

XXX. I Peter in Biblical Perspective  
*The Elect in the Exile*  
“Christian Suffering and the Suffering of Christ—Part 2”  
I Peter 3:18–22  
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III  
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We will be looking at I Peter 3:18–22 in this study but I want to start by looking at this key text that is foundational to what we are studying in I Peter 3 through I Peter 5:11. I Peter 3:13–17 says *[13] Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? [14] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, [15] but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, [16] having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. [17] For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I don't know many people who don't want to know what the future holds. Thankfully the Word of God tells us what the future holds and thankfully it doesn't tell us everything the future holds but it does make some things clear. *[27] And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment* (Hebrews 9:27). There are only two judgements after the Judgment – an everlasting glory with a new heavens and a new earth or an everlasting condemnation and punishment in a place called hell. The key to that issue is whether you are found in Christ and Christ is in you.

What about our future in life on our way to eternity? There are about 16 commentaries I am reading on I Peter and all of them point to this. I like the way one of my mentors put it but I am paraphrasing it for he said 'Every Christian at some time, to some degree and in some manner will suffer for Christ's sake' as a Divine blessing. This Divine blessing that comes with this suffering provides two things. One is it provides an opportunity to reaffirm, confirm and embrace Christ as Lord in your heart and two a platform whereby those who would cause you to be troubled, bring suffering or persecute, become those who ask the questions then gives you the opportunity to give a winsome answer for the Hope that is within you. So a platform for sharing the Gospel is given to you in the midst of that suffering.

This is hard for us to grasp because for whatever reason in the sovereign, providence of God we have dwelt in a nation that for a couple of hundred years has been visited with Gospel awakenings and revivals in which such intense persecution that is experienced by the vast majority of believers all over the world for 2,000 years, has not been as present here. But I think it may be coming which is why I chose I Peter to address this.

Peter has identified believers as elect exiles. Elect tells us who we are in Christ when He saves us out of the world. Exiles tells us what kind of life we're living for Christ while you're in the world and headed to glory. We are on a sojourner's journey and Peter who has never met these people he is writing to in Asia Minor, is pastorally discipling them from a distance in response to their letter to him. So first he gives them a perspective of who they are – elect exiles. As God's elect He has secured your eternity by His electing grace in Christ, through Christ and

by the Spirit of God which is all affirmed in Christ. You are His and He is yours. As we understand our life in Christ then Peter gives us our life for Christ.

What does this sojourner's life look like for Christ? He gives us the Gospel blessings first and then the Gospel commands. After that we come to I Peter 3:13 and from there all the way to I Peter 5:11 Peter is dealing with the matter of Christian suffering which means the majority of this epistle is dealing with Christian suffering. I'm not talking about Christians suffering because we live in a broken world where we get sick or you the kind of suffering you do when you do something sinful or evil and there are consequences to sin. He is speaking of suffering for Christ's sake, for righteousness sake where you have done that which is good by the grace of God, yet we know it's not perfect.

If you have a Christ-directed, Gospel saturated and Spirit-filled life, attempting to kill sin in your life, imperfectly but purposefully, pursuing obedience to Christ in your life, then you will go into the crosshairs of Satan. There will be suffering for Christ's sake for the world and Satan do not throw parades for this kind of life. Satan wants to marginalize you, shame you, rob you of your joy and testimony and all of that. A tactic he uses continually is to bring suffering and therefore this is suffering for Christ's sake.

Peter is trying to disciple us here in this text and when we do suffer for Christ we have just been blessed. Paul also wants us to understand this for he says in Philippians 1:29, [29] *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.* Christ wants us to understand this for He says this a number of times in the Bible but one is in Matthew 5:11–12 when Jesus says [11] *“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

When this happens He gives a double benediction of God's blessings because of two things. One is it gives us the opportunity to reaffirm under duress that Christ is Lord. Secondly it provides a platform whereby verbally we can share Christ in such a manner with respect, gentleness and reasonableness that it validates what we are sharing for Christ. So through Peter, Paul and Jesus we are told that the life of a believer will suffer to some degree, in some manner at some time on the way to glory. Jesus said in John 16:33, [33] *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* So our courage is not that there is going to be an absence of persecution and suffering for Christ's sake but Christ has won the victory over it and He is the One that is with us in the midst of it.

