

# **Sermon: Suffering as Christians**

**Text: I Peter 4:12-19**

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**Introduction:** There is no positive, redemptive purpose for suffering outside our relationship with Christ. Or as Alexis Shellhammer said last week in class: “Suffering people should turn to God and keep on doing faithful things.”

**Story taken from *A Godward Life* (Book Two), pp. 143-145 by John Piper:**

**David Brainerd was a missionary to the American Indians of New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. He lived from 1718 to 1747. His was a short life. But, O what a life! What an agonizing, burdened, painful life. But what a testimony to the long-suffering, severe mercy of God.**

**From entries in Brainerd’s diary we know his father died when he was nine. His mother died when he was fourteen. Brainerd died of tuberculosis when he was twenty-nine. Virtually the whole of his missionary life he coughed up blood with painful spasms. There was no cure. And God did not heal. He suffered almost relentless attacks of depression which they called “melancholy” in those days. It was like a death, and when it lifted it was glorious: “Tuesday, May 6, 1746. Enjoyed some spirit and courage in my work: was in a good measure free from melancholy. Blessed be God for freedom from this death.”**

**He was expelled from Yale a year before graduation and was never allowed to have his degree. He had said that one of the tutors “had more grace than a chair.” That was ground for expulsion in those days. So he was bumped from the normal ministerial route, became a missionary, and changed the face of history.**

**He never married and felt keenly the loneliness of the wilderness. “Wednesday, May 18, 1743. I have no fellow Christian to whom I might unbosom myself and lay open my spiritual sorrows and with whom I might take sweet counsel in conversation about heavenly things and join in social prayer” (207). “Tuesday, May 8, 1744. My heart sometimes was ready to sink with the thought of my work, and going alone in the wilderness, I knew not where” (248).**

**Life in the wilderness was hard. “Most of my diet consists of boiled corn, hasty pudding, etc. I lodge on a bundle of straw, and my labor is extremely difficult:**

**I have little appearance of success to comfort me.... I have taken many considerable journeys...and yet God has never suffered one of my bones to be broken...though I have often been exposed to cold and hunger in the wilderness...have frequently been lost in the woods.... Blessed be God that has preserved me” (484).**

**But in it all was the relentless pursuit of God and holiness. “When I really enjoy God, I feel my desires of him the most insatiable, and my thirstings after holiness the more unquenchable.... Oh, for holiness! Oh, for more of God in my soul! Oh, this pleasing pain! It makes my soul press after God.... Oh, that I might not loiter on my heavenly journey!” (186).**

**Why is David Brainerd so encouraging to me? Because God took this pain-wracked, moody, lonely, compulsive, struggling young lover of God and used him to lead several hundred Indians to eternal glory, to spark the founding of Princeton and Dartmouth colleges, and to inflame two hundred years of missionaries with his radically dedicated four-year missionary life. William Carey had Brainerd’s *Life* with him in India; Henry Martyn in Persia; Robert M’Cheyne in Scotland; David Livingstone in Africa; and Jim Elliot in Ecuador.**

**The Gentile Christians to whom Peter writes may not have experienced religious persecution before, but he begins talking about suffering for Christ not in theoretical terms, but with an understanding that the persecution in Rome under Nero very well may come to visit their doors.**

**[I Peter 4:12-19 \(NIV\)](#) <sup>12</sup>Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup>But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup>If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. <sup>15</sup>If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. <sup>16</sup>However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. <sup>17</sup>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? <sup>18</sup>And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” <sup>19</sup>So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.**

## **I. Suffering Should Not Surprise Us (v. 12).**

## A. Suffering is a normal Christian experience

“The very goodness of Christianity can be an offence to a world in which goodness is a handicap.” - Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, p. 306

Sometimes we make people feel guilty, uncomfortable, and judged even if that is not our intent.

**John 3:20 (NIV)** <sup>20</sup>Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

As Christians we should not be surprised that we have loss (describe) in our lives. The text here can read “fiery trial” (KJV) rather than “painful trial (NIV). It does carry though the idea of how fire helps to purify and refine us, to improve us, as Christians. Suffering is supposed to accomplish that in us.

## B. Suffering is the lot of everyone.

**Matthew 5:43-45 (NIV)** <sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup>But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. i.e., no special treatment for followers of God/Jesus.

Anybody can lose a loved one to cancer or accident, but who does the non-Christian have to help them go through that valley?

For the Christian:

## II. Suffering Is Cause for Rejoicing (vv. 13-16).

The kind of joy talked about in verse 13 is translated “overjoyed” (NIV) and “exceeding joy” (KJV). The word is not used by secular writers; (Grudem, I Peter, p. 60) and biblical writers use it to relate a “spiritual joy.”

This joy is what Mary the mother of Jesus expressed: **Luke 1:46-47 (NIV)** <sup>46</sup>And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

The kind the Philippian jailor experienced at his conversion: **Acts 16:34 (NIV)** <sup>34</sup>The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.

Even David of the OT where he says: **Psalm 51:12 (NIV)** <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Suffering Is Cause for Rejoicing, but Christians are not masochists.

A. Suffering is a form of fellowship (koinonia)

Family shares good and bad, happy and sad times. Our union with Christ our Lord, and Brother, is begun at our baptism. In that act of faith, repentance and confession we died with Christ. We were buried with Him. And someday we will raise with Him.

**Romans 6:5 (NIV)** <sup>5</sup>If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

B. Suffering is a blessing.

Even though it may not feel like it. If suffering is entered into properly, it can bring us closer to God. It can provide a witness to help win others.

