 Steve last week reminded us that as Peter was writing to Christians living in Turkey who are suffering persecution, because they are Christians. Peter sort to encourage them; rather than fighting for victory, he was encouraging them to live from a place of victory.


Which leads us to this morning's passage. 1 Peter: 4:12-19.

Our passage today deals almost entirely on the topic of suffering, and I don't mean it is in the sense that your Wi-Fi went down, or that the aircon on the school bus was broken, yet again. I mean real, life threatening, life changing suffering. Suffering because you have a faith is Christ's words and life example to the point that no matter what situation you face- you are unwavering in that faith you profess to have, no matter what lays ahead of you.

It's not an easy passage to preach on. Encouraging all of you, embrace hardship and suffering. So, this morning, for many, this passage might be a tough a passage to hear, and I'm pretty certain It will be tough passage for all of us to put into practise.

Opening prayer.

Opening question: Let us not get to heavy to quick. So, let me start with a simple question:

- What does Jesus mean to you?

At first thought, you might say, or at least be thinking:

Saviour, God's Son, Redeemer, Friend.

So, this morning, **'who is Jesus to you?'**

As we have seen over the past several weeks, we are being encouraged to build our lives, our character, off the sacrifice of Jesus.

And as we look further into the message of Peter, may we continue to see encouragement, in and for these current times, but also see this continued calling to God's grace, holiness.

Peter had spent considerable time in the preceding verses and chapters dealing with the Christian character and conduct in the midst of a fallen world.

He was aware of the struggles and persecution faced by the rapidly growing, extremely diverse - church.

Although they were forced to deal with adversity, there was this expectation that no matter where they ended up, they would maintain their integrity before others, presenting a positive witness for Christ, and our text today continues with this very thought. However, Peter takes their responsibilities in a different direction.

Most believers in that day dealt with opposition from the society around them, knowing all too well the difficulties of being a Christian in the midst of an ungodly culture. Peter does not shy away from that truth, nor does Peter try to minimize the reality of that effect it would have upon their lives.

Peter is very straightforward with the church, with the people. In fact, instead of trying to alter their focus, Peter deals bluntly with the sufferings they that had already faced. He was all too aware that their suffering would likely continue, if not, to get worse. So, we Peter wanting to prepare them as individual's and as a church to endure whatever they were to face in the future.

Suffering for your faith, being treated un-fairly for your Christian lifestyle and choices, possible jail time or beatings for your confession as Jesus being the only way to heaven—this isn't our reality- YET.

This rarely happens to anyone of us here in Toowoomba, even to the church broadly in the west. This seems so far from our normal, it seems unreal, possibly even un-true.


However difficult it might seem, or out of place (at least for the moment) these principles regarding suffering. They remain true, and as such, we should learn from them.

Our world today is rapidly changing, and we too must prepare ourselves for the difficulties that are sure to come. While we hate to admit it, the Lord often uses difficulties, trials, pain and suffering to strengthen our faith and reliance upon Him. The suffering we endure from time to time is actually beneficial in our Christian lives.

Growth is painful at times, but growth is necessary if we are to be like Christ.

Read verse together:

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 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. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

 ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; 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?" ¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good

1st- Trials and suffering aren't exceptions.

So, the first take away point is that trials and suffering aren't exceptions.

Trials and suffering can cause either growth or bitterness in the life of a Christian. So, how you and I respond to such circumstances, determines the result or outcome. It will either be **Growth** or **Bitterness in our faith**.

But trials and suffering are not exceptions. Our reading today reminds us clearly of this cold hard truth. **V12-If you profess to be a Christ follower, you will have trouble. Don't be surprised.**

These are hard words to hear, because today, this isn't our normal state.

I would say 99% of the time, you and I are encouraged either by TV or by Radio that we should seek easy and comfort, in fact you deserve it. We have all heard this somewhere: **"it will make your life so much easier, all for 3 payments of \$39.95, so call right now."**

In all honesty, Christianity in the west, that includes you and I, we don't even contemplate suffering as normal. It is the furthest thing from our thoughts. However, if we have do, generally 'suffering' we experience comes from a wrong choice or action carried out by us. Yes, the situation might be hard and uncomfortable, but we are dealing with consequences of that wrong choice or action- not suffering as mentioned in this passage.

