

SERIES: "THE RICHES OF SALVATION"**MESSAGE #7****"PAIN AND SALVATION" Part 3
I Peter 1:5-7**

"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."

No normal person enjoys pain and suffering. The Apostle Peter writes to Christians who were going through the fires of affliction. He says the outcome is more precious than gold and ultimately will be found to their "praise and honor and glory."

A man in Dundee, Scotland, was confined to bed for forty years, having broken his neck in a fall at age fifteen. But his spirit remained unbroken, and his cheer and courage so inspired people that he enjoyed a constant stream of guests. One day a visitor asked him, "Doesn't Satan ever tempt you to doubt God?" "Oh, yes," replied the man. "He does try to tempt me. I lie here and see my old schoolmates driving along and Satan whispers, 'If God is so good, why does He keep you here all these years? Why did he permit your neck to be broken?'" "What do you do when Satan whispers those things?" asked the guest. "Ah," replied the invalid, "I take him to Calvary, show him Christ, and point to those deep wounds, and say, 'You see, he does love me'. And Satan has no answer to that. He flees every time."

What a positive and victorious spirit that man had. The suffering of our Savior is proof that no matter how much we suffer, our pain will be easier to bear if we remember that God loves us and gave His Son to deliver us ultimately from all pain.

Christians, like everyone else, suffer. We are not exempt from physical, emotional or psychological pain. So we ask "Why Do Christians suffer?" On the cross Jesus asked "Why?" - "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1) So, it is all right to ask "Why?"

In the preceding message in this series, I gave seven reasons why Christians suffer. In this message I will give you seven additional reasons:

1. TO PURIFY OUR LIVES.

Notice the words in I Peter 1:7 - "tried with fire". The original Greek word means "proved", "tried," "refined," "purified" by fire as gold is purified. The suffering saint is, like gold, purified by the fires of suffering if the suffering makes us like God, The Holy Gold Standard!

Job was a man who was put through the fires of testing and trial. He knew what suffering was and recognized the painful process for what it was and said, "When he has tried me I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:10) Oswald Chambers said, "No man is the same after an agony; he is either better or worse."

ILLUST. My wife and I visited a goldsmith's shop in Chittagong, Bangladesh. The owner was a very gracious man and allowed us to watch as he plied his craft. He took gold rings,

various gold ornaments and gold figurines that he had accumulated and after cutting them into small pieces dropped them into a pot of liquid gold that was already boiling and bubbling. The top of the liquid was almost black in color. Frequently he would skim off that dark liquid and dump it onto the refuse heap. This was the purifying process.

Slowly the liquid became more and more yellow as he dipped off the impurities. Finally, he was satisfied when looking into the shiny metal he could see his face reflected as in a mirror. Then he put the pot into water and after cooling it a bit, he dumped out the metal into a heap. After more cooling, he picked it up and handed it to my wife and then to me. At that time gold was \$800.00 per ounce. He said we were holding approximately 20 ounces of pure gold in our hands!

We did not take any gold with us from that goldsmith's shop that day, but we took a valuable mental picture with us of what the Lord wants to accomplish when He permits us to go through the refiner's fire. He wants to see His image reflected in us.

2. TO FORTIFY OUR ENDURANCE.

Is there any gain in pain? The short answer is "Yes!" Hardship and suffering can weave into our character tenacity, determination and endurance that we would not otherwise have.

ILLUST. Vance Havner, evangelist and author, now with the Lord wrote: "Some of the greatest sermons are not preached in a pulpit but in sickrooms in humble homes; in hospital rooms and mortuaries by hurting, humble souls who have learned to depend upon God during affliction, sickness, loss and heartache. In drawing near to God in such times they absorbed, through divine grace, fortified character that can only be described as *grit with a grin!*"

"Grit with a grin!" I like that. Are you ready for what James writes on this subject? Here it is: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1:2-3)

Did you ever respond to any form of suffering by saying, "Oh, this is wonderful! I'm so happy that I have this problem?" Well, neither have I. But James says, "Consider it pure joy." I must admit that I have to work on responding like that when trials come. But we must not miss the point that James makes and that is that there is a good outcome from what we suffer "if", and I emphasize the word "if", we realize an increase in our perseverance level.

