

# The Christian and Suffering

I Peter 2:21-25

## Introduction

A.W. Tozer: 'The most important fact about any man is not what he at any given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God.'

i.e. - what one believes about God will affect our moral choices / decisions made under pressure / our ability to persevere in trials or suffering in this life / our resilience in the face of tragedy / our peace and calm in the midst of crisis / our hope in the midst of grief

Marshall Shelley was one of the editors at Christianity Today – and shared a personal life experience he and his wife went thru – and how their view of God was crucial to their understanding

He refers back to the birth of their son - named Tobiah. While the pregnancy progressed – the doctors told them one day that the boy had an abnormal heart and would probably not survive birth – if he even made it to birth. The Shelley's of course – prayed for a good outcome – they prayed for their child to somehow survive.

Then the day of birth came – Tobiah was born and alive! He had survived delivery! Marshall looked at his newborn son – he looked healthy and fine - - - Breathing looked normal. He uttered a prayer of thanks. And then things changed. Two minutes later – their son stopped breathing and the child died. The miracle of life followed by the mystery of death. When the nurse asked them if they had picked out a name for their child – Susan said it was Toby – short for Tobias – which means 'God is good'

Marshall said they stuck with that name because of their faith. 'The name was what we believed about God - but not what we were feeling at the moment. We believed that we would feel God's goodness to us again someday.'

We come this morning to the topic of the Christian and suffering

Many believers down thru the centuries - have found the Bible to hold forth a wealth of encouragement to those who are enduring affliction

One such passage by the Apostle Paul - who had endured much affliction as an Apostle - beatings / persecutions / stoned and left for dead / 5 times - received the 39 lashes / etc.

II Corinthians 4:16-18 - 'Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not on the things which are seen, but at the things which are not

seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.'

There is a forward hope always present in the Christian life

We look to God's promises / and to the fulfillment of His Word in due time

I Peter 1:13 - '. . . fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.'

MLJ: 'Hope is the measure of true Christianity, which is through and through other-worldly. Pseudo Christianity always looks chiefly at this world. Popular Christianity is entirely this worldly and is not interested in the other world. But true Christianity has its eye mainly on the world to come.'

Our hope is on the glory of heaven – the ultimate redemption of the body – the kingdom to come – Jesus will reign in glory – we will dwell with God for all eternity

Heavenly / eternal blessings are of far more value than the fleeting comforts of this world

Such truths undergird this next section of Peter's letter to the Christians of Asia Minor

They are experiencing affliction in their faith / persecution / suffering

Peter wants them to know that such things should not shock them or take them by surprise

Suffering in this world is not a sign that you have done something wrong - or that God has abandoned you - - - rather it serves as a summons to go deeper in the faith - - - looking to the Lord - who will ultimately vindicate His people

## I. The Imitation of Christ - v. 21

The big picture: Peter is encouraging his readers - who are Christians suffering unjustly / enduring affliction as a result of their faith

Encouragement is found in looking to the example of Christ

R.C. Sproul says that a problem for many Christians is that we read about suffering in the Bible - but we don't really expect it to come into our lives

R.C. Sproul: We do not face imminent threats each day to our existence or even to our sense of well-being. However, when spared from difficulties over time, we begin to expect that we will always escape hard things. Therefore, if suffering in any of its various forms - disease, injury, grief, loss, persecution,

failure - comes upon us, it tends to catch us by surprise . . . my purpose in writing is that you would not be surprised when suffering comes into your life. I want you to see that suffering is not at all uncommon, but also that it is not random - it is sent by our Heavenly Father, who is both sovereign and loving, for our ultimate good. Indeed, I want you to understand that suffering is a vocation, a calling from God.'

