

Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

An Expositional Journey Through **1 Peter** **1 Peter 3:18-22** 37- Peter Prepares Us for Suffering

November 18, 2018

1 Peter 3:18-22

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the just for the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, **20** who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water.

21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you — not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience — through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

To the Glory of God

Now, first of all, let me say that I love my country. I believe that the United States has been *uniquely* raised up, and *uniquely* equipped and blessed by God. And I am not happy at all with the direction our nation has been on for the majority of my life, but I genuinely love and respect my country. Okay, I said that.

But we need to understand that the 320 million+ people who live here represent only about 5% of the total population of the world. And the 242 years our country has been in existence represents only about 4% of the total time since God created Man in the Garden, and only about 12% of the total time of the Church. So, the 5%, who have existed for only 12% of the time since the Resurrection do *not* represent the

many Victories and the answered Prayers and the great Works that God has done, as fully as we would like to believe.

And case in point has to do with the Issue of Suffering. So, to understand what this Passage is really all about, we need to see how it relates to what came before it and what comes after it. Just before verse 18, Peter calls Christians to suffer if that is God's will for them. He said:

For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

... so, as we found out last time, *sometimes* it is God's Will that genuine believers suffer for doing what is "Right". Now this is not an easy thing to hear. But it's an even *harder* thing to try to teach. It is, what I call, a "hard sell". So, we need help with this; Americans *especially* need help with this. We need Understanding and Encouragement and Hope if God is going to will, at times, that we suffer for doing what is Right.

And then, in verse 18, Peter begins this Passage by saying:

For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

... and the word "**For**" shows us that Peter is beginning to explain at least two things:

1. Why it might sometimes be God's Will for believers to suffer for doing what is right.
2. Why suffering for doing what is right is "Better".

... so, the Passage that Brother Vern just read to us begins as an explanation or a reason for the Call to suffer as a Christian for doing what is Right.

But then we need to look at the connection between this Passage, which completes Chapter 3 and what follows it in **1 Peter 4:1&2**, which says:

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

Peter tells us “**arm yourselves also with the same purpose**”, and the “Purpose” that Peter is talking about is why Suffering for doing what is Right *might* be God’s Will and why it is “better”. So, before and after verse 18, Peter is making a very important point:

Believers, get ready to suffer for doing what is right if that should be God's Will.
Arm yourselves with that Purpose

And, in between these two Calls to suffer, we find the Passage that Brother Vern has just publicly read. And that tells us that, even though Peter gets into things like, “spirits now in prison” and “Noah’s Ark” and “Baptism”, the *main* Point of these verses is to help us get ready to suffer with Jesus for doing what is Right rather than suffering for doing what is wrong, because that is “better”.

Now many people get all engulfed in the imagery of this Passage and forget the main Point. So, I hope we don’t do that. The single most important thing you need to take away from verses 18-22 of **1 Peter** is that the Apostle Peter's intention is to help us arm ourselves with the Faith that we need to suffer for the Sake of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. And that is simply not a very popular subject to preach to Americans in the 21st Century.

Now if that sounds irrelevant to you, or if that seems to be anti-climatic, it isn’t because what I said isn’t true. Modern American Christians are basically insulated from the bigger world outside our own country, and outside our own short American era. We need to understand that, while it is against the law to kill people for being a Christian in the United States, for most of the world and for most of human history being a Christian has *not* been safe, and is *not* safe today.

I just read a book entitled, *The History of Christian Missions*. And in that book, on page 43, Stephen Neil says that in the first three centuries, when the Church was spreading like wildfire,

"Every Christian knew that sooner or later he might have to testify to his faith at the cost of his life."

Imagine conducting Evangelism in Gulfport where you could not make any promises to people that things would get better for them on earth. Imagine telling these lost people that if they believed what you offered, they would, at a minimum, lose whatever they owned and might even die for it. How many people would want what you had to offer? Who would ever want a Jesus that almost *guaranteed* a much *harder* life down here?

