



Sermon Transcript

June 14, 2020

God's One Story of Redemption

The Promises of Suffering

1 Peter 4:12—5:11

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on June 14, 2020 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Steven Peery. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text:
1 Peter 4:12 – 5:11

¹² Beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And

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what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

⁵ So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Introduction

Good morning. Our passage this morning is from 1 Peter 4: 12 – 5:14 and is about suffering. I've got to admit that the subject of suffering is daunting. We see and experience loss of life, loss of justice, loss of dignity, and loss of hope all around us. Suffering and persecution are on the forefront of our thoughts these days. Last year 245 million Christians in the world experienced high levels of persecution for their choice to follow Christ. In the past 3 months 115,000 people in the US lost their life to COVID-1, a virus that is spreading beyond our control and impacting the innocent and vulnerable. We see vividly on video clips the horrible injustice of racism, that continues to haunt our society taking the lives of an untold number of souls through appalling persecution. It sometimes feels as though we stagger from one grief to the next. Suffering is heavy on our hearts today just as it was for early church in Asia minor to whom Peter wrote this letter.

We are continuing our journey through Scripture and are now in the last week of the Teaching section, the T of Empty. The teaching of Christ contained in the New Testament is how the gospel spread and continues to spread throughout the world. It is critical to remember that Christianity is not an intuitive lifestyle. It has to be taught; it has to be seen; it has to be cultivated in our soul. 1-2 Peter, along with Hebrews, Jude, and 1-3 John are the letters referred to as the General Epistles, since they were written to the church as a whole, or at least to a large geographical region. In general, the Holy Spirit inspires the General Epistles to teach and strengthen the church facing persecution, suffering, false teaching, and demonic power in an increasingly hostile world. The same teaching and strength is needed today for followers of Christ living in a fallen world surrounded by suffering.

Before we dive into Peter's letter and see what he has to say about suffering as a Christian, I must admit one thing. Peter is my go-to apostle. If I am allowed a favorite apostle, it is Peter. I have always appreciated that Peter is never shy to act out of impulse or to say what is on his mind, or ask the questions we would likely ask, if we're honest with ourselves.

Scholars describe Peter as impulsive, hotheaded, reckless, transparent to a fault, yet has a large and genial humanity that appeals strongly to our hearts. Peter kind of serves as the representative of the Apostles and through him we get insight into their views, tastes, hopes, prejudices, and difficulties. Peter is a "guy" that I can relate to in that he seems to personify the struggles and backsliding we all face as followers of Christ. We can learn so much by following Peter through the Gospels:

- Peter is called to leave everything and follow Jesus (Matt 4:18–20; Luke 5:1–11) and he does leave all and follow Christ.
- Peter walks on the water (Matt 14:28–31) and then got scared and nearly drowns.
- Peter asks Jesus to explain a parable (Matt 15:15) thankfully
- Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah (Matt 16:13–19; Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–21) "You

are the Christ, Son of the Living God” immediately followed by

- Jesus rebukes Peter (Matt 16:21–23; Mark 8:31–33) Son of man must suffer, be rejected, and killed, 3rd day rise.... “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” Hindrance to me.
- Peter with Jesus at the transfiguration (Matt 17:1–9; Mark 9:1–9; Luke 9:27–36) Peter, James, and John.
- Peter asks Jesus about the extent of forgiveness (Matt 18:21–22) 7 times? Seventy times seven.
- Jesus foretells Peter’s denial (Matt 26:31–35; Mark 14:27–31; Luke 22:31–34; John 13:36–38) “If I must die with you, I will not deny you.”
- Peter sleeps in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42)
- Peter attacks the servant of the high priest at Jesus’ arrest (Mark 14:47; John 18:10–11)
- Peter denies Jesus (Matt 26:69–75; Mark 14:66–72; Luke 22:55–61; John 18:15–27) “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.
- Peter is reinstated by Jesus (John 21:15–19) and told to “follow me”

Through Peter we learn so much about Christ as well as ourselves. Peter wrote this letter approximately 30 years after Christ’s ascension, in ~64 AD to both Jewish and gentile Christians living in the Roman provinces of Asia minor, today part of northern Turkey. Peter’s letter is a powerful appeal to courage, purity, and faithfulness to Christ amid the suffering that these new Christians were facing under Roman persecution.

