The Glory in Suffering for Christ

1 Peter 3:8-4:19
Key Verse: 1 Peter 4:13
But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Suffering is not a popular topic to discuss. Today, we are going to talk about suffering. Welcome to the Fall Semester, IIT students!! As I mentioned, suffering is not a popular topic, as we know we all have a natural tendency to try to avoid suffering. The truth is though, that suffering is a fact of life and we all have suffered and know what suffering is. As we continue through our study of 1st Peter, we will see how Peter encourages the churches in Asia to rejoice in their sufferings. Just as a quick background, Peter is writing to several churches that were at the time undergoing intense persecution by the Roman Emperor Nero. From the text I pray that we may understand that although we all suffer, it is far better to suffer for Christ, because there is glory in it.

Last week we learned from Msn. Gideon's message that Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps. Christ suffered because he bore our sins, so that we may live for righteousness. And we know he did this, because he loved us deeply and did not want us to die, but rather to have life. When we follow Christ's footsteps, we can truly learn the depth of his love for us, we are brought closer to the heart of God, and God himself reveals part of his glory to us. Through this passage let us learn the importance of following Christ by being eager to do good, by building up the body of Christ, and by rejoicing and being overjoyed, so that we can find the glory in suffering for Christ.

Part I: Be Eager to Do Good

Please look at verses 8-9: "Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." After instructing the churches to be submissive to all authority instituted among men, he gives this final instruction. In times of suffering, it is hard to be cheery and smiley, and it is tempting to grumble and complain, or give way to despair or irritation. During these times where it seems harder to love one another, we must work even harder to love, but this is exactly what Jesus did. Jesus taught the same principle in verse 9 in his Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:18), "bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

The reason Peter tells them to live in harmony is because it is written in the law of God. He quotes Psalm 34:12-16 in verses 10-12, which, if we all can read together, "For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do

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evil." The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer. Proverbs 15:8 says, "The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him." Those who seek and pursue righteousness are pleasing to the Lord. If we repay evil for evil, we are not walking the path of righteousness, but if we repay *blessing*for curses, we will be doing what is right.

Do you want to love life and see good days? I guess the opposite would be dreading life and seeing bad days – but in order to love life, and see good days, as the verses 10-12 say, we must turn from evil and do good. Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good (13)? Interestingly enough, Prov 16:7 says "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him." Wow! The Lord has great power! This then helps us to understand v. 14: "But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." Yes, we should not fear or be frightened, because the Lord can make even a man's enemies live at peace with him. That leads us to understand that God is sovereign, and that if we do suffer, it is according to his will, and he has full control over everything that is going on.

Can we all please read v 15: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." What does it mean to set apart? We learned some time ago, that to be holy means to set apart. To set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts is to sanctify Christ as Lord, to exalt him to the highest place in our hearts. Let us do a quick examination of our hearts: what is in the highest place? Is it lunch? Is it football? Christ must be there as Lord. When we set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts, our lives fall in line accordingly. Then, when Christ is Lord in our hearts, we live to please him, we live to serve him. Then we have the power to live in harmony with one another, and have the power to return blessings and prayers even when others insult us.

Then some people will ask us: "What is the secret to your peace? How can you be so loving? How did you control your temper?" And so Peter also tells us, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." Always be prepared. This is not easy, as we all easily forget the grace given to us … so let's take some time daily or weekly, to remind ourselves the reason for the hope that we have. And it's interesting Peter adds, "with gentleness and respect." If you live in Chicago and have walked by the Old Navy store on State & Washington, you may have seen a preacher with a megaphone preaching the gospel. Sometimes he likes to tell people they're going to hell. ("You're goin' to hell!") While he is bold, he may not be preaching the gospel in the best or most effective way.