And yet the Church grew by leaps and bounds! So, what was it that made Christianity attractive to so many people, *especially* since it offered them such a difficult life? Look, I completely understand why poor people in Africa are attracted to the Health, Wealth, and Prosperity heresy. Who wouldn't want a Jesus, Who healed you when you are sick and blesses you when you are poor? Who wouldn't serve a god, who allowed you to go from living off a dirt floor to flying in a jet?

And yet, history tells us that Christianity did *not* spread around the world by promising financial prosperity to its followers. It was *not* the promise of Divine Health that attracted farmers and housewives and coal miners to repent. It *wasn't* the notion that coming to Jesus eliminated a harsh life on earth that caused kings and paupers alike to bow before Jesus. Those who believed, and especially those who led, almost *always* suffered. Many were beaten and imprisoned. And hundreds of thousands, if not millions, were murdered. For example, over 900,000 saints of God were martyred over two issues:

1. Rejecting the primacy of the pope.
2. Believing and trusting that Justification was by Grace through Faith in Christ- Alone¹.

Throughout the centuries, genuine Blood-bought believers were tortured and killed over seemingly innocuous Issues like the Doctrine of the Trinity and because they translated the Bible into the language of the common man. What does that say about our modern, American Evangelistic message and methods? So, as we "journey" through **1 Peter**,

¹ According to *Foxe's Book of the Martyrs*, the Spanish Inquisition (1478-1834) was responsible for at least 900,000 murders of people, who refused to ascend to Roman orthodoxy- most of them, Protestant.

we need to understand that Suffering was *normal* in Peter's day and in most of the places of the world, most of the time, including today.

The modern church has invented names for places where it's dangerous to be a Christian. We call them "closed countries". And I find that so strange. Because the only reason we use terms like that is because we have bought into the false notion that being "safe" is normal for believers. And when you read about how Christians have suffered through the centuries, and then see how easy it is today for "nominal Christians" to refrain from even the very basic Commands of the Bible, you can see how cowardly we have become.

It isn't uncommon today to hear the phrase, "*they won't let me pray*", where the "they" is either the Government or the Company they work for. But our dear Apostle Peter would have found that whole idea incomprehensible. We need to understand that outside the many "rights" and "safeties" that our Country provides believers through the Constitution, it is still very normal, in most places of the world, to suffer for being a Christian. To be safe and respected, and to receive tax advantages for being a Church, is the *exception*, not the rule. Here is just one example.

Evangelical missionaries first entered Cambodia in the 1920s. By the time they were forcefully expelled in 1965, there were only about 600 believers. So, for the first 45 years of the Gospel being in Cambodia, only 600 souls were saved. But between 1965 and 1975, during the intense civil war, the Christian population soared to an estimated 90,000! So, the Church grew by 89,400 in just ten years, during the most dangerous and hardest period! It was truly an amazing Work of God. But when the Khmer Rouge took control and Pol Pot unleashed his fury on the nation, most of these Christians were rounded up and murdered while a few fled the country. And this same story could be retold hundreds of times over and over around the world and along the centuries.

We must try to understand, dear friends, that it is *normal*, not *abnormal*, for Christians to be hated. Jesus said the most sweeping thing in **Matthew 24:9**:

Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.

... and that is a Warning for us here in America. You know, I get the Impression, sometimes, that we are in a very bitter, reactionary mood as Christians in America these days. The atmosphere seems to be one of acrimony and rancor, and even hatred in the public square, as if the liberal, humanistic, secular, relativistic cultural elites have taken our Christian world from us and all is lost unless we can defeat them *politically*. But it is hard to “square” that kind of defeatist rhetoric with the Statements of Jesus like:

Matthew 16:18b

... upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

... or...

Matthew 28:18b-20

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

So, will the Church be persecuted? Always. Will it operate in the earth under great hardships? Usually. Will we struggle against Sin and Temptations and Hostility and Trials? Yes. But *will* the Church, *can* the Church be defeated? Never!

