

Sermon Draft

Text: 1 Peter 4:12–19; 5:6–11

Sermon: “Joyful in Our Suffering”

Each Lord’s Day is a witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Christians live with the reality of our Lord’s victory over sin, death, and the devil. This reality causes us to “be glad,” “exult before God,” and “be jubilant with joy.” But we also live in the reality that until Jesus returns for the judgment, we are “in the world” bearing witness to the cross of Jesus and his resurrection so that others may also receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. And because we bear Christ’s name, we share in his sufferings. We are attacked and harassed by the devil, who seeks to devour us. Therefore, we gather as the body of Christ in worship to hear our Savior’s word of forgiveness and strength, just as his apostles did. Word and Sacrament are the means by which we can resist the devil, standing firm in our faith. Peter gives us the synthesis: Blessed with the name of our triune God, we can rejoice in our sufferings, glorifying God as Christians.

“Read the fine print. Know what you’re getting into.” These are words

of caution for anyone signing a contract. Many a person has been surprised by a contract when they learn that something was written “in the fine print.” Some very popular preachers today on every continent attract devotees by assuring people that followers of Jesus will be blessed with good health, wealth, and security if only they believe. It is then a blow to their listeners’ faith and confidence in Jesus when they experience suffering and trials. Upon closer examination of Scripture with faithful pastors or friends, they realize that Jesus never promised such a thing. In fact, as we shall see, Jesus said something much different. The reality is that Christians will suffer for the name of Jesus. But in the midst of suffering and trials, the reality of Easter prepares us for the reality of discipleship.

From the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry as he called the first apostles, he spoke in very frank terms about what would happen to them because they followed him. They would be reviled, persecuted, and evil things would be said about them because they followed him. Jesus told them to rejoice and be glad when those things would happen, because

their reward would be great in heaven. At other times, he told the disciples that they would be handed over to authorities to be beaten and punished. They would be hated by the world (John 15:18–19). Jesus also spoke of another kind of severe suffering for those who follow him. Shortly after Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper with his disciples, Jesus spoke to Peter: ***“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail”*** (Luke 22:31–32). Jesus never hid the reality of suffering for his name’s sake from his disciples. In fact, he was quite graphic in describing the details.

But Jesus prepared his apostles for those times of suffering with encouragement and hope. As Jesus was in the Upper Room with his disciples on the night when he was betrayed, he told them, “I have said these things to you to keep you from falling away.” Now listen closely to what follows immediately: ***“But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes [that is, persecutions] you may remember that I told them to you”*** (John 16:1, 4). Then, right after Jesus told the

disciples these things, he told them that the time had come when they would scatter out of fear, leaving him all alone. ***“Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace”*** (16:32–33). Additionally, Jesus assured the disciples that he would continue to pray for them (Luke 22:32; John 17).

This kind of straight talk about their suffering, along with Jesus’ word of encouragement and comfort, would become very important to the apostles as they would continue the teaching of Jesus through their apostolic office. At the time, they did not have a clue about what kind of suffering they would need to endure, even though they heard the words. But the Holy Spirit would bring these words of Jesus to their remembrance after Jesus was raised from the dead and the days following (John 2:22; 12:16). In time, the apostles lived the reality of suffering for the name of Jesus. We know this reality also.

The apostles continued this kind of frank talk about suffering for Jesus’ sake as part of their catechetical instruction to the church, especially as it began to grow and was increasingly dispersed. The opening of Peter’s

pastoral letter indicates it is written *“to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia”* (1 Pet 1:1). Peter’s letter to Jewish and Gentile converts in Asia Minor was to provide pastoral instruction about the Christian life in Jesus, including the reality of suffering.

Just as Jesus told the apostles that he wanted them to know suffering was in store for them so they would not fall away, Peter echoes this reality in a pastoral way in our text, as if to say, *“he who has ears to hear, let him hear”*: *“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you”* (4:12). Today we might say, “Forewarned is forearmed.” When you are persecuted for following Jesus, when you are reviled, insulted, shunned, shut out, ridiculed, arrested, imprisoned, put to death, sifted as wheat by Satan through severe trials, do not be alarmed. There is no need to ask God why this is happening to you. There is no reason to be ashamed. This kind of suffering as a Christian is an uncomfortable, hot, fiery trial to test you, Peter writes. When metals

and ore are heated in the testing pot, it can be determined what their makeup is. Spiritual trials *test* us, revealing our makeup. These fiery trials were often experienced by people of faith in the Old Testament. For example, God said to Israel through the prophet Isaiah, ***“I have refined you . . . ; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction”*** (Isaiah 48:10).

