

Praise God and Carry On

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Date: 20 February 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, I don't know what kind of books you like. I myself am quite partial to a bit of dystopian fiction. Think 1984, A Brave New World, that kind of thing.

Films or books that show the world gone wrong. And almost every way that the world can go wrong has been written down, portrayed in film in a thousand different ways.

But the best dystopian writing out there, I think, and the best known is this. It should have a wee slide. Fantastic.

Great. Does anyone know where this comes from? Keep calm and carry on. It's on almost anything. You can get it on T-shirts, cushions, anything now.

But these posters were originally printed by the government to plaster up all over the country in the event that this country would be invaded during the Second World War.

[1 : 02] Perhaps you didn't know that. They weren't needed. Of course, they were put in a box, forgotten about. And in the year 2001, someone found them, and they became famous and popular.

But its origin is quite dark, isn't it? It's quite a frightening thought to think that those posters might have gone up.

And we can only take it so lightly, we can hang it on our bedroom wall, because the suffering never came true. Because if the suffering had come true, well, what good would those posters have done?

Keep calm and carry on. Give me one good reason. The people who are saying it are not in power anymore. They've lost control. What with keeping calm do?

What with carrying on do? It sounds good, but in a real crisis, those words don't work, do they?

Keep calm and carry on. Well, this morning we see again that Peter is speaking into a real crisis, but he puts a twist on this phrase to teach us something different, something that does work, and something that makes all the difference to us this morning.

[2 : 20] We've seen the people that Peter's writing to are suffering for following Jesus in a world that does not love him. We read, if you noticed in verse 12, he speaks about a fiery ordeal.

At three times in this passage, he speaks about sufferings or suffering to describe the lives of the people he's writing to. But Peter's going to tell them in that suffering, not to keep calm and carry on, but to praise God and carry on.

But what makes those not empty words, like the words of the red posters, is that the one who says them is also in control.

Did you see that? I wonder in verse 19. So then those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good.

The author of the suffering is also in control of the suffering and trustworthy in the suffering. More than that, the one who says those words here, he gives us good reasons to trust him in the hard times.

[3 : 36] And more than that, the reasons he gives us don't just keep us calm as we trust and follow him, but they keep us rejoicing, praising, celebrating his goodness, his glory in our suffering.

And so the difference is Peter's going to give us vertical perspective. Okay, what's going on down here? He's going to lift our eyes to God and call us in our suffering to praise him and keep following hard after Christ.

Because knowing that we have a faithful, faithful God makes all the difference to us this morning. And so this morning, Peter gives us three reasons to praise God and carry on when we suffer for following Christ.

Firstly, he says, because you are sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Now, if you glance down, Peter begins this wee section in verse 12 with the words, dear friends, or dearly beloved, which reminds

us importantly that he loved these people.

They are his friends. Okay, so Peter's not writing to them like a general, sitting in his armchair, smoking a cigar, miles back from the fighting in the trenches.

[5 : 00] No, he's right there with them in spirit. They are his friends. He wants the best for them. But also those words, they tell us that he's turning the page and starting a new chapter in this letter.

If you glance back to chapter 2, verse 11, you'll see that he begins the last section in the same way too, dear friends. And if the first section of this letter focused on who we are to God, chosen, precious, and the second section focused on who we are in the world, foreigners, exiles, left out.

Well, this third section is all about how we live in that difficult tension. And Peter says in short, it's all about obedience to Jesus Christ, denying ourselves, taking up the cross, and following him.

Now, the last section of this letter, the last two sermons, they were really quite intense. It was like sailing on rough sea, lots of hard teaching to take on board.

This is a little bit more like sailing into the nice, calm harbor. Okay, to take stock, take a breath, take in what God is teaching us.

[6 : 20] And so have a read with me then from verse 12. Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal that's come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you, but rejoice.

And as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. So, it says Peter, suffering has come, but don't be surprised by that.

You don't let it take you off guard as if it was something out of the ordinary. I think here in the West, we can think of real opposition as something that we shouldn't have to go through.

It's an invasion of our privacy. It encroaches on our freedom, our rights. But if you're a Christian, says Peter, not suffering is weird.