So with that being the case why is this suffering here and how should I endure it? Peter tells us that we always start with Jesus. It's just like the children at church who have learned that if they just answer to Jesus to any question it will be right and that is the fact for Jesus, the preeminent Savior, is the answer. Peter tells us to fix our eyes on Jesus. Hebrews 12:2 says [2] *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, **despising the shame**, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Let's start with the first verse in our text for this study. I Peter 3:18 says [18] *For Christ **also** suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.* So Peter brings us back to Jesus and His suffering in order to understand how we suffer and why we suffer. Realize that Jesus on the one hand teaches us how to suffer in the ways that He suffered and we suffer like Him. In other

words, our suffering is similar to His in certain ways but then His suffering is unique and different from ours which is why we suffer for Him.

Why do we suffer for Him? It is because of the uniqueness of His suffering unto death. How do we suffer? We suffer as He suffered and learn from Him. There are two key words here. The first key word in I Peter 3:18 is also. When you say that you were at a place also then you just told that person that someone else was there as well. So when Peter says 'For Christ also suffered...' then he is saying that Christ suffered in some manner as you are suffering. So how do we also suffer like Christ and in what way is it unique?

The reason we would say His suffering is unique has to do with how He is referred to in this verse. Christ is not His name but His title. Christ means Messiah, Anointed One, The Prophet, The Priest, The King and so it says 'For Christ also suffered...' I do not suffer as the Christ. I cannot suffer as the Christ but I'm willing and desirous to suffer because of the suffering of the Christ. In some manner, in His humanity and His suffering I suffer like Him but as Christ I do not suffer like Him for it is unique and that suffering is the foundation, the inspiration and the motivation for why I would suffer for Christ's sake. His name is Jesus. His title is Christ. His status is Lord.

Paul says you fill up the cup of His suffering in fellowship with His suffering so how is it that we suffer like Him? Here are five ways in Christ's suffering that I learn from in my suffering. One, is that Christ's suffering is for righteousness sake. He did not suffer for something He did wrong. In fact, even the man who gives Him the verdict to take Him to the cross says 'I find no fault in this Man' (Luke 23:4, John 19:4). There is no one that could convict Him of anything so that the cross and Him dying on it was deserved. Christian suffering is when we suffer for righteousness sake, not unrighteousness, for doing that which is pleasing to the Lord.

Recently, a pastor from the US named Andrew Brunson was set free from prison in Turkey and as we prayed for him we rejoiced in him being set free. Before he was set free this is the message he was able to get out to everyone; 'I want you all to know and I want to be clear. I am in prison and it's not for anything I have done wrong. I am in prison because of who I am. I am a Christian. I want you to know I desperately miss my wife and children yet this is what I believe to be true. It is an honor for me to be here and suffer for Jesus Christ and there have been many who have done so before me. I want to give thanks for any and all here around the world who stand with me and pray for me. I want to finish well. I suffer for Him. I long to see His eyes ablaze with love for me and when I see Him I will run to Him.' Suffering for Christ's sake, for righteousness sake and not that we have a saving righteousness or that any of our deeds are ever perfect but they are done for Him, for righteousness sake.

Secondly, like His suffering our suffering is temporary in anticipation of the eternal to come. Paul says in II Corinthians 4:17-18, *[17] For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* Peter says in I Peter 1:6-7, *[6] In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] 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 honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Thirdly, our suffering becomes an opportunity to honor the Lord. Notice how Jesus took the opportunity in His suffering to honor His Father. So we honor the Lord in our suffering. It's

not about us. We suffer for Him in order to honor Him or as Peter says we ‘sanctify Christ as Lord in our heart.’

