

Place Lurgan Baptist 19:10:2008

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

Reading: 1 Peter 4:12-19

15. SURVIVING YOUR SUFFERING

Those responsible for statistics tell us that

- More than 43 million Christians have been killed for their faith since the death of the Lord Jesus.
- More than 200 million Christians in over 60 nations face persecution each day, and 60% of these are children.
- 150,000 to 165,000 are martyred each year.

Christians today are the most persecuted group in the world. Persecution is on the rise because of Communism, the expansion of Islamic and Hindu extremism and because of the Anti-Christ spirit that is prevalent throughout the world. Listen to this newsflash.

“ Three more believers were martyred and 12 others were severely wounded in a fresh wave of violence in Orissa India on the 30th September. An estimated 30 Christians have been killed and thousands of others have lost their homes since Hindu extremists went on a rampage after their leader was murdered.” Homes and churches have been burned down because these dear people bear the name of Christ. You see, you can tell your

unsaved friends that you are a Baptist or some form of a Presbyterian, or some form of a Methodist, or even an agnostic, and there will be no opposition, but tell them you are a Christian. ***Bring Christ’s name into the conversation and things will start to happen, for Satan hates that name.*** Now remember Peter is writing this letter against the backcloth of persecution. You see, what happened was this. In July 64 AD the great fire of Rome broke out, and the city of Rome was badly destroyed. Because of his well-known desire to refurbish Rome by whatever means, the people believed that the Emperor Nero was responsible for starting the blaze. But he blamed it on the Christians, and it started a wave of persecution among believers. The stories are terrible to listen to. Some of them were crucified. Others of them were rolled in pitch alive. Others of them were sewn up in animal skins with rats to eat them. They went through unbelievable trials. Yet Peter says, *“ I want you to know that you should not be surprised. This is part of God’s plan. God is doing a work and this is one of those unusual, strange parts of the plan of God for your life.”*

Do you recall the words of the hymn ?

***When through fiery trials my pathway shall lie
Thy grace all sufficient shall be my supply***

Well, fiery trials and painful ordeals aptly describe what most of us pass through at one time or another in life, some more frequently than that. Maybe you’re saying, *“ That’s where I am. I am going through a time of suffering. I am going through some misfortune. There are*

many problems in my life and I have a lot of questions and I don't understand why it's all going on.” Well, I want to talk to you this About “ **Surviving your Suffering.**”

(1) THE REALITY OF CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

There are those who tell us that Christians should not suffer. That they should not accept physical suffering and that it is always God's will to heal and deliver. **Does God still heal ?** Absolutely, for while the gift of healing is gone, the Lord continues to heal whom He wills, when He wills. But suffering can very definitely be “ *according to the will of God.*” (4:19) Don't ever let anyone tell you and don't you tell anybody else that when you become a believer your trials are over, from then on “ you can trust Christ and fly away like birds towards the heavens.” Suffering as a Christian is real. That suffering may be physical, emotional, financial, relational, or as it was here spiritual. That is, these believers were suffering because of their spiritual relationship with the Lord Jesus. Peter says, “ *Beloved think it not strange,*” “ *Don't be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering.*” You see, God's people are different from the people of this world. (2 Cor 6:14-18)

To the world the Christian brings the standards, commands, ethics of Jesus Christ, and the result is conflict, hostility, and opposition. Peter says “ this is something we should not be alarmed about.” Such suffering is,

(a) DEMONSTRATED IN THE WORD OF GOD:

Cain was a religious man yet he hated his brother and killed him. (Gen 4:8) The world does not persecute “ *religious people,*” but it does persecute “ *righteous people.*” Why did Cain kill Abel ? John says “ *Because his own works were evil, and his brothers righteous.*” (1 Jn 3:12) The Pharisees and Jewish leaders were religious people, yet they crucified Christ and persecuted the early church. Christ warned His disciples, “ *But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues.*” (Matt 10:17) Imagine scourging the servants of God in the very house of God. You see, after the Fall of man (Gen 3:15) God declared war on Satan and Satan has been attacking God through His people ever since. For believers therefore, persecution is not a strange thing. The absence of satanic opposition would be strange. The Saviour told His disciples that they expect suffering. He said, “ *if the world hate you ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*” (Jn 15:18) He said, “ *in the world ye shall tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world.*” (Jn 16:33)