The grand theme of Peter’s epistle is Christian hope and perseverance in the time of suffering. Peter refers to suffering 16 times in this letter and always it is tied to hope. This morning we’ll be drawing upon a segment of Peter’s letter Chapter 4:12 through Chapter 5:14 that specifically deals with the Christian response to suffering.

Peter is speaking to us from his heart and through his own experience about how to face suffering as a follower of Christ. I am very moved by how Peter always balanced his teaching on human suffering with our hope as Christians. Our Christian hope is a future certainty, not some vague expectation of some future event, but a certainty that is anchored in the promises of God. Therefore, I have titled this sermon “the promises of suffering.” With that background on Peter let me read the beginning of our passage 1 Peter 4:12-4:19. I found that Peter is telling us the what, how and why’s of suffering. What to do, how to do it, and why we do it when we face suffering.

With that background on Peter let me read the beginning of our passage **1 Peter 4:12-19**.

¹² Beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are

insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

To unpack what Peter has to teach us on our response to suffering let's first discuss the what's, how's and why's of suffering from a Worldly perspective.

The World's perspective on suffering

The culture in which we live today tells us that suffering is to be prevented, avoided and/or removed. Our secular worldview supremely values expressive individualism where we are called to Be true to ourselves. Follow our heart. Find yourself. The purpose of life is to find one's deepest self and then express that to the world, forging that identity in ways that counter whatever family, friends, political affiliations, previous generations, or religious authorities might say. The highest good is individual freedom, happiness, self-definition, and self-expression. Anything at all that is viewed to restrict individual freedom, happiness, self-definition, and self-expression must be reshaped, deconstructed, or destroyed. Therefore, we often find that traditions, religions, received wisdom, regulations, and social ties are seen as suspect or even evil because they restrict individual freedom and happiness. With individual freedom and happiness as the purpose of life we can see that suffering is a roadblock and must be avoided, resisted, mitigated, and removed. Suffering is abnormal and counter to the good life we all strive to have. If you suffer something is wrong, and it must be and can be fixed.

The world tells us that when we face a time of suffering, we first avoid or eliminate the suffering. How do we do it? Basically, through our own efforts, science, medicine, money, etc. Why do we respond this way to suffering, because there is no purpose to suffering and it is preventing us from being happy and fulfilled. That is what the world tells us, and honestly, I have bought into that storyline.

The Biblical perspective of suffering

The biblical perspective on suffering is very different. First, Scripture clearly attests to the reality of human suffering. Jesus noted, "In the world you will have affliction" (John 16:33) and Paul wrote, "All those who want to live in a godly manner in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12). Suffering is a central element in the curse associated with the fall (Gen 3:16-19), and suffering will not end until the final elimination of pain and suffering when Christ fully inaugurates His kingdom, following His second coming (Rev 21:4). Suffering generally stems from the misuse of human freedom. It originated from Adam and Eve's choice to disobey God's

command (Rom 5:12–14), and the consequences of their sin led not only to human suffering but also to suffering for all creation (Rom 8:18–22). Given the fall and people’s continuing sinfulness, suffering is an ordinary and expected condition of earthly life (Job 5:7; 14:1; Eccl 2:23; John 16:33). Tim Keller points out that, compared to the other worldviews, the Bible’s picture of suffering is, the most nuanced and multidimensional. When weighing the biblical material, we see two foundational balances. Suffering is both just and unjust. God is both a sovereign and a suffering God. These two sets of paired truths, held together without discarding one in favor of another, leads to a remarkably rich and many-sided understanding of the causes and forms of suffering.

That is a broad biblical perspective but to tell you the truth, if you’re like me, you still struggle with suffering. Knowing that suffering is a part of life due to the fallen nature of our world still does not ease the pain in the midst of our suffering. I think that Peter has a great deal to teach us about suffering and how we as followers of Christ should respond to suffering. I believe that in the passages this morning Peter tells us what to do in our suffering and how to do it, and why we do it. This morning we will discover that Peter tells us to: Reflect, Rely, and Rejoice in our suffering by trusting the promises of God, because this draws us closer to Christ. In times of suffering we are to reflect, rely, and rejoice. By trusting the promise of God’s sovereignty, love and presence.

