

Studies in 1 Peter-12 1 Peter 4:1-7

by Dwight Pentecost

The sermon emphasizes the importance of suffering in the lives of believers, as it leads to dependence on God, experiential sanctification, and spiritual growth.

Duration: 36:52

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:1

Topics: "Suffering In Christ", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the passage from 1 Peter 4:1-7. He emphasizes the importance of suffering in the will of God in order to live in the spirit rather than in the flesh. The preacher compares this to the rigorous discipline and preparation of an athlete before a game. He highlights the need for believers to submit to God's authority and accept the sufferings that come their way in order to learn the lesson of dependence on God. The preacher encourages the congregation to not resist God and to embrace the challenges and adversities that come their way as opportunities for growth and sanctification.

Transcript

Scripture reading this morning, would you take your Bibles and turn to 1 Peter 4, verses 1-7. That's 1 Peter 4, verses 1-7. It's on page 13-14 in some of the better manuscripts.

Please give your attention now to the reading from God's holy word. For as much then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind, for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lust of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lust, excessive wine, reveling, banqueting, and abominable idolatry, wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them through the same excessive riot, seeking evil of you.

Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead? For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. But the end of all things is at hand. Be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer." May God richly add his blessings to the reading of his inspired words.

The patriarch Job wrestled with the problem of why God would permit a righteous man to suffer. The problem that he faced was the problem that multitudes have faced in succeeding generations. Job was a

man concerning whom God could testify that he was a righteous man.

Because of his righteousness, it would seem that he would have been exempt from the sufferings and testings that God permitted to come into his experience, and yet the testings came. Job gave attention to that problem and listened to the counsel of many of his friends as they sought to solve this problem, but it was from the lips of Job that we get his conclusion. He testified that through his suffering he came to know God in a more personal and intimate way, and the new knowledge that he gained of God had produced a righteousness in him, an experiential righteousness which he did not have before.

When the apostle Peter comes to write to those under his care concerning this same problem, Peter comes to the same conclusion to which Job ultimately came. That God permits suffering to come into the life of his children in order that his children might come to know him more intimately, and that through this more intimate knowledge of him, their lives might be purified and that they might be experientially sanctified. Peter, in the fourth chapter of his epistle and the first seven verses to which we direct your attention in our study of Peter's letter this morning, introduces us to the fact that Jesus Christ himself suffered.

Jesus Christ was righteous in every thought and word and deed. God could find no flaw in his conduct or character, his friends could not fault him, and his adversaries could convict him of no act, no word that would prove any unrighteousness in him, and yet Jesus Christ suffered. This is an evidence that Peter presents to his hearers that suffering is not primarily punishment for sin, for if suffering were retribution for sin, there would have been no reason for Jesus Christ to suffer.

And yet, Peter begins the fourth chapter and the first verse by saying, "...forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." Back in the epistle to the Hebrews, chapter five and verse seven, the writer refers to Christ's experience as a sufferer, and he tells us in that seventh and eighth verses of two results of Christ's suffering. He writes, "...in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared, though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered, and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." The writer tells us that, first of all, through his sufferings, Jesus Christ learned obedience by the things which he suffered. Suffering for Christ, then, was a part of a learning experience.

The writer does not say that Jesus Christ learned to obey. He does not say that Jesus Christ was at one time obedient, and through the penalties afflicted for disobedience, he learned that obedience paid. Rather, the writer is saying that he experienced all that obedience to God includes and entails.

Jesus Christ came, it is testified of him in the tenth chapter of the book of Hebrews, to do the will of God. Step by step, as he walked through his times of humiliation, he was faced with the will of God, and step by step he walked in perfect obedience to that revealed will of God. When the will of God entails rejection, he welcomed that rejection.

When the will of God meant that he should be despised and reproached, he accepted that. When the will of God was that he should go to the cross and die for the sins of the world, he embraced that will of God. He learned experientially all that was involved in obedience to the will of God, and was perfectly obedient even unto that.