Peter says that in our suffering for Christ “the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you” (v. 14). This is the same promise spoken through Isaiah about the Messiah (Christ).

**Isaiah 11:2 (NIV)** <sup>2</sup>The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—

The glory that used to reside in tabernacle or Temple, now, is in us! This resident brings God’s power into the equation when we suffer.

C. Suffering should not be because of unchristian behavior.

For some things a person deserves to suffer. A Christian should never be found suffering because of sinful or immoral acts.

The difference here would be like a drunk driver who kills a family member. The drunk driver deserves to suffer. Peter says:

**I Peter 4:15 (NIV)** <sup>15</sup>If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

Being a “Christian” requires that we walk in a moral and upright manner - always doing our best to make God look good!

#### D. Because of the name of Christ

With the power of the indwelling Spirit, we represent Jesus while he is away. Sometimes we suffer because we are being disciplined - because God loves us enough to correct sin in our lives.

### III. Suffering Includes Judgment (vv. 17-18).

#### A. Judgment starts with the Church.

The word translated judgment ( $\kappa\rho\iota\mu\alpha$ ) is a general term which may refer to good or bad evaluations. This kind of judgment may mean approval, discipline or condemnation is coming (s. Grudem, I Peter, p. 181).

There is an interesting preposition here ( $\alpha\pi\omicron$ ) which can be translated “from.” And the Greek word ( $\omicron\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ ) translated “family” (NIV) is very often translated “house.”

i.e., this could read:

**I Peter 4:17a (NIV)** <sup>17</sup>For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God;

**I Peter 4:17a (NIV)** <sup>17</sup>For it is time for judgment to begin “from” the “house” of God;

And you say, what makes the difference?

Peter uses the word ( $\omicron\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ ) for house only one other time:

**I Peter 2:5 (NIV)** <sup>5</sup>you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

As you may be aware the idea of house, temple and sanctuary have went through a transformation from the OT to the NT. But one thing is clear that God expects the best from his own people.

**Ezekiel 9:4-6 (NIV)** <sup>4</sup>and said to him, “Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it.” <sup>5</sup>As I listened, he said to the others, “Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. ‘Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary.’” So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple.

And how does Peter begin chapter 5? - “To the elders among you”

**Malachi 3:1-2 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup>“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty. <sup>2</sup>But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap.

B. Judgment will extend to those “outside.”

**I Peter 4:18 (NIV)** <sup>18</sup>And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

What indeed?

“The impious (a godless person, a person without true reverence for God) and sinner will, by implication, find this judgment to be a fire of eternal punishment and destruction.” (adapted from Grudem, p. 184)

#### IV. Suffering Requires a Proper Response (v. 19).

A. Christians need to “do good.”

We, as Christians, need to be morally pure and ethically straight. We need to do good to represent the only One who can be called good.

The fact that we suffer as Christians draws us into the suffering of our Lord Jesus, and should bring us even closer to His side. We need to persevere.

As a person suffers it is critically important that he not lose faith, but:

B. Remain faithful in one’s commitment.

A perspective of temporary suffering here on earth compared to eternal joy in heaven helps us weather the storms of life and remain faithful.

Lately we have seen a lot of financial institutions fail or get in serious trouble. There were no banks back in biblical times, only trusted friends. The word *commit* in verse 19 sometimes relates to the leaving of money with a trusted person for safe-keeping. It reminded me of the *Parable of the Talents*. And Jesus used this word from the cross: **Luke 23:46b (NIV)** “Father, into your hands I *commit* my spirit.” That’s faith; that’s trust. We need to follow Jesus’ example.

**Conclusion:** Suffering can destroy faith or build it. God gives us opportunities to both suffer and give him glory by the way we respond. In the final analysis we are trusting in the same God to whom Jesus said: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit ([Luke 23:46](#)).” Let’s commit ourselves to live for him - even in difficult times.

*Jump*, Stories for the Heart, p. 259 (compiled by Alice Gray)

After the long day at work in his cubicle, the young man simply wanted to go home, relax, and prepare for his next day at work. As he made his way toward the elevator, he heard screaming and saw black smoke and flames billowing out of the hallway. Panic gripped him as a succession of thoughts flew through his mind, *I’m on the sixth floor. I’ll never make it down. I’m going to die!* What he considered to be his only escape--the hallway--was engulfed in flames and impossible to navigate. As his mind continued to race, he heard fire engines and remembered that the office was lined with tall windows all across his floor. He coughed and staggered to the windows in hope of a swift rescue. Instead, when he looked down he could see nothing but a curtain of smoke covering the area. Through the smoke and flames, he realized that a crowd had gathered and along with the firemen everyone was yelling, “Jump!” “Jump!” The young man felt a cloud of fear envelop him. Over a loudspeaker he heard the voice of what he assumed to be a fireman, “The only way you’ll survive is if you jump. We’ve spread out a safety net. You’ll be perfectly safe.” As the crowd continued to yell, the young man realized he didn’t have the courage to make the leap without being able to see the net. His feet were cemented to the floor. Then over the loudspeaker came the voice of his dad, “It’s okay son, you can jump.” As the familiar voice reached the young man, he felt the grip of fear lift. The trust and love that had been established between dad and son gave him the courage to jump safely down into the net.

Do we know and trust our heavenly Father’s love that much?

Many people before us have asked the same question especially in the midst of suffering, and I am here to tell you, today: Our Lord is trustworthy.

[I Peter 4:19 \(NIV\)](#) <sup>19</sup>So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling ...