

“No pain, no gain” (21)

A young woman was nervous about meeting her boy friend's parents for the first time; she wanted to look her absolute best. As she glanced at herself in the mirror, she noticed her black pumps looked a little dingy, so she gave them a fast swipe with the paper towel she had used to blot her breakfast bacon. When she arrived at their home she was greeted by the parents and their spoiled, cranky poodle. The dog got a whiff of the bacon grease on her shoes and followed her around all evening. At the end of the evening, as she was getting ready to leave, her boyfriend's parents said, "Cleo really likes you, dear, and she is an excellent judge of character. We are delighted to welcome you into our little family."

We all live with the fear of rejection and I don't know anyone who actually enjoys being rejected. And whilst others may well accept us being Christians, I'm sure there are a lot more people who will constantly reject us for being Christians.

In our sermon series so far Peter has reminded us that the people he's writing too were going through various trials back in [1 Peter 1:6](#). And in [1 Peter 3:13-18](#) he tells them how to prepare themselves for difficult times. And today in [1 Peter 4:12-19](#) he is going to continue with the theme of persecution but from a different angle. He is going to share with us how to persevere through difficult times.

Now remember we may not go through physical persecution like the early Christians did or as some Christians do in other parts of the world. But we may go through verbal persecution; where people will get verbally abusive towards us because we're Christians and because we try to live up to a higher standard of living. We also may go through social persecution; where people won't have anything to do with us because we're Christians or they think in their minds that we are better than them. And so emotional and social persecution can be just as painful as much as physical persecution.

But Peter is going to tell us today to keep going. He's going to encourage us to persevere when difficult times come. And the **first thing** he says is this, **expect persecution**. [1 Peter 4:12](#) "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." Twice in this one verse Peter reminds us of the **Tom Jones syndrome**, **you know what that is don't you?**

A guy goes to the doctors and says doctor, 'I keep singing, Tom Jones songs' and the doctor turned around and says, 'don't worry about, it's not unusual'. In other words Peter says it's not unusual for a Christian to go through difficult times. Peter says, "Do not be surprised" and in the very same verse says "as though something strange were happening to you." You're a Christian and you should expect difficult times of persecution.

The problem is we sometimes think we're the only ones who are experiencing difficult times. And maybe Peter realised that when he was writing to these saints and so a little later in [1 Peter 5](#) he is going to remind them that they are not the only Christians who are suffering. He says in [1 Peter 5:9](#) "Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world."

Peter is reminding them and us today that we are never alone when we suffer, there are other Christians suffering too. Maybe some are suffering physically but they are still suffering. Maybe some are suffering emotionally but they are still suffering. Maybe some are suffering spiritually but they are still suffering. The point I'm trying to make is that all Christians will go through hard times at some point in their Christian walk.

Jesus Himself warned His disciples that hard times were going to come. He told them in [John 15:18-21](#) "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but 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 also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me."

Loved ones when difficult times come we shouldn't be wondering **why on earth is this happening to me?** Maybe the question we should ask is; **why does God allow difficult times to come our way?** Well again Peter doesn't leave us in the dark as to why God allows difficult times to come our way. He says in [1 Peter 4:12](#) "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you." Peter says **the trials that we go through actually help to test our faith.**

Now remember he's already mentioned this back in 1 Peter 1:6+7 where he writes, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Peter says just as gold is tested by fire, so our faith is tested by persecution. Now I know there are times when we cry out to God and say, 'ok God that's enough now, I've been through the fire long enough now, it's time for some peace in my life.'

But loved ones, don't you want God to test your faith so that you will become stronger in your faith? Don't you want to know if your faith is genuine or not? You see you will never know if you have a faith which is strong if you experience nothing but good times. This is why God allows the devil to bring such persecution into our lives.

Remember Job and all the trials he experienced? God allowed the devil to test him in ways we cannot even begin to imagine and we were talking about Job we sometimes just focus on his trials. But we need to read on because when Job's trials were over the Bible says at the end of the book of Job 42:10-16, that God blessed him in so many ways for his faithfulness. And what we need to remember is that just as God blessed Job richly after his trials; God will also bless us richly after our trials.

1 Peter 5:10 "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." Now again notice that the suffering has an expiry date, Peter says, 'after you have suffered a little while.' And after your suffering he says, God will bless you richly.