Now, because he learned through that which he suffered what it is to be obedient to the Father, he became the author of eternal salvation. A disobedient son could never have provided salvation for sinners, and the salvation that we have comes to us because of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ to the will of his Father. Now, the writer to the Hebrews sees a benefit in suffering for Jesus Christ, and a resultant benefit for sinners through that obedience of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ experientially entered into all that obeying the Father includes, and through his perfect obedience he has become the author of eternal salvation to all those that trust him. Now, the implication of this that Peter wants to make to his hearers in 1 Peter 4.1 is that if Jesus Christ could learn experientially only through obedience and through suffering, how can we expect to learn what God has for us to learn if we escape suffering? If suffering was absolutely essential for Jesus Christ, how can we come to the conclusion that we can expect to escape suffering? And so he says, for as much then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind. That is, you should have this mental attitude that since suffering was necessary for Christ, it is no less necessary for us than it was for him.

And if the author of our salvation was brought to maturity through his suffering, then how can we expect to be brought to maturity apart from suffering? The apostle in writing in Philippians 2.5 exhorts believers there to have the mind of Christ in respect to his submission to the will of God, and Peter here exhorts and commands that we should have this same attitude toward suffering that Christ has, for as we follow through the life of Christ, the record given to us in the Gospels, we are impressed with the fact that Jesus Christ at no point in his life sought to turn aside from the will of God, but he pursued and embraced that will with an avid hunger so much that the disciples could not understand why he would keep pressing toward Jerusalem when Christ himself had told them that to go to Jerusalem meant to die. The disciples could not understand the way Christ was committed to doing the will of God, but Christ was determined to learn all that obedience, to experience all that obedience that the Father held for him in order that he might be the obedient son. Peter says that the believer in Jesus Christ should have this same attitude in which he reaches out to embrace the sufferings that God sends, lest we, by turning away from these sufferings, should miss some of the lessons that God has for us to learn.

Another great lesson that God has for us to learn from 1 Peter 4 is the lesson of sanctification, and Peter is going to relate suffering to the sanctification of the believer's walk in this portion of his epistle. He tells us at the end of verse 1, "...he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin." The apostle is not relating suffering here to the believer's salvation, as though to say that if we suffer enough, we will be saved. Salvation is not the result of what an individual bears, the crosses that fall into the life of the individual.

Salvation is based on the cross that Jesus Christ bore once and for all for sinners. But he does tell us there is a relationship between practical daily sanctification and suffering, and that apart from suffering, there will not be sanctification. So, since Jesus Christ embraced the sufferings that God committed to him so that he might experience all that the will of God tell for him, Peter says, you have the same attitude toward suffering, because suffering in the flesh produces a sanctification or a separation from sin in daily experience.

Now, why is suffering necessary? Why is it necessary for us to learn sanctification? We recognize that when we trust Christ for our salvation, we are eternally set apart under God. Positionally, we are sanctified. We are the children of God.

We have a destiny that is certain and safe and unmovable. Why is it necessary for the believer to learn daily, practical sanctification? Peter tells us in the verses that follow, in verses 2-5, we must learn this because this is not something we can see in the world around us. The world never can and never will present to the believer an example of godliness.

What do we see in the world around us? We see men, verse 2, living in the flesh to do the lusts of men, not doing the will of God. What do we see in the world around us? Verse 3, we see the lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, reveling, vanquishing, abominable idolatry. Peter reminds these to whom he is writing of the kind of life from which they have been saved.

These people who had been brought to Jesus Christ out of a heathen background were not irreligious. They had their gods, they had their temple, they had their rituals of worship, but there was no godliness in any of it. Those to whom Peter was writing fashioned their lives after their deities, and their deities spent their times in bacchanalia and revels and drunkenness and riotous living in chasing the fair daughters of men.

That was the religion from which these Gentiles had been saved. Religious people, but people totally given over to licentiousness and immorality because they patterned their conduct after their gods, and they had never had an object lesson in holiness, in godliness, in righteousness, in a life that is sanctified and set apart to God. Heathen religion did not demand that a devotee of that religion set himself apart to his deity.

As long as one paid lip service to the god, he could live like the gods lived, and men followed gods so that they could follow the gods in their daily conduct. And life, the life of the Gentiles, was a life of perversion, of immorality, of lust, and licentiousness. And Peter says that when you look into your background, when you look into your experience, when you look into the world of which you are a part, you will find no examples of righteousness, of godliness, of sanctification.

Therefore, God has to teach you what sanctification is, what godliness is, what righteousness is, and how does he do it? He brings suffering into the experience of the saint, for apart from suffering, we feel totally self-sufficient. When we have good health, we feel no need of either the doctor or God. When we have a sufficient bank account, we feel no need of the banker or God.