Sproul picks up on this point being made by Peter  
Suffering in the life of the believer - - - in the path of righteousness - - - is a calling from God

Corrie Ten Boom speaks of the time that she spent in the concentration camp - Ravensbruck - she and her sister Betsi. [where they were sent for harboring Jews] It was a time of great suffering - random beatings / psychological abuse / deprivation / disease / possessions taken from them

But she recalls one day

Corrie Ten Boom: 'One morning I was sitting on my bed looking around. Through the rows of beds I could see Betsie, sitting on a stool near the window, mending. There was something homelike about the way she sat there. Her face was so peaceful and sweet. We were already adjusting ourselves to this strange life. The pleasant atmosphere which Betsie always seemed to create about her at home had not left her even here. Precisely and neatly she mended our garments with needle and thread borrowed from a friend. God had called us to this place, and here was now our task.'

She recognized a kind of calling of God even there - in such circumstances - to live for Jesus there

God had not abandoned them - - - but given them an assignment

You have been given an assignment - - - 'live for Jesus where you are - right now'  
The circumstances / the situation / various trials / challenges - - - that's your assignment

God says: 'Live for Jesus in this'

Some of his readers are encountering suffering as they seek to live obedient lives to their Lord

Peter tells them not to buckle under it or run from it but to embrace it as part of their Christian calling!

These various circumstances and trials of life - - - things you have no real control over - - -  
You did not choose such - - - but it has come to you - - - and therefore becomes part of your  
assignment from God - embrace it as your calling

R.C. Sproul: 'Suffering becomes bearable when we understand that we are in  
that state by the providence of God, and therefore, at that time, it is our  
vocation.'

Ecclesiastes 7:14 - 'In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of  
adversity - consider - God has made the one as well as the other.'

We can apply this to the issue of our own mortality - or to the death of a loved one

We all know that death will come to each of us someday

And - how we approach that event will to a large extent reflect our faith and trust in God

Suppose the doctor comes and says, 'You have 6 months to live'

You did not choose that - but it has come to you

Sproul: 'When the summons comes, we can respond in many ways. We can  
become angry, bitter, terrified. But if we see it as a call from God and not a  
threat from Satan, we are far more prepared to cope with its difficulties.'

Christians who know they are on their last leg - want to honor God in their passing

Kelly Kullberg - spoke of a dear saint who was on her last leg in her battle with cancer - - -  
this woman had prayed and worked with different campus ministries over the years [the  
Veritas Forum]

Kelly asked her - 'How can we pray for you?'

Her peaceful response: 'Just give thanks' - God is good

Embracing her call - enabled her to focus on what she had to be grateful for

R.C. Sproul: 'Our divine vocation is not ultimately to suffering, but to a hope  
that triumphs over suffering. It is the hope of our future inheritance with  
Christ . . . the hope of eternal joy in the presence of Christ.'

Peter is turning our attention to Christ - as the model in unjust suffering

David Jeremiah: 'Christ is the example for everything in life - including the reality of suffering and the Christian's response to it. He endured and did not retaliate verbally but did what was right and committed the results to the Lord, who judges righteously.'

## II. The Righteous Sufferer - vv. 22-23

Jesus is the perfect model of patient endurance in unjust suffering

Jesus suffered and died - though He committed no sin

He did not return evil for evil

Jesus' patience and calm in the midst of suffering is our example

He embraced His suffering within the larger purposes of the will of God

In the Garden He prayed

**Matthew 26:39 - 'And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will but as Thou wilt."**

He endured the cross - despising the shame - because of the joy set before Him of bringing about redemption

He was mocked, spit upon – crown of thorns – beat with fists – whipped – verbally abused and insulted – nailed to a cross

How did He respond?

He didn't revile in return – curse those who were causing His pain

He uttered no threats

He entrusted Himself to God who judges righteously

The righteous sufferer has confidence that God will vindicate him in due time - or bring good out from it

**I Peter 5:10 - 'And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.'**

This was demonstrated in the life of David

He faced a period of great trial / essentially persecuted by King Saul - - - but David refused to retaliate - or return insult for insult

David refused to take any kind of vengeance out on Saul - - - who had been pursuing him with his army

### **I Samuel 24:1-7**

David is on the run from Saul

Saul takes 3000 men - on a seek and destroy mission to find David

David had been a faithful warrior in Israel - killed Goliath - brought about a great victory for Israel - - - now he is being unjustly pursued by Saul

But - David refuses to stretch out his hand against Saul - and put him to death

He is not going to return evil for evil

### **I Samuel 24:8-12**

Note v. 12

**I Samuel 24:12 - 'May the Lord judge between you and me, and may the Lord avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you.'**

David says - I am leaving you in the hands of God

David doesn't say: 'Saul - you are a weasel - I hope you die a horrible death - - - next time I see you - - - will do more than clip the edge of your robe!'

