

Suffering for Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 July 2025

Preacher: Geoff Murray

[0 : 00] So, the passage that we have just read is a helpful place to anchor ourselves in the midst! It helps us understand our sufferings as a Christian, and more importantly, how to respond! When we begin the path of following Jesus, it is a path of great excitement and thrill and joy. But of course, our sufferings appear very soon. Our trials come, and then what? How do we respond? The person who wrote this letter, one of Jesus' disciples, Simon Peter, he is writing to Christians who are on the run, who have had to leave everything because they are being persecuted for their Christian faith. So, the question is, what now? How do I move forward in the face of this?

Well, as we look at this section and think about what Peter is saying to us, we're going to see three things. First of all, we're going to see that Peter gives them and us a reality check in verse 12. And then in verses 13 and 14, a reason to rejoice. And then verses 15 to 19, he gives us a reminder. So, let's get stuck in. First of all, Peter gives us a reality check in verse 12.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you. Why is this not a surprise? Why are we not to be surprised that around the world Christians are being martyred even today? Why are we not surprised when Christians have property and possessions taken from them because of their Christian faith? Why is it a wonder that Christians are being arrested for their faith? Well, these things shouldn't surprise us. In fact, Peter's point in this sentence is it's to be expected. It's to be expected that suffering will come for being a follower of Jesus. We read in John 15, Jesus said, if they persecuted me, they will persecute you. Paul, another one of Jesus's apostles, says in 2 Timothy 3 that anyone and everyone who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. You see, early on in the Bible, the Exodus story is God's people are enslaved in Egypt. Or you go to the book of Daniel, where Daniel and his friends are not bowing down to the cultural and social and religious practices in Babylon, and they suffer for it. Their life is at risk because of it. Then you come into the New Testament, and it continues with Jesus and his apostles. And those who Peter is writing to, they're in the same boat. If you flip back with me to the first chapter of 1 Peter and just to the opening words in verse 1, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion. So, they have been exiled. They have been removed from their homes, and they're now on the run. They have lost everything, all because of their Christian faith. You can't even imagine what it would be like to be in that situation, to have lost everything for your following Jesus. Homeless, rootless, on the run, all because of your Christian faith. And Peter's words here are a helpful reality check for those believers on the run. Don't be surprised that this is happening. This isn't a shock. This isn't a surprise as though something strange is happening to you. You know, Peter's words aren't intended to be glib here. He's not saying, cheer up, nor is it the silver bullet. You know, like all you need to realize is that this is normal, and then all of a sudden you'll be fine.

[4 : 27] No. Suffering is still as painful and awful to experience. Yet there's a comfort in knowing this is normal. This is to be expected. It's a bit like when you make the daft move to Google your symptoms, and then you read of other people who are in the same boat as you. And it kind of, it doesn't remove what you're experiencing, of course, but it makes you realize, well, I'm not the only one.

Or maybe you're speaking with other parents, with children similar age to yours, and you're expressing what is going on in your child's life, and they share a story of a time when that was true of their child. Now, it doesn't make it okay. It doesn't mean that the thing you're going through means you're unfazed at all. But it does make you realize what I'm going through is completely normal.

It's to be expected. It removes the question of, am I doing something wrong? Am I getting it wrong? Because this is par for the course. It removes the self-pity, the woe is me that I have it so hard.

Nobody knows what it's like to be me. Because as much as you may have suffered for being a Christian, none of us have gone to pay for the sins of the world.

It also removes the triumphalistic false piety that I'm the real deal, I'm the real McCoy, because I'm suffering for Jesus unlike everyone else. Because many have suffered before you, and many will suffer after you. With the reality check, what it does do is Peter reminds them, no, what I'm experiencing now is normal. It's to be expected. And as they and us are called to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus, a part of that is being prepared to suffer for following Jesus. Paul, again, in Philippians 3, he's talking about the joy of knowing Jesus, that there's nothing that compares to the joy of knowing Jesus. In verse 10, he says, I want to know Him, I want to know Jesus in His resurrection power. I also want to know Him in His sufferings, to be made like Jesus in and through my sufferings. Both go together. Knowing Jesus in resurrection power, knowing Jesus when it is exciting and wonderful, it goes right hand in hand with knowing Jesus when it's hard, knowing Jesus when you suffer for Him. Now, we do have to admit that as we are gathered here in freedom of worship, in our day-to-day lives, living as Christians, these words might feel a bit foreign, because we have been incredibly fortunate for so long in the United Kingdom to live with religious freedoms, at least legally.