Not suffering is weird. The last 200 years have been a strange time to follow Christ because it's carried little to no risk in this country.

[7 : 27] But what these guys are going through in this letter is, he says, suffering as usual. It's normal. Now, fiery ordeal, that maybe conjures up sort of terrifying images of extreme suffering, people being burnt at the stake, things like that.

And that has happened. If you've visited St. Andrew's at all, if you've been down there, you can stand on the spot where 500 years ago, a man named Patrick Hamilton at the age of 24 was burned at the stake for trusting and telling other people about Jesus.

And Christians die in terrible ways for following Christ even to this day. But the Greek word, actually, in that verse is not to do with an ordeal, a fire.

It's just burning. And what Peter's probably doing is comparing the low-grade, everyday, non-life-threatening suffering that these guys are going through to what happens when you put gold or precious or choice metals through a fire to test their purity.

I'll come back to this later on, but the important thing to see at this point is that the suffering of these people is never going to make the headlines. It's not the kind of stuff that grabs the news feed.

[8 : 57] It's ordinary, run-of-the-mill. It's getting flack from the boss. Friends talking down to you, neighbours crossing the street when they see you, eyes rolling at the table.

And Peter says, when you go through things like that for Jesus, well, verse 13, you are participating in the sufferings of Christ.

There's dignity there, isn't there? Sharing Christ's sufferings, it's not super-Christians, okay, being thrown to the lions or being thrown in a fire.

No, this is Andrew, the teacher, getting cornered in the staff room by one of his colleagues who has a bone to pick with Christians. Okay, this is Sarah getting a warning at work in the care home for offering to pray with a frightened elderly person.

And when things like that happen, says Peter, you are sharing in Christ's sufferings. Now, how does that work? How can we suffer somebody else's sufferings?

[10 : 08] What is that about? Well, when we put our trust in Jesus, the Bible says we are, from then on, united to him. Union.

I don't know if you had a chance to see David Attenborough's latest big hit Green Planet. I love stuff like that. Plants are great, aren't they?

And one of the things that it shows is how a vine can climb up a tree in the rainforest and as it goes, it sucks its roots into the tree so that the vine is sucking the life out of the tree.

There is a living union, an organic bond that exists then between the vine and this mighty tree. And in the same way, by putting our roots down in Christ, we enter into a union with him, a living bond, so that his life flows into us.

He is how we live. Anything that comes to us from God comes through that living bond with Jesus. And we know, don't we, that in his life, Christ suffered.

[11 : 20] Of all the things that come to us, he suffered. He suffered for our sins to bring us to God. He still has. We know from the Bible, he still has the scars in his hands and his feet, even in his glorified state.

And so what flows in part from him to us is suffering. It's part of his life, so it becomes part of our life when we put our trust in him.

And that's why the hard things that we go through in life as Christians shouldn't surprise us. It's not because the world is getting worse. It's simply because we are in Christ and we are still living in the world.

So however long you've been following Jesus, a few weeks, a few months, years, even decades, whatever kind of difficulty, okay, that has brought with it into your life, know that all your suffering has been suffering suffering with Christ.

Peter's saying, you have never for one minute suffered alone. They were his sufferings before they were your sufferings. And notice the change that Peter's wanting to see in us as a result of that wonderful, wonderful truth.

[12 : 45] Instead of being surprised, he says, rejoice. Rejoice. Embrace the hard things, knowing that they're coming to you from the hands and from the heart of a loving king who once suffered and died for you.

There's freedom to rejoice in our sufferings. Now to be clear, he's not saying that we have to like pain, but rather he's saying that when we face pain for Christ, there is always a deep vein of joy that throbs underneath the pain.

Because our suffering is a reminder of the union that we have with the one who we love and hope in, Jesus Christ. And that joy that we have even through suffering, well, it only leads to more joy.

Do you notice that in verse 13? Rejoice now, says Peter, so that you'll be overjoyed when he's come again. If we learn to find joy in Christ now, even in suffering, well, says Peter, nothing can stop our joy boiling over, spilling out endlessly when he comes.

And friends, Jesus then is able to turn our tears of bitter pain into tears of sweet joy. joy. If you don't yet trust in him, isn't that very thought wonderful?

