



1 PETER 1.1-11
SUFFERING
AND BEYOND

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

SUFFERING IS
REAL

BUT JESUS IS
MORE REAL

THEREFORE
OUR *HOPE* IS
REAL

SO KEEP
FOCUSED ON
OUR HOPE...

...AND PRESS ON
IN YOUR
CALLING

A *ReVision* Resource

Suffering and Beyond: 1 Peter 1.1-11
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1 Peter 1: Introduction

In our day, most church leaders don't know much about what's happening in the churches in their own community. In the days of the Apostles, the churches, though farther apart, were much more concerned to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, no matter how hard that task might have been (Eph. 4.3).

So it is that we find Peter, who is serving the Church in Rome, writing to churches in Asia Minor to encourage, instruct, and support them during a time of suffering. We're not sure exactly what kind of persecution these believers were being forced to endure, but it must have been significant, because the news of it reached Peter, and he considered the situation serious enough to reach out as best he could.

1 Peter is a pastoral letter to suffering believers, reminding them of who they are, what they've been called to in Christ, and how they must respond to their trials so that their hope might sustain them and bear witness to their neighbors.

1 Peter is a powerfully theological epistle, chock full of insights to how Christians must make their way in the world, focused on the unseen realm of Christ and His glory.

In this opening section of 1 Peter, the Apostle acknowledges the suffering of his readers, but he puts their suffering in both an eternal and a temporal perspective. Eternally, no amount of suffering today can deprive them of the joy and inheritance that awaits them in eternity. In the same way, no suffering must keep them from fulfilling their calling to live for Christ and proclaim Him to the very people who would do them harm.

There are many excellent lessons to be gained from 1 and 2 Peter, and I hope these studies will bring them to you so as to encourage and strengthen you in your walk with and work for the Lord.

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1 and 2 Peter can encourage, embolden, and instruct us, if we're willing to take the Apostle's words to heart. My prayer is that all who take up this study will do just that. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Grace and Peace Multiplied

1 Peter 1.1, 2

¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

The Story: Writing from Rome, somewhere near the middle of the first century, Peter is seeking to shore up the faith of the believers in the regions of Asia Minor which he mentions in his greeting. They are undergoing severe persecution which would continue on into the second century. Appropriately, Peter begins his letter by putting their sufferings in perspective. His readers need to remember that they have been chosen by God to be His holy people (see on, 1 Pet. 2.9, 10). In reminding them of God’s foreknowledge Peter is not merely reassuring them that God knew these troubles would come upon them; the sense of that word, “foreknowledge,” is more like “loved from all eternity and loved even now.” A hint of development to come is found in his mention of the sanctifying work of God’s Spirit, which always proceeds through obedience to Jesus Christ and for the sprinkling of His blood. But their suffering is real, and these troubled believers need grace and peace to abound to them. Peter hopes to be an agent of these by his pastoral letter to them.

The Structure: Persecution of the faithful has been a theme of Christian history from the beginning. We are not merely appointed for salvation, but also to share in Jesus’ sufferings, as Paul reminded the Philippians (1.29). It’s part of the Christian story in the world to suffer at the hands of unbelievers; so we should not think it “strange” (1 Pet. 4.12) when such episodes arise. Rather, like the apostles, we must learn to rejoice in the face of our trials, that God would count us worthy to share in the sufferings of Jesus in such a way (Rom. 5.3-5; Jms. 1.2-4; Acts 5.41). These believers were suffering because their lives stood out as different from the unbelievers with whom they formerly consorted (1 Pet. 4.1-5), and it is this difference, this orientation to holiness and outspokenness for Christ, that prompts the scorn – and worse – of many lost people.

What are some ways that your walk with the Lord leads you to suffer the scorn of your unbelieving friends?

2 Sprinkling the Savior's Blood

1 Peter 1.1, 2

¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

The Story: We need to explore a little further that idea of “sprinkling of his blood.” This is actually what the text says. Literally, it reads, “unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” This translation reveals the resolute firmness which Peter intends to impart to these suffering Christians. Because we are the people of God, we must not deny the reality of our election, foreknowledge, and sanctification in the Spirit by caving in to pressure from angry unbelievers. This is who we are, and who we are comes to expression in obedience, come what may. Part of that obedience involves “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” – not literally, of course, but in a figurative sense. As the blood of Old Testament sacrifices was sprinkled on the altar and even the people at times, symbolizing their redemption, so believers are called to “sprinkle” the blood of Jesus around by proclaiming the Good News of His redemption and calling others to take shelter in Him from the judgment that is to come. We must not allow threats, intimidation, or persecution to deter us from this course.

