

Suffer Well

Good morning church. It is good to be with you!

I don't take lightly the privilege that I have to be up here. I want to take a second and thank Pastor Rob for entrusting me to fill in for him this morning.

My name is Robbie Isley. I serve as the High School Pastor, and it is a joy to be able to do so.

I'm glad to be with you and I'm glad you are here. If you are joining online, welcome! I'm glad you are with us also; my prayer is that if you are local then you can join us in person.

Looking at the title of the message, you might be sitting here wondering why you got out of bed this morning. You might be thinking... "I thought the youth pastors were supposed to be fun and uplifting. And I've gotta sit through this message to listen to a message about suffering?"

I'm going to be upfront with you. If you were here last week...this is going to be like a giant postscript to what our message was from John last week. I don't believe in coincidence, so I must trust in the timing.

Pastor Rob preached a message from John 16:1-7. In this passage Jesus warns of suffering. He showed us that Jesus told us to never forget His teaching so that we would have something to remember and keep us from falling away. What Jesus left us is to sustain our faith.

This morning's message is sort of an "Oh by the way..."

So, let's get at it.

Please open your Bibles with me this morning to 1 Peter 1. We will be covering verses 6-9.

IF YOU NEED A COPY OF GOD'S WORD, GET THE ATTENTION OF ONE OF THE USHERS AND THEY WILL BE SURE TO GET ONE INTO YOUR HANDS.

There is an aspect of the Christian life that is no secret, we are not shy about it because the Bible isn't shy about it, I'm talking about suffering.

Let's be honest Our suffering is very real. To put it another way, the struggle is real. Isn't it?

Whether it's the struggle of relationships. Maybe you've been hurt by those closest to you.

Maybe it's the struggle of work, or family. Maybe you're struggling to keep your head above water while you play taxi from 8 am – 9pm.

Maybe you're struggling to make ends meet.

Or maybe you're struggling in your faith. Doubts are creeping in; your faith is being attacked.

Whatever it may be...your struggle, your suffering it's painful. It hurts, yes. But it should never surprise you.

My hope this morning is to show you that God says that you can suffer well. Maybe not take the pain or the stress away, but you can suffer well...to his glory.

Look at our passage with me.

⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Right at the beginning of this sentence, Peter says when you set your mind right, when you have the right perspective your joy, your act of rejoicing starts somewhere outside of the trial, and even outside of yourself.

He says, "In this you rejoice."

The question that begs to be answered is, 'What is this?' What do we rejoice in?

To suffer well...you must first

- **Rejoice in your salvation**

The "this" that Peter is pointing back to is found in verses 3-5.

Read them with me...

*³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be **born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

*⁴ to an **inheritance** that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a **salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time.*

In that, in the salvation from God the Father, because of his abundant mercy, through Jesus Christ and his resurrection, to an eternal inheritance reserved for us and kept by God himself. That's what we rejoice in.

Peter reminds the church, reminds us that the object of our joy must be our salvation.

Oh, how often we lose sight of the mercy and goodness of our God because of our suffering.

We do this in many different areas of life though...

It's a hard season in work, I'm not talking about impossible work conditions, I'm talking about a hard season. Maybe you're in charge of employees and they aren't following instruction.

Or you have a deadline to meet and obstacle after obstacle pops up.

Before too long you hate your job. You come home mad at the world; you lose sight of the blessing that it is to have a job.

You are madder at the suffering than thankful for the car you drove home in, the home you have to drive to.

The joy of being able to provide for your family has departed, it's nowhere to be found.

Or maybe you're home with the kids all day and lose sight of the blessing they are.

We are coming off summer break, if you have school aged children I know you were there with me. Telling anyone who will listen... "it's time for them to go back to school."

In the hard times with your kids, you lose sight of the blessing that they are.

Just like you lose sight of the blessing of your salvation.

It's a matter of perspective.

Where is your perspective this morning?
Are you looking inward and sitting in self-pity?

Or are you rejoicing in your salvation?

If you only have eyes for the suffering I've got I have one charge for you.

Repent. Repent of your selfishness, repent of stealing the glory from Christ and his work on the cross.

When you fail to rejoice in your salvation your focus is not on Jesus, where it should be.

So yes, the first part of suffering well is rejoicing. Not in the suffering, not in yourself, or your ability to "fake it until you make it."

Instead, rejoice in your salvation.

And we see that as we move through the text.

⁶ *In this you rejoice*, [your salvation]

though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

What Peter is saying is:

- **Allow God to use your suffering**

We see that plainly at the start of verse 7, he says "So that," which puts meaning behind the grief, behind the trials and suffering.

