

TITLE: "No Strangers to Suffering" (Part 2)

PASSAGE: 1 Peter 4:13-14

THEME: *Pearls of Joy in an Ocean of Pain: Finding Joy in Suffering*

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{{Read 1 Peter 4:12-19}}

Fascinating early 3rd century account of t/Martyrdom of Perpetua ==> Vibia Perpetua, a 22-year-old mother of an infant son, along with her servant girl who was eight months pregnant, was arrested for joining a class of Christian believers. Perpetua nursed her child in prison and made arrangements with her mother to take him if anything should happen. Meanwhile, the servant girl gave birth to her child in prison.

When Perpetua's father learned that she was to be thrown into the arena with wild beasts, he tried to get her out. But he was beaten instead. On the day of the execution the men were taken first. Among them was Saturus, the Bible class leader. He stopped at the gate for one last word of testimony with Pudens, the prison governor, who later turned to Christ and became a martyr himself. The men were sent into the arena with a bear, a leopard, and a wild boar. As Saturus was mangled by the beasts, the spectators shouted, "He is well baptized!"

Next Perpetua and her servant were stripped and sent into the arena to face a "mad heifer." The torture soon became too much for the crowd and they cried, "Enough, enough!" The women were taken to the executioner. Perpetua called out to some grieving friends, "Give out the Word to the brothers and sisters; stand fast in the faith, love one another, and don't let our suffering become a stumbling block to you."

The first blow of the gladiator was not sufficient. Perpetua cried out in pain, took the gladiator's hand, and directed the sword to her throat. (For sources see Ruth Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, pp. 33-35.)

As a new Christian myself I read the story of Chet Bitterman a missionary with Wycliffe who was kidnaped on January 19, 1981 when a group of terrorists called "M-19" broke into the Summer Institute of Linguistics residence in Bogotá, Columbia. The communiqué from the terrorists read, "Chet Bitterman will be executed unless the Summer Institute of Linguistics and all its members leave Columbia by 6:00 PM February 19." Wycliffe did not budge. Brenda Bitterman and her two little children waited 48 days. On March 7 the terrorists shot Chet Bitterman through the heart and left his body on a bus in Bogota. More than one hundred Wycliffe members in Columbia were given the choice of a new field. None left. And two hundred candidates volunteered to take Chet Bitterman's place.

From the time of it's inception, the Christian CH has been subject to persecution and suffering.

Those to whom Peter writes, 1st c. Believers in Asia Minor, were no exception.

While t/kind of suffering that included martyrdom had not yet happened upon t/scene, it wasn't far off the landscape.

Verse 12, "**Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you.**" ==> Peter may well see on the horizon the persecution of Nero in which both he and Paul were killed and in which Christians were burned like torches to light up Nero's courtyard.

T/Rom. Emperor Nero goes down in history as one of the most ruthless tyrants to have ever ruled an empire.

He came into power in 54 A.D. at the age of 17. A sexual pervert who who freely engaged in homosexuality, he had his own mother murdered.

Right around t/time that Peter wrote this letter, on July 19, 64 AD T/great fire of Rome broke out. The fire burned 3 days and 3 nights, it was checked and then broke out again w/double the intensity.

Yet, it really was no secret who had set the fire: Nero. He had a passion for seeing things built under his authority. The city was full and he wanted to start over. It was said that t/firemen of the day were being deliberately hindered in their work and whenever it looked like the fire was getting under control men were seen sneaking about rekindling it.

[Barclay, 147]

After the devastation the people were enraged. Nero had to find a scapegoat. Who better than the Christians who were already despised.

A massive persecution ensued. Nero rolled Xns in pitch & lit them alive, allowing them to burn to ash as they lit his gardens. He had t/skins of wild animals sewed on them and then he set his guard dogs on them.

The Roman historian Tacitus records their plight==>

"Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed by crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burned, to served as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle..." [Barclay, 149]

To be born into this world is to be born into suffering. It doesn't take being a Christian to suffer. Yet, there is a uniqueness to t/sufferings of Christians. Think about it – we are followers of t/suffering servant – JC who entered into history for us. In entering into history He entered into suffering. All of His suffering pointed to t/cross where His suffering was propitiatory – it satisfied God's wrath against sin.

While our suffering can add nothing to that, it is also t/path to glorification, even as X's suffering was t/

Hebrews 12:1-2 **1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us . . . ==> if you read t/account in chapter 11 these were men and women of suffering**

. . . since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

"For the joy set before Him" ==>

I. Pearls of Joy in an Ocean of Pain: Finding Joy in Suffering

(12-19)

Our pain is to be tempered by the joy of suffering in Christ as we persevere in doing good, knowing that one day our joy will be made complete.