You know we've got the Olympics coming to London next year and I can guarantee you that those athletes have been training for years for this one moment. They've sweated and worked through injuries for this one chance at winning an Olympic gold medal. And I can never imagine Jessica Ennis the 2008 Olympic heptathlon champion running in the 800 metres and stopping at 400 metres because the crowd was shouting for someone else to win.

You see loved when our focus is on the crown of life, no matter how much suffering or injury comes our way, this shouldn't stop us from continuing the race to reach our goal of eternal life. Christians in the Bible died for the sake of Christ and Christians in times past have died for the sake of Christ.

Telemachus was a monk who lived in the 4th century. He felt God saying to him, "Go to Rome." He was in a cloistered monastery. He put his possessions in a sack and set out for Rome. When he arrived in the city, people were thronging in the streets. He asked why all the excitement and was told that this was the day that the gladiators would be fighting and killing each other in the coliseum, the day of the games, the circus.

He thought to himself, "Four centuries after Christ and they are still killing each other, for enjoyment?" He ran to the coliseum and heard the gladiators saying, "Hail to Caesar, we die for Caesar" and he thought, "this isn't right." He jumped over the railing and went out into the middle of the field, got between two gladiators, held up his hands and said "In the name of Christ, forbear."

The crowd protested and began to shout, "Run him through, Run him through." A gladiator came over and hit him in the stomach with the back of his sword. It sent him sprawling in the sand. He got up and ran back and again said, "In the name of Christ, forbear." The crowd continued to chant, "Run him through." One gladiator came over and plunged his sword through the little monk's stomach and he fell into the sand, which began to turn crimson with his blood. One last time he gasped out, "In the name of Christ forbear." A hush came over the 80,000 people in the coliseum. Soon a man stood and left, then another and more, and within minutes all 80,000 had emptied out of the arena. It was the last known gladiatorial contest in the history of Rome.

You see loved ones we shouldn't be surprised if we find ourselves facing ridicule, or not being accepted or even being physically persecuted for the cause of Christ. Paul and Barnabas understood that as Christians we need to go through hard times before we can get to heaven.

We find them preaching the gospel and encouraging the saints in several towns and he says in Acts 14:22 "Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

The apostle Paul also writes to his young friend Timothy and says in **2 Timothy 3:12** “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” So loved ones, we should expect difficult times as Christians but we should also know that God allows them into our lives to help strengthen our faith.

And so what are we going to do when it hard times do come? Are we going to leave God? Your problems are still going to be there. Are we going to leave His church? Your problems are still going to be there. No loved ones when troublesome times come our way, that’s when we need God and His church the most. But when difficult times come what we should be doing is rejoicing.

1 Peter 4:13+14 “But 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.” You see loved ones we struggle to rejoice because we struggle to understand.

Remember when Ernest was in hospital for a while and he never knew what was wrong with him. He was tired and his eyesight was blurred and the doctors and nurses didn’t have a clue what was going on until a specialist came along, spotted the problem and begun with the treatment. Ernest struggled to understand because he didn’t know what was going on; he didn’t know what was causing him to feel the way he was.

But when the specialist came along and explained to him what was happening and what they can do to help, Ernest begun to feel better within himself, why? Because he now understood what was causing his pain. When we fully begin to understand why difficult times come our way, it’s then that we too can begin to feel better within ourselves; we too can begin to rejoice again.

Paul says in **Romans 5:3-5** “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”.

Paul says for us to have hope in our lives, we first need to have character in our lives. But for us to have character in our lives, we need to first have endurance in our lives. Bur for us to have endurance in our lives, we first need to have what? Suffering in our lives. In other words without suffering in our lives we won’t be able to keep going and endure to the end. Without suffering in our lives we won’t be able to develop character in our lives. Without suffering in our lives we won’t have any hope in our lives.

Loved ones the Bible never tells us to pretend that a trial is nonexistent. Instead the Bible encourages us to recognize and rejoice that any problem can be the occasion for God to work in and through us in a way that He otherwise would not. Difficult times call us to believe in the goodness of God, and to trust that He is not only willing but able to accomplish His purposes, no matter what comes our way.

James tells us that any difficulty, whether great or small, is an occasion for joy, but only when we remind ourselves of the nature of God who loves us and wills only the best for us. **James 1:2-4** “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”.

So Paul says suffering produces endurance, which in turn produces character, and character, hope. James says suffering produces patience, and patience can help us be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. In other words, no pain, no gain. We can’t grow unless we go through trials.

And Peter himself goes on to say in **1 Peter 4:13+14** “But 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.”