Are you suffering because you are a Christian ? In the office, on the factory floor, in the school and college ? What about your unsympathetic home ? Your ungodly colleagues ? Do they revile because you bear the name of Christ ? Peter says, “ *Don't be alarmed, others before you have suffered the same way you are suffering.*” My what is the Acts of the Apostles ? But a record of those who “ *suffered for righteousness sake.*” (3:14) We think

of Stephen, they stoned him. (Acts 7:58) James, they executed him. (Acts 12:2) Paul, they took him for dead. (Acts 14:19) Peter and John, they imprisoned and beat them. (Acts 5:40) “ *And they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.* ” Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna about the middle of the second century. He was arrested for his faith and threatened with death if he did not recant. “ *Eighty and six years have I served Him* ”, the saintly Bishop replied, “ *and He never did me any injury. How can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour ?* ” “ *I have respect for your age,* ” said the Roman officer. “ *Simply say, away with the atheists and be set free.* ” By “ *the atheists,* ” he meant the Christians who would not acknowledge that Caesar was “ *lord.* ” The old man pointed to the crowd of Roman pagans surrounding him and cried, “ *Away with the atheists.* ” He was burned at the stake and in his martyrdom brought glory to His Lord. (a)

(b) DETERMINED BY THE WILL OF GOD:

That is, God determines and decides how long He should let others oppose us. The word “ *happened,* ” in (4:12) is very interesting. It means “ *to go together.* ” Persecution and trials do not just “ *happen,* ” in the sense of being accidents. They are part of God’s plan and He is in control. Sure, there is nothing that can enter the believer’s life without the divine permission of our living Lord. So if we suffer as a Christian we are suffering as (4:19) indicates “ *according to the will of God.* ” That means that it’s for our good. What is God trying to teach us when the suffering comes ? What does God have in mind ? Well,

He wants to purify us. Peter says, “ *Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you.* ” The word for trial is a word that was used to describe the refining of metals in a refiners fire, not in order to destroy the metal but to purify and cleanse the metal. Do you see what Peter is saying ? He is saying that “ *fiery trials,* ” are a furnace that God uses to purify the lives of believers. God has a purpose in mind. God has a plan. God’s ultimate plan is that you and I be like the Lord Jesus. So He allows the sufferings to burn away the dross and to burn away the impurities and make us more like Christ ? (Rom 8:28) Do you recognize that the trials you face are not by chance ?

**For not a single shaft can hit
Except the love of God sees fit**

We’ve all heard the saying that “ *a faith which cannot be tested cannot be trusted.* ” That is certainly true. So when the trials come just keep in mind that God is purifying you and that His intention is to make you more like Christ. I heard about an atheist who lived next door on a farm to a Christian. The atheist’s pumpkin crop was excellent, but his Christian’s neighbours crop was frozen and ruined. The atheist said to his Christian neighbour. “ *my crop was good. Why was your crop frozen if your God is all that interested in you ?* ” The Christian wisely replied, “ *My God is not growing pumpkins. He is growing men.* ” (1)

(2) THE RESOURCES IN CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

What do you do when the rug is pulled out from under you ? Do you panic ? Do you doubt God's love ? Do you trust in God to get you through the tough times ? Do you keep on rejoicing ? “ *What, are you kidding me ? I mean we are talking trials, fiery ordeals, and you are telling us to keep on rejoicing ?* ” My I am not telling you this. God is telling you to keep on rejoicing. In fact, Peter four times in two verses Peter mentions “ *joy,* ” in one form or another. He says “ *rejoice,* ” “ *be glad,* ” “ *with exceeding joy,* ” “ *happy are ye.* ” Why ? Because trials mean a deeper relationship with Christ on earth and a richer reward from Him in heaven. D. L. Moody told about a believer who was always bright, and cheerful, even though she was confined to her room because of illness. She lived in an attic apartment on the 5th floor of a run down building. A friend decided to visit her one day and brought with her a lady of great wealth. Since there was no lift the two ladies began the long climb upward. When they reached the second floor the affluent woman complained, “ *what a dark and filthy place.* ” Her friend replied, “ *Its better higher up.* ”