Paul wrote to the young pastor, Timothy, and said, "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (2 Tim 2:3) I was in the U.S. Naval Aviation branch of the military during the Korean War. We were introduced to the military service by three months of rigorous and painful training. Why? To develop in us discipline, perseverance and endurance. We Christians are in God's Basic Training Program and He wants His troops to develop endurance and become good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

ILLUST. Helen Keller was deaf, mute and blind. She wrote: “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”

Endurance results from persevering through hardships. Suffering activates determination, creates spiritual stamina, motivates to courage and stimulates boldness.

ILLUST. On the porch of an old dilapidated and abandoned Kansas farm house, hanging from a rusty nail, was a hand-written sign that said much about the farmer who had lived there before he died. The sign said, “I have lived here for more than 75 years. I’ve been burned out by drought, drowned out by floods, frozen out by cold, eaten out by jack-rabbits, blowed out by wind, closed out by the bank and I ain’t a leav’en here ‘till they carry me out feet first!” Which they eventually did. He had endured to the end.

Pain can result in gain! We can turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones! Character can be forged by fiery trials and molded by maladies. Paul said, “When I am weak then I am strong.” (II Cor. 12:10)

3. TO NOTIFY US OF PROBLEMS.

Are there any good outcomes from bad experiences? Yes! There is such a thing as “good pain.” Physiologically, pain is an alarm; pain is an alert; pain notifies us that there is an injury or malfunction in our body!

ILLUST. There are people who cannot feel pain. I once met parents who had a child who felt no pain. They had to constantly watch for shoe blisters, scuffed knees, bitten tongue, burned fingers from touching hot things, frostbite in the winter, etc.

Pain and/or suffering can be a blessing! The discomfort of pain lets us know that there is an ulcer eating a hole in our stomach; pain warns us that we missed the nail and hit our finger; pain lets us know that we stumped our toe; pain in the abdomen alerts us to the fact that our appendix is inflamed; angina is the alarm that our blood vessels in the heart are clogged; that pain in the heel tells us that we tore our Achilles tendon while jogging, etc. As much as we dislike pain, we have to admit that it often serves a good purpose. It warns us that something is wrong. The misery is the message that something needs attention.

The same principle that is operative in our bodies also applies to our souls and spirits. When we experience pangs of conscience, discomfort in our spirits and/or distress of soul, those are signals, alarms, and alerts that something is wrong in our lives or that we are being exposed to dangerous and/or evil stimuli..

Scriptures speak of an anguished, bitter, wounded, downcast, fainting and grieving soul. Also, concerning the spirit, reference is made to a sad, troubled, overwhelmed, broken and anguished spirit. These conditions are indicative of inward pain that needs to be addressed in order to regain and maintain spiritual health.

Why do Christians have trials, tribulations and troubles? Reason #4 is:

4. TO RECTIFY OUR CONDUCT.

Some of the difficulties that we experience are symptomatic – that is, they are indicators that some area of our lives need rectifying. “Rectify” means: “to correct, to remedy, to make right what is wrong; to bring into a state of agreement or accord.”

There is a correcting aspect to some suffering – mind you, not all suffering. In Peter’s First Epistle he qualifies suffering, using the phrase, “if need be.” (I Peter 1:6) And, only God knows “if need be”! People look on the exterior of our lives; God sees both the exterior and the interior and He, the Divine Doctor, alone knows if there is some area that needs to be corrected. We are prone from time to time to get out of bounds, off the path of God’s choosing for us, off the main-line of God’s will for our lives.

ILLUST. Train tracks have junctions called “switches” by which the train can be “switched” from one track to another. God is a good Train Conductor – He knows how and when to operate the switch in order to get us back on the right track and prevent a wrecked life!

This rectifying process is called “chastening” in Hebrews chapter 12. This is a section of scripture that helps explain why God allows some suffering:

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (vs.5-12)

Without pain, trials, reversals, troubles and/or sufferings when we “get off the track”, we would never learn the consequences of bad choices and would sin with impunity!

ILLUST. King David had a backache! He had sinned and this is what he says:
“My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.” (Psalm Ps 38:5-8)

What was the result? He said, “I confess my iniquity, I am troubled by my sin.” (Ps 38:18) That was good pain! Pain that resulted in David going to the Great Physician for treatment! He comments more on this experience as follows: “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.” (Ps.119:6) So, suffering rectifies – that is, corrects, brings us back into agreement with God “if need be”!

