Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Glory Through Suffering
Scripture: 1 Peter 2:21
Code: 60-28

Let's take some time this evening, as we look together to the Word of God, to examine 1 Peter chapter 2. This great, great portion of Scripture will command our attention on several occasions. I want to let you know, however, that we'll just get a little bit of a start tonight, next Sunday night will be the concert, and then the following Sunday night I will be away, and so it will be not until three weeks from tonight that we can continue what we begin tonight. Before we are through, we are going to be looking deeply into the rich, rich truths of this great portion of Scripture.

In 1 Peter 2:21 to 25 we have a section of Scripture that we could well call "The Suffering Jesus." Let me read it to you. Beginning in verse 21, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth. And while being reviled, He did not revile in return, while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously. And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and guardian of your souls."

Now the theme of this great, great, far-reaching text is the suffering of Jesus. We will look, as I said, deeply into that in the weeks that we study this tremendous portion of Scripture. But let me see if I can't set it into a very personal context for us.

Peter in this epistle is rather effusive in reciting two categories of truth. First one that obviously strikes you as you read this first epistle of Peter is the long list of blessings which Peter records. In other words, as he speaks about the identity of a Christian and what it is to know Christ and what it is to possess Christ and all that we have in Him, he goes from one great privilege to another, from one great blessing to another, from one great gift of God to another. Those of us who are Christians possess the following blessings, and I'm going to give you a very fast run through 1 Peter. You listen to all of the privileges that belong to Christians. Peter says we are blessed with great mercy. We are blessed with the new birth. We are given a living hope. We are given an imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance in heaven. We are given a purified soul. We are introduced into a brotherhood of love. We receive constant spiritual nourishment for growth from the Word. We have the honor of

being identified as living stones, a spiritual house, a holy and royal priesthood, a chosen race, a holy nation and a people for God's own possession. Furthermore, Peter says, we have received a spiritual gift by which we can minister with divine power to the body of Christ. He says we have a stewardship of God's manifold grace. We are the recipients of the promise of eternal glory. We have been given hope of God's comfort, God's strength and God's perfecting work in our lives. And finally, we are the beneficiaries of God's eternal peace in Christ.

All of that spiritual privilege, an incredible legacy. And we have been working our way through 1 Peter and we have already highlighted a number of those privileges, the richness of being a Christian.

Now you might assume, based upon all of that, based upon all of our blessings and all of our privileges and all of the promises that God has given to us and based upon our identity in Christ, that we should be loved and we should be respected. In fact, we should be honored and we might even say we should be adored. We perhaps should be exalted. We should be lifted up to a high position. We should be recognized as transcending the normal people who live in the world because of such privilege. But the fact of the matter is just the opposite is true. And so you have a very strange kind of duality. Because running along directly parallel to the list of privileges is the catalog of suffering. Those of us who are most eminently identified and are most greatly privileged are also told that we will suffer immensely. Peter, for example, writes about various trials into which we will fall. He speaks about tests of fire which every believer will endure. He writes about us being alienated. He says we will be abused under unreasonable masters whom we must serve faithfully no matter how they treat us. He says we will receive harsh treatment by hostile Christ rejecters. He says we will suffer for doing what is right. He says we will receive harm and we will receive evil at the hands of men. We will suffer insults. We will be intimidated. We will be continually troubled. We will have to defend ourselves. He says we will be slandered. We will be abused with speech. He says we will be mistreated for doing what is right. We will endure fiery ordeals which come for testing. He says we will share the sufferings of Christ. Peter reminds us that we will suffer according to the will of God, for God has a purpose in it. He says we will endure anxiety and care. He says we will be under the constant attack of the devil, who goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And he says we will suffer alongside all other Christians, all of whom are suffering.

Frankly, not very inviting, but that's the fact. That is the nature of the Christian life: On the one hand, immense privilege; on the other hand, continual suffering. Now let me sum it up. The Christian life is a call to glory through the path of suffering. The Christian life is a call to glory through the path of suffering. Those are the inevitable two sides of Christian experience. The reason? Because of who we are in Christ, we are set at odds with the environment in which we live. We are a problem in our culture. We are a problem in our society. We are strangers in a hostile environment. And since the environment in which we are strangers is run by Satan, who is the prince of this world, since it is a

Satan-energized system and a demon-activated system, we are at odds with it. That's why John says you can't love God and love the world. That's why James says if you're a friend of the world, you're the enemy of God. The two are mutually exclusive.