When we have a good job, we feel no need of an employer or God. Totally self-sufficient. It is not until health is taken away that we feel the need of any help, and we turn to the skilled physician and to God for help.

And if there are financial reverses, for the first time we feel our own insufficiency and inadequacy, and we look to man and to God for help. And what Peter is saying is that man will continue in their independence and self-sufficiency and will never learn godliness and sanctification until God brings us to the end of ourselves. And so, God brings sufferings, and testings, and trials, and difficulties into the life of his children to bring his children to dependence upon himself.

Independence characterizes all of Adam's sons and daughters, too. And because we are independent, we resist casting ourselves upon God. I'd rather do it myself has become a cliché that categorizes every area of life today.

This is true in the spiritual realm, and as long as we look up into heaven and say, I can do it and I will do it myself, we declare ourselves independent of God with no separation under God. So, God has to say, I'll show you you can't do it yourself, and he has to bring things into our experience that are too great for us to bear in order that we will cast ourselves upon him. And when Peter shows us that we have to learn sanctification by suffering because we'll never see a life set apart under God in the world around us, he then moves on in the fifth verse to show us the importance and the necessity of this godly life in the life of the child of God.

We shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead, those who are physically dead and those who are physically alive. Peter wants to remind his readers that every individual bears a responsibility to God. God is a creator, and every creature is responsible to God for his conduct.

This is true of both the saved and the unsaved man, and if you have wondered why Satan has propagated his doctrine of evolution, the minds of man can be very simply stated. It is Satan's attempt to sever man from any obligation to God who is a judge. If God is not creator, men are no longer responsible to him.

They can do as they please, they can declare themselves independent of God. But if God is the creator, as scripture says he is, then all men, saved and unsaved alike, have a responsibility to him and are answerable to him. And Peter reminds men here that they must eventually give an account to God for their conduct.

Paul developed this in 2 Corinthians 5 and 1 Corinthians 3, Romans 13 and 14, that every believer must give an account of his stewardship to the Lord Jesus Christ when he stands at the judgment seat of Christ. The scripture reminds every unbeliever that the day must come when he will stand before the great white throne and the books will be opened, and the record of a man's life will be spread before the individual to show that individual that he is unholy, that he is godless. What Peter is reminding believers of in this context is that this matter of practical holiness and righteousness is of utmost importance to the child of God, because God is going to examine the manner of life, the conduct of each one of his children, leaving out for the moment the responsibility of the unsaved man to God, emphasizing the responsibility of the child of God in this matter of practical holiness and righteousness.

Peter says, God demands an obedience and a commitment to the will of God in your life, the same as he demanded in the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ embraced the will of God even though it entailed suffering, and he experienced all that obedience meant for him. Because he was obedient, he provided salvation.

Peter says, you'll never learn obedience by looking into the world, because the world is disobedient. Peter says, let me remind you that you are answerable and chargeable to God, and you must give an account of yourself to God. Therefore, this matter of sanctification ought to be of utmost importance.

Peter points out in the sixth verse that the purpose of the preaching of the gospel is to save men from sin. The purpose of the preaching of the gospel is to save men from sin, for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead. The death referred to here could refer to spiritual death, and that certainly is true, for the gospel is to give life to men who are spiritually separated from God.

Maybe better in this context to refer to the death, to physical death. The gospel was preached to men who rejected that gospel and have now died in their sin and in their godlessness, and therefore they must face God as a judge. But he says, the gospel was preached to them that are dead, that they might be judged

according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

That was the purpose of preaching the gospel, that men should be delivered from sin. What Peter wants to remind us is that the gospel has a message for sinners that will deliver them from sin, but also to liberate them from sinning, and that deliverance from control by sin is as much a part of the gospel as deliverance from condemnation of sin. The idea that salvation is simply fire insurance that delivers us from the penalty of sins, that liberates us to live as we want to, to live in sin, is contrary to the holiness of God and the purpose of the gospel.

For Jesus Christ died to provide salvation for sinners from the condemnation of sin, but also that those who are saved might live by the power of the Spirit, a life of godliness and holiness and righteousness. Peter relates suffering to this ultimate purpose of the gospel. He says that we will walk in independence, we will walk in our own way, we will walk as God's children in rebellion against the Father unless we learn the lesson that God hates sin, and God hates it in the life of the child of God as much as he hates it in the life of a sinner, and that God will use suffering in order to teach us sanctification.