[7 : 32] We have to admit that we're more or less free from persecution. Imprisonment, execution, the loss of property and possessions for being a Christian, all of that is quite foreign to us. And so, it's easy to look at a passage like this and think, well, this really applied to me. I could just sort of skim over this and pay no attention, really. But just a quick 90 seconds on this. The first thing to say is that just because we do not suffer to the same extent doesn't mean that we don't have to suffer for being Christians. It doesn't mean that we don't suffer for being Christians. Now, of course, we don't want to overplay our sufferings for Jesus. As I say, we don't know what it's like to fear for our lives just for being Christians. But it doesn't mean that we don't suffer, and it doesn't mean that our suffering for Jesus that we do experience isn't legitimate. When work colleagues or friends or family members mock you or avoid you for your faith in Jesus, when you're overlooked and discriminated against at work, for example, for your Christian faith. Now, again, to be clear, these things, of course, they're not martyrdom. We're not suffering to the point of death, but it doesn't mean it's not painful. It doesn't mean that following Jesus might, for us even today, involve a degree of cost, a degree of loss. And the second thing to say is just because we do not suffer to the same extent today, it doesn't mean that we won't suffer for Jesus to a greater extent further down the road.

And I think this is something that's becoming increasingly more clear as time goes on in the West. You see, for example, the hate crime bill that came through our parliament, the possibility of being arrested for expressing Christian views and opinions and worldview, and if someone gets offended or upset about that, then it is possible that you can be charged for that. The recent abortion buffer zone bill that came through parliament, some of you might have seen on BBC News a week or so after the bill came into force, an elderly lady arrested for peacefully praying inside the buffer zone. And then there have been times where Christians have been denied certain things because of their Christian faith. It's not uncommon for churches or Christian organizations to be denied the use of a building or a space to meet in. That has happened, even in our own denomination.

So just because we don't suffer to the same extent now as the people that Peter is writing to, it doesn't mean that it might not come somewhere down the road. And so Peter's words at the beginning of chapter 4 is what I want to finish this point on. Since Jesus suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking. Arm yourself, prepare yourself for if and when this is required of you. That just as Jesus suffered in the flesh, just as God's people have suffered in the flesh for their faith in Him, so that might be required of you one day.

Arm yourself, prepare yourself so that when it does come, you are ready. You're not shocked or surprised, what is this strange thing that's happening to me? And if you have suffered for being a Christian, be that relationally, be that at work, be that otherwise, take heart because you are not alone. You walk with countless brothers and sisters throughout the history of the church who have walked the very same path as you have, who have suffered for their faith in Jesus.

It is not strange or unexpected or peculiar. Second of all, Peter gives us a reason to rejoice in the middle of our sufferings in verses 13 and 14.

[11 : 57] And, you know, after the first point, you maybe don't feel like rejoicing, saying that suffering is par for the course. But Peter continues, as he says in verse 13, but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If

you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

And you might think Peter is living in some kind of fairy tale. Peter is just a bit naive, perhaps, to the reality of what it's like to suffer for being a believer. But Peter himself, up until he wrote this letter, has walked this road. He has suffered loss for following Jesus.

As he is writing this letter, it's incredibly likely that he was suffering for being a believer. And the rest of his life, up to and including his death, meant suffering for Jesus.

Peter was arrested with John in Acts chapter 4 for proclaiming the good news of Jesus. And after they were released, they didn't keep their heads down and think, well, we better keep our nose clean, we better behave ourselves. No, they rejoiced. They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. Peter isn't some ivory tower theologian who is so far removed from the real-life experience of what it is to be a Christian. Peter is in the trenches with those he is writing to. Peter knows what it's like. He has suffered for Jesus.

And as he writes, rejoice in your sufferings, he isn't asking something of his readers that he himself hasn't gone and done himself, a place that he hasn't been to before. Peter writes to them as he and his readers are in the thick of it, and he calls them to rejoice. And he gives them two reasons why they can rejoice, even in their sufferings, even as they suffer for being believers.

[14:10] And the first one is just simply certainty of what's to come. And the second thing is actually your suffering for Jesus is proof that you belong to God. So, first of all, we can rejoice in our sufferings because we know what is to come. Again, in verse 13, rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. What Peter is saying is that when we are able to rejoice in the middle of our sufferings, it shows everyone where our hope truly lies. As those who Peter is writing to experience their lives being turned upside down as they experience loss and hatred for the name of Jesus.

