

Part 12: Living Your Blessed Life Now

Tyler Velin | 1 Peter 4:12-19

June 21, 2020

What's your response to being surprised?

I know there are some people who live life in the realm of spontaneity, and for them they love surprises. Then there are others who prefer a more planned out existence who are a little less prone to surprises. There are those like my son who loves to jump around corners and surprise others, but who hates to himself be surprised.

The truth is that our relationship to surprises generally has to do with the nature of the surprise. There are good surprises, and there are bad surprises. There's the surprise of a new promotion at work, and the surprise of being furloughed in our current economy. The surprise of finally getting accepted into your grad school, and the surprise of an untimely medical diagnosis.

There are good surprises, and there are bad surprises. Secondary to the nature of the surprise is the issues of preparedness. These unexpected encounters require us to act and part of our delight or our despair is rooted in our ability to respond to the changing circumstances.

Our passage today in 1 Peter begins with this **1 Peter 4:12-13**. Peter wants believers to not be surprised at the difficulties of Christian living in ways which leave us unprepared. But while speaking of difficult times he also prepares us to be pleasantly surprised by what we do encounter when life is difficult.

Central to this passage is what Peter calls, "the fiery trial." On account of this trial we ought not to be surprised as if it were strange, meaning instead if we encounter it, it should be with a certain level of expectation.

This trial isn't suffering in general. We can suffer in many ways because we live in a broken world. We can experience loss, health issues, injustice, sorrow and pain because our world aches with sin. Most people, Christian or not, are not caught off guard too much by these realities.

But this is not Peter's primary category of suffering. Peter is talking to Christians about suffering on account of their faith in Jesus and their obedient response to him. He is writing about suffering on account of the name of Jesus. Yet to prepare for this specific suffering, a suffering which the world finds strange, you will find yourself prepared to endure suffering which the world finds common as well.

As Christians today, we cannot afford to neglect this text. To neglect Peter's preparatory remarks is to do so at your own risk. This hits close to home for me as I prepared this sermon this week. In all honesty I can only think of two to three times at most in my life where I have experienced any sort of negative responses from individuals due to my faith in Jesus Christ, and even those were rather minimal.

But I can say this, if we are not careful we can assume that we are prepared for such pushback when in reality we are the ones who will be surprised at our lack of preparedness. This text today pushes back really hard against a prevalent misconception of the gospel which is often called the "Prosperity Gospel."

The prosperity gospel says that a sign that you're blessed by God is your ability to thrive by worldly standards. But Peter makes the point today that as sing you're blessed by God is that you might suffer for Jesus by worldly standards.

I think it's easy to see the danger of the prosperity gospel, but I think we can accidentally fall into another false gospel which I call "Passivity Gospel." This is some shell of Christian confession and culture which affirms certain doctrines of Christian faith while denying that faith any sort of controlling influence over our lives.

The passivity gospel is the path of least resistance. It convinces us that the public and private acts of Christian obedience are recommended at best, and can be entirely sidestepped at worst.

But both the passivity gospel and the prosperity gospel must themselves be caught off guard by Jesus' words to his disciples in **Matthew 10:16**.

To be a Christian is not to be rewarded with the world's idea of rewards. To be a Christian is not to find acceptance by worldly standards as the norm. To be a Christian is to be identified with a savior who himself was mistreated and murdered by sinners. If you are a Christian in here this week, I think this is a sober question to consider: Would you be surprised if the world treated you as they treated Jesus?

Now if you are a non-believer in here today you might be asking yourself: Why would anyone want to live like this? That is a great question, which I hope you will find answered in our text today. But in summary here is an attempt to answer that. Because while Christians are not surprised at how the world may at times treat us, we are pleasantly surprised when at every difficult crossroads, we find the nearness of our Savior to be what satisfies us even in life's most painful moments.

The big idea Peter wants us to see today is that the experience of suffering for Jesus allows believers to better experience the satisfaction of Jesus. Peter is going to show us this in three ways **To share in Jesus' suffering is to share in his glory, To share in Jesus' name is to share in his blessing, and To share in Jesus' trust is to share in his hope.**

Let's begin by looking at our first point from **1 Peter 4:12-13**.

Peter is here talking about being insulted and suffering for the sole reason that you are a believer in Jesus Christ and he has what is almost an audacious response: don't be surprised, but rejoice.

Why? Because at each step of Christian suffering we find the riches of what we share with Jesus our King. Here is his first point: **To share in Jesus' suffering is to share in his glory.**

Growing up I remember going to an amusement park and on all their water rides they had this recording that would play on a loop. It would say, "This is a water attraction and chances are you will get wet."

I remember thinking to myself that if someone thinks that they are going to be strapped into a small tube and hurled down a river full of rapids and waterfalls and they would end up not getting wet, they would be crazy.

But how many of us think that we can follow a Savior who was rejected, mocked, made fun of, misunderstood and even murdered for his obedience to God and think that we might not get wet when our obedience leads us down the same river?

Look at what Jesus said in **John 15:19-20a**.

Why is Christian conversion the greatest miracle? Because repentance and faith that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God is something that in the flesh we are too weak to do. No one chooses to follow this Jesus unless God opens their hearts to see that their greatest problem is not between themselves and the world, but between themselves and God.

