

Text: I Peter 4:12-19

Title: “Glory in Suffering”

INTRODUCTION

Before we get started this morning I want to thank all of you who were part of the Faith in Action projects this weekend. Hundreds of our members were scattered out all over the city doing deeds of love and compassion in the Name of Jesus. I’ve heard reports of the wonderful things accomplished, and we’re looking forward to hearing more.

Open your Bibles to I Peter 4:12.

Our friend Peter is serving up a spiritual, Scriptural diet for some believers in a time and a place where there was really no room for recreational, casual Christianity. He was writing to believers who were going into battle every day, primarily because they lived every day constantly surrounded by people and ideas that were anti-Christian. The spiritual diet these high-performance believers needed was not the cotton candy comfort food that made them feel good. No, Peter knew these believers who lived in challenging times needed fuel to run the race with perseverance, fuel to stand firm in the battle. So if the messages in this series have seemed “hard,” it is because that’s the tone of this part of God’s Word. Today we need a serious diet of God’s Word to fuel us for the battle. Read I Peter 4:12-19.

Now there are some words in this passage that we need to see and understand if we are to get what the Holy Spirit is saying to His people in this portion of Scripture. If you mark in your Bible you might want to circle these words, and take note of their meaning.

1. TRIAL

1 Peter 4:12 (NIV) - Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful TRIAL you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

What are these painful trials? Peter has talked about these trials often in the letter. It’s clear that this is something very much on his mind as he writes to these believers who are living surrounded by pagan hostility toward Christ and the Gospel.

1 Peter 1:6 - In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

Now Peter has a specific kind of trial in mind as he writes, namely suffering abuse for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. You picked up on this as we read our text earlier. In v.13 he talks about “suffering for the sake of Christ.” In v. 14 he talks about being “insulted because of the name of Christ.” And in v.16 he talks about suffering “as a Christian.”

ILLUSTRATION – In many parts of the world today people are suffering for the sake of Christ in ways we could never imagine. There, believers meet in secret because to meet in public would mean certain arrest and punishment. We don’t have to worry about that in the

US, but it is still true that if you live faithfully for Christ inevitably you will be mocked or insulted or excluded in some way.

Now as you study this word “trials” in the NT you see it means suffering for the sake of Christ, but it means more.

- Sometimes the word means “testing.” Circumstances come our way that test us. They leave us uncertain about the future ... will we have the provision we need ... will we have the power we need. This kind of uncertainty is pervasive in our day. People are uncertain about their jobs, about their retirement income, about keeping their home, about paying their bills, about health issues. And for believers these trials come as testing.
- Sometimes this word “trials” means the distress and anguish we feel when others suffer.

ILLUSTRATION – I sat for a few minutes with a dear lady last week who is suffering in this way. Her husband has a debilitating disease, and her son had just had a heart attack. Her trial was not her own suffering, but the suffering of her loved ones. And her faith is strong.

- This word “trials” is also used to describe oppressive attacks from Satan. This can be in the form of powerful temptation to sin, or an overwhelming despair that may come through depression. We’re in a battle and we have a real enemy.

So these trials that we suffer come in all kinds of shapes and sizes.

These trials are “painful.” The word actually means “fiery.” It was used of metal being melted in a furnace in order to purify the metal of impurities. In that process the metal isn’t destroyed, only purified and strengthened. When you suffer fiery trials know that God isn’t destroying you, he strengthening you.

There’s another word that will help us unlock the meaning of this passage:

2. SURPRISED

1 Peter 4:12 (NIV) - Dear friends, do not be SURPRISED at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

We shouldn’t be surprised by trials, but rather we should receive them as part of our life in Christ.

But is that really the way it is for us? In fact, as we think about our lives and our future, we expect that everything will be great ... smooth sailing ... no storms, no turbulence, no adversity, no illness, no conflict. We expect everything to work out well for us and for our families in every way. And there’s nothing wrong with that kind of hope and optimism and faith.

But that has to be balanced with the knowledge that one of God’s great tools in shaping us into the likeness of His Son is trial and adversity. God is at work in our lives through suffering, so we shouldn’t be surprised when it comes. We should expect them. If they do surprise us it is because we don’t really understand the ways of God as they are revealed in the Bible.

When you suffer in this way, don't think it's an accident or arbitrary. God is presiding over these things in the lives of His people; it's not just bad luck. As devastating and overwhelming as they may seem our trials are not outside of His sovereign control and love.

There's another word we need to see:

3. GLORY

Suffering always comes before glory in the plans of God.

1 Peter 4:13 (NIV) - But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his GLORY is revealed.

Enduring hardship for the sake of Christ today means sharing in His glory in the day that Jesus is revealed. One day the world is going to see Christ for who He really is ... King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Everyone will see Him glorified by the Father. And when we share in the sufferings of Christ by suffering in any way for His Name and for the Gospel, one day we also get to share in His glorification. His glory will be our glory.

ILLUSTRATION – Let me illustrate this truth in this way. If you are a loyal, die-hard Texas Rangers fan, their winning the American League pennant and going to the World Series is sweet. And it's much sweeter for you than it is for a fair-weather fan. You stuck with them when they were at the bottom, when they had no pitching and no hitting. You suffered with them. You stuck with them when their manager had problems, and when the team was up for auction in bankruptcy court. You suffered with them. You showed up at the stadium when there are more empty seats than there are fans. You really loved the team and kept cheering for them, even when they kept losing. In a sense you shared in the sufferings of Texas Rangers. But now they have won the pennant, and you are sharing in their glory. And it is so much sweeter for you because you shared in their defeats.

