

SERIES: "THE RICHES OF SALVATION"**MESSAGE #5****"PAIN AND SALVATION" Part 1****I Peter 1:5-7**

"Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

A farmer was driving his pickup with his dog in the seat next to him and a horse trailer in tow behind him. On a dangerous curve, the farmer was forced off the road by a large truck. A highway patrolman happened upon the accident and quickly assessed the damages. When he saw that the dog and horse were suffering, the patrolman pulled out his revolver and put them out of their misery. He then walked over to the farmer and asked, "How are you doing?" The farmer looked at the smoking pistol and then quickly replied, "I've never felt better in my life!"

Although a lot of us pretend we've never been better, the truth is that we do have troubles and trials. Even though we are saved sealed, sanctified and certified for heaven, we do experience suffering. Therefore, I will address this subject in several messages because we live in a horizon to horizon world of hurting people.

Why do Christians suffer?

It's all right to ask why! The Bible is filled with "whys." Warren Wiersbe in his book, "Why Us?" states that there are over three hundred questions in the book of Job alone! Jeremiah asked, "Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed." (Jer.15:18) Jesus asked, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Psalm 22:1)

Vance Havner was right when he said, "God marks across some of our days, "Will explain later." Only God can answer the "whys" of life and some He may answer now, others later. In the meantime, we must continue to trust and not be afraid!

The believers to whom Peter was writing probably asked "Why"? The idea of "suffering" occurs 26 times in the book, the word "suffer" or "suffering" themselves occurring 7 times. Peter writes to encourage these saints and all who are suffering. In verses 6 and 7 He addresses the age old question "Why do God's children suffer"?

The paradox that Peter presents.

Peter states in verse 6, "you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations." Rejoicing in suffering is a paradox. This verse teaches us that we are to be glad when we are sad – not glad that we are sad!.

What is a paradox? The dictionary informs that it is “a statement that is self-contradictory but may be true in fact.” Example: saying “the sun is shining in the storm” or “she was smiling through her tears” are examples. In v.6 Peter says, you “greatly rejoice although you are in heaviness.” That is a paradox.

The Christian’s life is a life of painful joy – that is, it is paradoxical. This sounds crazy to us but it also should remind us of what James said in James 1:2 “count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience.” There is a divine purpose to our problems as we shall see as we move through this passage.

Matthew puts it this way: “Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” (Matt. 5:11) There is the paradox again – reviled but rejoicing.

Peter tells us that some suffering is the will of God for the believer: “Let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.” (I Peter 4:19) And Paul writes: “Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” (II Cor. 4:16) Another paradox.

Talk about paradoxes, listen to what Paul writes in 2 Cor 4:8-10 “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.”

Jesus provides our best example of a paradox: – “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross...” (Heb. 12:2) Joy on a cross? Yes! Again, the Christian’s life is a life of painful joy. We can carry our cross with a smile; we can smile through our tears; gladness can co-exist with sadness – that is the paradox!

A Personal Testimony.

Right here, before I proceed with this message, and lest someone say, “Jennings has never suffered so it is easy for him to pontificate to us suffering people,” I want to let you know that I understand what Peter is writing about from personal experience. You see, for most of my life I have had a physical cross to bear, an infirmity that all who have ever seen me know about. Furthermore, I have suffered emotional scars the result of over 50 years of ministering in some very difficult situations. I know what many of you are going through and have already endured for Christ. I can say that, by the grace of God, I grow while I groan! I am not bitter – I am better! I gladly carry my cross with a smile; I smile through tears; I greatly rejoice though in heaviness. I’m not about to slow up, give up or shut up until the Lord Himself comes and takes me up! I have experienced that about which I am speaking. That does not make me an authority, but it does lend credibility to my attempt to encourage and enlighten.

How do you handle suffering? Do you go into a shell? Do you question God? Do you come unglued? Do you grumble and complain? Or are you like the Father who was burying his young son who had drowned? He turned to me at the graveside and said, “Pastor, only a

Christian can smile through tears at a time like this”. That is the paradox about which Peter is writing.

Now, with that background, let us begin studying these verses here in I Peter on the subject of “Pain And Salvation”. Let’s begin by considering:

I. THE CAUSES OF SUFFERING.

Peter writes about “manifold temptations” and “the trial of faith.” These are two different sources or causes of sufferings.

A. The Manifold Temptations.

Remember that Peter is writing to the diaspora, the Christians who had been dispersed throughout five provinces of the Roman Empire mentioned in verse one. Undoubtedly, they had experienced multiplied temptations.

“Temptations” are the appeals from either the world, the flesh or the devil. (God never tempts – “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.” James 1:12-13)

These Christians in Peter’s lifetime and Christians in our lifetimes have this same temptation commonality. The world, flesh and the devil are still very real and as a result of the tension between good and evil we suffer in an evil environment.

However, Peter would have us to know that “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.” (II Peter 2:9) Praise the Lord!

B. The Trials Of Faith.

What is the difference between “trials” and “temptations”? Trials are divinely ordered disciplines of life. In the New Testament there are many kinds of trials mentioned: affliction, persecution, suffering, troubles, burdens, etc.