[14 : 20] That Jesus Christ can take your pain and turn it to joy. Not that you will never suffer again, but that when you do, he will give you joy while you're going through it, and even more joy when it's over.

whoever you are, whatever you're going through, Jesus can do that for you. Put your trust in him, and he will prove it to you again and again and again.

You can even turn insults into blessings. See that reversal there again in verse 14? If you're insulted because of the name of Christ, you're blessed for the spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Now, perhaps that sounds a bit like mincing words. You know, how can suffering be joy? How can an insult be a blessing? But think a bit about the logic here. It's a bit like walking up a mountain on a really tough, steep, rocky track with a really strong headwind.

We live in Scotland. I'm sure some of you have experienced that. The path gets steeper, it gets harder, it gets more painful to walk as you approach the summit.

[15 : 39] And at some point, you might ask yourself, is this actually the right track? Is this taking me to the summit? Is it worth me keeping going through this fog and wind and hardship?

Well, do I just turn back? But then, you crouch down behind a rock, shelter from the wind, you get the map out. and on the map, you see that the path to the summit does indeed get steeper and harder and more exposed.

And so, looking at the map, you know that keeping going on this path, even though it is hard, in time, you will certainly reach the top. So, says Peter, being insulted for being a Christian isn't nice. you're being left out of plans or being dropped from the team or having good opportunities taken away because you follow Christ, that is hard.

But underneath the pain, they are blessings in disguise because they serve as signposts that tell you you are on the same path that Christ has walked before you and he walks to glory.

[16:52] If you check back at the map of his life in the Gospels, you'll see it is marked by suffering, opposition, insults, then death, and then glory.

Jesus, friends, he doesn't ask us to go through anything that he hasn't gone through before us, worse even. And he guarantees that if we do follow him through the pain, it will end in glory.

And so every insult here and now, it just becomes another signpost that points the way to glory. Another signpost that tells you you are on the right path, that God has not left you.

Instead, the spirit of glory and of God, it rests on you. And Peter has to tell us that, doesn't he? Because sometimes, often, well, it doesn't feel like that.

And so, brothers and sisters, every week, every day, as often as you need to, go back and check the road map. Go back and check the gospels.

[18:06] See his life. There are four gospels. What a wonderful blessing that is in our Bibles.

Remind yourselves that this is the path to glory. as it was for him, so it is with us if we are following him.

And that is why Peter can say to us, verse 16, that if you suffer as a Christian, don't be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. Praise God in that.

Again, Peter's not acting as a keyboard warrior here, safe behind his screen. He's lived this, hasn't he? You know, who was it in our reading from Acts at the start of our service?

Who said to the hostile rulers, we must obey God rather than men. And then were beaten for that. Well, it was Peter, wasn't it, and the first followers of Jesus.

And what did they do after that beating? We read they rejoiced. They rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name.

[19:12] Brothers and sisters, this goes against everything. Everything we are taught to want and live for in this world. When was the last time you said to yourself, I'm so glad that I get to suffer for Jesus?

What a privilege it is to be hurt for naming his name. That mindset, it is not of this world, but it's the mindset that Peter wants to get into our bloodstream today.

Someone gives you a hard time for being a Christian, thank you Jesus. Someone thinks that you're weird for coming here on a Sunday to worship God, thank you Jesus.

Someone shuts you out for thinking or speaking differently because of Jesus, thank you Jesus.

Thank you for the gift of suffering disgrace for your name because it reminds me who I am.

It reminds me who I belong to. It reminds me where I am going because it reminds me that I am united to you in your suffering and your glory.

[20:31] I wonder, can you pray that? Can we, as a church, pray that prayer? Well, if not yet, let's pray that we would grow and learn to pray that prayer because when we can rejoice in what we suffer for Christ, then we know for certain that our joy will spill over forever when we see him come in glory.

And so, Bonacord, rejoice in as much as you share in the sufferings of Christ. Christ. And secondly, praise God and keep going because through the suffering, you are being tried and tested as his own.

Tried and tested. If you would read with me, please, from verse 17. For it is time, says Peter, for judgment to begin with God's household.