When facing suffering Peter tells us to first reflect. Reflect upon the sovereignty of God and the will of God.

God’s promise is that He is Sovereign and our response in our suffering is to reflect upon that truth. Look at verse 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.” Suffering and persecution is not strange or unexpected. It is not meaningless. It is purposeful. Suffering is purposeful because God is sovereign, and life has a God given purpose. How should we respond to suffering? First, Peter says do not be surprised. Look at verse 19: “Let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator.” “According to God’s will.” Suffering is not outside the will of God. It is in God’s will. This is true even when Satan may be the immediate cause. God is sovereign over all things, including our suffering, and including Satan.

The Bible teaches us that God uses suffering to remove our weaknesses and build us up. First, suffering transforms our attitude toward ourselves. It humbles us and removes unrealistic self-regard and pride. It shows us how fragile we are. If you are anything like me, I can have extremely unrealistic ideas of how much control I have over how my life goes. In my times of suffering these blinders get removed. For example, COVID has shown me just how helpless and out of control I am over matters of health and reminds me I am always vulnerable and dependent on God. Suffering merely helps us wake up to that fact and live in accordance with it.

Peter tells us that suffering is not pointless or without meaning. We suffer, Peter says, because we belong to Christ, because we bear His name and as His followers, we live countercultural lives. Suffering can be used for the will and purposes of a compassionate and loving God. Peter tells us in verse 12 your fiery ordeal comes “for your testing.” God can use our experience of suffering to purify us, to test us, to refine us.

As Joni Eareckson Tada puts it, “God permits what He hates to achieve what He loves.” For those not familiar with Joni Eareckson Tada she is an evangelical Christian author, radio host, she has written over forty books, recorded several musical albums, starred in an autobiographical movie of her life, and founder of Joni and Friends, an organization “accelerating Christian ministry in the disability community.” Her father was an Olympian in the 1932 Olympics, and she enjoyed riding horses, hiking, tennis, and swimming until, at the age of 18, she dove into the Chesapeake Bay suffered a fracture between the fourth and fifth cervical levels and became paralyzed from the shoulders down. Joni knows suffering, physical affliction and emotional pain are part of her daily routine. “God permits what He hates to achieve what He loves.”

God may very well be teaching us, refining us, disciplining us and giving us an opportunity to grow toward Him, but we must first reflect. Reflect upon who God is and reflect upon who I am and what I have done.

This highlights a further case for reflection. We must reflect upon who we are and what we have done in the light of God.

Look at verses 15-17 “But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”

We should not take comfort in suffering that we bring on ourselves for sinning. Suffering can be a form of discipline to correct our course. Peter began his letter referencing persecution and suffering as trials that refine and prove one’s faith if reacted to in the will of God. Now he is adding that God allows persecutions as disciplinary judgment to purify the lives of those in the family of God.

This passage is all the more real for me today. Am I suffering as the persecuted or being disciplined as one who is persecuting others? Folks, that is what I have been reflecting upon lately. The Holy Spirit has convicted me greatly in this passage to reflect upon my role in the persecution of others. My silence, my intentional ignorance, my complacency in the midst of the suffering of those around me is haunting me. I am now feeling shame and great sorrow for not hearing the cries of my brothers and sisters in Christ, my very neighbors. Peter in this passage tells me to accept the righteous discipline of God to correct my course. The writer of Hebrews also supports Peter: “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons” (Heb. 12:7).

Noteworthy though is that this is suffering that we experience "as a Christian." Peter felt ashamed, and suffered great sorrow and grief, when he denied the Lord in the high priest's courtyard, but he learned his lesson, stopped feeling ashamed, and urged his readers "not to feel ashamed."

God may very well be teaching us, refining us, discipling us and giving us an opportunity to grow toward Him, but we must first reflect.

God promises us that He is Sovereign. In the midst of our suffering first reflect upon God's purposes.

Rely on the love of God.