A. We Must Expect to Suffer (12)

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.

1. Suffering is God's Will for Those Whom He Loves

2. Suffering is for our Testing, our Good, and God's Glory

I. Pearls of Joy in an Ocean of Pain: Finding Joy in Suffering

B. We Must Fellowship in the Sufferings of Christ (13-14)

Even as our lives are joined with his, we experience t/fellowship of His suffering.

Rem. that wonderful passage in Philippians (book of joy) ==>

Philippians 3:8-10 **8**More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, **9** and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, **10** that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

B. We Must Fellowship in the Sufferings of Christ (13-14)

1. This means we suffer for him (13a)

But in the degree you share in the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

a. What does Peter mean ==>

But in the degree you share in the sufferings of Christ . . .

(1) Word *καθο* expresses a measure or a degree (in this case suffering)

There is a correlation between the degree of suffering you experience for X and your joy. Specifically, Peter is referring to suffering that comes by way of persecution.

Suffering at the hands of sinful men because they hate what you stand for. This is scorn, ridicule, a difficult marriage, maybe a divorce, mockery in a college classroom, no job promotion. In extreme, but not rare cases, physical harm and death.

If you only suffer a little for X, expect little joy. There's not much joy in standing at t/water cooler joining in the sick jokes of pagans rather than walking away or offering something edifying. You no doubt know what that's like ==> An opportunity to glorify your Savior comes and you watch it go by like last year's sale at Walmart.

On the other hand, there is joy in standing for truth. We don't need closet Christians. It's a sad commentary that men will boldly and proudly stand for their depravity and sin, but we cower in the corner as if truth and righteousness were something to be ashamed about!

Come out of the closet! Yeah, it might cost you. Someone may become uncomfortable. They might laugh or ridicule you.

Suffer much! Rejoice Much!

Colossians 1:24 **Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions.**

Fact of the matter is – since we are united in X all of our suffering is to be in the fellowship of X.

IOW - whatever we face in life: Health issues; financial problems; wayward children; divorce; weakness; depression; painful relationships – if we face those things in t/Spirit of God & glorify Him & draw from His grace, we are fellowshiping in the sufferings of X who himself knew the pain of sin even though he was w/o it.

He had friends turn against him, he experienced the pain of seeing those whom He loved get sick and even die.

Clement of Alexandria (lived in the 2nd c.) in his comment on this verse, particularly the phrase ==>

But in the degree you share in the sufferings of Christ . . .

wrote that ==>

This means that if you are righteous you are suffering for righteousness's sake, just as Christ did. [Adumbratigns]

2CO 4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

If we are so united with JC, if our union with Him is so intimate that t/fabric of our lives intertwines with his to the point that Paul can say that for a Christian to join himself to another in an immoral sexual union (intimacy) is to join X to that union, then our suffering – all of our suffering – is to be a testimony to t/sufferings of X and t/sufficiency of God's grace.

Paul had a thorn in the flesh – he prayed, not once, but three times for God to take it away. God said, *"No, I want you to suffer. This is for your good."* Paul said, *"I can rejoice in that. God's grace will supply my every need."*

ROM 5:3 . . . we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;

ROM 8:17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with {Him} in order that we may also be glorified with {Him.}

2CO 4:17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

That's perspective!

I. Pearls of Joy in an Ocean of Pain: Finding Joy in Suffering

A. We Must Expect to Suffer (12)

B. We Must Fellowship in the Sufferings of Christ (13-14)

1. This means we suffer for him (13a)

2. This means we keep a dual focus (13b-14)

a. Future glory (13b)

b. Present grace (14)

This is what we call an eschatological tension. No, that's not an adjustment on your lawnmower. An E.T. is t/balance of living in t/here & now while possessing eternity. We focus on future glory while we also draw from present grace. We live in t/present focused on eternity.

a. Future glory (13b)

But in the degree you share in the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

Why do we suffer? Why do we not just seek the easy way out in life. After all, being a Christian isn't easy. It's a call to t/cross, to discipleship, to self-denial, to a battle.

We focus on ==>

a. Future glory (13b)

... so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

(1) What's the ==>

revelation of His glory ???

It's His coming. It's the blessed hope of t/CH. It's the marriage supper of t/Lamb, the finalization of all that is our salvation!

That's keeping our eye on the prize // focusing on future glory.

