

1 Peter 4:12-19

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 April 2014

Preacher: Chris Roberts

[0 : 00] Well if you've been around since January as we've looked through this letter you'll know! that Peter has concentrated on encouraging his Christian readership to live out their identity! as God's chosen people in the world.

We've been through his first two sections haven't we? Where he's focused on making sure they know all of the privileges they have as God's people.

So in chapter one they've got this glorious inheritance which cannot be spoilt or fade or perish and they're being built up as a spiritual house with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone.

And then in section two from chapter three he begins to talk about their conduct doesn't he? How they should behave to a watching world so that as outsiders see their behaviour they will glorify and praise God.

Now if you look at chapter four verse eleven just before our reading today and after all of that Peter could easily finish his letter here couldn't he?

[1 : 10] Look at the end of verse eleven. In order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. Yours sincerely Peter. He could easily finish it there couldn't he? And that would make sense. But clearly he's got more to say.

So let's say we get his third section in his letter and he particularly focuses again on Christian related suffering. So let's be clear about this.

This isn't just general suffering that everybody might experience. It's the suffering that comes through being associated with Jesus.

Of bearing his name. Now that's interesting isn't it? In the passage he mentions the word name and he calls them Christians. Look at verse fourteen. If you're insulted for the name of Christ you are blessed.

[2 : 10] Verse sixteen. Even if anyone suffers as a Christian let him glorify God in that name. Now that is one of the few places that he actually calls anyone actually calls Christians Christians in the Bible.

So he's talking about that crunch moment where you know it could hurt whether or not to say those words I am a Christian.

I wonder if you felt like that. Christ. That's the name I follow. Christ's name. I am a Christian. I don't know if you've had those moments where you've not known whether to say that in case it could hurt you or your reputation to be associated with the name of Christ.

I am a Christian. And the overwhelming theme as he draws this letter to a close is the idea that after suffering as a Christian comes glory.

After suffering comes glory. Chapter four verse thirteen. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

[3 : 29] Chapter five verse one. I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.

5 verse ten. If you look there. And after you've suffered for a little while the God of all grace who's called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you. Again you've got the suffering haven't you? Followed by the glory. So he wants then to have a robust theology of suffering in the Christian life through a robust theology of the glory of Jesus' second coming.

What happens to Jesus is the kernel of what happens to you as you trust him. Jesus suffered and will return in glory and so it will be for you.

You may suffer but you will experience glory. That's what it all rides on. The glory that is experienced when the resurrected ascended glorified King Jesus returns then changes their theology about suffering now.

[4 : 53] Suffering is followed by glory. Now that is a topsy-turvy way of thinking about suffering isn't it? He's got. The language that he uses in association with suffering is so different to what we normally think it's almost offensive.

Look at the words he uses. Verse thirteen. Rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings. If you're insulted you are blessed.

Verse fourteen. Verse sixteen. If anyone suffers as a Christian let him not be ashamed. It's back to front that isn't it? It's upside down.

It's inside out. Suffering as a sign of blessing. There's no shame in it. It's a cause for rejoicing he says. How strange. Where does Peter get off saying things like that?

If you're in his church. Peter's church. You might say to him. Look Peter don't you know what I'm experiencing as a Christian? Don't you know how hard it is?

[6 : 00] Don't you know what I'm going through? Well he's been there. I suppose. Hasn't he? He's been there. Peter is an expert on that sinking feeling of being publicly associated with Jesus.

Jesus. I am a Christian. Remember his time during the arrest and the trial of Jesus. Remember it. Stood outside. Warming his hands by that cold fire.

Three times they said to him. Do you know Jesus? Are you a Christian? And three times he denies Jesus. He sees suffering coming doesn't he?

With being associated with a Christian. And somehow his theology of suffering couldn't help him in that moment. It's not difficult to imagine that is it?

It's not something that we blame him for. He felt the pressure of being a Christian right then. Right there. But isn't it amazing that Peter then preaches in the same city of Jerusalem just a few days later to the very people that crucify Jesus.

[7 : 19] He gets thrown into prison. And Luke tells us in Acts. He and the other apostles come out from a flogging rejoicing. That they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name.

Sounds familiar doesn't it? Acts chapter 5. He's been there. He's done both. He's seen suffering coming. Denied Jesus. But he's later learnt to rejoice in suffering.

Now I just want to give you a list really today. Structure is sort of going out the window a bit. A list of Peter's top tips for a robust theology of suffering.