So, what a great time for a heavy dose of the Teaching from **1 Peter** as we find from the main Theme for this entire “journey”:

1 Peter 4:12-19

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

The Apostle Peter is laboring in this letter to say that we are "aliens" and "exiles" here. And that us being that is NOT surprising. It is not *abnormal* when the cultural powers that be revile Christianity. Jesus said:

Matthew 10:25

It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!

... so, in the Passage that Brother Vern just read to us, Peter is preparing us for Suffering, if God should will it. And *that* is the *main* Reason why verses 18-22 were written.

So, please allow me to remind you that, sometimes, it is very hard for those of us who live in the United States, in the first decades of the 21st Century, to relate to men who lived and who loved Jesus in the 1st Century and wrote down inspired Words. The Apostle Peter never knew about running water or bi-focals or antibiotics or plastic. He never heard a radio or watched a television or rode in a car or typed on a keyboard. But Peter knew Jesus. *Intimately*. And Peter followed Jesus. *Closely*. Peter even walked on water with Jesus.

Peter is one of only a handful of people in the history of the world, who understood what it felt like to have God the Spirit "move you along" as he wrote down words that are entirely inerrant and infallible. That God could use a crude and uneducated fisherman, like Peter, dazzles our minds. That God uses *any* sinner to carry out His Will in the earth amazes us. But, we must understand that if God didn't use unworthy sinners, He would have to use Himself. Because every one of the men that Jesus chose were sinners. Every man God chooses today are sinners. We all have flaws and fallacies, and *none* of us are fully qualified to do what God calls us to do. But in the case of *these* men, God took very ordinary men and He *anointed* these very common men

and supernaturally *transformed* them into being the Apostles of Jesus Christ.

But that's not all that God did. He also took very ordinary nouns and verbs and pronouns and adjectives and adverbs, and He *anointed* these very common words and supernaturally *transformed* them into being the Word and Will of the God of the Universe. And for the most part, what we read today in what we call "The New Testament" is the product of the Apostles and those who were commissioned by the Apostles to write.

But if any group in the history of the world *should* have failed at the Mission that God gave them, the Apostles *should* have failed. There is simply no reason for us to think that the breathtaking success of Christianity in its first 300 years of existence is anything short of a Divine Miracle.

The Christian religion went from being an *illegal* and *persecuted* sect of Old Testament Judaism (in most people's minds) to the *dominant* religion in the world in just three centuries. And at the forefront of that amazing expansion of the Kingdom of God were the Apostles. All of them weak, all of them frail, all of them scared, and all of them deeply troubled men; all with sinful pasts that had to be forgiven; they walked with Jesus, and they heard and saw and personally *experienced* things that we can only imagine.

But it is true that a human being cannot even begin to appreciate what it means to stand on the highest mountain until he grovels in agony in the lowest valley. So, while it is true that Peter was used by God to preach the very first Christian Sermon (**The Acts 2:14-36**), and perform a miracle of healing on the man, born with no ankle-bones (**The Acts 3:6**), and even though God so anointed Peter that the sick, who simply fell into his shadow, were healed (**The Acts 5:15**), Peter is also the man, who suffered the stinging Rebuke by Jesus as he heard His Savior say to him:

Mark 8:33b

... Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.

... Peter was all of that. And so, immediately after Peter heard Jesus tell the frightening news:

Luke 22:31b

... **Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat;**

... he also heard Jesus say:

Luke 22:31c

... **but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.**

... so, after Jesus told Peter:

John 13:38

Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.

... this happened...

Luke 22:60-62

But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.**" And he went out and wept bitterly.**

So, after His Resurrection, the angel told the two Marys and Solome:

Mark 16:6&7

Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, *here is* the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.

... and Peter was granted the Gift of Repentance and the Gift of Faith, and Peter believed. And Peter was with the other 499, on the Mount of Ascension, and with his own ears, he heard Jesus say:

Matthew 28:18b-20

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

... and Peter, along with about 119 others, obeyed the Command of the Lord and he went up into an "Upper Room". And after about ten days of very intense praying, he was among those:

Luke 24:49b

... clothed with power from on high.

