

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/1/93
I Peter 4:12-16 "When You Suffer As A Christian"

Intro:

Pep Talks. Do you ever need a pep talk?

Illust:

I Peter 4:12-16 sounds like a pep talk. Peter is like a coach talking to his team. The players are Christians living in Asia Minor in the mid 60's of the 1st century.

Why did they need a pep talk? Because they were suffering.

Some new Christians receive the shock of their lives when they discover that the trials of life don't cease once you trust Christ! As Christians we aren't immune from suffering.

Jm 1:2 "My brethren, count it all joy WHEN you face various trials."

Mt 5:11 "Blessed are you, WHEN men shall revile you and persecute you..."

Peter has already had a lot to say to us about suffering in I Peter.

1:6-7 "...though now for a season you are in heaviness through manifold trials..."

2:21 "For you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example"

4:1 "Forasmuch then, as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves..."

Suffering is the normal lot in this life for the follower of Christ.

Quote: Helmut Thielicke, the greatest problem in American church...

Q: What should you do when you suffer as a Christian?

Proposition: In Peter's pep talk in I Peter 4:12-16, God gives us 3 practical instructions for how to deal with suffering as a Christian.

I. Expect it (12).

II. Explore the Opportunities (13-14).

A. Suffering gives us an opportunity to identify with Christ (13).

B. Suffering gives us an opportunity to experience the ministry of the Spirit

(14).

C. Suffering gives us an opportunity to glorify God (16).

III. Examine the reasons (15-16).

A. The Wrong Reason to suffer (15)

B. The Right Reason to suffer (16)

This morning, we come to another major section of I Peter dealing with the theme of suffering. Last week, we learned about "End Time Living." How can we live successfully in the end times?

I. Keep looking UP (7).

II. Keep looking OUT (8-11).

A. For opportunities to love one another ((8-9)

B. For opportunities to minister to one another (10-11)

Now listen. When you are serious about living for Christ, one thing's for sure. You can expect opposition. In fact, that's Peter's first instruction for dealing with suffering.

I. Expect it (12).

V 12 "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial..."

Peter's choice of words is interesting. The verb "think it not strange" comes from the greek rootword which means "to receive a guest, to be surprised by a guest." Sometimes an unexpected visitor takes us off guard! He surprises us.

That may happen with unexpected guests, but Peter says, "Don't be surprised by suffering." Don't look at suffering as if it were something "strange."

Let me clarify something.

Q: What kind of suffering does Peter have in mind?

He's not talking about the normal difficulties of life (eg--not being able to get your VCR to work, or broken air conditioners, or flat tires on the way to work; although those may be great inconveniences to us, and in our eyes may involve suffering!). The kind of suffering Peter has in mind is something much more specific. "fiery trials"--lit. "the among you burning"

Peter's talking about persecution. All Christians will suffer for Christ. But when Peter talks about a "fiery trial" in ch 4, he has in mind a very specific kind of suffering. Peter knew that an official persecution loomed on the horizon for Christians.

v 14 "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ"

v 16 "If any man suffer as a Christian"

That's exactly what happened.

When Emperor Nero burned down the city of Rome, who did he blame? The Christians. In fact, Nero lined the streets of Rome at night with living, Christian torches. Peter knew this hatred of Christians in Rome would soon spread to the surrounding provinces outside of Italy, including the region of Asia Minor where his readers lived.

Now do you see the relevance of his warning? "Beloved, think it not strange..."

There's our first instruction for learning to handle suffering. Expect it.

Q: Why are we surprised at the growing attacks on Christianity?!

Peter told our forefathers 19 centuries ago, "Don't think it strange! Don't be surprised by the fiery trials which inflict the church!" And God's Word says to us...

Don't be surprised when the world vents its anger against Christianity.

Quote: On February 1, 1993, "The Washington Post" wrote a caustic article about Christians, especially those who called the Capitol to protest the President's lifting of the homosexual ban. The newspaper referred to Christians as "poor, uneducated and easy to command."

Don't be surprised when...

Illust: Pat Oliphant drew a recent political cartoon which depicted fundamental Christians as rats dragging the Republican elephant into a mission with a "Jesus Saves" sign above the door.

Persecution is inevitable for Christians. Do you know why?