1:6-7, 13; 5:4, 10.

(2) You persevere thru it all so that ==>

at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

Note this – it's not just rejoice (we are to keep on rejoicing now) but on that day we will rejoice with exultation (ἀγαλλιαω) ==> Lively joy; rapturous joy.

(a) For those who suffer, there is double joy

There is a joy now; but there will be pure joy later.

My wife and I were talking about this a few days ago. How tiresome it is to battle against all the false doctrines and perversions of Xnty on one front, then to battle the world on t/other.

There are all kinds of cultists who claim to have the truth, not to mention those w/i the RCC and Eastern Orthodoxy.

You can't go on the internet w/o being confronted w/their slick arguments.

You have false religionists on one hand and pagan secularists on the other. Men like Bart Ehrman who go around telling the world that t/Bible can't be trusted.

You feel like you are navigating a mine-field – am I going to get to the other side alive and sane?! That's what living t/Christian life is like today. It's a mine field. We're attacked by all kinds of mines - deceit, apostasy, discouragement, persecution, doubt, fear, sin, compromise, apathy. We try to walk in wisdom, feeling our way through every step, in order to get through this life intact.

Can you imagine the joy, rejoice with exaltation, when we are fully vindicated?! When every blaspheming atheist has his or her mouth drop suddenly knowing that they were terribly wrong. When every religionist & false teacher is proven to be in error and honor of God's name fills t/expanse of t/universe w/o rival or peer.

And we can look back at the pain, the trials – was there joy? Yes, tears can be tempered by joy – but imagine the exultation when Jesus Christ comes for us?! It's the Lord! We're okay! He's coming for you, for me! He's making every thing right!

I think of it in terms of sports. Basketball team - your team is struggling because t/best player in t/league, on your team, has been injured. He's light years better than any other player. You're in t/championship and you're struggling along, it's about to the end of the game. Suddenly t/spotlight and TV cameras turn to t/tunnel. Here comes your star, pulling off the warm ups. He's back. And t/entire arena erupts, jumping to their feet in excitement knowing that t/game is now over.

Or you're on a field of battle. Your platoon has been separated and cut off from the rest of your country's armed forces. You're hunkered down in foxholes, fighting as best you can. You've lost radio contact and the enemy is bearing down. You can see the evil smiles on some of them – they're cocky and arrogant – they think they've won. Then you hear the sound of tanks and planes and artillery – it's the Marines. They're pouring over the ridge 1/4 mile away. The enemy is dumbfounded, "Where did they come from?" They drop their weapons and retreat. You and the other men jump up and down in exaltation! You've been saved; you've been vindicated from the enemy!

Those scenarios pale in comparison to what it's going to be like when we rejoice with exaltation at the coming of JC!

Romans - no suffering can compare to the glory that is to be revealed.

ISA 35:10 **And the ransomed of the Lord will return, And come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, And sorrow and sighing will flee away.**

2. This means we keep a dual focus (13b-14)

a. Future glory (13b)

One thing to focus on the Sweet by and by – we live in the dirty now and now, so we need ==>

b. Present grace (14)

Peter brings us back to the gritty of living in here and now.

If you are reviled for the name of Christ . . .

(1) That "If" forms a First class conditional statement

We know from what we've studied so far that they were being reviled or slandered for their Christian testimony.

(2) This verse is a restatement of what Peter wrote in 3:14-16

(3) Note that it's being reviled or slandered or persecuted because of another – specifically ==>

... for the name of Christ ...

Not for sin (v. 15) but for X – for his name. That's verse 16 ==>

But if [any of you suffers] as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.

MAT 10:22 *And you will be hated by all on account of My name . . .*

MAT 24:9 *. . . and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name.*

(4) John 15:1-20

(5) Acts 5

Peter and the disciples are arrested by the Jewish leaders, they're commanded not to teach or preach t/name of Jesus. They're flogged (no inconsequential experience) commanded not to preach in the name of Jesus, and released.

Acts 5:41-42 *41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

I can't help but believe that Peter had this experience in mind– occurred some 30 years earlier – when he wrote these words in 1 Peter ==>

If you are reviled for the name of Christ you are blessed . . .

(μακάριος - blessed, happy). Same word used by Jesus in Matt .5:11

"Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me.

Here's the ==>

b. Present grace (14)

... for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

(6) Sounds like Isaiah 11:2

And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

(a) Why would Peter allude to Isa. 11 here in the context of believer's suffering?

