

Dear Friends,

A primary objection to the existence and being of the God of the Bible is the "Question of evil." If God is all-good and all-powerful, why doesn't He simply impose His power on humanity to prevent all evil from existing? Scripture answers this question nicely. First, man, not God, introduced evil into this world. Rather than create a robotic world in which He micromanages everything that occurs, God chose to create a responsible, moral world, giving man His moral law and commanding man to obey it. From the beginning with Adam and Eve, God informed man that respect and obedience to His moral law would bring His blessings, and disobedience and rebellion would as surely bring His judgment. If God so micromanaged every event as to prevent evil from existing, we'd already be in heaven. No need to look forward to it.

If you see the people around you making sinful choices, and you disapprove, you are reflecting your agreement with God's established moral government over all humanity. In reality, God shall bring every sin ever committed to account to Him. All the sins of His chosen people were judged in Jesus, saving us from future judgment, and imbedding in us His moral law, so that born again children of God live with that divinely imputed moral compass. We may respect and obey it, or we may choose to rebel and ignore it. Our sins will not send us to God's final judgment, but they ensure that we shall face His severe chastening judgment.

Peter's lesson for this week teaches us to keep our heart and our faith actively focused on Jesus, not on our trials, pains, and disappointments. When we obey Jesus and "**Take my yoke upon you,**" (Matthew 11:29a KJV) by definition in Jesus' symbolic reference to His "Yoke," our taking His yoke on us means He shares every load we must carry. What a powerful encouragement. He never promised that we would never face a burden, pain, or trial, but He did promise, when we take His "Yoke" on us and choose to walk lock-step with Him, He would join us in sharing our burdens.

Therefore, Peter teaches us in this same vein of truth. Don't think it a strange thing when you face trials and heavy burdens. Rather keep your heart and mind focused on your "Yoke-fellow," Jesus, through your trials. Despite the trials and burdens, this choice brings His joy, even in the midst of those heavy burdens.

Thank the Lord, we do not live in open and hostile persecution for our faith, but we do live in a culture that increasingly voices open objection to Jesus and His faith way. A few years ago I heard a national leader in a public speech ridicule Christians who really believe the Bible. Supposedly, according to his thinking, you may be a "Christian," but just don't "Really" believe the Bible. How can this be? If we accept the fundamental teaching of Scripture, it can't be. And abandonment of Scripture eradicates authentic Christian faith and life. We may be closer to persecution for our faith than we think. Nevertheless, rejoice in your Savior and Helper. Whatever lies ahead, as you stand faithfully with Him, He shall likewise stand powerfully beside you.

Love in Jesus,
Joe Holder

Suffering is Inevitable; We Choose Why

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. (1 Peter 4:12-14 KJV 1900)

In this country, Christians have forgotten the historical link between faith and persecution, suffering as a Christian. For most of us, the nearest thing to suffering we shall ever know is someone criticizing "Those Christians." There is a passing reference in Roman history to the region where the people to whom Peter wrote this letter lived. The official policy of the Roman government was to ignore Christians, along with other religions, unless they disrupted or challenged Roman authority. In this case, a regional governor wrote to the authorities in Rome, describing his more aggressive policy of persecuting and killing Christians merely because they were Christians, and the authorities gave their approval. Imagine being forced by the authorities to close all places of public gathering and worship and living in fear that the next knock on your door would be someone with an arrest warrant to take you to prison or death for your faith in Jesus. That was the situation for the first recipients of Peter's letter. A dominant theme of 1 Peter deals with suffering as a Christian.

Our human nature cries out, "But that isn't fair." And we almost sense Peter responding to that sentiment in our study passage. **Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.** Life is seldom "Fair." The primary "Assignment" the Lord gives each of us, His believing followers, is to keep our hearts and minds focused on Him and His goodness, not on the fairness-or-unfairness of things that happen in our world. Was what wicked men did to Jesus "Fair"? Did He ever complain about it? We've already seen Peter's reminder.

Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. (1 Peter 1:23 KJV)

When those dreadful moments invade our life, how do we react? Do we respond in kind? If someone "reviles" us, speaks cruelly and reproachfully against us, do we think we are therefore justified to speak just as harshly and hatefully against them? Or do we turn our hearts to the Lord and imitate Jesus, committing ourselves to Him whom we know to judge righteously? Peter wisely

reminds us. Such unfair and evil conduct in people is not “**some strange thing.**” It is “Par for the course” of human sin. We need this reminder often.

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. Jesus suffered for the benefit of others whom He loved, despite their being wholly unlovable at the time. Paul enlightens this truth.

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. (Hebrews 12:2-4 KJV)

Jesus didn’t obsess over the cross. He endured it. Based on the four gospels’ record of Jesus’ conduct prior to the cross, we may reasonably conclude that, just as Paul urges us in this lesson, so Jesus “Looked” to the Father prior to the cross. When we face our own trials, our best and right strategy is to spend serious time in prayer. Look to the father in your season of trial. Look to Him more than to the trial or its source. Despite Jesus’ knowing the intense suffering He would endure, He looked past the cross to the joy He knew lay before Him after the cross. The same truth applies to us. If we endure our tough and painful seasons in faith looking to Jesus, we shall realize more of His joy than the present pain and trial.

And when we think too much about how unfair life is, remember Paul’s point. How much more Jesus endured of human cruelty and unfairness than we shall ever know, but He was not deterred from keeping that joy before Him.