... and from that day forward, Peter never flinched, he never hesitated. And on every occasion, Peter opened his mouth, and like a herald, and he thundered the Word of God. And, even though Peter, no doubt, preached *hundreds* or even *thousands* of Sermons and led countless Bible Studies, some 36 years after the Resurrection², Peter was wondrously "moved along" by the third Person of the Trinity to infallibly pen down the Epistle that we are now "journeying" through that we now call "**1 Peter**".

But as we are finding out, the primary Subject in this Epistle is the Issue of "*Why do genuine believers suffer?*", sometimes *horribly*, even though the Bible promises that Salvation has forever removed the Wrath of God from them. And now, in Jesus, God works only for the ultimate "Good" for His people. So, in this Epistle, we are finding out how two, very different Realities fit together:

1. God's great Love and Kindness toward those who have been adopted into His Family.
2. The very violent, cruel, inhuman, and even barbaric Suffering at the hands of evil men.

² I didn't come to these dates arbitrarily. Originally, the designation, "AD" (Latin abbreviation for: "*Anno Domini Nostris Jesu Christi*" - *In the year of our Lord Jesus*) was used to begin monitoring time after the Resurrection. And the year, "0" would represent the Birth of Jesus. But in 1582, Pope Gregory XIII changed the calendar used since Julius Caesar created it in 46BC. This change pushed the most reliable date of Jesus' Birth backward to be between 6-4BC. Using the 4BC date- Jesus began His Ministry (at age 30) on, or around 26AD. 3-1/2 years into His Ministry- Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem- which would have been near 29AD. The Roman Emperor, Nero came to power, burned Rome, and scattered the Christians near 64AD- which was the immediate catalyst for the Apostle Peter's first Epistle. That would have made the date of **1Peter** to be about 36 years after the Resurrection of Jesus.

... and Peter visits these Issues *repeatedly*, in all five Chapters.

Now what we need to remember is that Peter was not sitting in a comfortable and safe "Pastor's Study" as he wrote this Epistle. No, Peter is right with these "scattered aliens", maybe in a tent or in a cave, or maybe even under a tree, as the Holy Spirit is "moving him along". So, Peter is not only *leading* this large group of "religious refugees", he is also suffering along with them. So, Peter was not immune to the hardships and lack of basic human necessities as he is urging these believers to *continue* to pursue Holiness *on purpose*, even though it is their pursuit of "Joyful Obedience" to Jesus Christ that has caused them to lose all their worldly possessions in the first place.

Now much has been written and discussed about Paul's "thorn in the flesh". A strange, unknown, *physical* problem that plagued Paul for the majority of his Ministry. But in Scripture, we see several characteristics of what this "thorn" was and how God used it in Paul's life:

- ✓ The "Thorn" was a gift from God, it was "given" (**2 Corinthians 12:7**)
- ✓ The "Thorn" was given to "torment" Paul (**2 Corinthians 12:7**)
- ✓ The "Thorn" was "given" to keep Paul from exalting *himself*, due to the "surpassing greatness" of Divine Revelations and the abundance of Visions that God gave him (**2 Corinthians 12:1&7**)
- ✓ The "Thorn" was a "Messenger of Satan" (**2 Corinthians 12:7**)
- ✓ God's Grace was "sufficient" for Paul to both *endure* and *excel with* the "Thorn" (**2 Corinthians 12:8**)
- ✓ The "Thorn" was equated with "Weakness", which tells us it could be seen and was evident to everyone (**2 Corinthians 12:9&10**)
- ✓ The "Thorn" *could* have had something to do with Paul's *physical* eyes (**Galatians 4:15**)
- ✓ Paul was never delivered from the "Thorn" and kept it until he was martyred.