Fiery trials show us how weak and helpless we are. They reveal how utterly dependent we are on God’s grace and mercy, and how much we need the prayers of Jesus so that we may bear them. When we are in the midst of these trials, we are often driven more deeply into God’s Word and prayer. We yearn more for words of comfort and hope as we hear God’s Word and receive the body and blood of Jesus. It is only then that we are able to rejoice in our sufferings. It is then, as we hear the voice of God speak to us just as clearly as Jesus spoke to the apostles, that we are reminded we are not alone through these trials. That gives us a whole new perspective. We can confess with assurance and joy, “The Spirit of glory and God rests upon me. I am blessed when I am insulted, for I

share Christ's sufferings. He has counted me worthy to suffer for his name." So, we need not despair in our suffering as though God were punishing us. It is quite the opposite. Rather, as Peter urges, we entrust our soul to the faithful Creator so we can go about doing the good that he has called us to do. We can let go of worrying about suffering and cast all of our anxieties on Jesus because he cares for us.

The life of a Christian is secure in Jesus. However, Peter urges us, we must be watchful because we have an enemy who seeks to rob us of our Easter joy and our faithfulness to Christ.

Peter reminds us to remain vigilant. This is no game of make-believe. Satan is real. Be watchful. Martin Luther noted that the world is the realm of the devil and we would be wise to regard our life as if we were staying in a hotel where every other guest was a robber. We would do whatever we could to protect ourselves and likely not get much sleep. In other words, we would be on our constant guard (see AE 30:140).

Make no mistake. Satan is our adversary, prowling around like a lion. If you've watched TV programs of nature where lions are in the wild, or

even observed a yard cat, you know that they see their prey long before the prey is aware. The lion studies the movements and stealthily creeps along the tall grass until the prey is not paying attention. Then it springs forth and sinks its teeth and claws into its prey, putting the death grip of its jaws around the throat.

Not only be watchful, but resist Satan when he tempts you, Peter says, remaining firm in your faith. Hold onto the Word of God in your heart and use it as Jesus did during his temptations from Satan. Do not give up or let go of the Word for anything. And know that you are not alone. Not only does the Spirit of God rest upon you and go with you through these fiery trials, but countless Christians join you as well. The same type of suffering is experienced by our sisters and brothers in the faith throughout the world. Yes, we truly can, as Peter writes, “[cast] all our anxieties on him, because he cares for us” (5:7).

Satan is not in charge. The world, who serves as Satan’s puppet, is not in charge. It may appear that way, as he and the world inflict all sorts of warfare on Christians. But Jesus demonstrated that he is Lord of lords.

Scripture tells us that Jesus descended into hell to announce his resurrection victory to all, right under the nose of Satan. Satan used worthless people to lie about Jesus and falsely accuse him, resulting in his crucifixion, but the reality is that no one took Jesus' life. He laid down his life willingly to be the perfect sacrifice for sin. What Satan intended for destruction; Jesus used for our salvation. When Jesus breathed his last, our sin fully atoned, Satan thought Jesus would be buried and forgotten as some misfit. But the Lord of Life would not be contained. Having destroyed the curse of sin, Jesus burst forth from the tomb, swallowing up death and giving in its place everlasting life. He lives! He lives! Therefore, Peter says, ***“after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever”*** (5:10–11).

There is no fine print to be concerned about in our discipleship of Jesus. No gimmicks. It is a reality that we will suffer trials for the name of Jesus. But they will not last forever. At the right time, Jesus, the

mighty hand of God, will exalt us. He will restore us, confirm us, strengthen us, and establish us. Our suffering will be over, and we will be with him in the everlasting paradise that he has prepared for each of us, rejoicing with gladness as his glory is revealed.

Amen