So, here we are with this incredible identity. Here we are, these children of God with privileges that are beyond even our comprehension. And rather than being exalted and honored and treated with some respect because of who we are in Christ and because of our elevated identity, we are just the opposite, we are antagonistic in the culture, we are a problem in the society and the society sets itself against us. And the more faithfully we live out our Christian life, the more hostility we can expect. The world, frankly, is filled with injustice. It is filled with cruelty. It is filled with wickedness. It is filled with abuse. It is filled with sin. And no single group has felt more of that than Christians down through the centuries. They have been hated, mistreated, abused, treated with cruelty, wickedness, even death. And Peter's readers are up to their ears in that very thing. When Peter writes to these Christians scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia who have been chosen by God for salvation, he realizes their very, very, difficult circumstances; that they are going through some very severe trials. So on the one hand he reminds them of their privilege, and on the other hand he tells them to expect their suffering.

But the real question for us to look at is this: How are we to handle that animosity? How are we to handle that hostility? How are we to deal with it? What is to be our attitude? Now, as we think about that we are drawn into this passage. Why? Because Jesus Christ is here presented as the model of a proper attitude in the midst of suffering that is unjust.

Before we look, however, at verse 21, we can go back to verse 20 and there it says, at the end of verse 20 that suffering should be endured with patience because it finds favor with God. Now the first thing you need to remember, and we already looked at that verse in our last study, but I just remind you of it, whatever suffering comes your way you must endure it because that pleases God. All right? You are to endure it because that pleases God. In fact, let's go a step further. Look at verse 21, "For you have been called for this purpose." You remember what I told you? That calling refers to the calling to salvation. You were saved to suffer. Does that surprise you? It shouldn't. You were saved to suffer. Why? Because you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's own possession. You are proclaiming the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light and consequently the world will resent you. The system will resent you. Now obviously it is more hostile at some times than others and more hostile in some places than others. But the world resents those who represent the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, he says by very virtue of your salvation you will suffer. You've been called to that. What does he mean? He means that you have been called to glory but as long as you're living in this world, the path to glory is the path of suffering. And that pleases God. Why does it please God? Why does it please God that we suffer? Look at chapter 5 verse 10. In 5:10 we have the answer, "And after you have suffered for a little while," that is here on earth, "after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you."

In other words, what he is saying there is suffering is part of the process of perfecting, confirming, strengthening and establishing you. It's part of your spiritual growth process. It's part of God's eternal plan, and I'll get into more detail into what I mean and show you some really thrilling truth. But the point now is simply this: God is pleased when you suffer patiently. You are to suffer patiently because God called you to that, because the path to glory is through suffering. It has to be that way from the viewpoint of earth because a godless, Satan-inspired world has animosity toward Christians. But not only from the world's side but from God's side. God has a purpose in your suffering. It has an ultimately beneficial effect. It is a part of your final perfection and final glory. It is a perfecting process.

This is not foreign to us. Go back to chapter 1 of 1 Peter, verses 6 and 7, and let me show you one of the benefits of suffering, and we could talk about a number of them, but just look at this one. He says in verse 6, "If... In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while if necessary you've been distressed by various trials." In other words, you rejoice in your future glory, you rejoice in the inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, you rejoice in being protected by the power of God unto that day, you rejoice in the glory to come. But in the meantime you are being distressed by various trials. But notice verse 7. Why? "In order that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Now listen, the implication is this, that you are suffering here obviously because the world resents you and the world hates you, but God allows that because it is the validation of your faith. And it will result in greater praise, greater glory and greater honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Now stick with me on this thought, this is a profound thought as we work our way sort of into this passage. When you suffer you are not just enduring here to learn patience, because you don't need to know patience for eternity because you won't have to be patient in eternity. You are suffering here to learn something, to accomplish something that is going to enhance your capacity to praise, glorify, and honor God. This then that you suffer in this life is directly related to your eternal capacity to glorify God. That is a great truth. It is directly related to your eternal capacity to glorify God.

Now you can go back to James 1 and James says you should count it all joy when you encounter various trials because the testing of your faith produces endurance and endurance has a perfect result that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. There is a sense in which going through trials causes you to become strong as a Christian, you become more mature, more perfected, more like Christ. That's James' point. But Peter's point is that what you endure of suffering here is going to have a profound effect on your function in glory, on your function in glory.