Now when you combine these characteristics, we see some strange "combinations":

- The "Thorn" was both a "gift" from God (it was "given") and a "messenger of Satan"
- The "Thorn brought about both "Humility" and "Torment"

... and from this, we see that, in God's absolute Sovereignty, satan is merely a "tool" who is used by God to help sanctify (make Holy) the people Jesus has saved. And that tells us that satan cannot do anything on his own. He must go to God and seek/demand/request/ask/plead for Divine Permission to attack God's people. And some of the variables that satan must get Divine Permission from God to do are:

- ❖ The Permission to torment God's people (*physically/emotionally/spiritually*, etc.)
- ❖ The depth of the Torment (pain/death)
- ❖ The *time limit* of that Torment (temporary/long-term)

... so, while satan may be given Permission to torment a child of God, he is always *limited* by the same God Who allowed it in the first place. So, for example, through reading the various accounts of Suffering found in the Bible, we know that satan may be able to trouble something owned by the believer (possession/finances/ etc.), or the believer's own physical body (through sickness or beatings, etc.), or even relatives of the believer.

But satan is also limited in just how long that Torment may last. So, no matter how severe the Suffering may be, it can only last as long as the life of the believer lasts. So, no Suffering lasts forever. The only Torment that lasts forever is that which is brought about by God on those who will spend all of eternity in Hell. And the temporary nature of all Suffering is what Paul had in mind when he said:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

... now, in context, this is an example of what Paul was going through when he wrote this Passage:

2 Corinthians 11:23b-27

... in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

... *this* is what the Apostle called “**momentary, light affliction**”. Now Paul was not minimizing what he was going through. He was merely putting his own personal Sufferings in their proper context. So, by referring to these horrific kinds of Sufferings as “**light**”, he was comparing the worst that satan was allowed to do to spending all of Eternity in Hell. And by using the word “**momentary**”, Paul was teaching that all that satan can do to us is only in this life on this earth and will *not* carry over into Eternity.

So, the logic of the New Testament is that the *worst* thing that can happen to a human being is *not* that he suffers. It is *not* living his entire life as a slave or losing all his earthly possessions or being imprisoned or being beaten or even killed. No, the very *worst* thing that can happen to a human being is that he is thrown headlong into the lake of fire to be tormented day and night, forever in a devil’s Hell.

And all of this shows us the level of Control that God maintains over the Suffering of His people. At all times, it is God Who is in absolute Command of what happens to those who belong to Jesus. Both satan himself and the people involved in bringing about the Suffering are *not* Sovereign. God alone is Sovereign, and satan and the others are merely being used by God to bring about a portion of God’s Will. One of the very early Hymns that was sung by the Reformers says this:

Whatever my God ordains is Right,
Here shall my Stand be taken
Though Sorrow, Need, or Death be mine,

Yet I am not forsaken
My Father's Care
Is round me there
He holds me that I shall not fall
And so to Him I leave it all³

But what is fascinating is that, in God's Mind, there also seems to be a "Priority", or a "Hierarchy" of importance concerning the "Thorn" or the "Torment" (Suffering) of the individual. So, for example, in the Apostle Paul's case, him being humbled and *not allowed* to boast in the abundance of Revelations and Visions, took *precedent* over the Glory that God receives in *healing* His children or in *delivering* them. And from that, we can teach with great confidence that "Humility" is *more* glorifying to God than "Physical Healing" or "Deliverance" from the Suffering.

So, does that mean that God doesn't care about our physical bodies? No, it doesn't. God is Good and Kind and Merciful. And God cares that His people are physically hurting, and He is *especially* concerned if that physical pain is caused by evil men during Persecution. So, even now, with a completed Canon, God can and He periodically *does* heal the sick and injured bodies of His people. And that Healing is brought about through a number of different ways:

- A. Through the "Common Grace" of Medicine, Surgeries, Therapies, or through other natural means.
- B. Through supernatural Miracles and Acts of Providence.

... so, we are correct to have compassion on those who hurt. It is godly for us to seek to relieve our *own* pain and agony, and the pain and agony of others, using every available means at our disposal. And it is also always correct to pray and ask God to supernaturally and miraculously heal the bodies of His people, and even those who are not saved.

And when Doctors and Medicine and Surgeries and Treatments and Herbs and Diet and other natural remedies work, we should thank God and be grateful that God has provided "Common Grace" to help us

³ *Whatever God Ordains is Right*; Severus Gastorius; 1675; <https://sovereigngracemusic.bandcamp.com/track/whatever-my-god-ordains-is-right>

in this life. And when God chooses to sovereignly intervene and perform a Miracle or engage in an Act of Providence to heal or deliver people, we need to thank God for being so Good and so Kind and so Merciful.

