

Friday: *Get Over It Already...*

Read: 1 Peter 4:19 ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Reflect:

"It's not ____!" Why does this always have to happen to ____? I imagine we can all fill in those blanks rather easily (in case you are struggling with it; "fair" and "me" go in the blanks). I wonder, is it arrogant to think we shouldn't suffer? If not arrogant, at least it is a mistaken presumption. Yet I think we've all fallen prone to it – at least once...

Verse 19 rubs us the wrong way doesn't it? We don't like to think of our suffering as being part of God's will. Yet remember that part of our suffering is a refining process (cf. Thursday). While it isn't fun, our suffering (so long as we're suffering for "doing good" – 1Pet2:20; 4:14) is for our benefit. Plus we have assurance that it will ultimately be OK.

We are a lot like Jesus, at least in this verse. He too had to entrust His soul to God (cf. Lk23:46). Even though the world mocked and ridiculed Him, Jesus knew He was "doing good". There is no doubt His "way of life" was pleasing to God.

Pray: Pray for this Sunday's special worship service – special in the way that our children will be presenting the Christmas story to us; pray for their practice tomorrow as well. Pray for God's guidance for New Life. Praise God for His protection. Continue to pray for protection from sin and strength during times of testing.

Respond:

What is the worst persecution (or suffering) for the gospel you have faced? How can it bring glory to God?

If we are "heirs" to the Kingdom of God (e.g., Rom8:17; 1Pet3:7), then why should we be exempt from what Jesus endured (e.g., Jn15:18)?

How can you "do good" today for Jesus? How did you "do good" for Him yesterday?

Saturday: *Peace...*

Read: Luke 2:1-20

Reflect:

Luke chapter two seems to be the most frequently read Christmas story (I wonder if that is because Linus recited it so poetically?). Yet the peacefulness we often envision in our minds as we read those words in the second chapter of Luke was likely not as apparent to the original readers of Luke's Gospel.

In verse one Luke is pitting the gospel of Rome against the gospel of Jesus Christ. Rome's gospel declared the importance of its Caesar to the world. In fact, it was Caesar Augustus who stopped civil wars in Rome and was viewed as a "savior" as he instigated the *pax Romana* (Roman Peace).

Yet Luke's Gospel declares that Jesus is the Savior of the world. Although He came in a way that was unexpected, and the way by which He is bringing peace is not liked by many, it is the true "good news". In fact, it's the best news the world has ever heard.

Pray: Pray for those God is prompting to come to New Life tomorrow to be obedient and come. Pray that what we do tomorrow is pleasing to God and that lives will be positively impacted by the interactions we have, the singing, preaching, and teaching...pray for a God-honoring day. Thank God for His love.

Respond:

Continue to pray for the time you will be spending with your family and friends this season; I'm sure we all have people we care about who need to submit to the Lordship of Jesus.

Read Matthew 2 to get another look at the events around Jesus' birth.

Ask God to lead you to someone who needs to hear the gospel; pray for the boldness to share it.

Comfort & Challenge...

December 7 - 13

It seems we all like to be comforted. For that reason many like parts of Scripture like Psalm 23

- ¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

It also seems that, quite often, we don't like to be challenged. Yet if we are not challenged, how can we grow? Fortunately for us, the Bible is full of not only "comfort" – but also "challenge". Just look at a few phrases in Psalm 23...

- "I shall not want."
 - Does this not imply that we will in fact be prone to want from time to time? The challenge is that we will trust in YHWH.
- "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,"
 - That sounds rather challenging to me...
- "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies"
 - Enemies sound challenging as well...will we trust YHWH?

Peter is full of "comfort and challenge" as well.

- Comfort – we are "elect exiles" (1:1)
 - Challenge – life here will be difficult because we don't conform to the pattern of this world
- Comfort – we "are being guarded" by "God's power" (1:5)
 - Challenge – God will allow us to face "trials" (1:6; 4:12)
- Comfort – "you are a royal priesthood" (2:9)
 - Challenge – we have a job to do...

The list goes on...

A problem occurs in Christianity when we take "comfort" as an end in and of itself. On one hand it would be nice if the Christian life was "easy" – but a problem with that is that we would distort how God desires for us to live.

We are "fortunate" here in America in that we don't have to suffer much for the gospel; at least not physically. We may suffer in other ways, but I wonder...if we lived more wholeheartedly for Jesus, would we not all "suffer" a bit more?

Personally, I'm torn...I don't like things to be hard for me – but I really want God glorified in my life. Will I accept the challenge along with the comfort of my salvation?

Monday: *Historically...*

Read: 1 Peter 4:12¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

<p>Reflect: Abel at the hands of his brother Cain; Noah being ridiculed by basically everyone else; the Hebrew people in slavery in Egypt; the prophets at the hands of wicked kings; Jesus at the hands of the religious authorities of the Jews... We don't like to think about it, but historically speaking, the people of God have suffered.</p> <p>The suffering of God's people is a reality. In fact, Jesus said that the world would hate us because it hated Him first (cf. Jn15:18). It's a price, and a small one at that, we pay for following Jesus. The good news is that our reward is worth it (e.g., 1Pet1:3-5).</p> <p>The word for "happening" is also used by Jesus to describe what was going to "happen" to Him (cf. Mk10:32). After Jesus' death two of His disciples talked about what had "happened" as well (Lk24:14). Jesus' reply was that it had to take place (Lk24:25-27). Are we ready if we have to suffer?</p>	<p>Respond: No one likes to suffer. Usually we think it is "unjust". I wonder, is this an indication of a longing (even for non-believers) for the Garden of Eden?</p> <p>Read 1Pet1:1-9. Did you notice some similar themes recurring here in Ch4?</p> <p>How do you describe what "happened" to Jesus to others?</p>
<p>Pray: Thank God for everyone who came to the building and worshipped with us yesterday. Pray the Holy Spirit will continue the work He has started in our regular attendees, as well as the guests who were with us yesterday. Continue to pray for workers in God's Kingdom (Mt9:36-38).</p>	