And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel? And if it's hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Now, Peter has a lot of surprises for us, doesn't he?

Even if we've been coming to church for a long time. Because he says there that God starts judgment day here in the church. But how does that work?

[21:49] We normally think of judgment, don't we, as something that we have escaped through Jesus. If we trust in Jesus, he's rescued us, hasn't he, from being judged?

Well, in the biggest possible sense, that's 100% true. Paul writes, there's therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Because if we put our trust in him, well, then through his death, he's taken away any reason for God to condemn us, any reason for God to find guilt in us, because he's taken away our sins.

So we are safe from God's judgment. But where does this judgment then come into it? Well, notice Peter says it's time for judgment to begin.

So this isn't final judgment. This is a kind of judging that God does here and now with us. And at the heart of God's judgment is the idea of sorting out.

[22 : 52] That's what he'll do with everyone when Jesus comes again in glory. It's what he begins to do now with his church, which is what brings us back to the burning we saw earlier in verse 12.

You know, fire is really good for sorting things out that are hard to sort out. When you put gold in a fire, it burns away the trace elements in the gold to make it purer and stronger.

But the fire has to be just above a thousand degrees Celsius to do that. That's intense heat, isn't it? But anything less than that won't do the sorting out that's needed for a pure precious metal to come out of it.

And so in God's perfect design and in his wisdom, the constant burning pressure of living in a world that doesn't love Christ, well, it sorts us out.

verse 12 tells us the burning comes to test us, that is to put us through a process that will result in a purer, stronger faith, a clearer, brighter witness, because the other bits will have been burned away.

[24 : 11] Peter said something similar back in chapter 1, hasn't he? For a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Friends, fire is purifying. And this is how God has always said he would deal with his people. Back in Malachi chapter 3, maybe a lesser-known book to many of us.

God says there, suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?

For he will be like a refiner's fire. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He will purify them and refine them like gold and silver.

The prophet Malachi, way back, is comparing Jesus to a fire. When he comes to his house, he will purify his precious people who love and worship him.

[25 : 30] And the way that Jesus does that often is through suffering, suffering for his name, so that we lose what can be lost to show that we cannot lose him, so that our faith rests more and more on what we cannot lose, that is Christ himself.

Now, that is hard. That's what Peter means in verse 18 when he says it's hard for the righteous to be saved. He's not saying that we have to work hard to be saved.

We know that we don't have to work our way into God's good book, do we, through Jesus? He means that we will go through hard things to be saved. God's good. As Paul told the baby churches in Acts chapter 14, we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

That's what the whole Bible tells us. Paul said that, we read, so that he could strengthen their souls and to encourage them to keep going. We can talk, can't we, about something strong and reliable being tried and tested.

I mean, it's been used, it's been worked, it's been stretched, it's been beaten. It's been tried and tested. Well, through suffering, God is giving us a tried and tested faith.

[26 : 54] And that is such an encouragement to us as we go on. Looking back on the hard things that we go through for Jesus, things that we've lost, things that we've suffered.

It tells us a story about where our faith really rests, not on the things of this world, but on Christ. And those tests, they strengthen us for the next thing, the next difficult time, because as we look back and see how God has brought us through each and every trial with a stronger, purer faith than before, well, we know that that is what he will do again and again and again.

You really sadly, though, for some, that process, that testing, it will tell a different story. Just where the end of those two verses comes in, if it begins with us, what will be the outcome of those who don't obey the gospel of God?

What will become of the ungodly and the sinner? The idea of suffering will put some people off following Jesus. Let me say, if you're not a Christian, there is nothing that you can lose by following Jesus that will be worse than what you will lose by not following him.

Even some who would call themselves Christians will be thrown off mid-course by suffering. Jesus tells us that in the parable of the soils. Those on the rocky ground are ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but have no root.

[28 : 36] They believe for a while, but in a time of testing, they fall away. Brilliant, you think. What good news. Jesus forgives my sins.

But then it starts to cost you friends, family, relationships, and in a time of testing, walk away. Sadly, that's also a way that suffering purifies the church, isn't it, by separating those who don't truly have their roots in Jesus from those who do.