But the Bible was written to help us understand *why* God also chooses *not* to help, and why He chooses *not* to heal or *not* to deliver, and why God allows His own children to hurt and suffer, and even die. And the Bible was written to help us to be able to worship Jesus Christ, *in* the Trial and *in* the Pain and *in* the Torment and *in* the Suffering.

So, by His Grace and through the Gift of Faith, and to God's Glory, genuine believers do not "lose heart" *permanently*, we do not "fall apart" *completely*, and we do not get mad at God and pout and take our ball and go home when God chooses to not heal us, and when He chooses not to deliver us, and when He chooses to allow evil men to hurt us. So, we may temporarily "lose heart", especially when the Trial is hot and hard. But by availing ourselves of the "Means of Grace", we do not lose heart *permanently*. So, in our Suffering God will *come* to us, He will *visit* us, He will *refresh* us, and He will *revive* us, and He will *comfort* and *strengthen* us, so that we may not fail God in the moment of our Torment.

The Bible was written and the Church was established, and Prayer was given and Godly Fellowship was created so that genuinely saved people could be *encouraged* and *empowered* to remain faithful, fruitful, and busy, even when Suffering comes our way. So, part of what it means to be saved is that, yes, we grieve when times are hard. But we do not grieve as those who have no hope. So, our grieving, our agony, our burning is not like the grief and agony and burning that unbelievers experience. The Word of God declares and we have been taught and the indwelling Spirit empowers us to believe that God expects us to not only live well, to God's Glory, but that we may also "suffer well", and if necessary, we may "die well", to the Glory of God.

And that means that the most *important* aspect of our Trials and our Suffering is *not* that they end, or that God delivers us or heals us. No, the most important aspect of our Trials and our Suffering and our Burning is that we go through it, magnifying the God Who brought it into our lives in the first place. We believe what God the Holy Spirit "moved along" the writer of **Hebrews** to teach us about the main Purpose of all our Trials and all our Suffering:

Hebrews 12:10b&11

[God] *disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

The Bible declares that Almighty God desires to share with us the very Holiness, the Uniqueness that He Himself has. But the Reality is that there are "character traits" or "habits" or "ways that we think or act or live" that we have in us, even after we are saved, that will prevent God from sharing His Holiness with us. And God could have just left it at that. But, in His Kindness and Mercy, God chose to bring Fire and Burning into our lives so that we will be changed, so that we may share in the very Holiness of God.

And that tells us that being forgiven and having the very Righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to us is *not* all that God desires to do *in us* and *with us* and *through us*. No, God wants unworthy rebels to be so radically transformed (by what He alone does for them), that they strive to *obey* God with Joy! So, they do not merely sit back on their "double-wides" and rejoice that they have been saved. No, these born-again saints also seek to *follow* Jesus gladly! They "die to self" and "live to God" with delight! And that is a Process that begins the very moment they are forgiven and adopted into the Family of God, and extends all the way to the moment of their death. And that Process is called "Sanctification", or being made "holy".

And Sanctification is a "co-operative Process". We co-operate with God in our own Sanctification. Regeneration or being Born Again is a sovereign Act of God alone. God regenerates us, sovereignly, all by Himself, without any help or any co-operation from us, at all. We contribute nothing to receive new, spiritual Life from God. God acts alone. But Sanctification or being made Holy is *not* a one-time Act of God's Sovereignty. It is an ongoing Process that involves every moment of our lives, from the moment we experience the Miracle of the New Birth until we close our eyes in death.

The point I am making is that while it is correct and right for the modern Church to pay so much attention to being forgiven and being made Righteous (Justification), I find it odd that so little is written or

spoken or sung or discussed about being made Holy. Being Justified is gigantic and deserves our attention. But Sanctification takes up the majority of our lives, and yet there is so much silence surrounding it. And I checked, this Silence is a relatively new phenomenon. The saints, who came before us spoke often and deeply about this long-term, co-operative Process called Sanctification. And yet, many today have never heard the first Teaching about it.