When Jesus suffered on the cross, he suffered for the eternal weight of your rebellion against God.

But what is Peter talking about here when he's talking about sharing in Jesus' suffering? Does he mean that Jesus' suffering was not enough and we need to make up what was lacking? No, he's not speaking in terms of atonement here. Instead he's speaking in terms of solidarity.

Why did Jesus suffer? It was not because he was the Son of God that he suffered. Jesus could have been the Son of God and stayed at home in Nazareth passing his days making high quality chairs. Jesus suffered because he obeyed God.

Jesus as the Son of God obeyed his heavenly father by fulfilling the ministry of the Messiah.

While we are not God's messiah, Christians are called to obey God and the obedience we have towards God will often put us at odds with the expectations and authorities of culture. So as we obey Jesus, we share in the suffering Jesus himself experienced from others due to his obedience.

Now what's really interesting here is the language Peter uses. He calls this a "fiery trial," then he goes on to call it, "suffering."

What is he talking about here? Well in the context of Peter's church he tells us in verse 14, "If you are insulted for the name of Christ." What is the fiery trial these Christians are experiencing? Insults.

Seventeen days ago in India, a group of Hindu extremists broke into the house of 14 year old, Samaru, drug him away and killed him because he and his father converted to Christianity.

But here, Peter calls name calling, the "fiery trial." Doesn't this make little of what Samaru experienced? But what I love is that a biblical view of suffering acknowledges our experience of suffering over and above the source of it.

It's easy for us to say that being insulted for the sake of Christ is nothing, until we are insulted for the sake of Christ. Then as silly as those words might seem, we feel the weight of a fiery trial. Peter isn't into making little of your experience, instead he wants to give you hope in the midst of it.

Paul does a similar thing in **2 Corinthians 1:8-9**. Now what did Paul suffer? He doesn't tell us. But what did Paul experience? Despair.

A Christian view of suffering comforts those who stand before silly names and shooting squads because it speaks to our emotional experience. And in the face of whatever level of fear you might have, there is a comfort for you.

What is that? That though we might share in Christ's suffering now, we know that one day we will also share in his glory. Look again at **1 Peter 4:13**.

Why should we not be surprised and unprepared when we suffer on account of our faith? Because that suffering we share with Jesus reminds us of the certainty of the glory we will also share with him. To suffer for Jesus in this world is to build up for us joy, and joy exceedingly, when Jesus comes back.

The world might often cause us to suffer so that it can remind us of what we lack in following Jesus. But for a Christian, suffering on this account reminds us of what we have in Jesus. Resurrection hope!

There may be times in your life where obedience to Jesus might lead you into an unwanted experience of aloneness and seeming isolation. But in those moments we remember that if we are suffering because of Jesus, we never suffer without Jesus. We have a savior who speaks into our lives and says, "I know...I know, but this isn't the end."

Suffering reminds us of the hope of glory. The hope that what Jesus gives us in the gospel is relief from the greatest suffering and what Jesus promises us in the gospel is an eternal relationship with him untouched by the pains of this world. To suffer with Jesus now reminds us of the glory we will share in heaven.

Peter continues with our second point today: **To share in Jesus' name is to share in his blessing**. Read with me: **1 Peter 4:14-16**.

Peter just showed us that Christians are not hopeless sufferers, but sufferers who share the glory of Jesus himself, but now he wishes to make sure that Christians are actually suffering for what is Christian.

Here we see once again the reason why Christians suffer, they suffer because they have the "name of Christ." What is that name? Christian.

Interestingly enough there are only three places in the New Testament where the word "Christian" is used, and this is one of them.

To be named a Christian is to publically identify as one who follows Christ. So as a point of contrast Peter says that you need to make sure your suffering is on account that name, and not another name, like that of sin. He encourages believers to lean into suffering on account of the name of Christ, but he says: be sure you don't suffer in name of a murderer, thief, evil doer or meddler.

Christians ought to suffer for good names and not for bad ones. If our suffering is due to our faith and obedience to Jesus, then we should make sure that when we do experience opposition from those around us, it is for obedience and not for disobedience.

It is not too hard for us to assume that when our co-workers, neighbors, or even governments are tense towards us that it is because of our Christian name when in reality it might be on account of a different name.

In other words it's reasonable that culture might be against you if you are a murderer or a thief. As Christians we understand those two far more clearly. If we act in those ways we would expect culture to be curt or jilted against us. But Peter includes two other words which get at broader sins: evil doer and meddler.

Christians should not suffer for the token big sins, but we should also not suffer for smaller, sometimes more culturally acceptable ones: for being a little deceitful in our business practices, being ok with a certain level of gossip, being a busy body, vengeful, overbearing, lazy.

When we experience the insults or pressure from those around us, we should as sober-minded Christians examine why we are being treated as such. And if it's for the sake of our own sin, we should stop the sin.

