

PERSEVERANCE: *How to View Suffering*

Got Hope? Messages from 1 Peter

April 17 & 18, 2010

1 Peter 4

Communion. Intro:

Imagine being forced to do what you don't want to do. Imagine being denied your freedom - not being allowed to go where you want to go, or do what you want to do, or eat what you want to eat. Imagine being identified by a number and having to perform to the very edge of your ability and beyond, only to be compared to others. Imagine long hours of sweat in the sun with no compensation while others just watch and critique your every move.

It may seem like I'm describing torture, but I'm really talking about college athletics. And this illustrates that when we understand *the reason* for our suffering, we gain the ability to persist, because we know *the pain accomplishes a purpose*. When we see our suffering not as *something strange and meaningless*, but *strategic and meaningful*, we can find the *power to persevere*. How *we view suffering* can lead us to not only accept it, but to excel and achieve.

We've been studying 1 Peter and our passage for today addresses this topic and more. As I was reading it, I began to note how the material affects me. It moves me to think and feel and decide certain things and I know it will have an impact in your life as well. I'll explain chapter 4, verse by verse, and *stop along the way for some personal applications*.

4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. *Therefore* points back to 3:18 where we are told that *Jesus died for sin*. That is *suffering* to the ultimate extent. Now we are to follow his example, and we can! The difference is that we don't die for sin, we die *to sin*! Since Jesus gave his life for us, we can't continue to live for ourselves anymore. Instead, we are to give ourselves to him - and not to sin!

I like that phrase, *done with*: *It's not going to be the same anymore*. This is severe. *Arm yourself* is a military

term. We're to arm ourselves with Christ's attitude. Jesus died for sins once for all, and we're to have that same unswerving resolve to honor God in and through it all. This reminds me of Rom 6:6,7 - *when we die to sin, we are freed from it - the bondage is broken*.

Identifying with Christ in suffering is part of this process. **2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.** Note *desires* is plural, but *the will of God* is singular. Worldly desires pull us in different directions but living for God unifies our lives. To think God's way about life and all that it contains, including pain, involves a healthy disconnect from the things that distract us, and a reconnection with God as our Maker and Master. Since Jesus gave us his life, our lives will never be the same again. Life is altered forever. It is no longer about trying to fulfill desires; it is all for God now. We can face the future with a new mindset and find strength. The past has passed!

3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. Haven't you had enough? That was a waste, when you were wasted! Make a decisive break.

oThis convicts me of self-indulgence and motivates me to live for God. When I read this, I think of the fact that *my change* has *fallen short of completion*. I have not made an *absolute* about face. I'm still too much like I used to be. My motto has been *excess in all things*. I changed the venues, but am I still too self-focused? I want to live for God, not me. Let this passage have its full affect on you. How about your heart? When identifying with Christ costs the most, I don't want any of us to compromise just to stay comfortable. That is even more costly.

Think of the last time you were seated at a restaurant with dim lighting. You couldn't see your table at first, but after a while your eyes adjusted to the dark and everything was fine. Have you been immersed in this world so long

that you have adjusted to the dark? Are you *used to it* now? This section reminds us that we have hung out there long enough and it is time to no longer live for our own desires, but for the will of God!

When you do renounce old ways, old friends won't get it. **4 They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.** Oddly, there is nothing strange about watching a person walk off a cliff morally. But when someone straightens out, there will be some talk! *Can you believe it? How backward! How old fashioned! Politically incorrect!* To hold different values will provoke hostility. The next verse says that, while *they may judge you now, God is the final judge.* **5 But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.** That will be no party. This teaches the inevitability of accountability. **6 For this** (that everyone will give an account) **is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead,** (this is the way it has always been) **so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.** He's saying that the suffering here in the flesh before men is only for now, but the reward in the spiritual realm before God is forever. The last effect of sin here is physical death but that doesn't end things for the believer - it is the gateway to eternal life. Those who have not responded in faith, but have rejected God, face a different future. Can you imagine what it would be like to give an account without having Christ at your side? To be on your own would be frightening.

oThis makes me think of my friends and concerns me about their future.

Is this all real? If so, what are the implications? Mat 12:36 - *But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment....* I don't want this to be true for my loved ones. But not liking it won't make it go away. Disbelieving in reality doesn't affect it. Just as believing in something doesn't make it true, so denying it won't make it disappear.

Heb 4:13 - *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.* This makes me grasp the nature of my responsibility. Remember the crawdad story I told last weekend? I was teaching later from Rom. *How beautiful are the feet that bring good news.* I took that story a little farther! Imagine you could enter their world and point them to the path of life! The muddy feet are beautiful!