Why didn't he respond that way? It's human nature / sin nature

He brought his view of God into the picture - - - and God is the just judge over all

David entrusted circumstances into the hand of the Lord

### **I Samuel 24:17**

Saul acknowledged David's righteous character

Many Christians - not too long after Peter wrote his letter - would face the possibility of being martyred for the faith - under Nero

Peter providentially prepared them for that period by reminding them of the example of Jesus

One famous martyr in church history:

John Huss - considered the 2<sup>nd</sup> figure in the Reformation of the church - behind that of John Wycliffe

Both Wycliffe and Huss - lived years before Luther [Wycliffe - 14<sup>th</sup> century / Huss - 15<sup>th</sup>] - -  
- it was not until Luther came along 100 years after Hus - that the Reformation exploded in Europe

Huss was a priest in Prague - who thru his study of the Scriptures came to evangelical views - he embraced justification by faith - rejected the practice of indulgences - - - he rejected the papacy - argued against simony - - - where payments were made for church office / etc.

In April 1415 - - - Huss was eventually declared a heretic and burned at the stake. A paper crown was placed on his head – decorated with painted devils on it. [the church was run by kindergartners!]

Huss responded to the insult,

John Huss: 'My Lord Jesus Christ, for my sake wore a crown of thorns; why should not I then for His sake wear this light crown?'

It is said that he also made a prediction about the future:

John Huss: "Today, you are burning a goose; however, a hundred years from now, you will be able to hear a swan sing; you will not burn it, you will have to listen to him."

That swan was Martin Luther - who nailed his 95 theses - on October 31, 1517

When Luther began teaching evangelical doctrines - he was accused of being a Hussite

Huss looked to the example of Christ

Jesus endured mocking by the soldiers / random insults from passersby - as well as from some of the religious leaders - - - and even one of those crucified nearby

**Luke 23:39-42**

One thief is railing against Jesus

The other sees the righteous character of Jesus - and puts His faith in Him

Jesus knew the Father would vindicate Him according to His perfect and holy justice

Romans 12:19 - 'Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.'

Every sin in the universe will either be covered by the blood of Christ - or repaid by God's justice upon the sinner in judgment

### III. The Sin Bearing Redeemer - vv. 24-25

The sufferings of Christ were purposeful - in that He provided redemption for sinners

Jesus didn't just come to be an example of righteous behavior - - - but to bear our sins on the cross

Isaiah 53:5 - 'But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.' [kjv]

Isaiah 53:6 - 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.' [kjv]

Christ's sufferings were redemptive - on our behalf

We are like sheep who have wandered away from the Shepherd

Thomas Schreiner: 'The purpose of Christ's death was not merely to provide forgiveness but to empower His people to live for righteousness.'

Dying to sin - we have been set free from sin's guilt and its power

We are to sever ties with wicked practices and associations - live to righteousness

Peter makes use of the imagery found in Isaiah 53 - we are like sheep going astray

Our Shepherd leads us back to the green pastures

### Conclusion

In the olden days – Saturday newspapers would often carry the sermon topics for the next day in some of the larger churches in town. In Norfolk, VA – a reverend Williams of Fairmont Park Methodist Church picked up his phone and called the local paper to give them his sermon topic.

“The Lord is My Shepherd” – he said. The person on the other end said, ‘Is that all?’ Reverend Williams replied: ‘that’s enough’. The next day the church page carried his sermon topic: ‘The Lord is my Shepherd – that’s enough’

If you have the Lord for your Shepherd – you have all you need

Whatever your circumstances this morning - take them as your assignment from God - - - and follow the Shepherd

Jesus said:

John 10:11- 'I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.'