Fourthly, our suffering like His is an opportunity to proclaim the Good News, the Hope that is within us. There is Christ hanging upon a cross, and a mocking thief that is next to Him is brought from death unto life. It is the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel on the platform of suffering.

Fifthly, our suffering, no matter the humiliation, is only preparation for our exaltation. Time after time the Bible connects the suffering of Christ with the preparation, weight and entrance into glory. I don’t have time to show you all of where we see this but in Luke 24:26, 27 it says [26] *Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?* [27] *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he (Jesus) interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.* Again, Hebrews 12:2 says [2] *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* Our suffering, like His, is a preparation and maturation process that is designed to perfect us, redeem us, change us, transform us and to bring us to glory in which there is no suffering in that glory.

We can see how the believers in church history have taken the sufferings of Christ and embraced it to honor Christ. They didn’t suffer to be saved. Jesus’ suffering is unique to save them but they learned to suffer for their Redeemer by looking at their Savior. The very first one we see is a man name Stephen in the Bible. As he is being stoned he will even repeat the words of Christ on the cross to those who are stoning him by saying ‘Father, forgive them for they know not what they do (Acts 7:60). Go read about the martyrs and the Reformers.

We see in the Reformers that almost every one of them before they would die they would look to the ones who were executing them and would invariably say ‘I forgive you for I’m merely going to see my Savior.’ They watched how their Savior suffered and because they were suffering for their Savior they then wanted to use their Savior’s suffering so there wasn’t the anger of man against those who persecuted them, even unto death. There was this winsomeness, reasonableness, and gentleness of giving an account of the hope that was within them.

The suffering of Christ is not only a model for us to emulate but it’s also unique as He suffers as the Christ. So how is it unique? Do you realize how big of a jump it is for Peter to say what he did in I Peter 3:18 especially when you go back to what happened in Matthew 16?

Matthew 16:13–22 says [13] *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”* [14] *And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”* [15] *He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”* [16] *Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* [17] *And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.* [18] *And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* [19] *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”* [20] *Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.*

[21] *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.* [22] *And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”* Here Peter had no place for a suffering Messiah in his theological perspective at that time, but that changed.

Perhaps one of the most poignant moments was after Peter fled, Jesus went to the cross and He was resurrected on the third day. He calls for Peter and the Disciples and meets them in the Upper Room. He explains Himself in all the Scriptures of how He must suffer and be brought to glory. Now this Peter has no hiccup over the Christ's suffering for now he tells us that this Jesus suffered for us. How does He suffer? Here are five things in how His suffering is unique.

One, His suffering unto death as the Christ is a substitutionary death. He takes our place. His justice is inflexible. The soul that sins must die unless someone worthy can take their place. For what was due to us to suffer what was insufferable, He drank the cup in our place.

Secondly, His death is an atoning death. I Peter 3:18 says *[18] For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.* The Righteous One suffered for the unrighteous many. He redeemed us by taking our place and by dying an atoning death for He paid for our sins. Someone has to pay for our sins. There is a payday some day unless you flee to Christ who took your payday on that day as Redeemer of His people.

Thirdly, He died a sufficient death. The reason it is sufficient is because the text says He died once. It's done. His sacrifice was once and for all. He was not re-sacrificed. He paid the penalty fully when He said, 'It is finished.'

Fourthly, His death is intentional. I Peter 3:18 says He died so that He might bring us to God. He brought us from our sins to the Father. Here is the amazing thing – you didn't want Him to die for you. Here is something even more amazing – He didn't need you. But He loved you relentlessly. He loved sinners. He went to that cross in your place to pay for your sins and He did so once and for all, completely, with the purpose that you could be with Him forever.

Who or what will you love and serve other than Him? If you know Him He has paid for your sins so arise and shake off your guilty fears for the bleeding sacrifice on your behalf appears. There is His victory! This leads me to the fifth thing that is unique about His suffering.

It is a triumphant death. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit! He was delivered up because of our sins and was raised because of our justification. Here is what I want you to walk away with in this study.