7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. This is startling. It is meant to disturb our complacency. This world doesn't go on forever here. A change is coming. We're to live in light of the eternal consummation of all things. When we think things will go on *as is*, we're lulled into lackadaisical prayerlessness and complacent disregard. Peter knew something about this: He fell asleep when he was supposed to be praying (Mk 14:37-40). Jesus taught us to be ready. Since we're to expect an *immanent intervention and invasion* by God, we must keep our head and conscious clear.

8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Deeply is literally *stretched out*. The word was used in ancient Gk to describe how a horse stretches out into a gallop and of an athlete strains for the finish line. It speaks of intense exertion. This kind of imagery doesn't exactly conjure up fluffy feelings. Note what love can accomplish. It is not blind, it sees but accepts others' faults. And love is practical: **9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.** Don't just love in word, but in deed. And it's not enough to *serve* if you're *complaining*.

10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. *We've got to take this apart to hear what it says.*

Each one: Not just to some, *the paid professionals*, but all.

use: Don't sit on your abilities, put them into practice.

received: These gifts are not determined by us.

to serve others: not to draw attention to ourselves.

faithfully administering: Stewards of what is not our own.

11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. This summarizes the gifts under two headings. Not all roles are up-front. Some are behind the scenes. Rom 12:4-8. 1 Cor 12:4-11 is similar. Whatever it is that God has called and equipped you to do, do it with all your might! And look at that result! Matt 5:16-*let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

oThis puts things in perspective and challenges me to love and serve. It is easy when times are tough to forget everyone else and shift your focus onto yourself. When suffering, we tend to withdraw. This is a mistake, *not only for individuals, but for churches as well.* Times are tight.

It would be easy to cut back and do less. We could respond to the bleak economic forecasts by cutting programs and disconnecting from missions. *But we need to do the opposite.* Remember me talking about our "health plan?" What do we need to *keep doing to be healthy?* It is as simple as ABC:

Align all activities toward the goal. *God's glory!*

Believe that God is alive and active. *Pray in faith!*

Commit to take the next step toward Christ.

We're to get our attention off of ourselves, even though times are tough. We need to get back to basics. What is your part? Put things in perspective: love and serve!

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. Expect difficulties. Some trials are just part of life for everyone. Other problems are *the results of our mistakes.* And others are undeserved persecution.

When you have to endure something because of your faith, it is no accident, but a divinely appointed opportunity to grow. Trials don't *just happen.* They are placed in our lives for a purpose. It purifies our faith. Not uncommon. 2 Tim 3:12 *Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. Share in Christ's sufferings and you'll also share in his glory. Rom 8:18 - *The sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be compared...*

14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Suffering is not a misfortune to be resented. James 1:2-4 *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. This leads to *undermining and contradicting* your testimony for Christ.

16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Example in Acts 5:41 *The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.*

17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" Judgment is here referring to trials to purify us (1 Cor 11:32). If we need a little discipline for now, and we do, how different will judgment be on those who reject God forever? Final summary in **19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.** Commit is a banking term. It means to *entrust for safekeeping.* Think of how *savings and loans* have

advertised since all the bank failures: *We're not going away. Your investment is safe. We're backed by the FDIC. We have stability and so can you.* This verse says *we should bank on God.* When *times are tough* we can confidently *entrust* ourselves to him. *He is able* to keep you. *Creator* reminds us that he *can* take care of us and *faithful* reminds us that he *will!* Prov 3:5,6 *trust in the Lord...*

oThis reminds me of the meaning of pain and encourages me to trust God. We can confidently trust God knowing that it is all for a purpose. This trouble is only for now. There is eternity ahead. Our present is not controlled by our past, but by the future. And God is trustworthy! What do you need to trust into his care right now?

Prayer: Phil 4:6,7 - Do not be anxious...

More Meat: a few extra random ideas:

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The other day I heard a person complaining about the economy and someone replied, *times are hard for everyone.* That is true. Life can be pretty difficult. We suffer for a variety of reasons, including own choices. But there is a special kind of pain; that is being persecuted for your faith. When we suffer unjustly, the Christian is to demonstrate perseverance - to stick with it even in the face of harassment and discrimination.

3 - How life used to be: 1 Cor. 6:9-11.

6 - Maybe the same fear was present in these people as in the Thessalonians - that those who had died were in trouble and missing out and didn't have a chance to get right with God through Christ. The gospel was preached to them when they were alive.

7 - sober thinking: Rom 12:3.

Jesus taught us to be ready Luke 12:35ff.

8 - Pr. 10:12; 1 Cor 13 - doesn't not take into account a wrong suffered.

12 - Fiery ordeal: Nero blamed Christians for the fire in Rome retaliated with a terrible persecution: executing many by fire.

Trail by fire. Testing of gold. Has a purpose.

14 - Mt 5:11 - rejoice.

17 - If salvation involved temporal judgments for the saved, imagine what is involved for those who are not saved.

Heb 12:7 - endure hardship as discipline.

19 - 1 Pet 2:23 - Jesus kept entrusting himself.