The next thing Peter tells us to do when facing suffering is to Rely. Verse 19 tells us "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator." Peter encouraged suffering saints to endure through the exercise of Christlike faith. Just as Christ trusted Himself to His Father who judges justly, so should believers commit or "to deposit or entrust" ourselves – our very souls - to our faithful Creator and continue to do good.

It is interesting to me that Peter described God as the 'faithful Creator' here. This combination of 'faithful' and 'Creator' reminds us of God's love and power in the midst of trials so that we will have no doubt regarding either his interest or ability. The faithful creator loves us individually while being all powerful. Peter refers to a faithful creator here because God the creator meets the needs of His people. It is the Creator who, out of love for us, provides food, clothing and shelter to suffering Christians and protects the in times of danger.

Peter provides a summary of suffering that is grounded in God's love for us in Chapter 5 verse 10 "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." God is using our suffering to draw us back to Him, because God loves us. Christians' suffering will last only a little while, while their glory in Christ, to which they were called, will be eternal. God Himself will restore us and make us strong, firm, and steadfast. God's plan of redemption, grounded in His love, works through and in our suffering.

Peter's appeal to "entrust our souls" has made me think hard about where I place my trust. I too often place my trust in the wrong things such as my own understanding, my hard work, my company. Through suffering, sometime in these exact areas of my life, God has course corrected me into placing my trust in Him. You can trust love and you can only entrust your soul to the perfect love of God.

In our times of suffering, First reflect upon the promise of God's will and next rely on the promise of God's love.

Finally, Peter tells us to Rejoice when facing suffering. Peter tells us to rejoice for we have the presence of God within us. When we rejoice in suffering, we glorify God.

Verses 13 and 14 tell us to “rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” We can also rejoice in these sufferings, because when we experience them, we “share” in Christ's “sufferings.” That is, we experience what Jesus did during His time on earth as He continued faithful to God's will. God will glorify us just as He will glorify Jesus.

If you want to be close to someone share experiences with them. I know that I can never relate to God through His Sovereignty. However, I can relate to God through suffering. I believe that this may be the gift of suffering. Suffering allows us to draw closer to God by relating to the suffering that Christ endured on our behalf. In this way I experience God's presence most clearly in times of suffering. This is why Peter tells stresses “If you are insulted for the name of Christ” because if we suffer as Christ did, sacrificially for the sins of others, our experience is most like Christ's and we can draw closest to Christ.

In our times of suffering, First reflect upon the promise of God's sovereignty, rely on the promise of God's love, and rejoice in the presence of God.

In verse 16 Peter tells us “If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.” Peter is telling us that when we rejoice in our suffering, we glorify God. Glorifying God means showing by your actions and attitudes that God is glorious to you and more important to you over and above worldly things. Think of Mother Theresa suffering with the poor in Calcutta, think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, William Wilberforce, Martin Luther King Jr, and think of Paul, and think of Peter. Their faithfulness in their suffering glorified God and showed us that their love of Christ was more important to them than any earthly endeavor or possession.

Peter tells us that in suffering with reflection, reliance and rejoicing we glorify God. That is why we suffer.

Beyond a lesson taught, A way of life lived.

This teaching is difficult. One reason it is difficult for me is that I have always treated this as a teaching. A type of “head knowledge” that you apply once you have received the instruction.

It is important to note that Peter does not pit the experience of grief and pain against rejoicing in Christ. In 1 Peter 1:6–7 Peter tells us to see God's salvation in Christ and “in this you greatly rejoice,” but then adds “though now . . . you have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” It is remarkable that both statements are made in the present tense. We are told to rejoice in our

salvation even as we are suffering deep grief, hurt, and sadness. Peter does not say that we can either rejoice in Christ or wail and cry out in pain, but that we must do both if we are to grow through our suffering rather than be wrecked by it.

I think this is difficult for us in the modern western world where we place such a high value on our emotions and our feelings. We somehow let our emotions define us. But we must remember that in the Bible, the “heart” is not identical to emotions. The heart is understood as the place of your deepest commitments, trusts, and hopes. From those commitments flow our emotions, thoughts, and actions. To “rejoice” in God means to dwell on and remind ourselves of who God is, who we are, and what he has done for us. Sometimes our emotions respond and follow when we do this, and sometimes they do not. But therefore we must not define rejoicing as something that precludes feelings of grief, or pain. Peter tells us that rejoicing in suffering happens within sorrow.