The Structure: Peter wants to comfort and encourage his readers, so that they can bear up under their suffering. But merely “bearing up” under suffering isn’t the point. Triumphant over suffering – that’s the point, for that’s what Jesus did; and the way we triumph is to receive our sufferings with joy and hope and to persevere in obedience and witness for our Lord. The Christian story has been able to proceed through the ages, in the face of stiff persecution in virtually every generation, simply because faithful believers understood this well and kept their testimony and obedience faithfully, even unto death.

Why do you suppose most believers today are afraid, or at least, reluctant, to share their faith with others? How can believers encourage one another to become more consistent witnesses?

3 Born to Hope!

1 Peter 1.3

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

The Story: Peter really knows how to encourage – not with sappy words and silly promises, but with the hard facts of who we are and where we stand as followers of Jesus Christ. Christians have been born again; we’re not the same people we used to be. We are a wholly different kind of people with an entirely new and eternal purpose in life (1 Pet. 2.9, 10). It only makes sense that the world will not understand and, on occasion, lash out at us harshly. But we have a living hope – a hope that Paul describes as “the hope of glory” (Rom. 5.1, 2). It’s not just that we “hope” we’re going to go to heaven when we die. We hope in glory, glory revealed to us by God’s Word and Spirit as existing in the living Christ, Whom we love and Whom we serve (2 Cor. 3.12-18). We hope every day to encounter Christ in His glory, to be deeply and dramatically affected by that glory, and then to show the hope of glory to the watching world (1 Pet. 3.15). And not even persecution must be allowed to rob us of this hope!

The Structure: Hope is a powerful affection. Hope moves the Christian movement along through the course of history, as we are a people who, rooted in the past, live our present with a firm eye on the future. The Christian thus maintains a three-faceted approach to his existence: He is who he is by virtue of events accomplished in the past. He aspires to all that God has promised (2 Pet 1.4) by gazing firmly and confidently toward the future. And thus he finds meaning, purpose, and strength for living in the present by knowing who he is and where he’s bound. In the midst of persecution, though, it can be easy to lose sight of these verities. So Peter, a true pastor, offering true comfort to his people, doesn’t just give them some schmaltzy “this too shall pass” advice to tie a knot and hold on. No: he urges them to remember who they are and to cling to their certain hope!

How do you nurture the hope into which you have been born again through the resurrection of our Lord? How do you encourage other believers to live in that hope?

4 Kept for an Inheritance

1 Peter 1.4, 5

⁴ ...to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The Story: It is characteristic of those who exercise leadership in God's covenant people to try to draw them through their present circumstances into the future by holding out the precious and very great promises of God (2 Pet. 1.4). God, Peter reminds his readers, is keeping an inheritance for them in heaven. It is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. This is not some lascivious promise of vestal virgins awaiting our every pleasure. This is the promise of God Himself (Ps. 16; Jn. 17.3). What God is keeping in heaven for us is none other than Himself! Moreover, He is guarding His children, as they look to Him in faith, for that day when He will fully reveal Himself to them (1 Jn. 3.2) and their joy will be complete. Peter encourages His readers not only to remember who they are but also to dwell on what's laid up for them. If they can glimpse the beauty, glory, holiness, and presence of God, beyond the horizon of their present sufferings, they will be able to bear up until the day that God makes His saving glory fully and completely known.

The Structure: What Edwards and others referred to as the "beatific vision" is an important component in the life of faith. We will forfeit real Christian joy if we focus only on our temporal circumstances or present condition of life. The Christian's hope is to know the glory of God, and we pursue this hope, here and now, every day. But the fullness of that hope lies beyond all time and history in the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells. "There and then" we will have no more sorrows and no more tears and unending bliss in the uninterrupted presence of our Savior and God. The challenge for these "last days" is to learn how to live the "there and then," here and now. Crucial to this is focusing beyond our temporal horizons to what God has laid up for us.

Could you summarize your vision of our blessed hope? In other words, if someone should ask about the hope that is within you, what would you say?

5 If Necessary

1 Peter 1.6, 7

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ...

The Story: How could it be “necessary” for believers to suffer persecution? And, when persecution comes, are we supposed to just smile and turn the other cheek? The anger, scorn, and ill-treatment others foist upon us because of our faith in Jesus Christ can be grievous. Peter doesn’t deny that. It wouldn’t be real suffering if there were no pain, hardship, sorrow, or loss associated with it. Sure we’re going to grieve when we are subjected to such treatment, just because we love Jesus. But by rejoicing with thanksgiving we can allow suffering to do its perfect work within us, which is to refine and purify our faith, strengthen our hope and resolve, and empower us in God’s Spirit to greater faithfulness and bolder witness. Suffering tests the genuineness of our faith. How we respond to suffering proves the viability and vitality of our profession of faith in Jesus. If we cower and collapse before suffering, that says one thing; if we rejoice, even in the midst of grief, and persevere in obedient witness, that says something else altogether.