Can you imagine an athlete appearing the afternoon of the first game of the season to play that game without having rigorously disciplined his body for weeks and perhaps months before the opening game? Why, that athlete would not last five minutes of the first quarter. The athlete, knowing the nature of the conflict and the struggle, prepares his body by rigorous discipline and exercise for days and weeks ahead in order that he might be prepared to play in the game. Now, may I say to you that many of you are so disgustingly flabby when it comes to doing battle with Satan you fall flat on your face from the beginning of the contest.

Why? Because you have not suffered in the will of God that you might learn what it is to live in the spirit rather than in the flesh. Now, you say, Preacher, why do you make a statement like that? You know why I make it? Because I hear so many of your prayer requests. My phone rings all the time.

Pastor, pray for me. I have a little snuffle today, and I don't know what it might develop into. Ask God to take it away from me.

You get the point of what I'm trying to say? I don't mean I don't want you to call and share your prayer requests. It's a privilege for a pastor to do that, but what I am saying is this, that for every individual who asks me to pray with them that they might learn the lesson God has them to learn through the experience they're facing, there are ninety and nine who ask me to pray that God would remove that difficulty. Do you realize what you're praying? God, let me be nice and soft.

I like my flabbiness. Let me continue as a flabby, fat, useless Christian. Don't ask me to learn through suffering.

Let me learn some other way. But the writer of the Hebrews tells us there was no other way that Jesus Christ could learn what was entailed in obedience other than suffering. You're asking God to do something for you he couldn't even do for his own self.

Battle with the will of the Gentiles, lasciviousness and lust and excess of wine and revelings and vanquishings and abominable idolatries, a battle with sin, with godlessness that surrounds us, is not going to win by those who are soft and undisciplined and untrained. It can only be won by those who have been strengthened by the Spirit of God, who have accepted the sufferings that God sent to them, who have

been so strengthened by their submission to the will of God that they are strong in the Lord and the power is might and can stand against the evil one. We're awed.

We're the testimony of a slip of a young lady, such as Betty Welch, who stood here to give her testimony last Sunday evening. She's going along the jungles of Columbia with all of the darkness, satanic opposition, religious oppression, privation, sacrifice, the disease that she faced. We say, how could she do it? I know what a lot of you parents are saying as you hear testimony of one like that, saying, I hope the Lord doesn't ask my daughter, my son, to go into something like that.

The Lord won't send most of you nor most of your children spiritually so flabby they wouldn't last. It wouldn't be worthwhile investing money in transportation, getting them down there. Who are undisciplined, just plain soft, not been toughened by any testing, by any adversity, by any submission to the will of God that has made them men and women of God instead of suckling babes spiritually.

Peter viewed the battle with Satan as basically a battle of submission to the will of God. We win in the battle by our subjection to the Spirit's authority. Peter says, we will never learn what obedience to God entails as long as we resist God and refuse to accept the sufferings that he has for us, that we might learn the lesson of dependence.

We might learn the lesson of submission. But we might learn what it is to cease from sin in the flesh to do the will of God, because we have learned the lesson of sanctification through suffering. The verse of the hymn that we always want to omit is the verse that says, Let sorrow have her perfect work.

Say, No, Lord, not for me. Had Job resisted the will of God, Job would never have been able to look up into heaven and say that while he had heard of God with the hearing of the ear, now he knew him personally and intimately and deeply. And if you hunger for a more intimate walk with Jesus Christ, and you hunger for a deeper knowledge of God, then permit God to send into your life that which will accomplish his purpose of teaching you obedience that you might be set apart from sin.

We pray, O Father, that the Spirit of God may let us see from this portion of the Word of God the part that submission to the will of God, even though it entails suffering, can have in our spiritual growth and development. Deliver us from resisting that which the will of God brazes, and of too quickly calling for deliverance and crying for relief from some testing when in truth we're asking God to stop maturing us, to stop teaching us, to stop developing us, that we might be men and women of God, strengthened with his power and might. Lord, teach us the lesson of faith that does not ask why when testings come, but asks, Lord, what would you have me to learn through this that in thy will has come? May our lives be given over to doing the will of God, as was Jesus Christ during his earthly sojourn, but with each new experience we might say, not my will, but thine be done.

It is with the riches of thy grace and mercy and peace upon us we pray in Jesus' name.

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