And if you turn to the back of these sheets I've printed them out for you just to help you follow along. Number one. Peter's top tip. Don't think that Christian suffering is unusual.

Don't think it's unusual. Look at verse 12. Beloved don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you. As though something strange were happening to you.

[8 : 35] Don't be surprised that you're suffering as a Christian. That you're insulted. Don't think that that's unusual. Don't think that it's something strange.

Now actually this is the second time Peter has dealt with things that people find surprising. Or strange. Remember a few weeks ago in chapter 4.

Verse 4 if you look back there. He talks about the Gentiles. Non-Christians. Having a skewed view of reality. And they're surprised. When you do not join in with them in the same flood of debauchery. Now they're strong words aren't they? But he's talking about the shock factor there. For non-Christian people. That they think that the weird ones are the Christians.

So the Christians they're the fly in the ointment aren't they? They're the bigots. They're the problem. They're surprised when Christians refrain and speak against certain kinds of behaviour.

[9 : 40] It's just like a bolt out of the blue for them. So now he says. Don't you get caught in the same trap.

Of having a skewed view of your reality. As a Christian. Don't think that suffering for the name of a Christian. Is like a bolt out of the blue.

That it's an alien thing. Don't fall into the same trap. Suffering for the name. Suffering for the name. Is actually par for the course. It's not strange at all.

Now in this country we have got so much to thank God for. Haven't we over the last few hundred years. Christianity and the Bible have become really central. To our society.

And we can be so grateful for that. But you know that's not normal. That is God's grace to us. It's not normal at all. So when we suffer for being Christians.

[10:42] If we're insulted. It's not because we're doing things wrong per se. Don't think it's unusual. It's to be expected.

That's number one. Number two though. Don't think it's because you've done something wrong. Don't think it's because you've done something wrong. Don't think that if you're suffering as a Christian.

It's because things are happening in your life. As a punishment from God. And that's how I often think in my mind. I don't know about you.

God is somehow in that moment. If I'm under the cosh as a Christian. He's sort of doing a calmer thing. Where he's repaying me for something wrong I did earlier in the week.

And it's coming back to haunt me now. Well this would happen wouldn't it. That sort of thing. Or it's not some kind of test. To see if I will buckle under the pressure or not.

[11:39] And if I do. Well that just shows how useless I am as a Christian. That's what we start to think isn't it. When we look at verse 12. Beloved don't be surprised at the fiery trial.

When it comes upon you. To test you. As though something strange were happening. So it's a fiery trial. Which comes upon us to test us.

So I think we think of those trials. Almost like a Christian exam. Don't we? Where you pass or you fail. But I think we get confused about what he means here.

Actually he's using the image of metal purification isn't he? Flick back to chapter 1. And verse 6 and 7. And it's a really similar thing there.

In this you rejoice. Though now for a while if necessary you've been grieved. By various trials, sufferings. So that the tested genuineness of your faith. More precious than gold that perishes.

[12:41] Though it is tested by fire. May be found to result in praise and glory and honour. At the revelation of Jesus Christ. He's saying isn't he? That when suffering comes it isn't a punishment.

Jesus has taken all of our punishment. On the cross. God never punishes his people. Outside of the cross.

But when suffering comes through evil things. Through evil people. God somehow graciously uses that. To refine a Christian's faith.

So it's not a test as in an exam. But it's a purifying thing. Suffering as a Christian. It's not a test or a punishment.

But a refining process. God makes that moment. When you feel under pressure. And you feel hurt. Your golden moment.

[13:43] I can put it like that. To shine you up. Don't think it's automatically because you've done something wrong. It's to refine you.

To purify your faith. That's the second thing. Number three though. Don't think that when suffering comes as a Christian. God has left you.

Don't think that God has left you. Don't think. That when you suffer for being a Christian. It's a sign that you're on your own. And God has abandoned you.

Look at verse 14 again. If you're insulted for the name of Christ. You are blessed. Because the spirit of glory. And of God. Rests upon you.

The moment of insult. And suffering. Should be the moment. Peter says. That we're more confident of God's presence. And not his absence.

[14:42] We're more confident. His spirit rests upon you. In that moment. Now he uses an image. Doesn't he. That is used throughout the Bible.

Of God's spirit. Resting upon. His people. So think about the suffering. Of the Israelites. In the wilderness. Back in Exodus. As aliens. In a strange land.

We're told. In their suffering. In Exodus. That God's glory. Rested upon them. Then there's the servant. In Isaiah. Chapter 11.