And this Silence concerning Sanctification contributes to *why* there are so many false Teachings and so much ignorance surrounding the Issue of Suffering in the life of believers. Because the Bible tells us that the *primary* Reason why believers suffer is to help make us Holy.

And this means that Sanctification is not *optional*. Being made holy through the abundance of the things that we suffer is not some form of "higher living" that *some* redeemed people engage in- while others (who are equally saved- can simply "opt out". No, being made Holy after we are saved- is part and parcel to why God saved us in the first place. And so, as soon as the writer of **Hebrews** told us that the main reason we suffer in this life- is so that we may share in God's Holiness- he went on to say,

Hebrews 12:12&13a

Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet...

Now talking like this to people, who are already being afflicted- simply doesn't make sense to our modern world. But this is how the Scriptures speak to believers, who are suffering. And the Bible reminds us about three aspects of our Suffering:

1. *Who* is in charge of the Suffering (God- not the devil or evil men)
2. *Why* the Suffering has come to us (so we may share in God's Holiness)
3. *What* we should do as we suffer (rejoice; strengthen hands and knees and make straight paths for our feet)

... in other words, we are to encourage believers, who are suffering, to remain faithful in the Trial; and to rejoice that they have been chosen to share in God's Holiness. And this odd, strange, biblical logic explains

why the Apostle Peter said what he said about the Suffering of genuine believers:

1 Peter 2:21

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,

1 Peter 4:1-2

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

1 Peter 5:10

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

... so, you simply can't read the Bible with any degree of honesty and not come away with the idea that Suffering is front and center in the life of a genuine believer. It isn't random or accidental. And the Suffering that believers endure- has nothing to do with a lack of faith on their part- but rather a Desire on God's Part to radically change us- so that we may share in God's Holiness.

Now the Reality is that everything I have said to you this morning is an introduction to the very first word that Brother Vern read to us in our Passage. The very first word in verse 18 is:

For...

... Peter said...

For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

... and we should see that word "For" as being the same thing as the word "Because". So, right out of the gate, the Apostle is giving us the

“Reason for”, or the “Cause” behind, why he said the rest of the sentence. So, back in verse 17, he said:

1 Peter 3:17

For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

... it is “**better**”. What is “**better**”? Peter said it is “**better**” for us to suffer for doing what is right than it is for us to suffer for doing what is wrong. If God should will it so. Now it’s easy to see why people suffer for doing what is wrong. But *why* should anybody see it as being “better” when we suffer for doing what is right? And *why* would God ever will us to suffer for doing what is right? Personally, I think it would be “better” if we were to be *blessed* for doing what is right. I think it would be “much better” to have God’s Favor for doing what is right, and that way, having God’s Favor would be the motivation to help us to do what is right. Right?

Well, evidently not. Now verse 17 itself begins with the word, “**For**” or “Because”, so verse 17 is actually trying to give us the Reason or the Cause behind why something else is true. So, to get this straight, we have to go back a little further. So, verse 13 begins this thought by saying:

1 Peter 3:13-17

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

So, Peter begins this discussion by asking, what, on the surface, is a ridiculous question:

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?

"What do you mean, 'who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good'? How about Nero and the entire Roman Government? How about the unbelieving Jews? I mean the reason we are here in this refugee camp right now with no food or water or clothing or any earthly possessions, Peter, is because we were already proving zealous for what is Good. And look what doing that got us. The Emperor Nero has blamed us for the Great Fire in Rome, and now we have lost everything we ever had, and we are nothing but 'scattered aliens'. So, what a ridiculous Question!"

But then, Peter goes from ridiculous to downright crazy by saying:

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.