Tuesday: *Blessed While Suffering...*

Read: 1 Peter 4:13-14¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

<p>Reflect: God created us for community, to do and experience life together. The Garden of Eden illustrates this quite well. Yet our sinful choices distort the community God desires. Jesus' life is an example of that community being restored. He continually invited others to "follow" Him (e.g., Mt4:19; 8:22; 10:38; 19:21,28).</p> <p>The words Peter uses in verse 13 are overflowing with emotion and encouragement. We are commanded to "rejoice". The actual wording is quite stilted as we are "being filled with exaltation". I am sure you noticed we are back to themes which initially surfaced in chapter one. We're also back to the thoughts of Jesus as well (e.g., Mt5:10-12).</p> <p>Our culture doesn't seem to care much about being insulted (at least it seems this way until someone sues). However, in the ancient world, being insulted was a huge deal. In a culture that worshipped "honor and shame" – to be shamed was to be avoided at all costs. Peter's words in v14 fly in the face of their culture as he basically says, "You're not shamed – in fact you have God's favor"!</p>	<p>Respond: In verse 14 Peter says the Holy Spirit rests upon us. That is comforting, but read what the Holy Spirit brought into Stephen's life (Acts6:5; 7:54-60). The Holy Spirit will lead us to obedience, not always "comfort".</p> <p>Verse 13 basically speaks of "delayed gratification". Are you any good at that?</p> <p>How can you reflect God's glory today: in your home, at school, where you work, towards your spouse, towards your children, etc. ?</p>
<p>Pray: Pray for Bob Griffin, Larry Hayes, and Roy Andrews; elders at New Life. Pray for the unity and purity of New Life. Thank God you are a Christian (if you in fact are). Continue to pray for God's people to have boldness to speak for Him (Acts4:29).</p>	

Wednesday: *No Shame...*

Read: 1 Peter 4:15-16¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

<p>Reflect: Undoubtedly we've all done at least a few things wrong in life for which we've "suffered" in one way or another. Ironically, perhaps at times we should have "suffered" more so that bad traits would have been corrected by the Holy Spirit... At any rate, with the term "meddler" we see that Peter's call for us to "love earnestly" (1Pet4:8) is certainly needed. When love is present a desire to meddle in affairs that are not your own will be snuffed out.</p> <p>The name "Christian" was originally a derogatory comment made towards those who followed Christ. The term does not mean "little Christ" – compare the use of "Herodian" in Mk3:6; 12:13. The "Herodians" weren't "little Herods" – they were followers of Herod. At any rate, Peter says for us to accept that initially derogatory comment as one of honor.</p> <p>Peter is obviously concerned about God receiving glory. This is why "spiritual gifts" have been given to Christians (1Pet4:11). It is also why our "way of life" is to be one that will convict others of their need to submit to the Lordship of Jesus when God "shows up" in their lives (1Pet2:12). May our concern be the same as well...</p>	<p>Respond: What is the most recent thing for which you've "suffered" because of your own mistake? What did you learn?</p> <p>In our culture is "Christian" viewed as a derogatory comment? If it is we can either abandon or reclaim it. I think Peter would prefer the latter.</p> <p>How has "suffering" you've endured in the past brought God glory? E.g., what have you learned that has helped you to grow stronger in your faith?</p>
<p>Pray: Pray for Ed Asbury, Mike Haag, and Keith Krause; deacons at New Life. Pray for the Youth as they meet tonight and the worship team as they practice tomorrow night. Continue to pray for God's Word to spread rapidly (2Thess3:1).</p>	

Thursday: *Uh...Can We Skip That?*

Read: 1 Peter 4:17-18¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

<p>Reflect: "Does anybody know what <u>time</u> it is?" Well, it's not "Tool Time" (although I liked that show); it's God's "appointed time" for judgment to begin. God knows what He is doing...it's just that we often don't understand why He does it.</p> <p>The sense of "judgment" in these verses indicates both that God allows His people to be subjected to the things of this world (e.g., persecution, ridicule) as well as that He will "test" His people. The purpose is for refinement (cf. 1Pet1:6-7). Unfortunately, some will fail the test and prove themselves to not be God's people (e.g., Acts5:1-11).</p> <p>The force of the words at the end of verse 17 is, "those who continually do not obey the gospel..." We are all disobedient from time to time, but a follower of Jesus will not make that a way of life. The words in verse 18 should give us pause. We may think we're far from "ungodly" – but check out Rom5:6. Grace, grace, marvelous grace...</p>	<p>Respond: An implication of it being "appointed time" is that its duration is limited. Are you willing to endure any suffering that comes your way?</p> <p>How has God been "refining" you lately?</p> <p>Verse 18 should remind us of our desperate plight before Jesus. With whom have you shared Him lately?</p>
<p>Pray: Thank God for His grace. Pray the radio ads on KVOE will be a benefit to New Life and God's Kingdom. Pray for Brent McCrory; preaching minister at New Life. Continue to pray for open doors to share God's Word (Col4:2-6) and the boldness to do so.</p>	