When they arrived at the third landing, the remark was made, “ *things look even worse here.* ” Again the reply was made “ *Its better higher up.* ” The two ladies finally reached the attic level, where they found the bedridden saint of God. A smile on her face radiated the joy in her heart. Although the room was clean and flowers were on the window sill, the wealthy lady could not get over the stark surroundings, in which this woman lived. She blurted out, “ *it must be very difficult for you to be here like this.* ” Without a moment's hesitation the shut in

responded, “ *its better higher up.* ” She was not looking at temporal things with the eye of faith, she had found the secret of true satisfaction and contentment even in the midst of suffering. Did you know that in the future when we stand at the bema judgment seat rewards will be distributed by the Lord Himself ? Did you know that there is a unique crown given to those who endure suffering ? James says “ *blessed is the man that endureth temptation or perseveres under trial, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life.* ” (James 1:12) One of these days you're going to get to heaven and the Father is going to explain to you what He was doing in your life. That's the future, but what about the present ? What are the resources God gives to us in the midst of suffering ?

(a) THE LOVING PLAN OF THE FATHER:

I love the way Peter begins this section. “ *Beloved,* ” (4:12, 2:11) This is a pastoral word conveying tenderness, compassion, and affection. The Greek means “ *beloved ones.* ” Here were believers passing through times of suffering and trial and Peter begins by reminding them, that they are loved with all the love that is found in the heart of God. Does it not comfort you this to know that in the midst of your trial, God's love for you is unchanging ? Is this not a sweet pillow on which to rest your burdened heart ? You see, times of suffering can cause you to doubt God's love but I am here to tell you that His love for you is unfailing. You need to know that the Father is planning for you in love. (a)

(b) THE ABIDING PRESENCE OF THE SON:

What a privilege it is as Peter says in (4:13) to be a “ *partaker of Christ’s sufferings.* ” This of course is not in a redemptive sense. Rather it refers to believers experiencing the same kind of sufferings He endured, that is suffering for what is right. (2:21) You see, we know that for us as for Him the cross will lead to the crown. (Rom 8:17 2 Tim 3:11) But until that day dawn and His glory be revealed (1:7-8) we have the assurance that Christ is with us in the midst of our suffering. Is this not what the three Hebrew children discovered when they were cast into a fiery furnace ? The King cried, “ *Lo I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire and they have no hurt and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.* ” (Dan 4:25) Now tell me, are you good at math’s ? How many went into the fiery furnace ? Three ? When the king counted them how many did he count in the furnace ? Four ? When the king commanded them to come out of the fiery furnace, how many came out ? Three. Where was the fourth man he saw in the fire ? **He was still there.**

That means, that when you go through the furnace of fire, the Lord Jesus is already in there waiting for you. He will be right there and He will walk with you through the trial. Is this not what Paul discovered in the midst of suffering ? See the old warrior as he stands in court ? And as his eyes sweep that court room there’s not one familiar face. He says, “ *At my first defence no man stood with me, but all men forsook me notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.* ” (2 Tim 4:17) Are you in the midst of a fiery ordeal ? Do you feel at breaking point ?

Will you take with you this assurance from the lips of your Master, “ *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.* ” (Heb 13:5) (a) (b)

(c) ***THE RESIDING POWER OF THE SPIRIT:***

Look if you will at (4:14) The word “ *spirit,* ” should be spelt with a capital “ *S,* ” for the reference is to the Holy Spirit who ministers to those who suffer for the name of Christ. Warren Wiersbe tells us that the verse can be translated like this, “ *for the presence of the glory even the Spirit rests on you.* ” The reference is to the Shekinah glory of God that dwelt in the Tabernacle and in the Temple. (Ex 40:34 1 Kings 8:10-11) There is a special glory that seems to reside and rest on the child of God who is suffering for Christ. I think about Stephen. Do you recall how he was martyred for his faith in the Lord ? The Bible says, “ *and all that sat in the council looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.* ” (Acts 7:55) The Spirit of glory and God was resting on him. Does this not explain how that when Paul and Silas were thrown into prison they “ *sang praises unto God,* ” (Acts 16:25) The Spirit of glory and God was resting on them. Does this not explain how the martyrs whom Rome burned walked to the fires singing praises to the Lord ? The Spirit of glory and God was resting on them.