ILLUST. D.L. Moody, founder of the Moody College in Chicago and after whom the Moody Church, located there is named, said that whenever his mother would chasten him, he would get as close to her as he could. That way, she couldn't get a healthy swing! He added, "if we will get close to our Heavenly Father, any chastening that we may experience will not hurt half as much."

5. TO MULTIPLY OUR FRUIT.

I live in vineyard country. Vineyards and vines abound and in the Fall of the year the air has a most inviting aroma. However, the vine does not exist to give off pleasant fumes but pleasing fruit.

ILLUST. We moved to a house that had a grape vine that had been allowed to proliferate unabated. The previous owner had built an arbor which the vine covered. The arbor had a bench beneath it and was a lovely place to sit and shade. The first autumn season rolled around and one of the members of the congregation that I pastored, brought with him to church a basket of luscious looking grapes as a gift. I said, "Thank you, but I have a large grape vine and I will have plenty of grapes. You may want to give these grapes to someone who does not have a grape vine."

He laughed and said, "Pastor, I've looked at your vine and you do not have many grapes and what you have are more like peas than grapes!" I was slightly offended but took his gift of grapes. When I got home that Sunday, the first thing I did was inspect my grape vine. To my dismay, I had lovely leaves but no grapes. I asked him what the problem was and he said, "The vine needs pruning." He graciously volunteered to prune it which he did – drastically! He cut it back to within a few feet of where the vine came out of the ground. I gently fussed at him and he replied, "Pastor, you have got to decide whether you want foliage or fruit!" My grape arbor was ruined! But the next autumn I had a bountiful harvest of grapes. Pruning multiplies fruit literally and figuratively.

Jesus said that He was the True Vine and that His followers were branches. (John 15) He wants more fruit than foliage. The question is: are we bearing branches or barren branches? He expects His branches to bear abundant fruit and if it does not He prunes them. He said, "every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit." (John 15:2) The pruning process is needful and painful. Here is one cliché that is true: "No pain, no gain!"

ILLUST. A pastor in Bulgaria was arrested and imprisoned. His crime was preaching. He was sentenced to eight months. He did his eight months, got out, and wrote these words: "Both prisoners and jailers asked many questions, and I had a more fruitful ministry there than I could have had in the church. God was better served by my presence in prison than if I had been free."

When we suffer it may be because the Heavenly Gardner is pruning His Branch to produce more fruit! And remember this, which is a great comfort to us when we are being "pruned": the Gardner is never closer to us than when He is pruning us!

6. TO AMPLIFY GOD'S GRACE.

In Acts 4:33 we read that “great grace was upon them all.” Grace is God’s favor and God’s grace could be seen in the disciples lives. They amplified the grace of God – “great grace” was seen in them. When we amplify a thing we make it appear visibly or audibly larger. We cannot *improve* upon God’s grace but we can *prove* God’s grace by demonstrating in our lives that it is indeed great!

Let us look at a couple of “displays” in the window of the New Testament. There is Paul: “And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (II Cor. 12:9-10) What a display of the grace of God!

Jesus is always our best Model. Here is the admonition from the writer of Hebrews: “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.” (Hebrews 12:2)

You and I are “display cases”, “showcases” for God’s grace. When people walk into our lives do they see displayed there the graces of the “God of all grace”? (I Peter 5:10) What do they see in us when we suffer? Anger? Complaining? A sour attitude? Grumbling? What are we advertising in the “showcase” of our lives when we are going through tough times? Do people see the grace of God and the God of grace sustaining us?

ILLUST. A Christian Medical Doctor, wrote:

“The greatest sermons that I have ever heard were not preached from pulpits but from sick-beds. The greatest, deepest truths of God’s Word have often been revealed not by those who preached as a result of their seminary preparation and education, but by those humble souls who have gone through the seminary of affliction and have learned experientially the deep things of the ways of God.

The most cheerful people I have met, with few exceptions, have been those who have had the least sunshine and the most pain and suffering in their lives. The most grateful people I have met were not those who traveled a pathway of roses all their lives through, but those who were confined because of circumstances, to their homes, often to their beds, and had learned to depend upon God as only such Christians know how to do.

