

An assistant college football coach in the northeast was told he couldn't voice his Christian beliefs in front of the team. In Texas, cheerleaders for one high school were facing lawsuits for putting Bible passages on banners. Atheists in Georgia objected to local churches providing meals for high school players. All over the country lawsuits have challenged pre-game prayers. It might not be most noticeable, but if you look you'll find Christians suffering.

I hope you aren't surprised by that. As long as there have been Christians, they have suffered. Suffering will happen to Christians, that much can't be stopped. Once we realize that then we don't need to be surprised when it does. Then we can concentrate more on how to handle it. When we face persecution or suffering where will we get the reason to continue?

In his first letter, Peter has talked consistently about living hope. It's the center of everything we are as Christians. It's the only reason we can continue to live in this world. And it's the boost and encouragement Christians need to face suffering in this world. On this last Sunday of studying this letter in the second lesson we find...

**Living hope for suffering Christians**  
**Be prepared for it**  
**Glimpse at future glory**

The door blasts off its hinges as armed officers in black shuffle in pointing weapons in all directions. "Police!" they shout as they make their way inside. The inhabitants instinctively put up their hands when they see the guns. They shout back, "What's happening? What did we do?" They're stunned when the handcuffs get put on. Have they committed a crime? Perhaps they're suspects in a robbery or worse. That's when the police finally identify why they're arresting them. "You're Christians" the cop sneers.

To my knowledge this scenario isn't happening in our society. Many of you believe a day is coming when it will. Or a day when I'll be standing up here preaching and police will burst in and arrest me for what I'm saying. It's not impossible. Peter says it wouldn't be strange if any of it happened. **"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you."** Actually lacking extreme trials and lacking suffering, Peter says those are the unusual moments in a Christian's life. Expect trial and expect suffering. And expect it to be painful, a trial by fire.

Criminals fight back to avoid jail. They run, they beg, they try anything to get away. They'll claim things are unfair. The world was against them. They had to do it to survive. They'll challenge that their rights were violated. Anything to stop or slow down the suffering of coming punishment. But what if it were a Christian who had done the foolish crime and then foolishly fought back against the suffering that came? When someone drinks too much and wrecks the car. When someone has sex before marriage and ruins the relationship. When someone gambles too much and loses valuable possessions. This brings suffering, but none of it is good. **"If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler."** Suffering for sin isn't good or right. That kind of suffering doesn't get praised by God.

When you or I face suffering because we're Christians there are real sinful temptations to give in or fight back. Have you pushed back against questionable moral standards and been forced to suddenly defend your position to a loved who pushed back? Maybe they suddenly agreed with a woman's right to choose abortion or homosexuality as acceptable behavior. Now you suffer because the conversation wouldn't go well if you tried to talk with them about their sins against God's Word. You might even feel pressure or threats from other family members if you don't cool off the Christian talk. You don't want to break up the family so you simply be quiet to keep family peace. If you weren't prepared for such suffering it might be easy to give in to get along.

But if you spoke up, if you had the difficult conversation, or if you ended up cut off from family because you shared God's truth, then rejoice. Rejoice in your suffering. **"If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."** You're a Christian who follows Christ. Rejoice and don't be ashamed because Christ bore suffering first. He was insulted, looked down upon, and threatened with death. He endured painful suffering in his life for you and me. Yet none of his suffering was because he sinned. It was all for our sins. All for those times we backed down. All for those times we did the sinful foolish thing and then tried to escape suffering. Jesus suffered to achieve our glory. **"But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."** We aren't finishing what Christ started. We aren't combining our suffering with his in some sort of payment to God. Rather we simply experience what he did so we might know we're connected to him. That's the greatest part, our connection to him. It's a connection to his suffering so we're also connected to his glory.

It might seem odd to be arrested for being a Christian and think that's okay. Or to be a pastor hauled off to jail for proclaiming the Word of God and be okay with it. Odd is right because how we act during suffering says a lot about us. Rejoicing and being overjoyed for suffering for Christ's name stands out in the world. Complaining, shouting, and trying to escape goes unnoticed. That's what everyone expects. Not being ashamed and holding our head up as we suffer tells the rest of the world our strength is not in us. It comes from Christ. We're strengthened by the Savior with living hope so we might be prepared for suffering as a Christian. Our sufferings are actually just a glimpse of future glory, the glory that is ours in Christ.

Take a snapshot of Christ's life and you'll find he lived the same life we do. In fact he faced worse. He stood out because he was ridiculed almost daily. Rejected by many. He faced a horrific ending to his life that many of us will never know thankfully. Still when you think about it, his suffering was only for a little while. It was temporary. The eternity he exists in now is far greater. His death was torture but it was with purpose. He faced the ultimate suffering for a moment, because he in love did not want you or me having to face torture forever in hell. He came through the suffering to glory. He rose again from the dead. He lives now. He lives in glory. He is victorious. His ascension back into heaven and making himself invisible on this earth show us his victory. It shows us our future glory with him.

Recall the last suffering you faced that really made you feel the worst. Whatever it was, do you have trouble calling it to mind, bringing it forward in your thoughts? I think a lot of time we imagine our worst moments will always be first on our minds. And they might be if the suffering was recent. But even then you know from past experience suffering usually only lasts a little while and then things get better. That's what Peter promised God was doing for us. **"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast."** God promises suffering will last only a little while. Even if it lasts your entire life that will still be a little while in comparison with the eternity God has planned for you in Christ.

As you remembered those moments of suffering, you probably also remembered how you pulled through. Was it just the right self-help book? Was it the right counselor? Was it words of advice from a website or Facebook? Even if it was those, they only provide temporary relief. For living hope and a glimpse at future glory your suffering drives you to God's Word more frequently. Maybe you become more deliberate about being in worship. You probably remember how God used people around you, friends, fellow church members, someone to share the right Bible verse, invite you to coffee to really listen, or take your hand and lead you back to God's grace. Suffering has benefits because God uses it to forge our faith stronger. Suffering causes us to realize God is tightening his grip on us and we get tighter relationships with others. God uses suffering to give us a glimpse of future glory in heaven.

Suffering and persecution happen all around the world. It shouldn't surprise us it also happens right here in our country and state. And as it happens in your own life ask the important question. Where will I get hope? Peter gives you a beautiful letter with living hope. Christ Jesus tells us to be prepared for it so we're ready with his grace to stand up to it. In Christ we have a glimpse into our future glory. We have reason in the face of suffering to have hope, Living. Hope.