I heard about John Wesley the founder of Methodism. He would have open air services and one day two thugs came with the purpose of breaking up the service. They were going to stone him and cause disruption. As he began to

speaking the glory of God seemed to rest on the preacher, and as he preached one of them looked at the other and said, “ *He ain’t a man Billy, he ain’t a man.* ” They listened to more and as they departed to leave Wesley pronounced a blessing on them they said, “ ***He is a man but he is a man like God.*** ” Think of it like this, in the midst of your trials and suffering you have the triune God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit unite to comfort, strengthen, and help as you pass through “ fiery trials.” (1) (2)

(3) THE RESPONSIBILITY THROUGH CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

Mind you there is a suffering that is *deserved* that comes into the life of a believer. Did you catch (4:15) There are a lot of Christians who are busybodies. They are always sticking their noses in someone else’s business. They go around prying when they should be praying. Then someone fires back at them and they say, “ *Oh, I am suffering for Jesus.* ” No, you’re not. You’re just a meddler. Mind your own business. There is a suffering that is deserved, but there is a suffering that is *derived*, that is, it comes because we are Christ’s. Now we have a responsibility if we suffer for Christ. Peter says we are to

(a) ***SEEK FIRST THE GLORY OF GOD:***

“ *Not be ashamed,* ” that’s the negative. “ *Glorify God,* ” that’s the positive. I wonder did this phrase remind Peter of the night when he was ashamed ? When he cowered before the might of Rome and denied His Lord.

(Mk 14:71-72) Have there been times when you have been ashamed of Christ ? When you have been embarrassed because of your association with Him ? Peter finished well didn’t he ? Clement of Alexandria tells us that Peter and his wife, who was helper in the gospel were martyred together. Peter had the grim ordeal of seeing his wife suffer before him. When they came to Peter he said, “ *Crucify me with my head downwards. My Master was crucified for me with His head upwards, I am not worthy to die as he died.* ” He glorified God in his death. (a)

(b) ***WITNESS TO THE GRACE OF GOD:***

Peter says “ *For the time is come appear ?* (4:17-18) If God sends a “ *fiery trial,* ” to His own children and they are saved with difficulty, what will happen to lost sinners when God’s fiery judgment falls ? You see, there is no comparison between what we believers suffer now and what the unrighteous will suffer later. “ *Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear ?* ” (4:18) They will not appear at the Rapture. They will not appear at the Marriage of the Lamb. They will not appear around the throne of God in glory. Where will they appear ? They will appear at the literal lake of fire at the Great White Throne Judgment. Oh, the horror of it all. John says, “ *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.* ” (Rev 20:15) Is that not a good enough reason unsaved to give your life to Christ this ? My is this not a good enough reason for us to be burdened for the lost ? When you have time this meditate on (Rev 20:11-15) Put your son there, your

daughter there, your family there, your enemies there for times of opposition are times of opportunity to witness to the amazing grace of God. (Matt 5:10-12 Acts 16:31)

(c) TRUST IN THE GUARDIANSHIP OF GOD:

Do you see how Peter concludes ? (4:19) That word “ *commit*,” means “ *to deposit*.” It was a banking term. It was used to describe the deposit of something valuable into a place of safe keeping. Peter says entrust your soul to Him as unto a faithful Creator. He uses creation as the example of how dependable God is. God is a faithful Creator. The same God who created you is the God who has the power to sustain you, and the same God who sustains you is the One who loves you enough to take care of you. My when the X-ray comes back and it doesn't look good, remember God is faithful. When you read that heartbreaking note from your spouse, remember God is faithful. When you hear the worst kind of news about one of your children, remember God is still faithful. He has not abandoned you, though you're tempted to think He has.

He is the Faithful Creator. ***Look at creation.*** The stars and planets move in their orbit by precision. He is the Faithful Creator. The earth revolves consistently around its axis. He is the Faithful Creator. The seasons on the earth continue to go undiminished in their regularity. He is the Faithful Creator. If God is that faithful with His creation, don't you think God will be faithful when you deposit your soul into His hands. In the midst of your “ *fiery trials*,” this say, “ *Lord, I don't what you're doing and*

I don't what the purpose of all this is in my life, but Lord I place my life in your care.” My God is faithful and He will hold you, sustain you, and keep you.

Though we pass through tribulation

Ours is such a full salvation

All, all is well

Happy still in God confiding

Fruitful if in Christ abiding

Holy through the Spirit's guiding

All must be well

Christian, in the midst of your difficulty do you need to commit the keeping of your soul to God as unto a Faithful Creator ? Unsaved in the midst of your dilemma do you need to commit the saving of your soul to God as unto a Merciful Redeemer ?