One day, Jesus Christ, the Champion of the ages, is going to be revealed. For ages the world has been insulting and abusing His sweet Name. But not so on that day. Every eye will see and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord! And that day will be sweeter and more precious for those who have shared in the sufferings of Christ ... who have endured hardship for Him ... who have endured poverty for Him ... who have died for Him ... who have limited themselves financially for Him ... who have sacrificed for Him. It will be so much more precious on the day Christ's glory is revealed.

Now remember that Peter is writing to people who had no real hope of any glory in this life. They were harassed, insulted, thrown out of jobs, run out of town, all because they were faithful to Jesus. There was no hope of glory in this world. But they had their eyes on something else.

1 Peter 4:13 (NIV) - But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his GLORY is revealed.

Is it enough for us to know that one day, whether we get any glory or not, we will get to see our Savior finally and fully get the glory He deserves?

Let me direct your attention to another word.

4. REJOICE

Because we know that suffering with Christ means we get to share in His glory, our response to this suffering is that we rejoice.

1 Peter 4:13 (NIV) - But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

When Jesus holds out His hand to you and calls you to follow Him ... to deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Him ... you don't just see the loss ... you see the glory that you will share with Him when His glory is revealed, and you rejoice.

That's what Jesus meant when He said,

Luke 6:22 (NIV) - Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

Luke 6:23 (NIV) - "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

That's what Peter has in mind...

1 Peter 4:13 (NIV) - But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

He's saying "Keep on rejoicing *now* as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that *then* when you see the glory of Christ one day you may be overjoyed (a combination of two words in the original that mean essentially rejoicing on steroids ... mega-joy)."

ILLUSTRATION – Going back to the Texas Rangers winning the pennant. Some of you were there; many of us watched in on TV. The celebration was incredible. Grown men jumping up and down, piling on one another ... people crying ... cheering so loud they lost their voices.

But that's only a game. One day as believers we will have something really important to be overjoyed about ... His glory revealed!

Peter goes on to say that when you endure painful trials in the course of following Jesus, you are blessed.

1 Peter 4:14 (NIV) - If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

ILLUSTRATION – I think about the deacon Stephen who, we're told in Acts 6, was dragged before the Sanhedrin for proclaiming the Gospel. And when Stephen's accusers sat there and looked at him they saw that his face was like the face of an angel ... aglow with the glory of God.

You can see this at the end of Stephen's story when he is being stoned by the Jews.

Acts 7:55 (NIV) - But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

1 Peter 4:14 (NIV) - If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Note: Peter reminds us that we are not to rejoice in *every* kind of trial.

1 Peter 4:15 (NIV) - If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

Don't bring suffering into your life by living in this way. You certainly can't rejoice in that.

Not only do we rejoice but we praise God.

1 Peter 4:16 (NIV) - However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Note: Remember that the word "Christian" was not used in NT times as it is used today. Today it is a culturally acceptable word, even to the point that it has been diluted and robbed of any real distinction in terms of the way believers live. In NT times it was not a name that followers of Jesus chose for themselves; others called them Christians ... people who belong to Christ. It may have been intended to insult believers and to make fun of them as followers of Christ.

If you get treated in that way at work or at school or in your family, don't be ashamed. Instead praise God that you bear that name ... that you exalt that name and lift it high with your life and with your lips.

Now there's another word I want you to circle.

5. JUDGMENT

1 Peter 4:17 (NIV) - For it is time for JUDGMENT to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

So God's work in our lives through suffering has something to do with judgment. But don't misunderstand. We should not think necessarily that trials and suffering mean that God is judging us in a condemning way.

The church is the "family of God." And God is testing and proving and purifying His church. In fact, Peter says, "We're living in the time, the season, where God is about this awesome work."

Paul said it this way: **1 Corinthians 11:32 (NIV) - When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.**

We would never ask for these trials, but God graciously and lovingly brings them into our lives to prove our faith and purify our faith that is more precious than gold or silver. Trials are there to break our dependence on this world and the things of this world so that we will cling to nothing or no one but Jesus.

Has God used illness, or a rebellious child, or a lost job, or a broken marriage to cause you to cling to Jesus in prayer like you never have before? Oh, that's the goal of it all ... to bring us to the point where we can do nothing else but cling to Jesus.

Now there is a note of warning here:

1 Peter 4:17 (NIV) – "If it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"

1 Peter 4:18 (NIV) - And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

If God is this serious about sin in the life of His church that He will take us through trials like fire that purifies gold and silver, what will the outcome be for non-believers who do not obey the Gospel of God?

Friend, if you are here without Jesus today, you have disobeyed the Gospel of God that calls you to repent of your sin and put your trust in Jesus ... to stop trusting your own righteousness and to put your trust in His righteousness.

Now there's another word that we need to understand if we are to get the full weight of this passage.

6. COMMIT

So how what are we to do when we suffer trials?

1 Peter 4:19 (NIV) - So then, those who suffer according to God's will should COMMIT themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Jesus did this on the Cross when He said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." What was He doing? He was committing, entrusting His spirit to His Father.

The word “commit” meant to put something on deposit with someone for safe keeping. In that day there were no banks. So if you were going on a journey and didn’t want to just leave you money in a hole in the ground in your house you might “commit” that money to a friend, to someone you trust, for safe keeping.

When we commit ourselves to God we are committing our lives (literally “entrusting our souls,”) to God for His safe keeping and for His greater work. Commit, entrust, your life to God and keep on doing good.

CONCLUSION

Do you believe that God knows what is best for your soul? If you don’t believe that then you will run away from trials, you will resent them and resist them. But if you believe that God knows what is best for your soul, when He brings you into the fire, you can you won’t resent or resist ... you will rejoice.