The takeaway is the unrighteous many, the elect exiles, suffer now for the Righteous One, Jesus the Christ, who suffered for us so that we might be saved from our sins to reign with Him forever. Until you know that Christ this study makes no sense. You may be thinking you have much more important things than to talk about Jesus suffering on the cross but I have nothing more important than to pray that one day when you see your sins there will be nothing more lovely than that love Divine that love excelling that Jesus came down. When you didn't want Him, He wanted you and the One who didn't need you wanted you to take you to be with Him for all of eternity. There is nothing I want you to know more than that. There is nothing I think more important to know than that.

When you know that, no matter where you are or what situation you find yourself in, you are more than willing to bear reproach for Christ in a way that will honor Christ. I want you to know what He has done for you on the cross. I say this very reverently that one day I am in Christ and Christ is in me and there is a day coming that is closer now than ever before where I will die and then will come the judgment. I have no fear and it's not because of who I am or what I have done or because I go to church or am a preacher which I love but it's because of this particular truth which you can know too – Jesus Christ died for your sins. He is yours and you are His and God can't send me to hell on that day for Jesus has already been there for me.

Jesus knocked the door of hell down, grabbed the keys and set me free. Some think that if I believe that then I don't care how I live now but that is so far from the truth. I care about my sins, not because I have to deal with my sins to get to heaven but I'm trusting in what Christ did to get me into heaven but I hate my sins because I know what my sins cost my Savior. I see Him on that tree and all the humiliation He went through. I see His blood and the spit that is mixed with it by those who would humiliate Him. I hear those mocking cries shouting for Him to come down from that cross if He is the Savior. I see the indifference of those people to what He did on the cross. I'm aware of the Roman institution that was designed for the utmost torture, pain and humiliation and my Savior who was there to save me from my sins.

Here is what I'm even more aware of is the cry of dereliction and agony from His heart when in Matthew 27:46 it says, *[46] And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* It is in that moment that I know what He did for me and the victory that He won. I know the last cup of the cup of wrath has been drunk and now I hear His next words, 'It is finished!' Then He rises by the power of the Spirit of God. I am His and He is mine.

What is temporary suffering now but one more opportunity to tell people about Christ and I pray that you know Him for the affliction and judgment that waits for those apart from Him is unspeakable. I know it's unspeakable because it can't even be spoken of as I see what He has done on the cross to save. My words utterly fail me but I do know that O the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not the part but the whole, has been nailed to the cross. I bear it no more, bless the Lord O my soul and it is well with my soul. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart. The biggest decision you will ever make in life is what do you do with this Christ who suffered for you on the cross. I pray that the Spirit of God enables you to see not only sin but the sinfulness of sin so that we don't think lightly of it or play word games like it's easier to get forgiveness than permission. Forgiveness cost God His Son and it cost the Son this substitutionary, intentional, atoning, sufficient, triumphant death for us. Forgiveness did not come easy. It is unspeakable and indescribable but it is glorious. If you would like to come to Him and pray with someone please call us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we would be happy to pray with you. It is inevitable to some degree, in some way at some time for you to suffer for Christ's sake – suffer like Christ but also because of the uniqueness of the Christ who suffered for you, a saving suffering for life evermore. Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Amen.

### Power Point

Every true Christian will at some time, to some degree, and in some manner suffer for Christ's sake as a Divine blessing and as an opportunity to affirm Christ as Lord and give an account for the Hope within us.

How is the suffering of Christ similar to the Christian's suffering for Christ?

- For Righteousness sake
- Temporary in anticipation of the eternal
- Opportunity to honor the Lord

- Opportunity to proclaim the Gospel
- From Humiliation to Exaltation

How is the suffering of Christ different than a Christian's suffering for Christ?

- Substitutionary Death of Christ
- Atoning Death of Christ
- Sufficient Death of Christ
- Intentional Death of Christ
- Triumphant Death of Christ

#### LIFE TAKEAWAYS

The Unrighteous Many – Elect Exiles - suffer now for the Righteous One – the Christ – who suffered for us so that we are saved from our sins and will reign with Him – forever.