As all these things go, yet they are able to rejoice in the face of it, and as they do so, it shows where their hope rests. Because if their hope was in building wealth and possessions, there is zero percent joy to be had when you have lost your home, when you have lost your livelihoods, when you have lost your possessions, when you have lost everything. If their hope is in a neat and tidy life, there is zero percent joy in being made refugees. But if they rejoice in their sufferings, it's living proof that their hope is not in this world. How can they and how can we rejoice in our suffering for Jesus? How can looking to our future bring lasting joy to us even when we suffer?

Well, it's not simply that one day our sufferings will be over, though that's going to be wonderful. We can't wait for that day, of course. But we rejoice, as Peter says, that Jesus' glory is going to be revealed. We're going to see Him face to face in unending and incomparable joy. We will be with Him, and it will be glorious. That's why the Apostle Paul is able to write in 2 Corinthians 4, our light and momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

We suffer for Jesus. Yes, it is costly. Yes, it hurts. Yes, but that is in light in comparison to the eternal weight of glory which awaits us. The gravity, the greatness, the gladness that will be found in the presence of Jesus is so far greater than what we're going through that you can't even compare the afflictions. That in comparison, our afflictions, our suffering for Jesus are light. They're also momentary. They're brief. God gives us 70, 80, 90 years, maybe more, maybe less on this planet. And our lives can sometimes feel a bit long and drawn out. But actually, 80 years is nothing in comparison to eternity. Our 80 years on this planet is just a dot, a speck in comparison to the great lengths of eternity. You suffer and are grieved by all kinds of various trials. Yes.

[17:33] But friends, you know that it's not going to go on forever. That what you experience in suffering for Jesus has an expiration date. And that one day you will be basking in His glorious presence forever.

And it will be glorious where joy and singing are going on and on and on, where tears and sorrow and sighing will flee away. This is why Peter's readers, including us, can rejoice when we suffer for Jesus. Because we know it's not going to go on forever. Our sufferings, our pain have an end point, an expiration date. And then beyond that is eternity in the glorious presence of our Lord and Savior and King Jesus. So, we can rejoice because of what is to come.

But if we suffer for Jesus, we can also rejoice because our suffering for Jesus is proof we belong to God. If those Peter writes to aren't living for Jesus, they would have been left alone.

They would still be in their homes. They would still have their possessions. They would still be employed. Life would have looked very normal. There would have been zero cost to them. But they

are scattered. They've been forced to flee their homes and to leave. They've lost everything for Jesus. On the surface, they are not blessed at all. They wouldn't make the caption on Instagram, hashtag blessed life. It wouldn't be theirs. Nobody envies their life. Yet Peter says here in verse 14, if you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. If you suffer for Jesus, it is proof that the Holy Spirit is living within you. What a reason to rejoice, friends, in the middle of our suffering that as we suffer, we are not alone. The Holy Spirit goes with us. Suffering has this awful tendency of stripping everything away from us.

[19 : 55] But there's one thing that suffering and even death cannot take from us, and that is the presence of God with us. God is with you as you suffer for Him, as you sigh, as you groan, as you cry, as you feel at the end of your rope, the Holy Spirit goes with you.

And this isn't meritorious. You know, you suffer for Jesus, and then you get this extra special blessing of the Holy Spirit. But I think this is Peter instead saying, the fact that you are suffering for Jesus is living proof you belong to Him. Because if you didn't, there would be no reason for you to be persecuted. And it's hard because Peter isn't giving us any silver bullet. He's not giving us any life hacks. He isn't giving us 10 tips to suffer less. No, he's saying, you're suffering for Jesus. Back to our first point, don't worry about that. That's normal. And on our second point, you're suffering for Jesus. That's great. It shows you belong to Him. And it's one of these kind of weird encouragements of which there are many in the Christian life. You know, like when we're battling against our sin and we're feeling weary and discouraged, and you speak to a more mature believer about it because you're fed up, and they go, you're struggling with your sin? That's good. And it's kind of a weird encouragement because these things never remove the hard things from us, but actually the presence of these hard things are proof that God is with us. If you aren't a believer, you aren't mocked, mistreated, or hated. People love you and accept you. They welcome you with open arms. But if you're a believer who openly lives out their faith and tells others about Him, that's when things can turn.