The Structure: Previous generations of Christians have revered the martyrs more than we do in our day. In our day, once a year – a Sunday in November, I think – we have a special service to acknowledge the persecuted church. Wow. In the early church, when persecution was widespread, the stories of suffering Christians were written down and circulated all over the Roman world, giving hope and strength to all believers and encouraging them to encourage one another continuously, that they might persevere together even unto death. In our day we minister to the martyrs through a feeble, poorly-attended annual rite. In other days, the martyrs witnessed and ministered to the Church by their triumphs through suffering.

How does your church benefit from the example of contemporary Christian martyrs, or the martyrs of the past?

6 Unseen, but Loved

1 Peter 1.8, 9

⁸ ...whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls.

The Story: There are two components to saving faith, and Peter touches on both of them here in this first chapter. The first is what the writer of Hebrews calls “the assurance of things hoped for” (Heb. 11.1, my translation.) Peter has been commenting on that, reminding his readers of what God has done for them, who, as a result, they are, and what is laid up for them in the world to come. This is the hope they have come to know through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and Peter is stirring them up to cling to that hope in the midst of their present trials. The second component of saving faith is “the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1, again, my translation). These believers had not seen Jesus, but they loved Him. One of the ways they “gave evidence” of their love for Jesus was to rejoice with inexpressible joy, even in the face of their trials. Even though they were suffering, the hope of glory was radiating out from them and would strengthen their faith and assure them of their salvation, as long as they persevered.

The Structure: Saving faith works toward the reconciliation of all things back to God (2 Cor. 5.17-21; Eph. 2.10). Nothing stands in the way of true and lively faith as, drawing on the assurance of things hoped for, it works through thanksgiving and hope to give evidence of the reality of things not seen. Faith without works is dead, as James insisted (Jms. 2). We are not saved *by* works; rather, we are saved *unto* works, which are the fruit of salvation and abiding in Christ, and the reason Jesus has chosen us and made us His own people (Jn. 15.1-17). As Peter thus encouraged these suffering believers to persevere in faith that works, so we also must consider how to stimulate one another to love and good works, so that the genuineness of our faith may be seen by all (Heb. 10.24).

Suppose a new believer, coming across Ephesians 2.10 in his daily reading, should ask your advice about the “good works” for which he has been redeemed. What would you tell him?

7 Salvation, Suffering, Subsequent Glories

1 Peter 1.10, 11

¹⁰ Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, ¹¹ searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

The Story: The prophets of the Old Testament received just enough of God’s revelation to understand that salvation was coming, and that it was coming through a Suffering One, and that because of His suffering subsequent glories would redound to all who believed. That’s about as close as they could get to understanding what we as believers pretty much take for granted. But notice how Peter says they “searched and inquired carefully.” This mystery of salvation, this wonder of suffering, these abounding glories to come – this was beautiful to consider, and the prophets eagerly sought from God’s Spirit more insight, more understanding, and more glimpses of the saving glory of our suffering King. We can imagine them pleading in prayer, poring over scrolls and books of the Old Testament, and eagerly consulting one another for more insight and understanding. If only we were as eager to learn about our salvation as they were.

The Structure: The Church in America today could hardly be described as “suffering” for our faith. And yet where do we encounter much “inexpressible joy” or such eagerness in studying and learning about our salvation as Peter describes in this first chapter? Have we lost sight of the greatness of salvation? Do we take for granted the “inheritance” that is being kept for us? Is the “beatific vision” merely something to chat about, rather than a daily experience of breath-taking glory? Peter’s epistle should put us to shame for our “good as it gets” approach to Christian faith, and should inspire us to achieve more of the faith and power that these first Christians knew – even if we must attain these through suffering.

Would you describe yourself as “eager” to learn more about your salvation? How do you express that eagerness?

For reflection or discussion

1. Should Christians today expect to suffer for their faith? In what ways? What might be some reasons Christians today would *not* suffer for their faith?
2. Peter says we have been born again into a “living hope.” How would you explain that “living hope” to an unbelieving friend or co-worker? Is this just a hope for the future? Does it have an value in the here and now?
3. Peter said that we should love Jesus even though we can’t see Him. How is that possible? How can believers help one another so to love Jesus and to keep focused on Him that no amount of suffering in this life would deprive them of their joy?
4. What are some reasons suffering might be “necessary” from time to time?
5. What is the “beatific vision” and how does one acquire a clearer sense of this? Why should we?
6. What are your goals for this study of the epistles of Peter? What are you hoping to learn?

Prayer:

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Thank you.