I think that if we look at the life of Peter, we can see how his heart was continually being, allowing him to rejoice in his sufferings.

- Like Peter, we are first chosen and selected by God.
- Like Peter, we must drop everything, turn away from our old life and faithfully follow Christ where He takes us, even if we don’t understand.
- Like Peter we will mess up, but we repent and be thankful for forgiveness.
- Like Peter, we must practice the disciplines of a Christ following disciple, we must daily practice the disciplines living by Scripture, living through prayer, and patiently waiting on His direction.
- Like Peter, we must live by the power of the promised helper, the Holy Spirit. We then live life based on the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit obediently following and trusting God.

Ever since Jesus called Peter to follow him, Peter’s heart was formed and shaped, day-by-day, step by step with Christ. And then after the victory of the cross and His ascension, Christ did not abandon Peter, nor does Christ abandon us. Christ promises us the Holy Spirit. “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever” (John 14:16–17). We are never closer and never more aware of the power of indwelling Holy Spirit then when we are sharing the same experiences as Christ.

Peter is teaching us what he learned as a disciple of Christ. Peter did not learn this simply by listening to Christ. Listening to a podcast or a ted talk. Peter LIVED with Christ, Peter was disciplined by Christ, Peter SLOWLY learned how to live as a Christian with all his heart, soul, and mind. But this only clicked for Peter after prayer, patiently waiting on Christ, and being indwelled by the Holy spirit. Peter suffered with Christ and Peter is telling us that Christ suffers with us when we suffer.

Folks do not try this approach to suffering without the enablement of the Holy Spirit that indwells within us as followers of Christ. It cannot be done. We could never rejoice in our suffering based on head knowledge alone.

Conclusion

God is sovereign over suffering and yet, in teaching unique to the Christian faith among all worldviews and major religions, God also made himself vulnerable and subject to suffering. The other side of the sovereignty of God is the suffering of God himself. God does not merely empathize with our sufferings; He inserted Himself into history through Jesus. God ordained and allowed Jesus' temporary suffering so He could prevent our eternal suffering.

Good Friday isn't called Bad Friday, because we see it in retrospect: We know that out of suffering and the appallingly bad came inexpressible good. Although the bad was temporary, the good is eternal. If someone had delivered Jesus from His suffering, Jesus could not have delivered us from ours (Isa 53:10-12; Rom 6:5).

We can only face the sufferings of this fallen world by entrusting ourselves to a faithful creator, by relying on God' love and the power of the Holy Spirit. We then rejoice in suffering because our unity, our closeness, our relationship with Jesus Himself has been strengthen because He suffered for us. We can rejoice in suffering because we know that through suffering God promises restoration. Through Christ's suffering we are saved from sin and death. Through our own personal suffering we draw closer to Christ.

Peter leaves no doubt that salvation is possible only through the suffering of Christ. Let me say that again. Our salvation, my salvation your salvation, is possible only through suffering. The suffering of Christ saved us.

When we suffer, for the sake of our faith, we draw closest to Christ, to our savior. That is the goal and the point of life for followers of Christ to draw near to Him.

Peter tells us to **Reflect, Rely, and Rejoice in our suffering by trusting the promises of God. In times of suffering we are to reflect, rely, and rejoice. By trusting God's sovereignty, God's love, and God's presence. This brings Glory to God!**

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Sermon Title: A Timely Message on Race
Sermon Text: Ephesian 3:1-21
Sermon Date: June 7, 2020

COMMUNITY
GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What is one thing you are celebrating from this week? What is one challenge you are facing this week?
2. Discuss with the group your favorite human biblical character. Why are they your favorite?

Diving Into The Word

3. Read 1 Peter 4:12 – 5:11

How is God revealed in this portion of Scripture? (Who is God and what is he like?)

What does this portion of Scripture teach us about the people of God?

What does God require of us from this section?

How does this portion of Scripture testify to Christ?

Taking It Home

4. Discuss what it might look like for you to rejoice in suffering.
5. Spend some time praying for the suffering of others.