“How to Live as Suffering Saints”

1 Peter 4:12-14

Trials should not be a surprise to us

They are inevitable for a believer in Christ

John 15:18-19: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

John 16:33: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace.  In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

1 Thessalonians 3:1-4: “Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.”

2 Timothy 3:12: “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

2

Even though the Scriptures are very clear about this, many Christians still have strong misconceptions about suffering

Listen to these examples

Perhaps some of us have come to these conclusions during times of misfortune

If God really loves me, He will either remove or prevent suffering in my life

If God is truly omnipotent, He has the power to erase suffering from my life in a nano-second, so why doesn’t He do it?

I thought being a Christian meant primarily good things would happen in my life

If I pray for God to remove suffering from my life, He should do this immediately since I’m asking Him sincerely to do so

The end goal of these rationalizations is to totally side-step suffering in this life

But as we have already seen, for the Christian, this is virtually impossible

Now, if we are truly honest about it, we have to admit that we bring more suffering upon ourselves for doing what is wrong rather than what is right

There is the inescapable sowing and reaping principle taught within the New Testament

3

If we sow to our sinful flesh, we will reap the unpleasant, harmful consequences to our actions

However, remember within this letter Peter is referring to suffering which we must endure unjustly

In other words, it is not the result of willful disobedience on our part

Paul and Silas’ tribulations in Acts 16 illustrate this

It is significant to note that to identify as a Christian in the first century necessitated total commitment

There was a very real possibility you could become a martyr based upon your public profession of faith

Peter calls their suffering a fiery ordeal, indicating it must have been very intense

These Christians were in danger of being blindsided by these unwelcome trials, questioning God and asking why through resorting to the questions we noted earlier

Peter, instead provides an answer to the “what” question

In other words, “what is God’s purpose behind allowing them to experience such unfair hardship?”

God was permitting this suffering to strengthen their faith

4

His divine goal was to prove the authenticity of their character and faith and produce greater holiness in their lives

The apostle Paul substantiates this in Romans 5:1-4

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

The testing God permits through suffering benefits us, others and most importantly brings greater glory to God

Suffering always works for, never against a Christian

As such, we should not think it strange to experience suffering

Rather, we are to replace perplexity with recognition and rejoicing

Christ spoke to this in the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:10-12: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed ae you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

5

This response is counterintuitive to our sinful human nature

When we receive unfair treatment, we usually will want to do anything but rejoice

However, Peter gives us the reason why we should rejoice

We have the tremendous privilege of being a partner with Christ in His earthly suffering

The Greek term is “koinonia”, i.e. to enter into fellowship

We also will most certainly share in Jesus’ glory throughout eternity

So we are essentially being blessed when experiencing suffering reproach for the name of Christ

Peter is referring to harsh, verbal abuse

To have God’s glorious Holy Spirit rest upon us is an incredible privilege

The idea of rest is to presently experience a quiet, calm expectation of God’s ultimate victory over suffering, looking beyond this brief life into one’s eternal future

The unbelieving world may mock the Lord Jesus Christ but He will be glorified through our lives

To glorify God is the main reason for our human existence

How will these Scriptures truly change the way you and I live?