Those dear saints of God have refreshed my heart again and again as they preached from sick-bed pulpits. They have been the men and women who have been the most cheerful and the most grateful for the grace of almighty God.” (M.R. DeHaan in his book Broken Things)

ILLUST. One time a daughter complained to her father about having to suffer with the effects of a crippling disease. Her father was a chef and he took her to the kitchen to teach

her a lesson using visuals. He filled three pots with water and placed each on the stove. He put a tomato in one pot, an egg in the second pot, and coffee beans in the third pot. Then he let them sit and boil, without saying a word to his daughter. The daughter continued to complain about her lot in life. After twenty minutes he turned off the heat. He took the tomato out of the pot and placed it in a bowl. He took the egg out and placed it in a bowl. He then spooned the coffee bean out and placed it in a cup. Then he explained: "You can be like the tomato which fell apart in the hot water; or you can be like the egg which only got hard when exposed to the trial of hot water, or you can be like the coffee bean which changed its surroundings – it changed the water to coffee!" He then asked her, "Which one are you like – the tomato, the egg or the coffee bean?"

Patience in suffering amplifies the grace of God when appropriated and applied. Let us not "receive the grace of God in vain." (II Cor.6:1)

The final reason I will give, as we conclude this message on "Pain And Salvation" is that we suffer:

7. TO IDENTIFY WITH CHRIST.

Perhaps the most significant answer to the question "Why do Christians suffer"? is this last one: suffering identifies us with our Savior! The following question is asked in Luke 24:26 "Did not Christ have to suffer?"

God had only One Son and He suffered! Isaiah writes:

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not; Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 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." (Isa. 53:3-5)

How do we identify with Christ's sufferings? I Peter 2:21 reads: "Christ suffered for us leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps." Does that mean that I have to suffer literally on a cross? No!

ILLUST. I was ministering in Philippine Islands at Easter time one year when a man allowed himself to be crucified – again! He had permitted himself to be nailed to a cross several times before. His friends would nail him to a cross, lift up the cross for photo opportunities and then his friends quickly pulled out the nails and rushed him to the hospital. It was front page news the next day and he was quoted saying, "This may be the last time I do this. It takes me too long to recover." He also said that he went through the ordeal to gain salvation.

When Peter said, "Christ suffered for us leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps" He did not mean that we should be physically crucified. Why? We have already

been co-crucified with Christ! “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Gal.2:20) God reckons believers to have been crucified with Christ.” Therefore, Peter is not saying that following the example of Christ means literally dying on a cross.

How then do we identify with our Savior in His sufferings? We cannot suffer as Christ suffered, but we may be called upon to suffer for Christ.

Paul said, that he wanted to know Christ and “the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil.3:10) Peter helps us understand what Paul was talking about: “if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.” (I Peter 3:14)

ILLUST. When I was a student in Chicago at the Moody Bible Institute, now Moody College, Dr. William Culbertson, a godly and greatly loved and respected man of God, was the President. In a Chapel Service he told of a dream that he had. He dreamed that he was in heaven standing with a group of persons talking about what they had suffered for the Lord Jesus while they were on earth.

John The Baptist said, “They cut off my head”; Stephen said, “They stoned me to death”; Paul said, “Nero beheaded me”; James, the brother of our Lord said, “They crucified me upside down”; another said, “They fed me to the lions.” Polycarp said, “They burned me at the stake.”

Dr. Culbertson said that in his dream he saw them look at him and ask, “And sir, what did you suffer for our dear Lord?” He said that he awoke and determined never again to complain about his sufferings compared to what others have suffered for the cause of Jesus Christ.

Are we identified with Christ’s sufferings? Do we belong to that exclusive fellowship called “The Fellowship Of His Sufferings?” Have we ever suffered just because we are Christians?

CONCLUSION

To my fellow Christians, I leave you with Paul’s positive prospect: “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Rom.8:18) Praise the Lord!

Now a word wooing and warning word to any who may not be children of God through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ: come to Jesus who suffered for you – else, you will suffer, if not here, certainly hereafter for all eternity!

Life with Christ is an endless hope and life without Christ is a hopeless end !

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