Now when we talk about suffering, trials etc, don't just think in the way of physical pain and suffering because it also includes the emotional, mental and social abuse and hardships. The bare bones of it all is that **Christians will be tested, in all facets of life.**

In fact, we are told early in the verse that we should not be surprised, which means that It should be expected. So, this morning if you aren't in that state of trial and testing already, you should be preparing yourself for that time to come.

I was reading recently of an account of a man that lived and worked in a farming area in rural China. He was exposed to the message of the cross and eventually he became a Christian. Soon the message of the cross changed him so much that in time the vast majority of the village that he lived in came to Christ as well. As the church grew and lives continued to change, so did the acceptance of this change.

The local authorities came and saw them, harassed them, broke their possessions (the very little they had) and eventually progressed to acts of physical harm towards the believers. The firsts man became the teacher to the church that had grown very organically, and as the leader of the church he was told on one such occasion, that if he continued to share this false teaching, they would have to take him away for re-education training. What a nice way to say torture until you give in to their wishes.

He didn't stop, and in fact, as he was taken away one Sunday from the church service he was running, his last words to them were words of encouragement. He wasn't asking them to stop police from taking him or in fact, from destroying anything they wished, instead he called them to pray for the police and for God's will to be done and his Love to be clearly seen through them all, but keep meeting together, keep trusting God for all things.

What you and I say we believe and follow, will be challenged, it will be tested by society's expectations, and by personal pressures and pleasures that we allow to be placed before us and a daily basis.

Foreknowledge is to be fore warned. So, be ready, Start preparing now because pain and suffering aren't exceptions for those professing to life a Christ like life.

This is where we tie back into Steve message from last week: We were encouraged to stop giving authority to Satan that he shouldn't have – take control of our lives, and remain under the power of the Holy Spirit, by renewing and transforming the way that we think- Scripture based not self-based.

Remembering that our reaction to suffering is either producing growth or bitterness in your faith.

2- Suffering is an Opportunity to reveal Christ

Charles Spurgeon said: "The idea of suffering is a strange one. We don't like pain and we definitely don't want suffering. Anything that is drawn out, especially pain or injury, yep we don't want it."

How true is that. Self-preservation, fear of what will be done or could happen, discomfort are just some words that spring up. But as Christians should be thinking this way? Or should we have a different idea, a different view.

Let's see what it is that Peter focuses the hearer of this letter onto:

Verse- ¹³ **But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.** 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..**


David Pawson in Unlocking the Bible said- **"See all things as an opportunity, as a blessing. Even though your body might be harmed, the persecutors are unable to touch your spirit. ' Let them do what they like with your body, but keep your spirit intact- that way, even though you seem to be losing, you will, in the end, gain the victory."**

Did you catch the idea?

The most important thing is your spiritual life. Today we spend so much time working on our physical bodies and little time making our spiritual life the best it can be.

To say this a different way: A couple getting married will spend hours upon hours getting the day just right. From dresses, flowers, music to seating arrangements, however they might only spend 5-6 hrs working on their physical relationship, making sure that it will last a lifetime.

Through Christ's life, teaching and then ultimately his redemptive work at the cross, Christ chose to switch things around. He was working on the spirit, not the physical life which is temporal.

 **John 12:23-26-²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.**

Paul said it this way:

Hebrews 12- **12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes**

on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

⁸ If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Enduring suffering is about of the sanctification process. We aren't holy, but we are on a journey of being made holy. As you replace the joys of the physical with the continued joy of knowing, sharing and being a part of God's family, holiness becomes the desired outcome- being in that relationship always.

As a Christian, if you and I show no difference in the way that we handle all that life puts before us, then Christ death is meaningless, and no-one will be saved by our example. Why? Because it first hasn't changed us.

If we do not reflect Christ's goodness, joy through obedience, through the good times as well as the hard times, then what is Christ to me?

