Rejoice In the Sufferings of Christ

1 Peter 4:1-19

Key Verse: 4:13 “Bur rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

In 1678 when John Bunyan wrote ‘*Pilgrim’s Progress*’, he was in prison. He was imprisoned because he was accused of the violation of the Conventicle Act, which prohibited any religious meetings except for the Church of England. John Bunyan was one of the English Puritans who claimed freedom of religion from the English church. The book ‘*Pilgrim’s Progress*’ shows us how a Christian endured sufferings and overcame hardships during his journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City (the kingdom of God). On the way to the city, he had to pass Slough (Swamp) of Despond, Hill Difficulty, Valley of Humiliation, Valley of the Shadow of Death, and so on. Especially in the Valley of Humiliation Christian had to fight against Apollyon, the devil, who tried to kill him. At that time, Christian defeated Apollyon by impaling him with the Spirit of Sword, which is the word of God. When Christian finally arrived at the Celestial City, which is the kingdom of God, after crossing over the River of Death, what Paul the Apostle said in Acts 14:22 came true, “*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.*” Paul said this to the Christians in Lystra and Derbe where he had been persecuted and even stoned to death while he was preaching the gospel. Paul encouraged the suffering Christians to remain true to the faith. (Ac 14:22)

In today’s passage Peter’s encouraging message to the suffering Christians continues. Peter taught them not only to endure the sufferings, but also to enjoy the sufferings. How can we enjoy suffering? Here is the answer.

First, live for the will of God (1-6) Look at verse 1. “***Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.***” In this verse Peter said that Christ suffered in his body. Even though Christ Jesus is the holy Son of God, he suffered like one of us because he was also fully human. But Jesus endured the cross and obeyed the will of God. In the same way we also must endure the cross and obey the will of God as Jesus did. 2:20-21 says, “*But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this, you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps*.”

Peter urged the suffering Christians to suffer for doing good, what does ‘suffering for doing good’ mean to them and to us? This means living for the will of God. Look at verse 2. “***As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do–living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry***.” Before they came to know Christ Jesus, they lived according to their evil desires. They spent time for debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry. They suffered much by paying the price of their sins. But they have changed since they came to know Christ Jesus. Now they suffer not because of their sins, but because of the name Jesus.

The first reaction of the unbelieving friends or family to the converted Christians is surprise. Then, persecution follows. Look at verse 4. “***They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you***.” The first reaction of my unbelieving and drinking friends to my conversion was surprise and then discrimination. They were shocked by my sudden change. They were surprised that I quit drinking, smoking, and hanging around with them in the dark alley. Then they began to avoid me because I invited them to Bible study every day. In *Pilgrim’s Progress* there are two persons who tried to persuade Christians to go back home. They are Timorous and Mistrust. They were afraid of a lion chained near the House Beautiful. But Christian kept on his journey to the City of God by faith. We often become hesitant of our journey as Christians. We sometimes have peer pressure and fear of losing friends or colleagues because of our faith in Jesus. We are not confident about our faith in public for the fear of rejection or discrimination. But we don’t have to fear them. Rather we must fear God who will judge the living and the dead. Look at verses 5-6. “***But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit***.”

Second, love each other deeply (7-11) Peter urged us to live for the will of God, not for our evil desires. What is living for the will of God? What is the will of God? The will of God is loving one another. Look at verses 7-8. “***The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.***” In Matthew’s gospel Jesus predicted several signs of the end of the age. One of the signs is the decrease of love. Jesus said in Matthew 24:12, “*Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold*.” When we are in difficult times, we become self-centered. We don’t have room to think about others, but care only for ourselves. The more difficult we are, the more indifferent we become. But Peter said that we must love each other deeply. The more difficult we become, the more we must love one another. Love covers over a multitude of sins. This verse reminds us of a story in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. In the book Interpreter leads Christian into a parlor which is covered with dust. Here, a parlor represents a man's heart, and dust represents original sins. A man is asked to sweep the room by the broom of Law. But dust began to fly about, and the room was not cleansed. Now Damsel is asked to sprinkle water over the room. Then, the room was cleansed because the water covered the dust. Here, water symbolizes the gospel and the love of Christ. This story tells us that our dirty sins and consciences can be cleansed not by the Law, but by the love of Christ. This is because love covers over a multitude of sins. Do you know why parents easily forgive their children? This is because they love their children unconditionally. When we love, we become blind. We become blind over our children’s sin. In the same way the love of God covers over the multitude of our sins. God did not look at our sins as if he covered his eyes. God proved this on the cross. When Jesus bore our sins in his body. God covered his eyes. Then God shed his tears for his son. Therefore, we must forgive others as God forgave us.  When we forgive others and love them deeply, God changes them. We cannot change others, but God changes them when we forgive them and pray for them. Paul said in Romans 13:10 that love is the fulfillment of the law. (Ro 13:10) Amen!

