THE PURPOSE AND POWER IN SUFFERING

1 Peter 4:12-14
October 12, 2014

INTRODUCTION: Peter instructs us to view our present trials from the perspective of eternity. When we walk with Jesus Christ, submitting to His plans and remaining faithful to Him, our suffering down here will result in additional delights in heaven.

The Apostle Peter focuses upon the positive aspects or benefits of suffering as a Christian. Many Christians are surprised or shocked when the trials and sufferings of Christ come into their lives. There is a popular theology which is espoused by some which suggests that the sun always shines upon the Christians, that our grass is always greener, and that the spiritual temperature around us is always ideal (fair-weather believers).

Peter is reminding us that such teaching is simply not true. In fact, as we have seen, Christians will often suffer for doing good (3:13-18). We should not be surprised when the fiery trials come our way. We are at spiritual warfare with Satan himself. It is not a strange or unusual thing. Christians have faced trials and have suffered for their faith from the beginning of the church.

Peter, himself, suffered greatly for his Christian faith. Tradition tells us that he was crucified on a
cross upside down because he felt unworthy to die in the same way as did his Master, Jesus Christ.

I. OCCASION FOR TRIALS  12

A. TRIALS WILL HAPPEN:  PROMISE

2 Timothy 3:12
“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

Note Jesus’ sayings:

John 15:18-21
“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.”

Peter probably wrote this letter shortly before or after the burning of Rome, and at the beginning of the horrors of a 200-year period of Christian persecution.
“do not think it strange” – do not be surprised (same word used in 1 Peter 4:4)

“happened to you” – means “to fall by chance.” A Christian must not think that his persecution is something that happened accidentally.

“happened” – is a compound word meaning to stand; together. The word often envisioned two parties meeting to discuss differences and, hopefully, to arrive at a compromise.

Gradually it simply adopted the idea of “coming together” in the sense of “happening” as used here. The Christian, by virtue of his profession, is on a collision course with suffering. The world is antagonistic to the saints’ commitment.

B. SOME TRIALS WILL BE HOT: PURIFY

“fiery” – the image of fire is often applied to testing or persecution. “He is really going through the fire!”

Peter saw in the image of fire a refining process.
1 Peter 1:7
“that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

God’s purpose in allowing trouble is to test the reality of one’s faith. But the benefit of such a testing or “fire” is immediately for the Christian, not God. When a believer comes through a trial still trusting the Lord, he is assured that his faith is genuine.

The image of the refiner’s fire suggests that such suffering purifies and strengthens Christians.

“fiery” – focuses on the severity of the trials. A chronicle of the sufferings of Paul (2 Cor. 11:21-28) or of the heroes of the faith (Heb. 11:32-40) provides insight into the extent of these expected trials.
Swiss Theologian Karl Barth wrote, “What we are and have and think and do and attempt as Christians in good days, when the situation is calm and favorable and we are not exposed to any serious assaults from within or without, is always subject, for all its conscious zeal and sincerity, to the difficult question whether and how far it is tested, and hardened, and solid and enduring.”

In other words, the trials not only provide witness to onlookers concerning the adequacy of our faith, they even assist in demonstrating for the benefit of the one being tested that the Lord is able to meet every need in the fiery furnace.

C. SOME TRIALS WILL BE HELPFUL: PURPOSE

The readers are encouraged to see God’s purpose behind their difficulties, enabling them to grow stronger in faith and give more glory to God.
II. OPPORTUNITY FOR REJOICING 13-14

The Christian who is persecuted for his faith is a partner in the same kind of suffering Jesus endured; suffering for doing what is right.

Matthew 5:10-12
“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Philippians 1:29
“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”

The verb translated “granted” is from the noun for grace. Believers’ suffering is a gift of grace which brings power and eternal reward. (1 Peter 4:13)

1 Peter 5:10
“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.”
While the believer is being personally attacked by the enemy, he is being personally perfected by the Lord.

The four words speak of God working through the Christian’s struggles to produce strength of character.

These attributes are necessary for the believer to grow in Christ to effective maturity.

A. SUFFERING MEANS FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST  13

Philippians 3:10

“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”

“fellowship of His sufferings” – this refers to a partnership; a deep communion of suffering that every believer shares with Christ.

“being conformed to His death” – as Christ died for the purpose of redeeming sinners, so Paul had that same purpose in a lesser sense; he lived and would willingly die to reach sinners with the gospel. His life and death, though not redemptive, were for the same purpose of his Lord’s.
B. SUFFERING MEANS FUTURE GLORY WITH CHRIST

“when His glory is revealed” – suffering and glory are twin truths that are woven into the fabric of Peter’s letter. It is necessary to understand that God is not going to replace suffering with glory; rather, He will transform suffering into glory. Jesus used the illustration of a woman giving birth.

John 16:20-22

“Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”

The same baby that gave her pain also gave her joy. The pain was transformed into joy by the birth of the baby.
The thorn in the flesh that gave Paul difficulty also gave him power and glory. 
(2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

C. SUFFERING MEANS FULLNESS OF CHRIST  14

1. REPROACH OF THE SAINTS

Insulted, reviled, abused, slandered.

2. RESULTS IN THE SAINTS

“blessed are you”
Acts 5:40-41
“And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.”
3. REWARD TO THE SAINTS

“the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you”

indicates an unusual fullness of the presence of the Holy Spirit to bless, to strengthen, and to give a foretaste of heavenly glory.

It is Peter’s conviction that the glow of glory rests on the person who suffers for Christ.

ILLUSTRATE: Stephen

Acts 6:15
“And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.”

Pure, calm, unruffled composure, reflecting the presence of God.

“A man’s devotion to a principle can be measured by his willingness to suffer for it.”

Remember: Anything we must suffer for the sake of Christ becomes a privilege and not a penalty.
D. SUFFERING ALLOWS US TO GLORIFY HIS NAME 14

“on your part He is glorified”

From the earliest centuries the church has treasured accounts of the joy with which martyrs have endured sufferings for Christ’s sake. The letter from the church of Smyrna in the 2nd Century describes the martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. After the aged man had been arrested and brought to the arena, the proconsul urged him to offer incense to Caesar. “Take the oath,” said the proconsul, “and I shall release you...curse Christ.”

Polycarp replied, “Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” Tied to the stake, Polycarp prayed to be received by the Lord as a rich and acceptable sacrifice.

Believers who suffer for Christ are filled with hope.