We all suffer. That is no secret.

You don't have to be a Christian to know what suffering is, it's all over...it's part of living in a broken world.

However, as Christians...we know there is purpose behind the suffering. When we understand that we don't just have to suffer, but we can suffer well.

But you must allow God to use the suffering. Allow him to work in your life through the hardships.

Peter says that the trials show the beauty of your faith. The tested genuineness of your faith.

It's the old analogy of the oak tree. As the oak tree grows taller the wind pushes against it harder and harder.

As the wind pushes against the tree the fibers in the trunk become fractured. The tree heals itself after the wind rips through the leaves and branches crating stress on the trunk...and it becomes stronger.

Same with lifting weights, our muscle fibers tear, we heal and become stronger.

In the trials our faith is tested, questions may arise, doubts may pop up...but when we come out the other side of the hardship and see God's goodness we heal. And our faith becomes stronger.

Peter gives two very specific ways in which we can allow God to use our suffering.

First, allow God to use your suffering to:

- **Refine your faith**

look back at what Peter says in verse 7.

"So that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire"

Peter is using the analogy of gold to convey how precious our faith is.

Gold...one of the most precious metals on earth, when it is mined, or found is not all that pretty and even needs to go through a process of purification to become more valuable.

Gold, as it is purified goes from being a relatively useless nugget of metal, or even metal flakes...but when it is tested, or melted, can be made into something useful.

I read this past week that a single gram of gold can be hammered into a translucent sheet that covers 300 square feet or stretched into a thread that is 50 miles long.

What use does that have? I have no idea! But it's more use than a 1-gram metal rock looking thing!

As gold is intentionally purified and smelted by fire, our faith is intentionally tested and purified by suffering.

Do not miss when Peter says, "If necessary, you will face trials." It is God who uses and ordains our trials. It is God who intentionally puts us through the fire...and my friends that should bring you comfort.

If you're anything like me, you might be thinking...well that doesn't seem right. Maybe you're thinking, God wouldn't do that...he's love, he's good.

Yes. He is both of those things, and that is why he will put us through trials if He chooses.

Peter tells us where the comfort comes from.

In verse six Peter assures us that the suffering is not forever.

He says, “though now for a little while.” The suffering will end. Either in this life or in eternity.

Either way, in the grand scheme of things, our life is but a mist...a vapor that comes and goes. If you are a believer in Jesus, your faith is in him, then your suffering will end.

Even the gold that Peter compares our faith to is temporary. That will fade away.

Our comfort also comes from knowing that there is a reason we suffer; knowing we are going through the refining process, and our faith will come out the other side shining like pure gold.

Because when gold is pure it reflects perfectly the image of the person looking at it.

And when your faith is pure, it reflects perfectly the glory of the author of your salvation, that is Christ and it never fades away. The beauty of your faith is something that lasts forever.

So, allow God to use your suffering to refine your faith.

Secondly, allow God to use your suffering to:

- **Increase your praise**

One more time look at verse 7.

7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

I want to key in on the last part of this sentence. “[your faith] may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In other words, your praise increases because of your suffering.

That’s what Peter is saying, the genuineness of your faith when tested by the fire will result in praise and glory and honor.

When we come through the fires of suffering how easy is it for us to look back and see what God has done?

When we set our minds and hearts on him, when we rejoice in our salvation through the suffering, we come out the other side absolutely astonished at how God brought us through the fire.

And our response. Praise.

Many of us in here either grew up in the 80s and 90s or lived through them. Young people...go watch a YouTube video to see what you missed.

Great time to grow up.

But if you grew up in the church during that time you will probably recognize the name Joni Eareckson Tada.

I remember as a young kid watching the biographical film titled *Joni*, on the “movie night” at my church.

Joni became famous after she had a life altering accident. On July 30, 1967, at the age of 17, Joni dove into the Chesapeake Bay. She misjudged the depth of the water, hitting her head on the bottom of the bay.

Joni fractured her spine and lost the use of all of her limbs. She lives today as a quadriplegic.

Joni struggled at first. With doubt, with depression and suicidal thoughts.

As a dad of four very active boys, her story is one that gives me chills and momentarily strikes fear into my heart.

But as she struggled, she would talk to her feelings. She would quote Psalm 42 to herself. *“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”*

It took time, but Joni got to a point where she relied on God and she saw God’s goodness. She even goes as far to say that she is thankful for her disability.

Her struggle, her pain, her trial increased her praise. To the glory of her Savior.

