

Introduction:

It doesn't happen often. But recently a brother strongly urged me to repeat a sermon that I presented five years ago. Since the congregation is significantly different from 2004, I decided it might be good to revisit the inexpressible joy God provides us. **I Peter** is an amazing book. Peter points out nearly 25 times in this 5 chapter letter that Christians will deal with suffering, trials, reviling, oppression, and pain. Yet, five times he says we need to rejoice and be happy. How can we have a positive mindset regarding God, Christianity, and life if we are going to go through so much suffering, especially if some of it comes directly from obeying Christ? Throughout this letter, Peter provides seven insights into serving God and suffering that can help us maintain a positive outlook and help us continue to serve God despite what we suffer.

Discussion:

- I. We are not alone in our suffering; rather, it is part of being a Christian.
 - A. **I Peter 5:8-9** said that the devil is trying to steal us back. That is the reason for the suffering we endure. But Peter also pointed out we should resist him and gain strength from knowing that this is the common lot of all our brethren. Everyone faces suffering. We are not alone.
 - B. Granted, the fact that other people have been in pain will not make ours less painful. But, knowing that we are not alone can help us maintain the strength to face whatever we must endure. Keep in mind **Hebrews 12:1ff**. We have a great cloud of witnesses who have endured a great number of things (**Hebrews 11:35-38**). Their endurance can provoke us to realize first, maybe our sufferings are not so bad, and second, if they could do it, so can we.
- II. Our suffering demonstrates that we have the Spirit of God.
 - A. In **I Peter 4:12-16**, Peter points out that suffering reproach for the name of Christ gives us great reason to glory in God. Peter points out that suffering reproach and persecution is not an indicator that God has abandoned us. Rather, it is an indicator that we have God's Spirit with us.
 - B. He additionally pointed out that all suffering does not indicate this. If I am suffering because of my own sins, murder, theft, evil or being a busybody, then I should be ashamed. But, suffering as a Christian gives me reason to glorify God, because He is with me and I can commit myself to Him, just as Jesus did when suffering on the cross (**I Peter 2:23**). Considering this, we should not be concerned when people are speaking ill of us, but rather when everyone speaks good of us and we never suffer. Jesus also taught this in **Luke 6:22-23, 26**.
- III. Our suffering increases the genuineness of our faith
 - A. In **I Peter 1:6-8**, Peter claims that the suffering we endure is a test. However it is not simply a test to see whether our faith is genuine enough. It is a test that, like gold refined in a fire, causes the impurities to rise to the top so we can skim them off. Is our faith just for show? Is it just on the surface? Is it shallow or misplaced? How we deal with the sufferings we face in life will demonstrate to us, to others, and to our God the reality of our faith. Then we can work to improve it. Without suffering, we have no idea where we need to grow. It has often been said that a person's character is not revealed until he has to suffer. When our resolve is pushed to the limits and is tested, then we learn who and what we really are.
 - B. **Romans 5:3-5** drives this home pointing out that suffering produces endurance, which produces character, which provides hope. Our hope will not put us to shame. This is not because we came through suffering unscathed proving we are so great, but because our suffering caused us to see our weaknesses and pushed us to grow and overcome.
- IV. Our suffering is only for a little while.
 - A. In **I Peter 1:6**, Peter claimed that the trials and grief were only for a little while. He repeated that sentiment again in **I Peter 5:10**. In the context of both passages, Peter reminds us of the eternal reward that is waiting for us. We can rejoice, because we know that whatever we face here will eventually pass. Even if it kills us, it will be over. Following that, the eternal glory of God awaits us in heaven.

- B. Consider, which of the following would you prefer? Eighty to a hundred years of comfort and pleasure and then an eternity of torment. Or eighty to a hundred years of discomfort, suffering and persecution followed by eternal glory and happiness? The choice is really quite simple when we keep in mind that every thing we face here will be over soon, at the most a matter of years. But eternity in heaven will never be over. Think on that when you are suffering and rejoicing in Christ will be much easier, no matter what you face.
- V. We are following Jesus' example.
- A. In **I Peter 2:21-23; 3:17-18**, Peter demonstrated that before we suffered for the faith, Christ left us an example of suffering. We can rejoice, because we are following in the footsteps of our Master. We are like Him. Remember what Jesus said to His apostles in **John 15:18-20**. We are not greater than our Master. We will not figure out some way to avoid the suffering and be faithful to God. So, when we are suffering and held in reproach because of our faith, then we demonstrate ourselves to be His disciples. That is a reason for joy.
- B. Secondly, Peter demonstrates that the example set by Jesus was not just one of suffering. Rather, it was suffering followed by glory. He made this point in **I Peter 1:11, 21; 2:4; 3:18-22**. Jesus suffered and then, because He endured the suffering, was glorified. If we follow His footsteps in suffering, we will also follow His footsteps in glory. More on this in a moment.
- VI. Those who cause our suffering will either repent, becoming one of us, or they will be judged.
- A. When we commit ourselves to Him who judges righteously (**I Peter 2:23**), we can rejoice knowing that one of two things will happen to those who oppress, revile or persecute us. First of all, our hope is that they will repent and have the forgiveness that we also have, becoming one of us and one with us. That, in fact, will happen with some as Peter taught in **I Peter 2:11-12** and in **I Peter 4:6**.
- B. But if they refuse and continue with their oppression or persecution, they will not get away with it. They will be held responsible. **I Peter 4:4-5** said they will be judged and punished. In the middle of this letter, Peter reminds us of a time when God was very long-suffering with those who were disobedient. But eventually, He judged the world with the flood. Only eight souls were saved by the flood waters, the rest were destroyed by them (**I Peter 3:18-20**).
- VII. We can see, by faith, the end result of our suffering.
- A. If we suffer with Christ, we will be glorified with Him. We can rejoice in the midst of suffering because we know where it is leading us. In **I Peter 1:6-9**, Peter made it clear that we suffer for a while, but then we will praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus when we receive the salvation of our souls. In **I Peter 5:10**, Peter taught that we will suffer for a while but that will lead to God perfecting, establishing, strengthening and settling us.
- B. This is the repeated theme of New Testament Christianity. When Paul established elders in the churches he had previously started, he taught them saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (**Acts 14:22**). In **Romans 8:17**, he wrote that if we suffer with Christ we will be glorified with Him. Paul demonstrated his own suffering and the endurance that all Christians must have that leads to salvation and reigning with Christ in **II Timothy 2:8-13**. The letters to the seven churches of Asia in **Revelation 2-3**, repeatedly speak of the blessings and glory that will come to "him who overcomes." What was he overcoming? Suffering. This is true for us. When we suffer, we can rejoice because we know the reward suffering with Christ produces.

Conclusion:

Suffering, persecution and reproach are all a part of the package. Today it seems that the normal approach to this is to somehow try to make Christianity palatable to the masses so that they will leave us alone. But if we are really disciples of Christ, we will never achieve this. After all, our Master, who is greater than we are, was unable to achieve this. Instead, we must learn to rejoice in suffering, committing ourselves to God all the more, trusting His way and proclaiming it to others so that they may also be forgiven. Keep this in mind, whatever you are facing now, it will pass. But heaven will endure forever.