

Sermon by Bob Brown on Sunday AM 11/23/08
Hope In Suffering **1 Peter 4: 12-19**

Sometimes it is very difficult for us to think of being persecuted for Christ or going through trials as actually suffering— but those reading this letter from Peter knew what it was to suffer for Jesus name.

For each of us, as we learn about and grow in our trials in this life, we need to recognize that in the life of a believer, trials are not an accident. We should not be surprised by them—God can even use the things we go through to help us by using them as a testing or proving ground.

Verse 13 seems so strange to us, talking about rejoicing in our sufferings, but in the midst of trials and suffering for Christ's sake, there is a glimmer of hope, a bit of joy and a bright light because we have the encouragement that our future is to be seen as eternally secure from all suffering. When all you and or I can squeak out is a little upturn of the corner of our mouth; Rejoice! We can trust the One who is "*...able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.*" (Ephesians 3:20).

Speaking of suffering and abundance, A.B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian & Missionary Alliance Church said, "What blessedness when I came to the knowledge that I had been looking in the wrong place, when I found victory, salvation, deliverance, purity, holiness —all must be found in Christ Jesus Himself, not in some formula. When I claimed Jesus just for Himself, it became easy and the glory came to my life."

When you or I suffer for the name of Jesus, that is, being called names, spoken of in a derogatory way, lose possessions, lose our status, or even physical pain, the Bible says, "*You are blessed!*" (verse 14). I guess that is another biblical paradox, when you suffer you are blessed. The blessing comes by the Spirit of God, the glory of God filling our spirits and resting on us. The same Spirit that was on Christ, the Bible promises will be on us— in our suffering and trials. Now that is hope in suffering!

Peter is very helpful here to all of us as well as to those who were reading this letter after he wrote it. He explains that if we are actually doing wrong, we can't hide behind a Christian curtain and call it unjust suffering, or even suffering for the cause of Christ. He mentions some commonly

known and deserved reasons for being judged and punished: A murderer, thief, any kind of lawbreaker, even as a meddler.

We need to park here for a few moments. What Peter is saying is that all these actions are just cause for being found guilty before men. Meddling is getting involved in the lives of those in which we ought not to be involved. It is talking about the lives of those in which we have not been invited to help. Meddling is being a gossip, a busy-body or prying into the lives of people, believers or unbelievers, uninvited and even in a hurtful way.

Any one of these things is actually stepping outside of our calling, which is to be as Christ-like as possible and outside our mission, which is to take as many people to heaven with us in as Christ-like condition as possible. Any one of these actions is forbidden by Word of God as sin.

It seems as if we have gone full circle in the attitudes of the world toward those who call themselves Christians. In the first century, as this was being written, there was contempt for those who were followers of Jesus. Christians were considered narrow-minded, intolerant and were accused of causing trouble for anyone who just wanted to please their cultural leaders.

We, like those early Christians, are exhorted, however not to be ashamed of the name of Jesus. This is the name that means salvation and forgiveness of sin. This is the name at which *"every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Philippians 2:10-11). Instead of being ashamed, we are to praise God that even if we suffer for Christ, we have hope.

The judgment of God should be a concern for each one of us, and it should begin in God's house, we are to hold each other accountable in our walk with Christ. What we stand for is really how we are known and how we are judged, both in the world by men, and in heaven by God.

One of the questions we should be asking ourselves, is the question asked in verse 17: if judgment begins in the church, what will happen to those who reject Jesus by unbelief and disobedience?

The answer is a quote from **Proverbs 11:31**. You see, even if we as believers suffer for righteousness, we still have the absolute assurance of our salvation, now and in the future. We have the promise and hope of life everlasting even if we didn't have it perfect here on earth. But to the unrepentant, to those who love sin and have no hope, we should be thinking of ways to reach them for Christ, even if they are the source of our suffering.

We who call ourselves faithful followers of Jesus must always commit ourselves to our faithful Creator. The fact is, sin came into this earth and destroyed the original plan of God and severed that personal relationship that Adam and Eve had with God. God missed us so much that He came to us, even the Old Testament name of Jesus means "God with us".

God has restored that severed relationship through the life, death and resurrection of His one and only Son, Jesus Christ. He reminds us constantly of His love through the Holy Spirit.

Those who live in the will of God, who live for Jesus, who want the will of God in their lives, can always know that He is faithful to us. When we are totally committed to Him, God becomes our only hope in suffering, actually God is our only hope at all!