping to go back. So thank you for holding the rope as these missionaries go into unreached people groups and spread the gospel to the entire world. We truly are very thankful.

When Robbie asked me to pick a text for missions week, it's very hard for a missionary to do that, because the entire New Testament is written on the mission field, written by missionaries, and written for those who are in the mission field. It is very difficult. But the text that I've chosen here today is 1 Peter. The reason why I particularly like 1 Peter is because the church, the church of Asia Minor, is very similar to Japan. Asia Minor--actually the Church in Asia Minor was actually very isolated from the initial workings of the apostolic church. They were cut off from any kind of support. And Japan is very much like that—a country of 120 million people and only 0.3 % Christian, a small, fledgling church. And this passage is sweet, sweet encouragement to a church that has suffered so long. So today it will be a long passage. I won't expound every single text or every single verse, but hopefully you can feel the heart for missions of Peter. So please turn with me to 1 Peter 3:8-22. That's 1 Peter 3:8-22.

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For

“Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.
¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the

spirit,¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

This is the word of the Lord. [Thanks be to God.] Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we ask for your Holy Spirit to illumine our hearts so that you can expose where our hearts have grown cold and hard to the call of missions. Father, help us understand your promises, the reason for our sufferings, and the great victory we have in Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

The Japanese church is very familiar with suffering. A book named *Silence* was written by Shūsaku Endō, a Japanese Catholic novelist, that gives us a picture of what missions was like in the 17th century of Japan. He writes of two Catholic missionaries, zealous, excited to go to the land of Japan where there are very few who know the gospel. They are actually thinking about missions in a romantic way, hoping to shed blood for the missions of Japan. But of course when they get to the shores of Japan they are utterly disappointed. These friars are found by Japanese Christians. The Christians hide them away. But the Japanese government during that time hears of this. They go to the village that were hiding the Christians, and they say to the village, 'We will slaughter every single one of you if you don't cough up the missionaries.' And of course the missionaries say, 'It's OK. We can die.' But the Japanese Christians say, 'No, no. You have to be hidden.'

The government gives a condition: 'If one or two of you recant the faith—we know some of you are Christian—if you recant the faith, we'll let the whole village go. Two Japanese Christians volunteer, but they do not recant their faith. The government takes these men, crucifies them upside down. And as they're bleeding and suffocating on the cross they put them on the shores of Japan. And as they are bleeding to death the waves of the Japanese Sea crash onto them. And because of this these Catholic friars—their zeal for missions dissipates. And one of them says this: "This was the sea that relentlessly washed the dead bodies of Mokichi and Ijitsō. The sea that swallowed them up, the sea that after their death stretched out endlessly with unchanging expressions. And like the sea, God was silent, and his silence continued."

And 400 years later it seems like God's silence has continued with a very small Japanese church. And it's scenes like this that give us that reality that the mission field is not a romantic endeavor. It is a battle field, and war is never romantic. Real people suffer; real people die; real people are scared. But many people think that because we're living as the American church in comfort and safety with an abundance of economic and spiritual resources, we are engaged less in the war. My friends, Peter says this: "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." [1 Peter 5:8] As of this moment he is circling our worship service, circling our Christian schools, our Christian families, circling our covenant children—waiting to devour our weak and injured and broken-hearted fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

And when we are engaged in this war, engaged in this spiritual battle, sometimes we grow weary, weary like these missionaries. Maybe you are like the Japanese church. You have prayed again and again for the brother and sister, your neighbor, for conversion, but it seems that the Holy Spirit has not moved at all. Maybe you are like the Japanese Christian. You have prayed and prayed for your children to come to faith, but it seems like the temptations of the world suffocate them and Satan snatches them away from the church. Maybe you're like the Japanese church—that you're praying for the alleviation of financial burden, social isolation, physical ailments, spiritual attacks, and you want relief, but God is silent. Maybe you're like John the Baptist who wrestled with this silence, and he said to Jesus: “Are you the coming one, or shall we look for another?” [Luke 7:20] Maybe your words are saying, ‘God, you might be listening, but you aren't really doing anything.’ Maybe you feel that towards missions. Maybe because of that you have grown cold, cynical, and tired.

But Peter in this beautiful text is kind of like a fiery platoon sergeant, as we are the soldiers in the trenches—shell-shocked, scared, and tired; surrounded by enemy forces; cut off from supplies and reinforcements. Peter, in his kind of radio contact, says: ‘My fellow soldier, pick up the word of God. Remember the promises and be faithful to your calling. For the great King Yahweh has fixed his eyes on the enemy, and he has sent our victorious captain in the faith. Be faithful, my fellow soldier. Stand your ground and wait a little longer.