Quote: William Barclay hit the nail on the head when he wrote (257), "It is human nature to dislike and to regard with suspicion anyone who is different; the Christian is necessarily different from the man of the world...To the world the Christian brings the standards of Jesus Christ. That is another way of saying that he inevitably is a kind of conscience to any society in which he moves; and many a man would gladly eliminate the troublesome twinges of conscience. The very goodness of Christianity can be an offence to a world in which goodness is regarded as a handicap."

The point is this. Don't be surprised by antagonism towards the gospel, and towards us. Don't be caught off guard. Whatever glorifies God angers our enemy.

Q: "Ok, so we should expect suffering. But shouldn't we do something about it?" Yes!

Tran: That brings us to our second instruction. Expect. Explore.

II. Explore the Opportunities (13-14).

Did you realize that suffering affords us opportunities? In fact, suffering is like a furnace. Peter refers to suffering as "fiery trials." God uses suffering to refine us.

Illust: Walking through our woods and seeing an old charcoal pit...

Q: What kind of opportunities does suffering bring our way? Notice 3...

A. Suffering gives us an opportunity to identify with Christ (13).

V 13 "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings..."

Watch this. What v 13 says almost blows us away. The wrong response to suffering is to be caught off guard. What's the right response?

v 13 "Rejoice"// "Be glad with exceeding joy."

v 14 "happy are ye"

Rejoice? Be glad? Be happy? How can that be? Suffering affords us some amazing opportunities. The first appears in v 13.

Suffering gives us an opportunity to identify with Christ. Let that sink in.

When we suffer for Christ, we actually "share with" Christ.

"partakers" = from greek word "koinonia" = to share

You remember what happened to the 3 Hebrew men Shadrach, Meshech, and Abedego (Dan 3). They chose to obey God rather than the pagan ruler Nebuchadnezzar. And they were thrown alive into a fiery furnace, only to discover they were not alone! To the amazement of the Babylonians, who was with them? The Lord!

The same goes for us. When the flames of persecution burn all around us, Christ is with us in the furnace. May we never forget his parting words, "Lo, I am WITH YOU always, even unto the end of the age." (Mt 28:20)

Q: Did you realize that not every Christian grows to the point where God can trust him/her with the privilege of suffering?

Illust: Act 5:41 Do you remember what happened to the Christian leaders in Acts 5? They were arrested for spreading the news about Jesus. They were reprimanded by the highest Jewish court. Then they were beaten (40). And finally they were prohibited from ever mentioning the name of Jesus in public again (40).

I want you to see how they responded. They did 2 things:

- "they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name" 41

- "they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ"

Here's our responsibility. When we suffer, we need to Explore the opportunities. Suffering gives us the opportunity to identify with Christ.

Another thought. In Col 1:24, Paul says, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church."

Christ identifies with His Church so much that Paul says there is a quota of suffering. Christ suffered. And there's a quota of suffering left over for the Church. When we suffer for Christ today, we are identified with the very sufferings of Christ. That's why Christ said this to Saul when he persecuted the Christians, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME?" (Acts 9:4)

Key: Suffering gives us the opportunity to identify with Christ. Not just with His sufferings, but also with His glory (13).

B. Suffering gives us an opportunity to experience the ministry of the Spirit (14).

V 14 "If ye be reproached..."

Did you catch that? When you suffer for Christ, the Spirit of glory rests upon you. What does that mean?

Apparently Peter has in mind the Shekinah glory of God. Ex 16:7 says, "The glory of the Lord settled upon Mount Sinai." When the tabernacle was completed, Ex 40:34 says, "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." Later, when Solomon brought the ark of the covenant into his temple, I Kg 8:11 says, "the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord." In the OT, when you saw The Shekinah glory, you knew the Lord was there.

Do you know what happens when we suffer for Christ?

In a very special sense, the Shekinah glory of His presence rest on us. We don't have to wait for heaven to experience God's glory. Through the ministry of His Spirit, we can experience His glory now.

Did you ever wonder how Christian martyrs could face horrid executions with praises on their lips? Remember what happened to Stephen? When Stephen felt the

blows of the rocks, Acts 7:55 says, "But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the GLORY of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."

