

## 5. SUFFERING: MYSTERY OR MINISTRY? (Scripture Portion 1 Peter 1:1-8)

STUDY [5]

**TEXT:** [1 Peter 1:1-8] *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup>who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*

*<sup>3</sup>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup>In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup>These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup>Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,*

One of life's mysteries which is "hard to be understood" is that of suffering, and the presence of so much suffering in the world and in the lives of God's children presents great moral and ethical problems. Even to the Christian there is a strong element of mystery in the question of suffering, though to the enlightened child of God it is viewed not so much as a mystery as a ministry. The Christian comes to see that God, who is over all and guides the lives of His children, has a gracious and wonderful purpose in permitting them to suffer.

"Troubles bear down on all of us. I've never met a person who didn't have something to be concerned about. Why we suffer is a spiritual question which can only be understood spiritually," \_Billy Graham to the UN in 1999,

In this study our theme will be the ministry of suffering, and we shall center our study upon and around 1 Pet. 1: 6-8. Peter has much to say on this subject in his epistles, and in these three verses we have a summary of teaching. Consider J. B. Phillips' helpful paraphrase of 1 Pet. 1: 6-8:-"*At present you are temporarily harassed by all kinds of trials and temptations. This is no accident it happens to prove your faith, which is infinitely more valuable than gold, and gold, as you know, even though it is ultimately perishable, must be purified by fire. This proving of your faith is planned to bring you praise and honor and glory in the day when Jesus Christ reveals Himself*"

Let us draw out the teaching from these three verses, and notice:-

### **1. In the life of every Christian there are periods and experiences of suffering and trial.**

Personal experience confirms this, and the Word of God definitely affirms it. In verses 6-7 there are two words which should be underlined "heaviness" and "trials" The child of God shares the sufferings and trials common to mankind. There is no immunity because we are Christians - look up Job 5:7 and 14:1.

Job 5:7 *Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.*

Job 14:1 *"Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.*

But the Christian also experiences sufferings and trials because he is a Christian-look up Matt.10:25; John 15:18-19; 16:33; Phil. 1:29; 1 Pet. 4: 12-13-and see what Psa.34:19 says!

[Mat.10:25] *It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!*

[John 15:18-19] *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. <sup>19</sup>If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.*

[John 16:33] *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

[Philip.1:29] *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,*

[1 Peter 4:12-13] *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup>But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

Psalms 34:19 *A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;*

## **2. These periods of suffering and trial are intermittent; they come and go.**

Notice the words in verse 6 - *"a little while."* Broadly speaking, this refers to our whole lifetime, but the idea in the word "season" is as J. B. P. suggests - *"At present you are temporarily harassed."* What a mercy it is that suffering does not constantly rest upon us in all its weight and heaviness! The expression *"a little while"* means "for a short period" - look up 2 Cor. 4: 17.

[2 Cor. 4:17] *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

Life is made up not only of shadow but of sunshine as well!

## **3. These periods and experiences of suffering and trial are purposeful.**

For the child of God there is a ministry in suffering - **"this proving of your faith is planned"**. Notice the words in 1 Pet. 1: 6 - *"if need be"* Peter does not say, *"if by chance"* [*"you may have had to suffer grief"*], because there is no such thing as chance or accident in the life of the Christian. Rom. 8:28 assures us of this, and this being so, the question is raised: If God has a purpose in allowing suffering in the experience of His children, what is His purpose? Why does He allow us to suffer?

(1) To prove the reality of our faith. 1 Pet. 1: 7 says, *"the trial of your faith" - or the testing of your faith.* God allows us to suffer to see if our faith is genuine. Compare Gen. 22:1 (the word "tempt" = "test") with Job 13:15.

Genesis 22:1 *Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.*

Job 13:15 *Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face.*

(2) To strengthen our faith. When our faith is tested it is deepened and strengthened. Notice the "degrees of faith" in the following: Mark 4:40; Matt.16: 8; 15: 28; 8:10; Acts 6: 5; Rom. 4:19;

[Mark 4:40] He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

[Matt.16:8] *Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?"*

[Matt.15:28] *Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.*

[Matt.8:10] *When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.*

[Acts 6:5] *This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.*

[Romans 4:1] *Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead.*

(3) To discipline and educate us. Look up Heb.12:7; 5: 8, and compare 1 Pet. 4:17-19.

[Heb.12:7] *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?*

[Heb. 5:8] *Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered*

[1 Peter 4:17-19] *For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup>And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" <sup>19</sup>So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.*

(4) To humble us. Look up Deut. 8: 2-3, and compare 2 Cor.12:1-9.

[Deut. 8:2-3] *Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. <sup>3</sup>He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*

[2 Cor. 12:1-9] *I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. <sup>2</sup>I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know--God knows. <sup>3</sup>And I know that this man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows--<sup>4</sup>was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. <sup>5</sup>I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. <sup>6</sup>Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.*

<sup>7</sup>*To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup>Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup>But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

(5) To purify us Look again at 1 Pet.1:7. and compare 1 Pet 4:1-2.

[1 Peter 1:7 ] *These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

[1 Peter 4:1-2 ] *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. <sup>2</sup>As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*

(6) To qualify us to help others. Study 2 Cor. 1:3-7.

[2 Cor. 1:3-7 ] *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. <sup>5</sup>For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. <sup>6</sup>If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. <sup>7</sup>And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.*

(7) To prove to us the sufficiency of His grace and to make us long for Heaven. Compare 2 Cor. 9: 8; 12: 9 with Phil. 1: 23.

[2 Cor. 9:8] *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

[2 Cor. 12:9] *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

[Philip.1:23] *I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;*

#### **4. These periods of sufferings and trials are varied.**

Peter speaks of "*all kinds of testings*" (verse 6) - that is, there is a diversity about them. Suffering may affect us physically, in the form of sickness, infirmity or weakness; it may affect us emotionally, mentally or spiritually; it may be in the domestic realm. Some Christians suffer and are tested by poverty, and others by prosperity; some by having to take a lower position, and others by having to assume heavy responsibilities. But all the manifold testings that God permits in the lives of His children are purposeful, and therefore they are for His glory - look up and compare John 9:3 with 11:40.

[John 9:3] *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.*

[John 11:40] *Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"*

#### **5. These periods of suffering and trial are sometimes very severe.**

In verse 7, Peter speaks about being "tried with fire", which suggests the idea of severity - but thank God no testing will ever be so severe that we cannot bear it Look up 1 Cor. 10:13. Here let it be stated that God calls some of His children to a special ministry of suffering. Just as some are called to the ministry of the Word or to the ministry of prayer, so, undoubtedly, others are called to glorify God in a special ministry of suffering - look up Acts 9:15-16.

[Acts 9:15-16] *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup>I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

#### **6. These trials and sufferings that we experience are all related to the future.**

In verse 7. Peter tells us that our trials are very precious, because if they are patiently borne they will bring "*praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*". This is something we are to accept by faith - 2 Cor. 4:17.

[2 Cor. 4:17] *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

One day we are going to look back upon all our trials and sufferings and see the reason for them, and thank God for them (John 13: 7). Now we can only thank Him for them by faith; then it will be by feeling and by sight Look up James 1:12.

[James 1:12] *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

#### **7. The secret of victory, patience and endurance in suffering is in an ever-present vision of the Lord Himself.**

See what 2 Pet.1: 8 says, and compare 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

[2 Peter 1:8] *For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

[2 Cor. 4:16-18] *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup>So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Let us not dwell upon the mystery of suffering but by the grace of God, let us rejoice in the ministry' of suffering.

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