Look at verses 9-11. “***Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.***” In these verses Peter urged Christians to serve others as the Lord serves the church. The Lord Jesus served us until he gave his life as a ransom for our sins. By loving us and serving us Jesus revealed the glory of the Father. By enduring the cross and obeying the Father’s will, Jesus glorified God the Father. We have many ways to glorify God’s name by teaching the word of God and by serving others. We glorify God by doing his will which is to love one another deeply. Amen!

Third, rejoice in the sufferings of Christ (12-19) We often experience strange things happening when we live by faith. We expect that good things may always happen to us when we live by faith, but we experience the opposite. This is not only our story, but others, too. Abraham obeyed God’s command and left his father’s household and went to the land which God had directed. But what was waiting for him was not a paradise, but the militant and hostile enemies. Abraham confronted a severe famine in the promised land, too. When Moses killed an Egyptian slave master to rescue a suffering Hebrew slave, he thought that he did right before God. He might have expected a reward from God. But what was waiting for Moses was the wrath of Pharaoh and the deportation from the palace. Next, 40 years of life in the desert awaited him. What’s wrong with our life of faith? In the same way we experience the similar thing happening when we do something good before God and expect his reward. But, instead of blessing, suffering often comes next. But Peter said in this letter that suffering is the blessing. He explains why suffering for doing good is a blessing to Christians. Look at verses 12-13. “***Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.***” Suffering for Christ is a blessing because the suffering brings God’s glory. We’ll be overjoyed when his glory is revealed through our suffering. How can we reveal God’s glory through our suffering? Job was a righteous man. He lived by faith even though he was rich. But one day he lost everything including his children, his wealth, and his health. Strange things happened to Job who was a righteous man. But Job did not blame God. Rather he rebuked his wife who blamed God. Job lived by faith to the end and showed his integrity as a man of God. In this way he kept his faith in the extreme suffering. His perseverance and faithfulness revealed God’s glory. His faithfulness gave victory to God over Satan. In the same way God is pleased when his glory is revealed through our perseverance and faithfulness. We are happy when we see God’s glory and our own glory behind our sufferings.  Paul said that the glory which we will receive in the future is not worth compared to our present sufferings. (Ro 8:18)

The second reason we rejoice as we participate in the sufferings of Christ is that we bear the name of Jesus. Look at verses 14-16. “***If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name***.” Amen! It is a sure blessing when we suffer for the name of Jesus. We’ll have the Olympics in Paris, France this year. Each athlete competes with each other for the glory of their country. They are proud of bearing the flag of their country. When they win the race, they receive the victor's crown. In the same way we Christian run bearing the name of Jesus. The glory which we receive from Jesus when we finish the race is not worth comparing to the Olympic crowns. Therefore, we must be proud of bearing the name of Jesus. We must persevere and finish the race for the name of Jesus. Amen.

Paul was a champion who finished the race and won the victory. His goal was to finish the race and win the prize. He said in Philippians 3:14, “*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*.” What is your goal as a Christian? I believe that your goal as a Christian is to be like Jesus. That’s Paul’s goal, too. Paul really wanted to be like Jesus. So, he confessed in his letter to Philippians in this, “*I want to know Christ–yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*” (Php 3:9-11) As Paul confessed, how blessed we are when we become one in Christ and be united with him in his death and resurrection.

Paul boasted about his suffering for Christ and with Christ. He wanted to participate in the remaining suffering of Christ. This is because Paul knew the value of suffering for Christ. He was like a merchant who sold all he had to buy the field where treasure is hidden. (Mt 13:44-45) Hebrews 11:25-26 talks about Moses who had the same value. “*He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.*” What is your treasure? Where is your reward? What is the meaning of your present suffering now? Do you suffer because of your sins or suffering for doing the will of God? If you suffer for your sin, repent. If you suffer for Christ, rejoice. If you suffer for Christ, rejoice because you live for the glory of God and rejoice because you bear the name of Jesus. Amen!

Look at verse 19 as a conclusion. “***So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good***.” Our life is a pilgrimage to the kingdom of God. In *Pilgrim’s Progress* Christian finally reached the City of Celestial, the City of God. On his way to heaven, he suffered much to overcome temptation and opposition. Each time of trial God sent good people like Evangelist, Faithful, Hopeful, and so on so that Christian could complete his journey. May God help us to have a right attitude toward our suffering and biblical view and value so that we may continue our pilgrimage until we complete our journey to heaven.  Amen!`