For the Christians to whom Peter was addressing, rumors may have spread about them like wildfire, and people could have been slandering them and accusing them falsely. But instead of trying to defend themselves and retaliate, they were instructed to share their testimony with gentleness and respect, so that perhaps even some of those people who participated in the gossip, when they met these Christians, would become ashamed of their slander (16). While the

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Christians suffered, by their humility they could convict the hearts of their accusers, and in this way God could use them for this purpose. God could use them according to his will. Can we all read v. 17: “It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”

It was not easy for them to understand the sovereignty and grace of God in all of this, but Peter recounts the story of Noah to give them hope and encouragement, in verses 18-22. Can we please read these verses responsively: “(18)For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, (19)through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison (20)who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, (21)and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (22) who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.”

Peter was saying this same Spirit that raised Jesus, who was God, preached through Noah to the wicked long ago to repent and turn to God. But the whole generation, the whole world at the time was wicked. Noah faced much persecution and ridicule too, but he remained faithful to God. In time, unexpectedly as people went about their day to day routine, the flood came, and all were wiped out except Noah who obeyed God and built the ark. This was an encouragement as it showed that God will be faithful to a few, and that this God of history was the same God they were serving today, who kept his promise by sending his Son to save them (and us). This Son is our Lord Jesus Christ, who is above all angels, authorities and powers. The lesson learned here also is that like in Noah’s day, the flood came unexpectedly, so also, some day, the Son of Man will come like a thief in the night. We must remain alert, faithful and prayerful. We must set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts, and continuously be eager to do what is righteous and good.

Part II: Build Up the Body of Christ

Look now at Chapter 4, v.1-2: “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.” Jesus left us an example that he died for our sins, so that we might live for righteousness. So, we must arm ourselves with the same attitude. Those are interesting words: arm ourselves. Our weapon, our defense against evil is to have the same attitude of Christ – to die to our sins, to deny ourselves, so that we can live the rest of our earthly lives for the will of God.

Look at v.3 “For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.” Here we see that some members of the church were not culturally Jewish, some were also Gentiles who had worshipped other gods, and in doing so may have participated in these idol worship gatherings of drinking and satisfying their lusts. Debauchery is a general term for over indulgence in alcohol,

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lust, etc. Carousing, in today's society is what some might call bar-hopping, or spending all night travelling from bar to bar drinking. The society in Peter's time is really not that different from the society we live in now. And so these Christians had stopped living this lifestyle – what were the consequences?

Verse 4 tells us "They [non-Christians] think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you." The Christian converts no longer joined these sinful practices – perhaps they were members of some of these cults in the past. Now that they have stopped doing these things, they were receiving a lot of scorn and abuse from their old friends. We see this happening in some other religions in other countries. There have been testimonies, for example from India UBF, where a woman was disowned and beaten by her own family members for converting out of Hinduism to Christianity.

Such people will have to give an account one day to God, who is ready to judge the living and the dead. The Lord is poised and ready, he can be swift to judge without delay, waiting only until all who are his in this world come to repentance. In this time, the gospel must be preached, and the body of Christ built up. Please look at verse 6: "For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit." The gospel must be preached even to those who are dead in their sin, that perhaps they may be awakened and repent to live according to God. Let us continue to pray for and seek and save those that are lost or are in bondage to sin. Let us pray that God may burden our hearts to pray for lost souls.

Can we all read v. 7-8: "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins." Jesus taught Peter to pray, and to love. We remember that Peter had many shortcomings as a disciple, he had a quick temper and a quick mouth, but Jesus loved him. This love covered over a multitude of his sins. In the same way, 2 of the most important actions we can do in our ministry is to pray, and to love each other deeply. Our key verse for 2010 is 1 John 4:16b, you can see it in the corner of the program: "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him." We chose this key verse so that we may remember to love one another deeply.

These things seem difficult to do, but think of how much more difficult it was for the early church Peter was writing to, under the persecution they were facing. If it's difficult for us to practice prayer and love towards one another in smooth times, it will be even more difficult to exercise these in rough times. We need everyone's prayer and everyone's contribution in this ministry. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 4:11b). God is praised because we know that all things are provided by him. 1 Chron 29:16 reads, "O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you." All that we have, all that receive, all of it comes from the hand of God, and it all belongs to Him. We build up the body of Christ through new members, and through encouraging each other, so that

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ultimately, God's name would be praised and glorified.