Now let me take you to another passage and just track this thought for a few moments. Second Corinthians chapter 4, verse 17, Paul comes up with the same idea. He says in verse 17, "For momentary" that is in this life, "light affliction is having this effect. It is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." Did you get that? This is a very important blessing, extremely important. Not only is suffering in this life teaching you to be more patient and thus spiritually stronger and thus more like Christ, not only does it have an effect on you here, but it produces an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Now let me follow the thought. The suffering you have here is affecting your function in eternity, not just in time. It does affect you here. It makes you stronger when you endure it with patience, it teaches you to trust God and it teaches you to be growing in your faith, getting stronger. It throws you on the Word of God. It makes you dependent on Christ. It makes you more like Him as you are strengthened by trials. But that's here and now. That's not the point we're looking at. What I want you to understand is that the suffering in this life that we go through for the cause of Christ will bring about a change that will impact our eternal function. And what is our eternal function? You tell me. What are we going to do forever? We're going to glorify God, we're going to honor God, we're going to praise God, we're going to adore God. And so the capacity to do that is affected as you endure patiently the suffering here. And that's what he means in verse 18. So he says, 2 Corinthians 4:18, while we're going through these trials, we're looking for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. So he says, "While we look not at the things which are seen," we don't get stuck on the trial. We don't get focused on this particular pain. But we look at the things which are not seen. "For the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal." Now what is he saying? As you go through a trial, focus on its eternal impact, its eternal consequence.

You say, "Well, tell me more." Second Timothy chapter 2, let's fill up our understanding. Second Timothy chapter 2 verse 12, just a very simple statement, the first part of the verse, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him." You getting it? We shall reign with Him if we endure with Him. What's the point? The point is simply this, beloved, the greater the endurance through suffering in this life, the

greater the eternal reward. And I am convinced that eternal reward is primarily a capacity to glorify God. Did you follow that? The greater the endurance in this life, the greater the eternal reward. And eternal reward is nothing more than a greater capacity to glorify God. So your eternal capacity, capability to glorify God is directly related to that which you endure in this life.

I know you remember an illustration of this, or you will when I point it out to you because it is such a familiar one. In Matthew chapter 20, James and John and their mother came to see Jesus. And He said to the mother of James and John in Matthew 20:21, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your Kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on your right and one on your left." Now what's she saying? She recognizes a couple of things. One, she recognizes that there is a...there is a ranking or a hierarchy within the kingdom of God and that is accurate and Jesus does not correct that. He does not say you are wrong because that's not wrong. There is definitely that. There are definitely greater and lesser rewards, true? We can... We can remember from the words in the epistle of John that we are to look to ourselves that we lose not the things we have wrought but that we receive a full reward. And there are some things that are wood, hay, stubble; some that are gold, silver, precious stones. So there are varying rewards. So there are varying rankings. She was right in assessing that in the kingdom there would be some who would have achieved a very high level of prominence, a very great capacity to glorify God.

But what does Jesus say? "He answered and said, 'You don't know what you're asking.'" What does He mean by that? You... When you ask for prominence in the kingdom, when you ask for elevation in the kingdom, you don't know what you're asking. And then He says, "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" What was He referring to? Well, He was in the Garden that night before He was taken to be crucified, praying to the Father. He said, "Let this cup (what?) pass from Me." What was He talking about? His suffering, His suffering. And so He is saying to the mother of James and John, He is saying to her and to the two boys who are also asking the question, "You want to be on My right hand and on My left hand? Then are you able to drink this same cup of suffering that I'm about to drink?" What's the implication? That elevation in the kingdom is related to what? Suffering. Who suffered the most? Who suffered the most? Christ. Who is most elevated in the kingdom? Christ. Direct correlation. And so what Jesus is saying is if you want to sit on My right and left hand, then you must understand the path to that is suffering. And the higher the elevation, the greater the suffering. And they said, "We're able." So He said to them, "My cup you will drink, but to sit on My right and on My left is not Mine to give, it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." And on what premise does the Father prepare to give out those high-ranking positions? On the premise of suffering.

Let me tell you something, beloved, you say, "Isn't it wonderful that we live in the society we live in? Isn't it great that we live in this free country and we don't suffer much?" It's nice for now but when it comes time for the eternal capacity to be expressed and it comes time for all eternity to be filled up with our offering praise and honor and glory to Christ, there will be plenty of folks who will have greater capacity for that because they have known greater suffering here and like the apostle Paul, forever and ever and ever and ever they will praise God for the pleasure of having a momentary affliction in order to have an eternal weight of glory. Don't sell yourself short, this is a brief time. Every time you avoid righteousness in order to save suffering, you infect, in a way, your life in such a way that will impact your eternal capacity. Now I'm not saying that you're going to sin in heaven, not at all, there won't be any of that. I'm not going to say you'll be disappointed, because there will be no disappointment there. I'm not going to say you'll be sad, you won't. But the fact is, the greater the suffering in this life, the greater the glory in the next life, the greater the capacity to honor god.