Peter says we can rejoice in our sufferings because when Jesus comes back we will rejoice like we’ve never rejoiced before. Peter says we can rejoice in our sufferings because when we do Christ is glorified. Peter says we can rejoice in our sufferings because when we suffer God is with us. The point I’m trying to make loved ones is simply this, when you suffer, make you’re suffering worth while.

1 Peter 4:15+16 “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.”

Now this may come as a surprise to some people but a lot of people bring suffering on by themselves. If you go out and murder someone, you should expect to suffer the consequences of your actions. If you go out and break into someone's home and steal all their possessions, you should expect to suffer the consequences of your actions. If you go out and do harm to property or people around you, you should expect to suffer the consequences of your actions. Or even if you go out as start sticking your nose in someone else's business, you should expect to suffer the consequences of your actions.

But as Christians Peter says when you suffer, make sure it's only because you're a Christian not because of something your doing you shouldn't be doing. When we suffer we need to self examine ourselves and make sure our suffering will bring glory to God. When we suffer we need to self examine ourselves and make sure our suffering demonstrates the grace God gives us to endure it. You see loved ones like I said a few weeks ago, people are watching and ready to make a judgment call on our lives, especially when we're suffering. But Peter reminds us that people are not the only ones who are watching.

1 Peter 4:17 "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? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

Now this is one of those verses which scares me as I am reminded that the Lord's church will be first to be judged by God. But what is more scary is this, if God is willing to judge His own faithful children, **what about those who are disobedient?** Or as Peter asks, **"What will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" "Where will the ungodly and the sinner end up?"** Well if God's children are heaven bound, if we're just strangers living in a strange land, travelling through earth until we get to our real home in heaven, **what about those who aren't Christians? Where are they travelling to?**

Paul tells us the answer in **2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 "Since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might."**

Paul says that Jesus will come **"with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."** Paul says those who are not Christians will be punished with eternal destruction.

If you're not a Christian today then think about this. Peter says if we who are Christians are trying our best to live faithfully to God and obey His commands and we barely make into heaven, **what chance have you got of getting into heaven if you haven't even tried to live faithfully to God or even know His commands?**

You see Peter is saying that we can only make it, even through our sufferings if we continue to commit ourselves to God. **1 Peter 4:19 "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good"**. Peter says we can make it to our goal by committing ourselves to God in doing good, no matter what the circumstances. When people are doing evil things to you, respond by doing good.

Jesus Himself says in **Luke 6:27+28 "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."** And when Jesus was hanging on that cross he looked into the eyes of those who were carrying out the death penalty, He said to them in **Luke 23:34 "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."** When Stephen was being stoned to death he said in **Acts 7:59+60 "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."** And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, **"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."**

Do you realise that Christians are so blessed even though we have many responsibilities? Even though we have to go through the fire of suffering sometimes, God continues to bless us. The problem is we forget just how blessed we are, even on the cross He said, **'forgive them.'** When people hurt us we want to hurt them back but Jesus says, **'forgive them'**. When people say evil things against us, we want to set the record straight but Jesus says **'forgive them.'**

You say but Mike that man down the street totally slandered my wife; Jesus says **'forgive them.'** But Mike that guy totally wrecked my car; Jesus says **'forgive them'**. What we should be saying is, **'father I'm a sinner and I've sinned against you in so many ways I can't even remember, forgive me.'**

Ask yourself loved ones, do really you want to go back to the chaos of this world and act like the world does? A gentleman who owned a small estate wanted to sell it. He sent for a real estate agent and asked him to produce an advertisement of the estate. When the advertisement was read to him, he said: "Read that again." The agent read the description of the estate once more, whereupon the owner of the property said: "I do not think I will sell. I have been looking for an estate like that all my life and I did not know that I owned it."

Why would you want to go back to the chaos of this world and act like the world does, when you have everything you need for live and godliness right here? You see loved ones Peter is saying, don't let persecution be an excuse for sinful behaviour. Don't let suffering be the reason for you missing out on your salvation.

You possess Someone Who is very special and I hope you realise that. Because you can search all over this earth and never find someone like Him. Commit yourselves to God **why?** Because God is a faithful Creator. He is the Creator, who has all the power to do what is right in the end. Suffering is good for us, if we suffer for the right reasons.

And unlike those who haven't obeyed the gospel our suffering has an expiry date. So no matter what you're going through and no matter what tomorrow may bring, let me encourage you to hang in there church, keep on keeping on. No pain, no gain, surely the suffering we have to endure in this life is well worth the gain of eternal life.