So, when you do suffer for Jesus, remember you have reason to rejoice, even in the thick of it. One, because you know what is to come, but also your suffering for Him is proof that you actually belong to Him. Thirdly and finally, we have in verses 15 to 19 a reminder, a reminder of how we are to live our lives for Jesus in the midst of our suffering. Verse 15, if you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or a thief or any kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. Peter is saying, if you're going to suffer, don't let it be because of your own stupidity and sin. Don't let it be because of your own mistakes. Peter gives the examples of murderers, of thieves, of meddlers, of evildoers, but it could literally be anything. Gossips, slanderers, adulterers, liars, and so on we could go. If you gossip or slander or lie, you shouldn't be surprised that people won't like you very much.

[23 : 14] Peter says that if you're going to suffer, don't let it be because of these reasons. Don't let it be because of your own sin. If people are going to hate you, don't let it be because you've lied to them. Don't let it be because you're the town gossip. Don't let it be because you're constantly meddling in people's affairs and businesses and trying to tell people how to run their lives. Don't let it be because you've had an affair and you've ruined your family and you've ruined the family of the person that you've slept with. If you're going to suffer, don't let it be because of your sin. Let it be because you're living for Jesus.

And I think to kind of narrow in on a very particular focus, I think this is really helpful when we're thinking about evangelism. In certain personality types, there can be the tendency to be quite aggressive and quite combative and ultimately unhelpful in our discourse.

You may or may not have seen online these debates. There's guys that go around university campuses in America and debate college students and so on and so forth. And usually the debate's conducted quite well, but whoever is the admin of these channels, whoever puts the videos up, less helpful. The caption is usually like, based conservative destroys woke liberal student. Or every week there's prime minister's questions, and both sides, conservative and labor, will put up their own video of prime minister's questions, both claiming they've wiped the floor with their opponents. And it could be tempting, especially against anyone who causes our suffering, to proclaim the word of Jesus in the world's ways. We're not out to win souls so much as we are to win arguments. We're not so much out to convince people of the beauty and worth of Jesus so much as we are to wash the floor with our opponents.

Ultimately, if people are going to be hating us, friends, we want it to be because of our love for Jesus. We don't want it to be because we are a cantankerous, argumentative, harsh so-and-so. God forbid that we stand in the way of anyone coming to know Jesus for themselves. God forbid that we put anyone off Jesus. God forbid that we, instead of painting Jesus as winsome and attractive as He is, paint Him to be a grumpy, miserable git, because that's exactly what we are. [25 : 57] Friends, how is your faith? How is your heart when engaging in dialogue around the Christian faith? Are you there to win arguments or to win the person? If you suffer, Peter's saying here, don't let it be because you're being a tool. Let it be because of your love for Jesus.

If you're going to have a target on your back, make sure it's not a target which you yourself have drawn and strapped on your back. Now, to turn to the fearful and timid in evangelism, not just the argumentative, brash, but also to the fearful and timid. Verse 16, Peter says, if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

If and when you suffer for being a Christian, Peter says, don't shrink back, don't hide away, but glorify God in the midst of your suffering. Why? Because verse 17, it's time for judgment to begin at the household of God. And if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now, the judgment spoken of here by Peter towards believers is not judgment for sin. It's the refining process. It's the going through the flames, the fire in our sufferings to be made more like Jesus. It's a painful process. It's a challenging process, but it is the process through which we are made more like Jesus. Whereas the unbeliever that Peter speaks of, it is one of judgment for sin. And here is one of the reasons why we are not to be ashamed, why we are not to shrink back when it comes to proclaiming the message of Jesus. Because those who mock us and mistreat us will ultimately be judged for their sin against us, it's God's to sort out and to deal with. Meanwhile, you and I will be vindicated for our faith, for our standing for Jesus.

And so, the call for the fearful and timid in verse 19 is to entrust your souls to a faithful creator while doing good. Keep on keeping on, press on, fight the good fight of faith, all the while entrusting your souls to Him so that Jesus may be made known in Aberdeen and right across the world.

And really, that is where we ought to end for all of us, regardless of our personality type, regardless of how we find living as a Christian in a society which is not sympathetic to our living as a Christian. Entrust your souls to your creator while doing good. Because you know that as you walk this narrow path in obedience to God, that what awaits you is eternal pleasures in His presence forevermore. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we do give you thanks for this passage of Scripture which you've given to us, which helps us be reminded that ultimately we can rejoice in our sufferings.

[29 : 29] Because even as we are mocked and mistreated for the name of Jesus, we know that what is to come is far greater and far outweighs our light and momentary experience here on earth. And we know that even as we suffer for you, that we wouldn't be suffering if we didn't belong to you. And so, Lord, let us take courage and take heart in following you. Help us to seek you and to live for you, not to shrink back, but to live out our faith in trusting our souls to you while doing good.

In Jesus' name, amen.