

# A FINAL WORD ON SUFFERING

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1 Peter 4:12-19

## Introduction:

### → GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

A man went to see his doctor in a state of high anxiety. "Doctor," he said, "you have to help me. I'm dying. Everywhere I touch it hurts. I touch my head and it hurts. I touch my leg and it hurts. I touch my stomach and it hurts. I touch my chest and it hurts. You have to help me, Doc, everything hurts."

The doctor gave him a complete examination. "Mr. Smith," he said, "I have good news and bad news for you. The good news is you are not dying. The bad news is you have a broken finger."

The readers that Peter was writing to in the first century were facing far more serious suffering than a broken finger, but the good news that Peter had for them was that they had a God who was good and that He would never leave them.

### → IS GOD GOOD?

Randy Alcorn, in his book *If God is Good*, talks about what happened to his friend, Ethel Herr. She had gone through a double mastectomy. Then two months later, doctors discovered that the cancer had spread. One of Herr's friends, in shock, asked her, "And how do you feel about God now?"

Herr says, "As I sought to explain what has happened in my spirit, it all became clearer to me. God has been preparing me for this moment. He has undergirded me in ways I've never known before. He has made himself increasingly real and precious to me. He has given to me joy such as I've never known before -- and I've no need to work at it, it just comes, even amidst the tears. He has taught me that...he will lead me on whatever journey he chooses and will never leave me for a moment of that journey... God is good no matter what the diagnosis or the prognosis or the fearfulness of the uncertainty of having neither."

(Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil*, Multnomah, 2009, p. 399)

Do you believe that God is good? Even when confronted by suffering and affliction? This morning we are continuing our study of 1 Peter as we look at the final verses of chapter 4.

I have entitled this message, "A Final Word on Suffering." This is certainly not **the final word**, but it is a kind of summary and conclusion by Peter as he wraps up his letter to these suffering believers. In the final chapter, he has some closing words to church leaders, and some final instructions on how we ought to live out our days as Christians.

So I want to take us through these verses this morning and look at four points that Peter makes regarding the purpose of suffering and our response to it, and then his summary statement in v. 19.

## Suffering should not come as a surprise – v. 12

We live in a culture where any kind of suffering or even discomfort is seen as negative. As Christians, we are encouraged to believe that God wants only health, wealth and prosperity for his children. Even evangelism is often carried out in a way to give the impression that if you just give your life to Christ, all your troubles will be over, and life will be glorious and trouble-free from now on.

But the Scriptures never suggest that to be true. Yes, in the OT, God promised his people blessing in return for obedience, but even the prophets of God suffered greatly because of their commitment to God and his truth.

Jesus himself, the only truly righteous man who ever lived, knew that he must suffer.

*Matt. 16:21 – "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."*

In Matt. 17:12, Jesus reminded his disciples of how John the Baptist had come in the spirit of Elijah and had suffered at the hands of the Jewish authorities. Then he said, "*So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.*"

The Apostle Paul, from the time Jesus called him was destined for suffering. When Ananias was sent to pray for Paul in Damascus, after his conversion, he was told, "*For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.*"

We are told by the Apostle Paul that it is our privilege to suffer for Christ's sake. *"For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,"* (Phil. 1:29)

So Peter says, don't let suffering catch you off guard. Don't be surprised, don't think this is something unusual. In fact, we should welcome adversity as an indication that we are, in fact, walking with Christ. One person said it this way: *"Suppose someone sent me on a journey and warned me that I would come first to a dangerous crossing over a river and then to a forest filled with wild beasts. I would feel a sense of satisfaction when I actually encountered these obstacles, because they would prove to me that I was traveling the right road. The same is true in the Christian life. The Lord told His disciples that they could expect tribulation. When difficulties come, therefore, I find encouragement, for I know I am walking the narrow path of God's choosing."*

## **Rejoice in your suffering, knowing it is for your benefit and God's glory – vv. 13-14**

In Act 5:41, we read that the apostles, Peter and John, after suffering much abuse by the Jewish ruling council, *"... left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name."* You can rejoice in suffering, knowing that God sees you as being worthy to be identified with Christ, who also suffered.

You can also rejoice in affliction because we know that our suffering has a purpose. God does not put us through trials and struggles just because he likes to see us suffer.