Isaiah 11 is a glorious messianic passage. The movement of thought begins in chapt. 6: Isaiah is charged to announce that God has determined in his holiness to cut his covenant people back to a mere stump (6:13). Just as God destroys the insufferable Assyria, so also he cuts down the arrogant and corrupt house of David (10:5-34).

Nevertheless, God promises a coming messianic ruler (Isa. 7), a righteous messianic king who sits on David's throne and is recognized as mighty God (Isa. 9). IOW - from the stump there springs a new shoot (11:1 - a shoot will spring forth from t/stem of Jesse - Messiah).

Then 11:2 **And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.**

What's the connection? Why did Messiah need the Spirit of the Lord to rest on him, spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength?

It isn't as if the 2d person of t/Trinity didn't possess these things from all eternity. Why would Messiah need t/power of t/Holy Spirit? To accomplish t/task that was His – to be born into a world of sin and suffering. To live a perfect life in obedience to t/Father's will, a life w/o sin. To endure the pain and scorn.

Hebrews 12:2-3 . . . [He] who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. . . . [He] who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself . . .

The Spirit of the Lord, poured out on the Messiah, who suffered for His own – that same Spirit is also poured out on Messiah's people when they suffer on His behalf.

Peter sees t/Completed sufferings of X and the Continued sufferings of Christians as being intimately related.

To borrow the language of Paul, we are crucified with Christ. We died when He died, we were buried and raised with Him. Seated in t/heavenly places.

2 Tim. he says that if we endure suffering with him, we will reign with him.

If you are reviled for the name of Christ you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (even as it did Him).

That's ==>

b. Present grace (14)

(7) A passage that pulls both of these themes together ==>

a. Future glory (13b)

... so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

and

b. Present grace (14)

... you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

Romans chapter 8 (turn there).

{read 8:18-39}

A.W. Pink reflecting on that 26th v. of Romans chapter 8 wrote ==>
"Not only does "hope" . . . support and cheer the suffering saint, leading him to patiently wait for deliverance from his afflictions, but the blessed Comforter has also been given to him in order to supply help to this very end. By His gracious aid the believer is preserved from being totally submerged by his doubts and fears. By His renewing operations the spark of faith is maintained, despite all the fierce winds of Satan which assail. By His mighty enabling the sorely harassed and groaning Christian is kept from sinking into complete skepticism, abject despair, and infidelity. By His quickening power hope is still kept alive, and the voice of prayer is still faintly heard. And how is the gracious help of the Spirit manifested? Thus: seeing the Christian bowed down by oppression and depression, His compassion is called forth, and He strengthens with His might in the inner man. Every Christian is a living witness to the truth of this, although he may not be conscious of the Divine process.

Why is it, my afflicted brother, my distressed sister, that you have not made shipwreck of your profession long ere this? What has kept you from heeding that repeated temptation of Satan's to totally abandon the good fight of faith? Why has not your manifold "infirmities" annihilated your faith, extinguished your hope, and cast a pall of unrelieved gloom upon the future? The answer is, because the blessed Spirit silently, invisibly yet sympathetically and effectually helped you. Some precious promise was sealed to your heart, some comforting view of Christ was presented to your soul, some whisper of love was breathed into your ear, and the pressure upon your spirit was reduced, your grief was assuaged, and fresh courage possessed you. Here, then, is real light cast upon the problem of a suffering Christian, the most perplexing feature of the problem being how to harmonize sore sufferings with the love of God. But if God had ceased to care for His child, then He had deserted him, left him to himself. Very far from this, though, is the actual case: the Divine Comforter is given to help his infirmities. . . . How can we who are weak in ourselves, so inferior in power to the enemies confronting us, bear up under our trials which are so numerous, so protracted, so crushing? We could not, and therefore Divine grace has provided for us an all-sufficient Helper. Without His aid we had long since succumbed, mastered by our trials. Hope looks forward to the Glory to come; in the weary interval of waiting, the Spirit supports our poor hearts and keeps grace alive within us." [A.W. Pink, "The Problem of a Suffering

Christian, Chapel Library Tract]

I. Pearls of Joy in an Ocean of Pain: Joy in Suffering (12-19)

C. We Must Suffer for the Right Reasons (15-16)

1. While we suffer because of sin in general we must not suffer for our own sin in particular

D. We Must Persevere Knowing that Heaven and Hell Stand in the Balance (17-19)

1. God's People May Suffer First and Most, but not Last (17-18)

2. God's People are to Entrust Themselves to Him in Well-Doing (19, cf. 5:10)