When we suffer for Christ, unlike any other time, we have the opportunity to enjoy the ministry of His Spirit.

Quote: Billy Sunday preached a message on "Heaven." In it he said this, "I've thanked God a thousand times for the roses but never for the thorns. But now I have learned to thank Him for the thorns." (Dorsett, 175)

Warning: Are we in the American church prepared to suffer for our Lord?

Illust: I read this week in the US News & World Report about a "religious cleansing" going on today, right now, in the country of Sudan. The country of Sudan in Africa is predominantly Muslim. There are 3 million Christians living there. The Khartoum government, aided by Iran, is planning to force Christians living in the south to resettle in the north, which is predominantly Islamic. Once there, they will be forced to send their children to Muslim schools, and forbidden to establish new schools of their own. What's more, strict Islamic laws will be extended to the south, where authorities recently banned the singing of Christian hymns and the ringing of church bells as "missionary activities offensive to Muslims." In addition to that, the government has also blocked emergency food relief to Christians, which in many cases is distributed only to those who agree to convert to Islam. (Aug 2, 1993, p. 17)

C. Suffering gives us an opportunity to glorify God (16).

V 14 "on your part He is glorified"

V 16 "but let him glorify God on this behalf"

Some people have the mistaken notion that when we suffer, God is punishing us for our past failures ("Since I'm suffering I must have done something wrong."). Granted, sin has consequences. We sow what we reap. But God doesn't make us pay for our sins by suffering. Christ already paid for our sins.

To the contrary, suffering gives us the opportunity to glorify God.

Quote: Aleksandr Solzenitsyn "...bless you prison..."

Application: Do you have the right attitude towards suffering?

First, we must expect it. Second, we must explore the opportunities suffering affords us--to identify with Christ, to experience the ministry of His Spirit, and to bring glory to God.

Tran: Now we come to our third instruction. Expect. Explore.

III. Examine the reasons (15-16).

When I suffer, I need to ask myself, "Why am I suffering?" For what reason? Because there are two reasons we might be suffering.

Not all suffering is a fiery trial.

A. The Wrong Reason to suffer (15)

V 15 "But let none of you suffer as a..."

Notice the strong conjunction that begins v 15--"But." There are 4 illegitimate reasons for a Christian to suffer:

1. Murderer
 2. Thief
 3. Evil-doer
 4. Busybody--one who meddles in things (somebody who sticks his nose where it doesn't belong); specifically, one who meddles in things alien to his calling
- Listen. Because we are followers of Christ, some things have no place in our lives. Stealing. Violence. Evil of any sort. These are foreign to our calling.

Suppose I don't show up for work on time, and tell the boss, "I was late because I was reading my Bible." And he docks me. Do I have any right to say, "Hey, I've been persecuted for my faith!"? No! That's an illegitimate reason to suffer. The problem's not my boss. The problem is ME (I need to get up earlier!).

There are wrong reasons to suffer.

B. The Right Reason to suffer (16)

V 16 "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian"

Q: Do you know how many times the word "Christian" appears in the Bible?
--who guesses for more than 100? --between 10 and 100?

A: Only 3 times!

Q: Do you know where the word "Christian" originated?

A: The name was coined by the enemies of the church. It was term of reproach, a slam, an insult.

For the first 30 years or so, the early followers of Christ were known as "believers" or "disciples" or "the Lord's disciples" or those who belonged to "the Way." Not until the church spread to the Gentile town of Antioch did the title "Christianos" take hold (Acts 11:26).

"Christian" comes from a Latin word. The pagans slandered the disciples by calling them "Christians," which means "a Christ one."

For us, of course, the term Christian is an honored name. It's a great honor to have the name of Christ associated with us. It's also the right reason to suffer.

V 16 "If any man suffer as a Christian, don't be ashamed"

Peter undoubtedly thought of the time he was ashamed. Yet he had changed. Now he knew it was a privilege to suffer for the name of Christ.

The point is this. There are legitimate reasons Christians to suffer. And there are illegitimate reasons Christians suffer. When we honor Christ with our lives, and ruffle some feathers, that's legitimate. When we offend people by our lack of tact or by our personality quirks or by self-seeking acts, that's illegitimate.

Sum: To deal with suffering--Expect, Explore, Examine.