*Rom. 5:1-5 – "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in **hope of the glory of God**. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that **suffering produces endurance**, and endurance produces character, and character produces **hope**, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."*

Connected to that is the truth that sharing in Christ's suffering prepares us to share in his glory.

*Romans 8:17-18 – "...and if [we are] children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."*

## **Suffering must be for the right reason – vv. 15-16**

Note what Peter says here. Our suffering should not come because we are a murderer ... nope, not me; or a thief ... nope; or an evildoer ... try not to; or a meddler ... what? ... really? Let me ask you something. Have you ever gotten yourself into trouble and suffered because you stuck your nose into someone else's business? Now Peter is really getting personal.

But the point is that there is no glory in suffering for being a meddler or for doing wrong. This is the same sort of thing that Peter spoke about back in 2:19-21. Doing what is wrong, being involved in evil activity, that results in suffering and affliction offers us no credit. For suffering to accomplish anything in our lives, it must be for the right reason.

The fact is, there is no shame in suffering for Christ – v. 16. When we live to please God, and the world opposes and abuses us, we need not feel embarrassed or ashamed. Rather we can be confident, knowing that God is doing his work in us.

And, ultimately, our goal in suffering is to glorify God. When we suffer affliction for the right reason and respond in the right way, God's name is lifted up for others to see His glory.

## **If believers suffer, imagine what is in store for the ungodly – vv. 17-18**

One of the key things to keep in mind, when we are going through trials and affliction, is that whatever may be happening to us now is only temporary. What happens to us in this life can only last for this life, but its purpose is to purify us and prepare us for the life to come. Look at what Peter says in vv. 17-18 – *read them*.

There is a lot that could be said about these verses, but I am going to be brief. Peter reminds us that suffering and affliction are forms of judgment, designed by God to purify and refine our lives. As believers, individually and collectively, we need to go through the fires of tribulation to burn away the dross and impurities, so that we can be made into what He intends us to be.

But all of that is temporary. It serves a purpose here and now, so that we can enjoy the wonder of eternity in all its glory. But I believe that Peter's point is this:

If we, who are God's beloved children, must suffer briefly here in this life, imagine what it will be like for the ungodly who will suffer for all eternity. Our judgment is temporary, the judgment of the unbeliever is forever.

## **The Conclusion of the matter – v. 19**

So how do we respond to suffering? How do we react when affliction and trials come our way? *Read v. 19.*

If it is God's will for us to suffer then we must accept it as a gift from his hand. Peter says that we are to entrust or commit our souls to God, knowing that he is the one who will keep us and sustain us. Jesus is our example in this. Peter tells us in 2:23 that, "...*When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*"

That word *entrust*, or *commit* is a banking term meaning "to deposit for safekeeping." That's what we're to do with our lives when we go through times of suffering. Deposit your life in God's bank (so to speak) for safe-keeping. Trust Him to preserve you in the fire. Give yourself to the Lord by continuing to do good.

That's what Bethany Hamilton did. At one time, Bethany was ranked as the #1 amateur teen surfer in Hawaii. Then she lost an arm to a tiger shark in October 2003, but she never lost her faith.

Soon after the attack, she began to raise money to restore a man's eyesight. While visiting New York City, she gave her ski coat to homeless girl. When asked about the gift, she said she had more than she needed in life. At the time, Steve Thompson, her pastor, said, "She's looking forward to

the future. She's asking herself, 'How can I show the world I still have a life, that I enjoy my life, and that my life is filled with joy?' She has an underlying trust that God is taking care of her."

(Jill Lieber, "Teen Surfer Riding Wave of Amazing Grace," USA Today, 3-19-04; [www.PreachingToday.com](http://www.PreachingToday.com))

Bethany Hamilton entrusted herself to her faithful Creator. She didn't quit living when she lost her arm. No! She gave her life to God. She deposited her life for safekeeping into His hands; and God gave her an international platform from which to share her story and bring Him glory. Bethany Hamilton returned to surfing; and just over a year after the shark attack, she took 1st place in the Explorer Women's division of the 2005 NSSA National Championships -- winning her first National Title. After that she turned pro, and a major motion picture about her life was produced and released in 2011. It's called Soul Surfer, and God has used it to bring hope to people all over the world.

*Read v. 19 again.* Whatever struggles you are facing, trust God and keep doing what is right.