The suffering servant. The shoot. From the root of Jesse. A branch. From the root. Shall bear fruit. And the spirit of the Lord. Shall rest upon him.

Then think of Jesus himself. Before his trial. And temptation. In the wilderness. What happens before that? The Holy Spirit.

[15:39] Rests upon him. At his baptism. Insult. And trial. And suffering. As God's people. Is preceded. With God's spirit.

And presence. Resting upon them. So when it's really. Really tough. That is saying to you. That God is especially near.

Not far. His spirit. Is resting upon you. It should encourage you. When it's really hard. That he is close by.

Don't think. That he has left you. So that's the third thing. Number four. Don't think. That when Christian suffering comes.

It is all about you. Don't think. That the suffering. Is all about you. Look at verse 13. But rejoice. In so far.

[16:33] As you share. Christ's. Sufferings. That you may also. Rejoice. And be glad. When his glory. Is revealed.

Ultimately. The suffering. That you face. As a Christian. Is not about you. In some senses. It is not your suffering.

But your sharing suffering. Sharing in Christ's suffering. It's his suffering. Not yours. First and foremost.

Now just use your imagination for a bit. Just think of a family. Let's imagine them for a moment.

Where the father. Or the mother. Goes out to work. Every day.

And his job is really. Really hard. Perhaps he's a miner. Or a farmer. Something physical maybe. It's hard graft. And for 12 hours a day or more.

[17:31] Six days a week. He goes out and works. And he suffers. And his son. At home. Sees his scarred hands.

His broken body. His tired eyes. And he admires his father. For it. Doesn't he? He's so moved. By what he is doing.

For the family. He gets to know. Every day. The suffering. That his father feels. As he serves the family. He sees it every day.

So years go by. And eventually. That son. Has a family of his own. He has children himself. And he takes on the job.

The same job. Of his father. And his children. See his scarred hands. His broken body. His tired eyes.

[18:28] And wonder. Dad. Why do you do it? Why do you suffer. In this way? And of course. He tells them. Doesn't he. About grandfather. Tells them about his father.

Your grandfather. Was a great. Great man. He says. And every time. I go out to work. I think of him. I share in his sufferings.

In this job. I rejoice. That I can be like him. Your grandfather. In his sufferings.

Jesus said. If they persecuted me. They will persecute you. To his disciples. It's not about you.

In some sense. It's about grandfather. If I can put it like that. It's about sharing. In Christ's sufferings. And the honour.

[19:26] And privilege. That it is. To do that. So don't think. It's about you. It is sharing. In Christ's sufferings. But then.

Fifthly. And lastly. Don't think. It's forever. Don't think. The suffering. Is forever. There will be glory. Suffering. In the Christian life. Is always.

Followed by glory. Look at verse 13. Again. But rejoice. In so far. As you share. Christ's sufferings. That you may also. Rejoice. And be glad.

When his glory. Is revealed. You can rejoice. Because you share. In Christ's sufferings. Today. What an honour. That is. But you will.

Rejoice. In his glory. Then. Chapter 5. Verse 1. He says. That I partake. In Jesus's glory. It is.

[20:21] After all. About him. About Jesus. That although. Suffering may come. Jesus' verdict. And return. Is actually.

More important. Than what. Other people think. If he is glorious. And he is the one. He blesses. Then ultimately. The curses.

And insults. Of other people. Have no effect. Ultimately. If his spirit. Rests upon you. In that moment. Then no matter.

How isolated. You may feel. You are in fact. Known. And loved. By him. He is close to you. What happens.

To Jesus. Is at the kernel. At the centre. Of what happens. To you. As you trust. In him. So just as surely. As his suffering.

[21:15] Is followed. By glory. So your suffering. Too. Will. End in glory. As he returns. You know.

As we listen to this. I am not commanding. You here. To be joyful. If you are suffering. Today. For being a Christian. I cannot just say that.

Can I? Peter though. Gives us the resources here. I think. We need. To see that suffering. Is not unusual. And actually.

It's a sign of. A privilege. Privileged position. To share in Christ's sufferings. And it should be our prayer. Shouldn't it. Today.

That that. Would lead us to. Rejoicing. In that moment. When you want to say. I am a Christian.

[22 : 14] But it feels really hard. Don't think that that feeling. Is unusual. Don't think it's because. You've done something wrong. Don't think it's because.

God has left you. Don't think the suffering. Is all about you. And the suffering. Is not forever. It will lead to glory. Let's pray.