

Pentecost 17
1 Peter 4:12-19
September 27, 2009

Peter actually spends much of this entire inspired letter encouraging Christians in regard to suffering as Christians. This is sometimes called cross carrying. Peter refers to it in several ways – painful trials, tests, suffering as participating Christians, suffering according to God's will, even participating in the sufferings of Christ.

This is a basic teaching of Jesus. Scripture deals with it and illustrates it often.

We do not somehow 'get' this matter of suffering as Christians because of Jesus. There is much about God, about ourselves, and about eternal salvation that we will never 'get' either.

Suffering Because of Our Connection to Christ Jesus Is a Blessing for Us.

Such suffering is a blessing for us because it keeps us connected to Jesus our Savior by faith.

As is the case with everything about the Christian faith, Jesus Himself is at the bottom, center and top of this whole matter.

How did Jesus accomplish saving us from our sin, from death and from satan and his kingdom of darkness? He did it by humbling Himself, making Himself a Servant – not only Servant of His heavenly Father but also our Servant, a Servant of all lost sinners.

How much of a Servant did Jesus make Himself? Well, He is God. He made Himself one of us, a human being. He placed Himself under suffering, suffering at the hands of sinners and suffering under the holy justice of God for all of humanity's sin and guilt. All of that reached its culmination, aim and goal on the cross, where Jesus gave His life as a perfect sacrifice, but appearing as a criminal, jeered, mocked, insulted, abused.

Jesus did that because that is what the Father sent Him here to do, because that was the only way the satanic struggle hold of sin and death on all people could be broken. God had to do it for us. But in order to do it, God had to die for us sinners as our Substitute, in our place. Jesus is God in the flesh, able to suffer and die for all!

As He did it, suffering more than anyone can even imagine – suffering eternal hell for each and every one of the billions of sinners of all time – Jesus just committed Himself to His Father's will and to His just judgment.

Easter Sunday, Jesus' bright ascension to the almighty, eternal and everywhere present right hand of God the Father Almighty, let us know certainly that Jesus accomplished our forgiveness, defeated death and the grave and opened heaven's gates to eternal life for all people.

Every Christian has been called by faith in this Savior to follow Christ's steps through suffering to cross to glory. Suffering and cross help is deny our sinful self, purify our faith in Jesus, and give us the joy of being in fellowship with Jesus. The goal of our faith in Jesus is the glory to be revealed on the last day r revealed to each believer on his/her last day.

The goal is the crown of glory that will never fade away. God has called us to His eternal glory in Christ. But Christ, God in the flesh, entered that glory through suffering and death, then by resurrection and ascension.

We will enter Christ's glory only as we follow Christ through suffering, insult and humility, then by resurrection and ascension.

Suffering according to God's will blesses us because it helps us against our old sinful self, too. This is important because our original sinful self is self, is there all the time and does always want to take over and control us again. That would mean death to faith in Jesus; that would mean eternal death again.

Peter says when we suffer we should think of it as a beginning of God's judgment with God's people. As we endure trials, persecution and sometimes, the more difficult to hear, insults and put downs because we trust in Jesus and believe His Word to be the absolute truth, we will understand better how awful, hateful and cruel satan, sin and unbelief are. These sufferings will also drive us again and again to Jesus' strength, help, forgiveness, that will purify and strengthen our faith in Him. We get to know that, when we are weak, then we are truly strong in or Savior. We are glad God judges our sinfulness now to rescue us from the final judgment. Unbelievers will not escape condemnation. Believers will. It's short trials now, eternal glory later, or it is short pleasures now but eternal hell later.

We may endure lies and slander and false accusations and insults and put downs of unbelievers now, but this only identifies unbelievers as unbelievers and identifies believers with Christ who was treated the same way. Yes, we participate in the sufferings of Christ with joy because we know we will also participate in Christ's eternal glories. Of certain, professors at universities and colleges call you ignorant because you believe the Bible is the truth, rejoice that the Holy Spirit of God and of glory rests on you. It is by the Spirit's power and working in the Gospel, that makes you one of Christ's people by faith.

These sufferings for Christ teach us to say 'No' to satan. Satan lies. He loves to hurt Christians. He wants to destroy all of them. He tries to interpret every cross we carry as God hating us. But the cross defeated satan and hell. Our crosses connect us to Jesus' cross. Our crosses remind us of how Jesus has rescued us. When suffering, place all your anxiety on God because God cares for us.

When we suffer and learn to rejoice in it because we know we are following Jesus to heaven, others will see our joy, our strength, our trust. That's some of that light that Jesus talks about. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." If they end up glorifying our Father, that means they have also begun trusting in Him for Jesus' sake. You see, when we trustingly, even joyfully, suffer with our Savior, that may get others to check out Jesus, the only source of our joy, our strength, our patience. They may for awhile accuse and slander us but will see our good works. Some of them may come to glorify God. That's why Peter says, even when we suffer for doing good, the suffering ought only to keep us doing good.

Suffering because of our connection to Jesus is a Blessing for us, maybe a blessing for others, and brings glory to God. Amen.