One of the best illustrations of various trials comes from the experience the apostle Paul writes about. In 2 Corinthians 1. He wrote: “We do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a peril of death....” (vs.8-10)

When we yield to temptations and experience suffering as a result, the suffering is self-induced. When we experience trials as a result of our testimony of faithfulness to God and suffer, we should remember that “Blessed is the man that endures *temptation*: for when he is *tried*, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” (James 1:12)

II. THE CHARACTER OF SUFFERING.

Suffering is characterized by “heaviness” – “Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness.” The Greek word translated “heaviness” is “lupeethentes” and is in the plural here and literally means “you are made to grieve.” Of course, whatever the situations and circumstances Peter is referring to here, they had caused grief, heaviness, pain, sorrow - suffering. That is the character of suffering.

Charlie Brown is famous for saying, “Good Grief!” Grief is indeed good – if it drives us to God. The Canadian author, L.E. Maxwell, wrote a book entitled: “Crowded To Christ” in which he wrote of the various ways God crowds us to Himself and suffering is one of them. In such a case, that is “good grief.”

III. THE CONTINUATION OF SUFFERING.

“for a season” - this phrase from v.6 does not say “forever” but “for a season”! Paul weighs in on this subject when he writes, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” (II Cor. 4:17)

This suffering by the saints is short compared to the sufferings of those in Hell! This suffering is light when compared to the sufferings of Christ for us at Calvary!

ILLUST. A country preacher was reading from 1 Thess 3:4 where Paul wrote, “when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass.” He remarked, “Thank God it says that it came to pass – it does not say it came to stay!”

ILLUST. “When God permits His children to go through the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat. If we rebel, He may have to reset the clock; but if we submit, He will not permit us to suffer one minute too long.” – Warren Wiersbe

IV. THE CONDITION OF SUFFERING.

Do not miss the short qualifying phrase in v.6 - “if need be.” The Winter is necessary so that we can have Spring; the rain is necessary so that we can have flowers; the sun needs to go down so that we can have nightfall. Either situation may be troubling but God knows what “needs be” for our own good.

What is God accomplishing in this “if needs be” scenario anyway? He does not keep us in the dark about that for Peter explains: “That the trial of your faith might be found unto praise and honor and glory.” (v.7) God is proving the genuineness of our faith by subjecting us to the trial by fire. And, only God knows “if needs be”!

ILLUST. Mrs. J and I have a friend whose husband was killed in an accident. Soon afterward the grieving widow was in a supermarket and a woman said to her, “Have you figured out yet why God killed your husband?”

Not all suffering is punishment for sin. You remember the story in John 9 about the man by the roadside who was blind? The disciples asked Jesus, “who sinned, this man or his

parents, that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." (v.2-3) Only God knows what "needs be" in order that we might be more like Jesus. Let us not be guilty of speculating about what is happening in other's lives, for God is not finished with any of us yet!

V. THE CULMINATION OF SUFFERING

"might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

We humans are very short-sighted. When we are in the fire and are suffering grief, all we see is the fire. We do not see the end result, the eventual outcome. The Living Bible renders v.7 as follows: "These trials are only to test your faith, to see whether or not it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests gold and purifies it - and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold; so if your faith remains strong after being tried in the test tube of fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day of his return." That is a good rendition of v.7 and is true to the original language.

Life during the time of Nero was difficult for the recipients of the first letter of Peter. Life for some today in America and other countries is difficult. You may be tempted to ask, "What is it that God wants to accomplish in my life as a result of the trials, temptations, griefs and sufferings through which I am presently going?" That is a good question and there is a good answer from scripture.

The Master has a Master plan for our lives and it is summarized for us in Romans 8 - "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." (v.28-29)

God is forming, yes, transforming us, as a sculptor works to transfer a piece of stone into an image. He hammers here, chips a little off there, sands and scrapes but He will not take off one more chip than is necessary to create the image of His Son in our lives! So, it is important to develop and maintain a biblical perspective of suffering. Let us determine not to be bitter but yield to God to make us better!

ILLUST. A craftsman was whittling away on a stick of ebony wood. The wood began to complain because the owner was cutting it – drilling holes in it – shaping it. The owner was making a flute out of a stick of ebony wood. The wood was bitterly complaining.

The owner said, "I am making you valuable. Without my whittling and drilling these holes you would be only a stick forever – just a useless piece of ebony wood. What I am doing now may make you think that I am destroying you, but instead, I am changing you into a flute – and your sweet music will bless all who hear and comfort many a sorrowing heart. Your temporary suffering will not ruin you but make you, for only in this way can you be a blessing in this world."

As children of God we are like that stick of ebony wood. There is a reason for trials and once you and I truly understand and appreciate the reasons for these trials of life, we can "greatly rejoice." We can praise even when we are in pain because we know that it is just

“for a season” for we are on our way to the place where “there shall be no more pain”!
(Rev. 21:4) Do you have God’s salvation that will take you to that place of no more pain?
Jesus is the Way to the Father’s House!

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