Augustine wrote to another pastor who assumed he was being persecuted for the sake of the gospel, but in reality it was for a certain stubbornness he was exhibiting. In summary this is what Augustine said in the 4th century: "For whenever a man suffers anything that is harsh and unpleasing, he is warned to consider why it is that he is suffering...If you discover you are suffering for what is right, continue in it. But if you see that it is unrighteousness for which you suffer, you should understand that you are suffering and being tormented most fruitlessly and change your purpose for the better."

Tension between us and those around us should lead us to assess if we are actually suffering for the cause of Christ or if we are suffering on account of our own sins.

Because Jesus was numbered among the transgressors to save us, we ought not to be. This doesn't mean we shouldn't associate with sinners, for Jesus did. This doesn't mean that people won't accuse us of guilt by association, for they did that to Jesus. But it does mean that with God as our witness we ought not to rightly be named as such by participation ourselves.

So when we suffer we assess. And if we assess that we are indeed suffering for the name of Christ, look at the wonderful reality Peter presents to you: **1 Peter 4:14-16**.

If you suffer for the sake of Jesus, is to be blessed. Jesus says a similar thing, with the same word in **Matthew 5:10**.

That word Peter and Jesus use, "blessed," is simply translated as happy. Happy are you.

How so? How is it that suffering on account of our Christian name should make us happy?

Because it reminds you of what you have been joined to. Through faith in Jesus Christ, you have been reunited with God. His Spirit lives inside you. You no longer need to be ashamed of it but instead you are able to glorify God in it.

I want to read to you an encounter the early apostles had with persecution when they were arrested for preaching the gospel. And I want you specifically to pay attention to the role obedience plays in the disciple's life, but also the blessing of the name of Jesus: **Acts 5:27-32...40-42**.

What lead these men to rejoice? Because they knew that when they suffered for the name of Jesus it meant they suffered because they were saved by Jesus even though they did nothing to merit that mercy.

Suffering reminds us of the blessing of being in Christ. To suffer in Jesus name reminds you of the nearness Jesus himself has to you, it remind you that the Holy Spirit of God himself is in you. That the whole work of the Triune God is laboring in you.

For those who wrestle with assurance of faith, suffering allows a wonderful proof of your conversion. When the world sees in us not the riches of sin but the reproach of Jesus we take heart and realize the joy of this miracle!

When we are experience pushback because of our obedience, we rejoice that we are no longer suffering for our disobedience. To suffer for the name of Jesus reminds us that we are blessed to be persecuted by the world for his name because one day we will be justified before God on account of his name.

This is what leads us to our last point today: **To share in Jesus' trust is to share in his hope.**

Read with me **1 Peter 4:17-19**

What does it mean that judgement starts at the household of God? I think Peter means this in two senses. We saw the first way this begins in **1 Peter 4:6**.

Christians are judged in the flesh by the world. The world has begun to judge us and they are surprised when we do not find hope in the things they find hope in. They call us fools. They call us threats. They call us whatever seems to be the moniker of the day.

Just as the culture of the day made judgments against Jesus, they will now make judgements against his people, the church.

But this judgement is not only a human effort. It is as Peter says, according to God's will. Back in verse 12 he said that this fiery trial has come to test you. And remember the illustration Peter used back in chapter one? **1 Peter 1:6-8**.

Just as gold is proven valuable when it has had its imperfections burned off in a furnace, so God's judgement of the church in this age establishes the church's purity and hope for what will come.

Suffering helps us by removing object of false hope and proving to us that Jesus and only Jesus truly satisfies. It helps us to taste that obedience though hard, always brings us a greater joy in Jesus.

Peter applies an eyeball check to this life. By worldly standards it will seem that Christians scarcely make it through this world when compared to those who don't follow Jesus. It will seem that we are the ones who are missing out.

But it is God and not the world who will ultimately judge us. Those who suffer for Christ in this world will not be those who suffer apart from Christ in the next.

Our object of hope, though tested by suffering, proves its value in the end.

So what do we do? We refuse to disobey this wonderful Jesus.

Remember what sustained Jesus when he was called to costly obedience? **1 Peter 2:21-24.**

Jesus entrusted himself to God and in so doing he went to the cross for your sins so that you might be healed even from the deep wounds of sin and the world.

And here Peter uses that same word, entrust, and commands us to do the same: **1 Peter 4:19.**

Because Jesus has removed the judgment we deserved for our sin, we know that the judgment of the world is not of eternal value. So what do we do when we encounter suffering on behalf of Jesus? We entrust ourselves to God and continue to do good.

Peter isn't writing this passage to prepare us for suffering as much as he's writing to prepare us for obedience. And it's only when we see the joy of obeying Jesus that suffering doesn't catch us by surprise.

I used Polycarp, one of the early martyrs of the Christian church, as an example a couple weeks ago. After he was arrested he was brought to a tribunal and told that he must "curse Christ." If he cursed Christ, he would be set free.

But Polycarp, old and frail turned to the proconsul and said, "Eighty-six years I have served him and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

You see in God's grace, the test of suffering exposes the enduring goodness of Jesus to satisfy us forever.

So how do we apply this to our lives? We prepare to do good even when it's hard. And we trust that as the world might press against our obedience, we will be surprised to look and see in the flames of the trials, Jesus standing there with us. Providing us strength to obey, and promising glory at the end of it.