Folks, Peter's simply saying that if being saved involves hardship, well, what will not being saved be like? Not being saved now is really easy, but it won't be in the end.

Will Jesus deal with us more easily for not obeying his gospel? No, he won't. He is a refining fire to those who love him, but he is a consuming fire to those who don't.

And so if you are not a Christian, let me plead with you, let that sorting out begin now. Whatever it costs, it is not worth leaving it until the last day.

[29 : 53] It might seem easier not to go through that here and now, but Peter hints of the far more terrible outcome for those who don't obey the gospel. These are the words of Jesus, the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many, but the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it a few.

Friends, the way of Jesus is narrow, it is hard, but it leads to life. So be sorted out now as part of God's family, not as one of his enemies later.

And in that sorting out, in that suffering, praise God and carry on, finally, brothers and sisters, because we are suffering for a faithful God. So then, verse 19, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good.

Now, perhaps you're asking this morning, why would God want to put me through suffering? But when suffering comes, there's really nothing better to know that someone is in control and that that someone is a good God.

Now, knowing that doesn't answer all of the difficult why questions. Why is this happening to me now? Now, we don't normally get to know why the bad things happen in the way that they do.

[31 : 31] But it's enough to know, isn't it, that whatever reason it's happening, it is not outside of God's control. It's not random chance events. Or worse, it's not the malicious plan of someone who has it in for you.

I'm sure it maybe felt like that sometimes for these guys. So what a comfort to know that they were not suffering according to the will of their hostile neighbors, but according to the will of their faithful creator.

You can't rest in the will, can you, of someone who wants to do you harm, but you can rest in the will of someone who wants to do you the ultimate good. You know, last week I lay, not so quietly, but I lay on a bed and let a nurse twist my finger around until it was put back in position.

It was agonizing. Why did I lie on that bed and let her do that to me? Because I trusted that she was not doing it to harm me, but so that the finger would heal and get better.

How much more then can we trust our faithful creator when he puts us through suffering for his name? There's no one that we can trust more to do us good through the suffering that he sends us than this God.

[32 : 54] We've seen, haven't we, that this suffering is rooted in a saving relationship with Christ, his purifying work in our lives, and his unchanging faithfulness, it tells us and assures us that where this suffering is all going is glory.

Glory. And so, brothers and sisters, when you suffer for Christ, commit yourself again and again and again to your faithful creator. Rest in his good and life-giving will, even if you cannot say why it has to be this way.

Commit yourself to him and he will bring you through it into glory with Christ. And don't stop there. He says, continue you to do good. Keep loving your enemies.

Keep working hard. Keep doing good to those who harm you. Keep praying for those who persecute you. Keep keeping on the right side of the law. Keep loving your family.

Keep witnessing to others around you. Keep serving God with your life. Praise God, he says, and carry on. Keep doing good because we are in Christ, because it strengthens our faith, and because our God is faithful to the end.

[34 : 17] Friends, whatever tomorrow holds, whatever this week holds, whatever this year holds, let us praise God and let us carry on. Let's pray and ask for God's help to do that together.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Faithful God and loving Heavenly Father, we do commit ourselves to ye this morning.

We thank you that you are the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, that you order our lives according to your perfect will and wisdom. And Father, we confess that we don't always understand why things have to be the way that they are for us.

But Lord, we commit ourselves to ye into your caring hands, not because we understand why, but because we understand ye. We thank you that you've revealed to us your heart, that we see in ye the greatest good, that you are perfect, and that your every desire is to do good for those who love you.

be. And so, Lord, as those who love you, we ask that ye would be our strength, Lord, that you would help us to suffer for Christ. And as we live clearly for him in this coming week, that you'd help us to rejoice, Lord, for the things that we suffer.

[35 : 48] Lord, help us to bear with insults, knowing that in that is a blessing. Lord, we pray that every insult and every way in which we are harmed would only be a signpost to Jesus and to glory.

Lord, for those who don't as yet love you, Lord, how we pray that you would lead them on this path with Jesus. Lord, how we pray that you would be their strength in times of difficulty and suffering.

Lord, how we pray that you would lead each one to glory in the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[36 : 55] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.