That's essentially today's message, my friends. Because our great King is watching and he has sent our victorious captain, we walk into the battle victorious, but with the limp of suffering. And we'll unpack that in three points today: **The Servant's Hard, but Hopeful Mission**; Secondly, **The King's Silent, but Watchful Eye**; and third, **The Conqueror's Intangible, but Complete Victory**. I'll be spending a couple of minutes on the first—a longer time on the first points. If you're watching your watch, that's why. I'm trying to set it up for the second and third point.

So in our text, first point: **The Servant's Hard, but Hopeful Mission**. Peter summarizes the call of missions in verses 8 and 9. He says this: “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.” I think these two verses explain Peter's mission strategy, and it's very simple: Evangelism and missions through suffering. You might, kind of take up again those two verses and say, ‘Mark, I don't see the word *missions*. I don't see the word *evangelism*. And kind of suffering through missions—that isn't really a good strategy.’ But if you kind of take a look at Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, Peter is building up to this point. Chapter 2:11-12. He describes the church as sojourners in this world, declaring war against the passions of this flesh. And he says to the church: May the nonbelievers see your good deeds so that they may glorify God on the day of visitation, so that they may turn to Christ through your humble, faithful suffering.

He gives us three case studies. He first turns to the entire church and he says, You know that emperor who has been putting heavy taxes upon you? You know that governor that has been interrogating and torturing Christians? You know that neighbor who has been mocking you? Chapter 2:17 says: “Honor everyone...Fear God. Honor the emperor.” He goes to a second case study and he says, “Servants,” (verse 18), “be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.” You know that boss that mistreats you, discriminates against you, may possibly be verbally abusing you? I want you to turn the other

cheek. Third case study. “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.” [1 Peter 3:1-2] Do you know that unbelieving husband or spouse that mocks your face, who ignores you, who mistreats you? Win his heart by your holiness so that he may turn to God.

That's why in Chapter 3:9 Peter says, “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless.” In the first century this was completely, just unimaginable. Honor, reputation, and wealth were something to die for. In verse 14 that's why Peter says that's the exact effect that we want. This should be shocking to our non-believing friends. He says it in verses 14 and 15: “But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for [a reason] for the hope that is in you.” True, genuine, humble, faithful, obedient suffering is absolutely shocking. It freaks people out. *Wait, you actually read the Bible? You actually try to love God and love your neighbor? Hold on a second, you're actually trying to work harder for me, even if I took credit and plagiarized your work? Wait, how did you throw out that huge promotion because you wanted to protect your time with family and on your time on Sundays? Wait, you just spent hours and hours helping a person who's struggling with addiction when you could have been watching football or playing golf? Wait, you actually spent half of your savings giving money to people in the church who you don't know and trying to bless people who reject the Gospel.? That's crazy!*

What Peter is basically saying is this. By your suffering, by your humility and your obedience, the mission advances. That is the evangelistic strategy of the first century. The Christian call is about taking up your cross and dying to oneself for the advancement of the kingdom. But if you're anything like me, I hear that and say—I was trained as an economist—OK, how can I optimize this: least amount of suffering, maximum impact. Alright? That's me. That's how I think. I want to grow in holiness, I want to grow in the word—but not by pouring too many hours into prayer, in the word, in the church. I want to share the gospel with people and children, but I don't want to invest the hard and laborious and time-consuming work of building relationships and sharing the gospel. I want to share the gospel, but I don't want to be bullied by non-Christians. I want to support missions, but I don't want to sacrifice too much--maybe a little bit--too much time or money, careers, our pastors, our children, our lives for mission.

But Peter is saying, (kind of, again, in my mind Peter's like this platoon sergeant), and he says this: Our call is not to succeed first; our call is to be faithful first. And success, influence, may come, but it must obedience first. And God is not in the business of setting up successful, influential, impactful missions. God is not in the business of giving Christians comfortable lives. If you look at the entire Bible, that's the case. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—they're promised a land of milk of honey in a huge nation. But what happened? They died in the desert. Think about Moses. He was promised an exodus, the promised land. But what happened? They again wandered for forty years and he died with a disobedient generation, never seeing the promised land. Think about Joshua who successfully conquers the promised land, and what happens? Israel basically loses the land because they weren't faithful. David and Solomon—they created this relatively small, but glorious kingdom, but what happens is that the kings fall into disobedience and they lose their entire kingdom. Jesus himself attracted thousands and thousands of people, and we look at that and say, ‘Wow! that's a great ministry!’ But at the

end of that ministry he was all alone on the cross. Even the apostolic church. We think of that as a successful movement of the Spirit, which it was. But if you look at the epistles, it is filled with false teachers, persecution, internal strife, and people who are struggling with the silence of God.

My friends, God calls us to a hard mission. He wants us to obey, he wants us to suffer, because he does not want us to put faith in the comforts of this life. He does not want us to put faith in the wealth, the reputation, and honor that we have. He wants us to put faith first in our Lord Jesus Christ. But you might be thinking, 'Well, that's a lot of suffering.' And it is. But in verse 9 is a beautiful reminder that you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. In the Greek it's more: You may *inherit* a blessing. And in Chapter 1:3-5 Peter talks about what we are inheriting. And he says this: "According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you." My friends, suffering in this world, as one theologian put it, is like putting a scratch on a penny to your trillion dollar inheritance in heaven. That is why Peter says although this mission is called to suffer is hard, but is very, very hopeful.

But I know some of you are here struggling, suffering. Maybe not on the mission field, but here. And you might be saying, OK, I understand this inheritance thing, but that doesn't answer this question: The Lord promises to protect us, but why is he so silent. And that's why in verses 10-12 Peter argues that the king might be silent, but he is very, very watchful. Verses 10-12 say, "For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Peter is quoting Psalm 34, and Psalm 34 is basically David's Psalm. And David is actually being persecuted. He is being pursued by his enemies; he is surrounded. His troops are tired and his life is threatened. And he says this. He says that God is faithful even though I'm being attacked. And you might be thinking how is that possible? First God promises that he will protect his people, but at the very same time God promises suffering. How can these two conflicting ideas be reconciled? And I think the key to that answer is our view of God's final judgment.

The reason why David and Peter can reconcile these things is because they knew that the second coming of Christ was absolutely certain and very, very soon. In Chapter 4:7-8 he says: "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers." He is saying that if you believe in missions, if you believe in Jesus Christ, you believe that he is coming and that he's coming very, very soon. Or you might be a good Presbyterian and you might be thinking, 'Mark, that makes me a little bit uncomfortable. Are you trying to predict when Jesus is coming?' No, that's not what I'm trying to do. But what the Scriptures say is that he is coming very, very soon. We don't know when. But again my practical, pragmatic part of me comes out and says, well, OK, let's do some calculations here. So the promise of the coming of Jesus Christ was about 38 A.D., 50 A.D.—whatever—it's around 2000 right here. So if we just take that, probably in the next two thousand years, maybe Jesus is not coming back. So in the meantime, again my optimization kicks in and says, I'll suffer, but I'll have a plan B. I'll be comfortable in the meantime.

But my friends, what Peter is saying is this: The possibility that Jesus is coming in 100 A.D., in 2000 A.D., in 3000 A.D., is exactly the same. The arrival of our king is imminent. It's kind of like the seatbelt sign turns on and we're going to have a little bit of turbulence, but we're on the final approach. And what Peter is saying is: Do you hear the hooves of the chariots of God's divine army? Do you hear his divine war call saying that he will destroy the enemies of the church, that he wants to save his beloved bride, he wants to redeem you, he wants to heal you, he wants to bring salvation to you. Do you truly believe that?

One scholar, Michael Green, who is a scholar of the early church, said that the reason why evangelism, the reason why missions was so rich in the early church was because of a strong, realistic hope and a lively expectation of the coming Kingdom. If we truly believe this, this completely changes how we view our finances, our lives, our careers, our retirements, our sufferings, and our lives. Our grip on our earthly sense of comfort, our earthly sense of security and our grasp on status, reputation, and honor and success, starts to loosen. And what we do is that we embrace the internal inheritance that Jesus Christ has given us. We embrace and grab hold on to and say I am a co-heir with Christ. I am the beautiful bride of my Lord and Savior. I am the son of the Great High King. And I know very, very soon, with the tree of life he will heal all of my wounds, he will wipe away all of my tears, and he will bring me to eternal glory—very, very soon. The King might be silent, but he's coming, and he's very watchful.

But finally you might be thinking, hearing this, and you might be thinking, well, if Jesus is coming immediately you might be convicted of your own sins and say I'm not ready for Jesus to come. Maybe you are overwhelmed by the prospect of suffering. Maybe you are overwhelmed by the fact that I haven't been faithful. I don't think I'll make it. I don't think I can finish this race. And that's why we have the third and the most powerful point: The Conqueror's Intangible, but Complete Victory.

Look down into your Bibles in verse 18. He gives you the reason why we suffer. That little "For" in verse 18 shows you that Peter is saying that everything that comes after verse 18 is the reason why we suffer. And what Peter is saying is this: Your walk of suffering is a suffering that Jesus Christ has already accomplished. Maybe that marathon of suffering—you think that you have to complete it—but my friends, Jesus Christ, your Divine Conqueror, gets out of the trenches and charges the enemy and slays his head so that he can secure victory for us already. He is the captain of our faith, Jesus Christ. I'm not going to go through every single detail of this text, but to give you the heart behind these verses. In verse 18 Peter is saying: My fellow soldiers. Our Great Conqueror, the Divine Warrior, had the ultimate mission to suffer. His mission was to suffer. His mission was to bleed. His mission was to hang on the cross so that he might bring you—all of you, all of us—although we are sinful—into the heavenly realm where we will see that eternal inheritance.

Do you know that our Great Conqueror had to defeat sin and death itself? when Jesus dies on the cross it's not some sort of weak warrior that kind of doesn't want to go to Calvary Hill. No. John Calvin said this: We must not understand that Christ took our curses in such a way that he was covered and crushed by it. But on the contrary, in receiving it he brought it down and broke it and tore it in pieces. Jesus Christ is that David-like warrior who charges up Calvary and slays the head of Goliath—death, the curse of the law, and sin itself—and secures us for that

inheritance. Do you know that our Great Conqueror had to live and suffer and fulfill the law on your behalf so that he would be resurrected? You might think that obeying the law is a great suffering, and it was. But Jesus, for the thirty some years that he lived on this world suffered every single moment of his life. The great tempter, who circled around him every single moment—and he overcame every single temptation with the Word of God. And because of his perfect obedience, because of his perfect obedient suffering, he was resurrected. And if you put your faith in Jesus Christ, we will be resurrected, as well.

In verse 19, do you know that our Great Conqueror, when he ascended into the heavenly realms, he proclaimed victory over the evil spirits and Satan himself. When he went into the heavens he declared victory. What he did was, he basically...Imagine Satan and his minions, kind of these ferocious tigers trying to take us away. But when Jesus was resurrected he broke the teeth of the lion, so that even though they may roar, they can never tear us apart. In Romans 8 Paul reminds us that they may cause you to suffer, but “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [Romans 8:38-39] Do you know in verses 20-21 this Great Conqueror will send a great flood that would destroy all of the evil in this world, and he will preserve us like the ark of Noah in the body of Christ so that we may ascend into the heavenly realm? Do you know in verse 22 that the Great Conqueror sits at the right hand of the Father, right now at this moment, with his iron scepter crushing every knee of our enemies, causing them to worship? And the heavenly court is in this great Hallelujah chorus, praising God in his victory. Do you know you are on his side? Do you know that this Great Conqueror’s bride is you?

We're fighting a war that's already been won in Jesus Christ. We're just waiting for that Great Conqueror to rescue us from the trenches. And as we're waiting we're trying to gather the unreached, the lost, so that they may be able to partake in this beautiful family of Christ. And if you are here today, you are invited, as well. My friends, you might be in a state of suffering, but do you know that Jesus tasted the cup of God's wrath and all of the suffering, so that he may give you an eternal living water to quench that thirst that you have in your heart. My friends, this is our call—our call from our victorious King.

Lastly, I want to end with the beginning of 1 Peter again, to give you again the heart of Peter's heart for missions. Chapter 1, verse 6. “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 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. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. CPC, you are co-heirs with Christ. You're the bride of our everlasting, our Divine Conqueror. He has given you an inheritance, so that's why he calls you. Go, advance the kingdom; suffer for the church, so that the unreached might join us in that heavenly Hallelujah chorus. We might be entering into a battlefield wrought with suffering, but we walk victorious, limping, but filled with inexpressible joy that we will see our Great Conquering Bridegroom very, very soon.

Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we desire to see your face. We desire to be with you, but you have called us to advance the Kingdom of God here in this world, so that the unreached might

join us in praising you. We pray, Lord, that you would be with us in our suffering. Be with us as we give to the church, as we give to missions. Be with us as we suffer for the name of Christ. But Lord, remind us of the promises of God. Remind us of how you will commune with us and heal us and redeem us, Lord, so that we may push on, walking victoriously with a limp. We thank you and in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.