"Well, we really don't feel very blessed right now, brother Pete. Actually, we feel pretty abandoned by God right about now. I mean we were all doing pretty good until you and all the other Apostles starting teaching about this 'Sanctification' thing. And when we started to pursue Holiness on purpose, all the trouble began. And now here we are, with nothing. So, no, we really don't think that this has made us very 'blessed'. I mean over in Corinth, those guys are teaching about Prosperity and Divine Healing and Prophetic Utterances. But you, you're teaching about Holiness and Purity and Suffering."

But then Peter does something that all the Apostles did. He attaches what he is teaching them in the New Covenant to what the Old Covenant said, proving that this has been God's Will all along. So as the tension is rising, Peter goes back to the golden tongued Prophet Isaiah, and the Apostle of this radical Theology ties in what he is teaching to what God inspired Isaiah to say:

Isaiah 8:9-18

Be broken, O peoples, and be shattered; And give ear, all remote places of the earth. Gird yourselves, yet be shattered; Gird yourselves, yet be shattered. Devise a plan, but it will be thwarted; State a proposal, but it will not stand, For God is with us. For thus the Lord spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, You are not to say, 'It is a conspiracy!' In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread. Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a

stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, *And* a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Many will stumble over them, Then they will fall and be broken; They will even be snared and caught." Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait for the Lord who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob; I will even look eagerly for Him. Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.

... this is what Peter was referring to when he wrote:

1 Peter 3:14

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,

... but *why* should we *not* fear people, who have the power to take away our homes and take away our possessions and to beat us and imprison us and force us out of our land and kill us? And *why* should we not be troubled for all this? What else *should* we do but fear them and be intimidated by them? Look what Peter said next:

1 Peter 3:15&16

but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

... so rather than give these suffering saints an "out", rather than say, "*Well, it's perfectly understandable why you have lost hope and care nothing for the things of God anymore. I mean look at how you have all suffered. And it's understandable that you are bitter and have turned away from God.*"...

Instead of that, Peter says, "*Get busy saints! Rise up! Put your Faith to work! You have been taught why Suffering comes to believers, so instead of becoming bitter at what God has allowed to come your way, sanctify Christ as the sovereign Lord in your hearts! And use this moment of your "Suffering for the Cause of Sanctification" as a means of Evangelism to prove that Jesus Christ is infinitely better than anything*

this fallen world can give to you. And prove through this fiery Sanctification that Jesus is infinitely better than anything evil men can take away from you!"

But, *why?* What is the Divine *Motivation* to resist every fiber of their tortured minds to turn from Jesus and to become hostile toward God, and to live in angry bitterness because of all the Evil that God has allowed to come their way? What could Peter possibly tell these people as to why they should "Sanctify Christ as Lord in their hearts?"

1 Peter 3:17&18

For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the just for the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

But, *why?* Because [For] it is "**better**" to suffer for doing what is right. But *why* is it "better" to suffer for doing what is right? What could possibly make "suffering for doing what is right" *better*, or *preferred*, or *avored*, or *sought for*, as opposed to not suffering at all? Because [For]...

... Christ also died for sins once for all, *the just for the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

So, because Jesus Himself suffered and died, He has made it "better" for us to suffer for doing what is right. Because Jesus suffered, because God allowed Jesus to receive Suffering at the hands of evil men, because of that, us suffering now for doing what is right has now been made "better". But in order to really understand this, we have to ask another Question, "*Why did Jesus die?*" *Why did Jesus suffer?*

And I suppose that if you asked 20 people that Question, you might get twenty different Answers. Some would say, "*Jesus died so that I wouldn't have to ever die.*" Others might say, "*Jesus died so that I could go to Heaven.*" Still others might say, "*Jesus died to forgive me of all my sins*". And all of those Answers would be *true*. But all of those Answers would be *incomplete*. And what makes them incomplete is because they don't give the *best* and the *highest* and the *final* and the

decisive and the most important Reason why Jesus died. But Peter gives us the Answer. Peter said that Jesus died:

... so that He might bring us to God.

So, the *highest* and the *best* and the most *decisive* and the most *important* Reason why Jesus died was to bring sinners to God. Not to Heaven, but to God. Not into great Prosperity and Divine Health, but to bring us to God. And *that* is why Jesus died.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.