

# EXILES

LIVING IN HOPE  
1 & 2 PETER

SERMON TITLE: "Suffering as Exiles"

DATE: March 17, 2019

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 4:12-19

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Identity is an ever-present buzzword. This should especially be true for Christians. We are chosen, loved, forgiven, and secure in Jesus. But Peter reminds us of another part of our Christian identity—we are exiles. The "world as it is" isn't our home. We are pilgrims on a journey, telling others along the way about the wonderful things God has done in calling us out of darkness and into his light. And just like Peter's personality, these two letters that share his name are bold invitations to cling to a living hope in the face of any suffering that may come our way.

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Early Christianity wasn't glamorous. In many places in the first-century world, signing up to follow Jesus meant that you were willing to forsake family, friends, and even your own life in order to trust and obey Jesus. It's likely that Peter's friends weren't yet experiencing violence against them (although that would increase within a generation or two), but Peter is still direct with them about how they should process existing and future suffering in their lives.

In fact, Peter talks about suffering more than any other New Testament writer. The letter of 1 Peter takes up less than 2% of the New Testament, and yet includes over 25% of the New Testament's use of the word "suffering." But what is Peter teaching us about suffering? How should we respond to it in the world and in our lives? And how do we suffer well as exiles?

Peter uses language about suffering that is shocking to us. He speaks of it in terms of "blessing" in 4:14, and in 4:13 he calls for his friends to "rejoice in their suffering." Why would he ever say a thing like that? Nobody in their right mind would walk right into being shamed and ostracized for the fun of it. But Peter is saying that if you suffer for your faith in Jesus (4:16), the blessing of suffering is that God's Spirit has led you there to make you further identify *with* Jesus and what he has done for you. And it's likely that Peter is echoing these ideas from Jesus himself:

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely *on my account*." Matthew 5:11

So, the reason we can rejoice in *temporal* suffering is that it's a reminder of our identification with Jesus, and it points us to the *eternal* glory that we will get to share in when Jesus returns. This doesn't mean that suffering isn't difficult. It means that we can have hope; it means that we have great reason to "entrust our souls to our Creator" (4:19) even in the middle of our pain. And what Peter is teaching us about suffering is born out of the following early logic:

If Jesus is God's way of bringing heaven to earth and bringing eternal life into the temporal present, and Jesus suffered for sin and death in order for salvation like that to be available and experienced right now, then if we follow Jesus and suffer like him, we can be confident that we are being caught up into God's rescue plan of kingdom come. Because of this, sharing in Christ's sufferings is one of the loudest reminders that we belong to God, which is grounds for – verse 13 – rejoicing. Or, put practically:

If you ever wonder whether God is trustworthy, loving, or good, look at the cross before you look at your circumstances; look at Jesus' sufferings before you look at your own.

Every other approach to suffering doesn't see it like this. Atheistic naturalism, other world religions, and even weaker expressions of Christianity all consider suffering a sign of weakness. But the biblical gospel is so powerful and good, that suffering is not only not a weakness, it's also one of the strongest, strangest, yet truest reminders of God's love for you. How? Because thinking about it correctly points you to the cross where Jesus' suffering and death makes him victorious over our sin and all its ugly effects. Again, if you ever struggle to know if God is trustworthy, loving, or good, look at the cross

before you look at your situation. It is there at the cross we see Jesus as our high priest who understands our pain. He can sympathize with us in our suffering. The healing that we seek is not supremely found in escape from suffering, but in realizing that Jesus is there in the middle of our suffering with us, and he gets it. This is why Peter can say things like "don't be surprised at the fiery trial," and "rejoice insofar as you in Christ's sufferings."

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### Discussion Starters

*Have someone read 1 Peter 4:12-19*

1. In what ways do people see suffering as a weakness?
2. In view of the gospel of Jesus crucified and risen for sinners, how can suffering be seen as something we can rejoice in?
3. When suffering comes, what makes you want to blame God rather than "entrust your soul" (4:19) to him?
4. Who is someone you know who has true hope and joy in the midst of pain in their life?
5. Is it hard to look to the cross first before looking to your circumstances? How?
6. What is your biggest "take away" from this passage and/or this message?