Peter's continues urging Christians, urging you and I to consider the relative unimportance of temporary suffering in this world, compared to enjoying of an eternal inheritance.


We are being encouraged strongly, to consider how our suffering can lead to the salvation of others – not that we pay the price of their sin [not that we in any way purchase their salvation], but that as we suffer, we witness to the one in whom they may believe in thus be saved.


So, as you and I go through tough times, these times of growth, do we look to see how we can make it an opportunity to make much of Jesus. Does the simple fact that you and I are redeemed, that we each have had our eternal salvation purchased and secured, mean enough that it brings us great joy and security, no matter what we face?

Our is it something we only consider on our death bed or when attending a funeral?

3- Suffering, Judgement or Refinement

So, which do we consider to be true: **is suffering judgement for harboured sin and wrong choices or is it refinement- the process of being made holy?**

 **V¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; 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?"**

 **¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.**

I do not know about you, but my first thought about this verse is, no thanks, start with someone else. However, judgement here is not punishment it's quite the opposite. It's refinement. God's household, used here in verse 17, literally means the house of God. That is the temple, which is now recognized as God's people. Believers. You and I.

Ezek 9 and Mal 3 reveals Gods intention of purifying, refining those that are His. He starts at His house. Judgement here is seen as purifying and cleansing. It is a positive thing. The suffering of God's people makes them stronger.

1 Peter 1:6-9 ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen

him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

If a Christian needs to go through this process of sanctification, the process of being made holy, then how much more will those that don't have the blood of Christ counted to them. Eternity with the living God isn't their reality. It's not even a thought. So, if we are no different, how will they know?

V19 summarizes the message of 1 Peter. **¹⁹So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.**

You and I might be the only reflection of Christ that someone will see. As we commit to God's will and purpose for our lives, we need to see **that all things**, the things we call good and the things we call bad are actually opportunities for us to grow in faith and increase our dependence on the one that has done it all for us.

Be different because you are called to be different, choosing to live from a place of victory, not fighting for victory.

Romans 5 **In and through our sufferings, we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.**

Pain and Suffering help us, allows us to grow in and through our faith so that we can be examples of Christ to others.

So, if we see suffering as refinement, and allow growth to happen, then bitterness should not be the result, we should also then seek to continue to do good.

We aren't called to be judges, but we are called to follow the one that will judge everyone, at the appointed time.

This leads me back to the question at the beginning: **"What does Jesus mean to you?"**

 **Communion:**



Each week we take time to reflect on the suffering and obedience of Christ to the will of His Father. Through Christ's obedience, God's judgement on humanity was appeased, however, that acceptance and thus covering of His shed blood is a decision that each person must make for themselves.

From the words of 1 Peter 1:13-21

¹³Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

¹⁷Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰He was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Remembering that Growth through suffering builds into your faith, however, bitterness always takes away from your ability to grow and live in faith.

So, we come to the work of Christ at Calvary. His acceptance, his example of faith through suffering should always be a motivator for living our Christian life- seeing things from a different point of view: For the joy that was set before him.

His trust in the Father was complete and as such all the work of life in and of faith also complete.

Philippians 3:7-12 ⁷ **But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.**

¹⁰ **I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.**

¹² **Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.**

Please take the bread (or whatever you are using) and your cup and consider these verses once again: The work, the purpose, the faith and sacrifice of Jesus, God's own Son- That for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross.

Please, in your own time, eat and drink when you are ready.

Conclusion:

God will in time destroy all sin from his creation and make it new again. This re-creation, this work, has begun. The trials, and the suffering that we experience show us that God is already beginning his great work of renewal in and through each of us.

So, instead of trying to explain away, pain and suffering as just a part of the life's experience, and so, becoming negative and all consumed by it. Commit yourselves whole heartedly to the faith – and to take all opportunities to share God's desire, that all be given the opportunity to see the love of the Father, highlighted by His Son's life, death and resurrection no matter the circumstance.

Our challenge today is that each of us must follow Jesus for ourselves.

You may never have to face the decision of whether to die for your faith, but every day you face the decision of whether or not you will live for it.

Question: So, who is Jesus to you? 🖥️