...that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. As is often the case, “**that**” in this verse was translated from a Greek word that defines purpose. A’s purpose is to bring about B. If we follow Peter’s teaching (That our eternal salvation is wholly of God and His work, not by human works) in Acts 15:11, as well as in the introduction and earlier lessons in this letter, his connecting our response to pain and trials as the basis for our joy, we need to ponder his intent by “**...when his glory shall be revealed.**” I wholly rejoice that our entrance into eternity with the Lord shall be joy beyond anything we can presently imagine. However, given the purpose link between the two thoughts in this lesson, I am more inclined to regard “**when his glory shall be revealed**” as a present revelation of the Lord’s glory in our lives, a glory we seen when we keep our hearts fixed on Him through our trials.

In Hebrews 2, Paul emphasizes our present view of Jesus, not a past crucifixion view of Him or a future resurrection view. **“But we see Jesus...”** Paul saw Jesus in His glory as he wrote these words. By “we,” He reminds us; we too can “See” Him when we look to Him in faith. In 2 Peter 1, after describing his personal experience with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter likely shocked his first readers, as he will shock and encourage us if we grasp his thought.

Despite the amazing glory of Transfiguration, Peter teaches us that **“...we have also a more sure word of prophecy”** than he received on the mount. And lest you say that Peter’s experience was different; it doesn’t work for us, take note that he wrote these words to suffering Christians, not to other apostles or “Special” Christians, plus Peter included **“also”** in his thought. What could be more sure for them and for us today than to see Jesus glorified, talking with Moses and Elijah about **“...his decease which he should accomplish in Jerusalem”**? (Luke 9:31 KJV) Peter answers our question. Inspired and divinely preserved Scripture, according to Peter, is **“More sure”** than his personal experience on the mount. Think for a moment. Can anything be **“More sure”** than God’s words in Scripture? If we read and believe the words of Scripture, we shall see Jesus in His glory. His glory is revealed in Scripture. For us in the here and now, Scripture is **“More sure”** than our emotions, our “Impressions,” or anything else. We live in a culture dominated by human emotion. “I feel” a certain way, and my “Feelings” are more important than anything else, even Scripture. Peter, along with Scripture at large, rejects anything other than our **“More sure”** testimony in Scripture. Why is this so? What about Scripture magnifies it more than anything else in our faith? **It reveals Jesus in His glory.** Therefore, when we turn to Scripture in our trials and see Jesus in His glory, Scripture guides us to become **“...glad also with exceeding joy.”** However, if we turn elsewhere—anywhere else—in our trials, we lose our spiritual joy and health. Did you notice Peter’s insertion of **“also”** in this thought? During the Incarnation, Jesus’ time on earth as a man, He faced disappointments from every side. Isaiah 53:3 prophetically described Him as **“a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs.”** But now He lives in that **“joy that was set before him.”** Therefore, when we turn to His revealed glory in Scripture in our seasons of trial, we **“Also”** participate in His present joy. What a gracious God we serve!

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. Reproach comes in many forms. We may be reproached because of our own failures to live up to our profession of faith. If that is the case, there is no “Happiness” or blessing. In this context, “Happy” does not refer to emotional joy. The literal meaning of the word translated “Happy” in this verse identifies someone who receives divine favor. We might well substitute the word “Blessed” for “Happy” in the verse. This thought logically links to the experience of suffering for the name of Christ. Further, “Name” identifies the core identity of a person. We suffer because we are faithful to the Person and teaching of Jesus. We faithfully position ourselves in fellowship with Him and His lifestyle. Peter explains the point, **“...for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.”** We are not “Happy” because of personal gain or success, but because the Lord rests with us in our

reproaches, so much so that Peter describes His presence as “**the spirit of glory and of God.**” Vine’s New Testament Dictionary explains “Rest.”

To cause or permit one to cease from any labor or movement” so as to recover strength. It implies previous toil and care. Its chief significance is that of taking, or causing to take, rest. (Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary)

It is not personal success that causes this rest, but the Lord’s blessed approval. When we face His reproaches in faith—and faithfulness—He intervenes to give us rest for recovery.

...on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. We live in a culture and world that is inherently hostile to our Lord and His ways. Identify yourself as a believer in Jesus who lives His faith, and your acquaintances will quickly divide. Other believers will stand close to you, but unbelievers will ridicule you and put you down. They not only speak evil of you; they also speak evil of Jesus. Peter doesn’t miss a step. Despite what “They” say or do, our task, our divine assignment is to so live that our conduct, words, and deeds, even thoughts, glorify Jesus.

Read over these verses. Ponder their sentiment. Now imagine yourself in the situation Peter’s first readers lived, of intense, life-threatening persecution all because of your faith in Jesus. Despite Christians in various countries who suffer persecution, we have been spared, so it is difficult for us to comprehend such a thing. But it was the way of life for Peter’s first readers of this letter. And it was people in that frightening danger to whom Peter wrote these words. Their persecution was far more ominous than wicked people speaking evil against Jesus and against them. They used the faith of Jesus as their excuse to persecute and to kill faithful Christians.

For the season, we live in a much safer environment, so how do we use this liberty with which we have been so richly blessed? When a work associate or family member speaks evil of Jesus or of our faith, how do we react? Do we maintain such a gracious steadfastness that we give even our—and His—critics pause? We have much to learn, much spiritual maturing to pursue. All of us. Like Jesus, though in infinitely less degree, we face our crosses, our difficulties. Our choice is clear. Do we focus our energies on our crosses and trials? Or do we turn, in Jesus’ example, to joy that is set before us? What a blessed opportunity we have. Lord help us to use it wisely.

Elder Joe Holder