It was that kind of thinking that spurred the apostle Paul on. It was that kind of thinking that made Peter be willing to be crucified upside down, because Peter understood that suffering was the path to glory. So don't be too overly excited about your privilege in this life because those of us who most escape the hostility of the world will be limited in the capacity we have for eternal glory. I don't believe at that...at that point that we will feel cheated at all, I think we'll rejoice and glorify God with all that we have, but I don't know about you, I want to be able to have much capacity as I can have. So suffering plays a very important role in not only the time of a believer's life but the eternity of a believer's life.

Back to 1 Peter chapter 2. "For you have been called for this purpose," called for this purpose, called to suffer. Why? Because suffering is the path to glory. Luke 24 verse 25, listen to the words of Jesus, talking to His disciples on the road to Emmaus, "Oh foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken." So foolish. Why? "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Christ had to suffer to enter His glory. We should expect it to enter our glory. And the greater the suffering, the greater the glory. That's the principle.

Listen to Hebrews 2:10. "For it was fitting for Him," that is Christ "for whom are all things and through whom are all things in bringing many sons to glory," listen to this, "to perfect the Author of their salvation through (what?) sufferings." Now listen to that. Who was perfected through sufferings? Jesus, Jesus was perfected through sufferings. You see, that's why Peter says, back to 1 Peter 2:21, "For you have been called for this purpose," listen to this, "since Christ also suffered." If the path to glory for Christ was through suffering, the path to glory for you is through suffering. There's no escape, and the greater the suffering, the greater a loving God will give the glory.

In Hebrews chapter 5, verse 8, it says of Christ, "And though He was a son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered and having been made perfect He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation." He suffered. He learned obedience. And He gained eternal glory through His suffering.

In Matthew's gospel, in that marvelous 10th chapter where Matthew records the instruction of Jesus to the twelve, it says in verse 21, Matthew 10, "Brother will deliver up brother to death, a father his child, and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death, and you will be hated by all on account of My name. But it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved, but whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next, for truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of man comes." In other words, expect to be persecuted, expect to suffer, and you're suffering for righteousness sake because the next verse gives the principle, "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master."

In other words, if your master suffered, if your teacher suffered, you'll suffer. In fact, it is enough, verse 25, for the disciple that he become as his teacher and the slave as his master. Christ suffered, you suffer. That's the principle.

And also in John's gospel chapter 13 alludes to the same thing in verse 16, "Truly, truly I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent Him." And again He reiterates that what is characteristic of Me is going to be characteristic, or should be, characteristic of you.

Now, the path to glory for Christ was the path of unjust suffering. Follow that thought. The path to glory for us is the path of unjust suffering. Christ endured it perfectly, and therefore He is our example. And that's exactly what Peter wants to say. You have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an (what?) example.

I don't have time to say any more than that and that's the introduction. Christ is an example of this great truth. He is an example of suffering unto glory. He is the model of the one who suffered the most with perfect patience and is therefore glorified at the highest level. And He is our example.

You say, "Did Christ die only as our example?" No, no, because verse 24 says He is not only our example, He is our substitute. He died more than just an example, He died bearing our sins. And then verse 25 says, "More than an example, more than a substitute, He is the shepherd who gathers His

sheep."

In our next study we're going to look at Christ then as our standard for endurance and suffering through the path to glory; as our substitute, the one who died in our place; as our Shepherd, the one who gathered us when we went astray and brought us to Himself. But for tonight we have learned a great lesson if we understand that the path to glory is the path of suffering. The greater the suffering for righteousness' sake with endurance and patience, the greater the eternal capacity to glorify God. And that is why again I say Paul says I don't mind the momentary light affliction because I will receive an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. I hope you won't trade momentary, light affliction here for an eternal privilege. You don't have to seek to be abused, but just seek to be faithful in your environment, seek to exalt Christ, seek to live the Christian life. And when the suffering comes, God will be gracious. And if you endure it with patience you will not only be maturing and perfected here, but gaining a greater capacity for glory in the life to come.

Now next time we're going to look at Christ and see exactly how He modeled endurance in the midst of His suffering and how He became our perfect substitute and our loving Shepherd. Let's bow together in prayer.

Lord, we could pray that You would bring us suffering, but we don't ask that. We just ask that You would give us endurance for the suffering that comes when we live godly lives, when we exalt Christ at school, when we exalt Christ on the job, when we exalt Christ in an unsaved family, when we exalt Christ in our community, when we lift up Your name and we live pure lives and preach Christ unstintingly, unhesitatingly, unequivocally, affirming the gospel, when we confront sin and when we speak of righteousness and when we call men and women to repent. Lord, we understand that there will be abuse. Give us the endurance that only Your Spirit can provide, that in that endurance we may know that greater weight of glory that someday shall be our joy. We thank You for this great hope in Jesus name. Amen.

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