Part III: Rejoice and Be Overjoyed

Please look at verse 4:12, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you." I have to give credit to Dan for this amazing insight, but isn't it true, that when we suffer, often one of the questions we usually ask is, "Why me? Am I a good person? Why is this happening to me? What did I do wrong?" We think something strange were happening to us. So far we saw that suffering could come from those that hate us or accuse us, but sometimes, suffering can simply just come from the will of God. Recall verse 3:17: "It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil." So Peter corrects their understanding in verse 4:13, can we all read this together please: "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." Do not be surprised, if you live rightly and suffer for the name of Christ, but rather, rejoice. Look at verse 14: "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory rests on you." Rejoice, and I'll say it again rejoice if you suffer for good according to God's will! Listen to this example from Acts 5:40-41, "[Gamaliel's] speech persuaded [the Sanhedrin, the religious leaders not to put the apostles to death]. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." The rejoiced after being flogged!!

This is why we rejoice: if we suffer for doing good, according to the will of God, we have been counted worthy of suffering for his Namesake. It is like a confirmation that we have followed Jesus deep into his ministry. We come close to the heart of God, and we catch a glimpse of what God endured out of his love for all people. God reveals a part of himself to us, we can understand his pain and suffering, and we can become more intimate with God. It is also important to understand that the suffering must be the will of God, not our own will. That is to say, we should not go out searching for opportunities to suffer, but we should simply commit our lives to God and allow him to lead us anywhere. And even if that means suffering, we should be willing to go.

And the way to be overjoyed is to set our hope on Christ. Col 3:2-4 says, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." Our lives are hidden with Christ, he keeps them in his hand. And then, on the day Christ returns, we will be overjoyed, which I think is an understatement. I believe on that day, those who have hid their lives with Christ would be super abundantly overjoyed when he comes, because the fulfillment of their hopes has arrived. The one whom we love, know and longed for has come. And our lives, which were hid with him on earth, would then be revealed to us in it's full glory in heaven.

So then, if we suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or criminal, or even as a meddler. The suffering we receive from these are deserved, and we will receive no reward. This is to say, we

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should not suffer from our sins any longer, but we should commit ourselves to doing good. If we suffer as a Christian, we need not be ashamed, but can praise God that we bear that name. The early Christians were probably looked down upon by their society, I have heard that in those days Christians was actually a derogatory term. Shame for being a Christian was very real, but Peter encouraged them to praise God that they bear that name.

Look at verses 17-18, can we read these: “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? And, ‘If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’” Judgment begins where God has given the most blessings – in Jesus’ parables we see the principle that those who are given much, much more will be expected (Luke 12:48), and in Matt 11:20 Jesus first began to denounce the cities where most of the miracles had been performed because of their unrepentance. Judgment will begin with the family of God, with the early Christians, and also, with us.

But we do not need to be afraid if we are right with God. It may be hard for the righteous to be saved – but when we are judged and tested, we usually come out strengthened. Though judgment for the righteous can be painful, the end result is glory and salvation. However, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God, the ungodly and the sinner? Unfortunately, without Christ they cannot stand the heat and would be consumed.

Can we all please read v. 19: “So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” In God we have a great hope, and he is faithful when we remember he sent Jesus as he promised before the world began. Jesus committed himself to God, saying, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23:46). Another great example of one who committed to Christ was the apostle Paul, in Acts 14:19-20: “Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.” How’s that for continuing to do good?

Commit yourself to the Lord, and continue to do good. Those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. Let us commit ourselves to the Lord, and continue to do good. Let us be eager to do good: by living in harmony with one another, loving one another, and being gentle, patient, compassionate, considerate and humble toward one another. Let us also desire to build up the body of Christ, through outreach, praying for the lost, and also through loving one another deeply, having care and concern for one another. And in our hearts let us rejoice, if we suffer for God’s will. We may not need to jump for joy outwardly, but let our hearts be glad to bear suffering for his name, and fix our minds on heaven. Then, when he comes, we will be overjoyed, eagerly expectant and anticipating to fulfillment of our hope: the perfection of our souls in eternity. That is where the glory can be found in suffering for Christ.

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