People praise Joni for how she “dealt” with her accident. For the ministries she started, for the music she made, but the truth is she shines because of the light of her savior.

As Christians we are the mirror that reflects the glory of Christ.

Do you?

As you go through your trials, do you sit in the downcast mindset, do you wallow in self-pity? Are you the forever victim who always asks, “Why me?”

Or do you look to Christ and say, “My hope is in you. I shall again praise you. My salvation and my God.”

And at the same time reflect His glory.

Increasing your praise does not immediately take away the struggle. It may not take away the pain. This is not a spiritual pain pill to dull the pain.

This is healing. Through your struggle, and after, allow God to use your suffering.

Allow God to use your suffering, to increase refine your faith and to increase your praise. But there’s more!

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

In other words:

- **Set your eyes on Jesus**

Peter commends the church for their belief and faith.

Peter is praising something spiritual by speaking about something physical.

Though you haven't physically seen Jesus, though he's not physically standing in your church as you read this letter...you believe in him; you love him.

This isn't a command for them to do something; he is praising them for something they are already doing.

Peter is moved by their love and devotion to Jesus. Despite their circumstances. The church was facing persecution, imprisonment, beating, and even death. But their faith is not being shaken.

He's like the dad who sends his child off to college and not only does the child not leave the faith, but his love for Jesus grows.

You can almost feel the pastoral and fatherly pride welling up in his heart as he pens this letter. This is a moment, not of rebuke or command to change, but it's like a long-distance hug and a whisper in the ear of a child as you hug him. "you're doing great, keep it up."

When I read this, I was reminded of a message that Pastor Rob preached...what I thought was just a short time ago. Turns out it was 2 years ago to the weekend.

The title of the message was "Believe is Seeing," from John 4:43-54. Go back and listen to it, because that was exactly what we are seeing here.

In that message Pastor Rob lays out what it is to see through belief. In our western mindset it's almost always, "I'll believe it when I see it."

Whether we admit it or not, we live much of our life with this mindset. If I can experience it with my 5 senses, then I will believe it.

We don't trust things until we have physical proof. Parents, you will probably resonate with this one, "You cleaned your room? Mmmm...let me see."

Maybe you're a person who is always late...like you could wake up 3 hours early for something and still show up 10 minutes late. You promise you'll be there on time...and the response is usually, "Ok, we'll see."

But when it comes to the things of God, it's the other way around. You must believe in order to see.

You must believe that God has a plan for your struggle in order for you to look back and see His purpose.

You must believe that God is good in order to see that he's not just picking on you and making you hurt; to see the purpose behind the trial.

When you set your eyes on Jesus you love him for who He is.

When you set your eyes on Jesus you believe in him, you trust him, your faith in Him is solidified.

Not only that, but you will experience a joy that is inexpressible.

Not happiness that is fleeting, but true joy, the choice to acknowledge and believe, trust, and love Jesus.

This joy is beyond expression. It's like trying to describe the glorious beauty of an Iowa sunset to someone who is born blind.

To fully understand you must experience it, and when you set your eyes on Jesus you will!

In the good times, in the hard times, be like the believer Peter wrote to.

Love Jesus, believe in Jesus, rejoice with joy that is inexpressible, filled with glory.

And then finally:

- **Reap your reward**

Look at verse 9.

⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Peter ends his sentence with a reminder of what is now and what is to come.

Peter is not saying that you are only saved at the end. That you have no security now and just "find out" if you are saved.

There are so many jokes and cartoons out there about people meeting Peter at the Pearly Gates to find out if they are saved or not.

Those are jokes...not reality. As believers we are saved now. Our God will not forsake us. He will not forget us.

Our salvation is secure, but it is not fully realized.

Peter is affirming their salvation now and at the same time he is saying...THE BEST IS YET TO COME!

So, there is this sense of here and now, and also a future tense.

Peter says the purpose of our faith, that has been tested by fire is the salvation of our souls.

The circumstances that you endure must be understood in light of glorious future that God has in store for us.

For now, our reward is Him. Our reward is a God that is for us, that loves us, and that keeps us.

In the future our reward is Him. Our reward is a God that is for us, that loves us, and that keeps us...but we get to experience that and live that out without sin.

And oh, what a day that will be.

Church, in this life we will suffer. Jesus is clear, all of Scripture is clear on that. But that does not mean that we are simply beat down. We can suffer well.

We can suffer well to the glory of Christ. We can suffer well and be joyful.

Set your minds right. Set your heart right and understand why.

Let's pray.