

1 Peter

WEEK 6 // Our Suffering: How the Gospel Shapes Our
Suffering
1 Peter 3:8-4:19

Good morning. Welcome to Lake Wylie Baptist Church. Aren't you glad to be here? I am! If you have your Bible begin opening to 1 Peter 3. If you're using a Bible from the pew rack it's on page 816.

PRE-SERMON

While you're turning there let me tell you about some awesome things going on here at Lake Wylie. Over the last month God has really blessed us with a big problem. But this isn't the kind of problem we hate. It's a huge problem, but it's such a good problem.

If you're a family with kids, and you've been coming for the last few weeks you know all about this problem. We are running out, indeed, we are out of kids' space! Thank God. We love, and value families here, and we love the sound of little feet running these halls don't we church? I know that your hope is to see these halls overflowing with kids. I know, grandparents, that your hope is that Lake Wylie will be a church for your grandkids, right?

Well, I just want you to know that we're aware that we have a space problem. Our deacons have already been discussing what to do about it, and we're meeting after this service to keep working on a solution. Just for now, though, be praying about this problem. Thank God that he's given us this problem. Pray that he'll continue to send families with children to our church. Pray that we'll be the kind of church that always finds a way to make room for them. Pray and ask God to show you how you can make room, personally! And pray for us leaders who are working on the solution.

In fact, let's stop right now and pray.

Father, thank you for being a God who loves and cares for little children. Thank you for trusting Lake Wylie Baptist with the families

you're sending our way. We long to be a church where families are made stronger for you and your glory. We pray that, as you send families our way, our hearts would be continually open, that we would sacrifice to meet them and their needs, and that through our faithfulness as your church we would see a harvest of families changed, healed, renewed, and following you. We ask this for your glory. Amen

These are great days to be a part of Lake Wylie Baptist aren't they? Alright, let's look at 1 Peter:

SERMON

As we've been going through this letter from the Apostle Peter we've encountered a number of topics. Peter shows us what it means to live out the hope and power of the gospel in nearly every compartment of life.

Last week we looked at Peter's instruction for wives and husbands. Thankfully no one burned an effigy of me this past week—at least not to my knowledge.

Peter has also instructed us how to live out the gospel in the public sphere—how to think about politics and culture.

We've talked about our identity—where it comes from, how we live out of our identity—and that makes what we choose as our identity deeply important.

Today in 1 Peter 3 and 4 Peter gives us instruction on suffering. I'll be honest with you and tell you 2 things. 1st I promise I'm not preaching a 4 hour sermon on every verse in those two chapters. I thought about it, but I love you guys more than that.

2nd Because we're flying through almost 2 full chapters there's a lot I won't say, a lot I won't get to. If you just feel robbed today, email me or grab me after the service. We'll get coffee this week!

1 Peter

Now, if you're like me you've heard a lot of talk from Christians about suffering. You've heard sermons—you've seen Christians on TV talk about, preach about, lecture about, write books about evil and suffering.

And, if you're like me, you've probably heard a lot of Christian teaching on suffering that could be divided into two categories.

One the one hand, you've heard Christians talk about suffering and say things like, "The key to this life is to have faith! Believe! If you'll think positively—if you'll increase in your faithfulness. If you'll call the number at the bottom of the screen and send me some money—then God will make you prosper. You won't suffer. You'll be rewarded." Ever heard that?

Another kind of Christian teaching on suffering you are likely to have heard goes something like this. You've heard sermons where the pastor referenced God a little bit in the beginning of the sermon, but the large majority of the sermon was given to tips, mechanisms, counseling on how to practically deal with suffering. So he says something like, "God is sovereign over suffering and evil. He's in control, so while you suffer here's what you need:

- You need close relationships surrounding you, supporting you.
- It's OK to express grief.
- Whenever you start to feel anxiety, shift your thinking.
- Become altruistic—best way to get through your suffering is to help others in theirs.

Now, let me be clear here—all of those are wonderful counseling techniques, and we need good counselors—but I typically respond to those two Christian teachings on suffering with two responses:

When I hear a gospel of prosperity—that if you'll increase your faith then you won't suffer—I **get really angry**. Because, most rational people know this kind of teaching is a lie, because most people know someone who is incredibly faithful to God, who loves and serves

God—and yet, for all their love and service, for all their positive thinking—cancer still came knocking. **And if that's the only Christian teaching on suffering you ever hear, then Christians sound like charlatans peddling snake oil.**

When I hear the sermons on suffering that pay a little respect to God in the beginning, but are mostly filled with coping mechanisms and counseling—I hear that kind of Christian teaching on suffering and I think to myself, **"While that was helpful on a practical level, was there anything particularly Christian about it? Couldn't I have gotten the same coping mechanisms from a Jewish Rabbi, or a psychologist or a self-help book from Barnes and Noble?"**

You see, I think most of us typically have two reactions to what Christians say about suffering. Either, we hear the prosperity peddlers and think, "If this is who God is, then God isn't helpful." Why? Because we know faithful people who suffer.

Or, we hear self-help preaching on suffering and think, "God is unnecessary. I don't have to come to church, or read the Bible to learn any of this."

Today Peter is going to radically depart from either of those views. Peter's going to show us a deeply theological understanding of suffering, that is rooted in and grows out of the gospel. Now, that sounded really deep—and we will go a little deep today. What does that mean, that our view of suffering should be deeply theological as it is rooted in and grows up out of the gospel?

Most of you are saying this internally right now—"I know what the gospel is. The gospel is the death burial and resurrection of Jesus. It's the message you believe in order to become a Christian." And for most people—that's what they think of the gospel. It's what saves us. It's what gets us in the door. The gospel is kind of like the diving board into the pool of Christian life

1 Peter

And many Christians think—now that I'm in the pool and I'm suffering, there's must be something else I need. Something beyond the gospel that will help me deal with suffering.

Peter is going to show us today—that when it comes to suffering—the gospel isn't just the diving board into the pool of the Christian life. The gospel is the pool. It's the sum total of the faith. The gospel isn't just the ABCs of Christianity—it's the A-to-Z of Christianity.

If you're here today saying, “Yes, I know the gospel is what I need for salvation, but what do I need for suffering?” Peter says, “You need the gospel for suffering. The gospel is how you understand, rightly think about and respond to suffering.”

He's going to give us a view of suffering that's rooted in and grows up out of the gospel. That's what I mean.

CONTEXT

Now, here's the deal. This topic typically raises a lot of questions.

- Why is there evil in the world?
- Where does evil come from?
- How can God be good, and powerful, and wise and still allow evil?
- Why is the suffering I'm currently experiencing happening?

If you're going to walk away today and get what Peter is saying you have to realize something. Peter is not going to answer all of your questions about suffering. He's not writing Suffering 101. Peter has written this letter to a specific group of people, at a specific point in time to address a specific issue.

So what is he doing? We'll he's writing, most likely from Rome to a group of Christians in Asia Minor—modern day Turkey. These were people who once had not believed the gospel. They didn't know God. They fit in with their surrounding culture. And then the gospel was preached to them:

- Jesus Christ, God made flesh, died in your place.
- You owed a debt to God because of your sin.
- But God, who is rich in mercy isn't making you pay that debt.
- God took on your debt.
- When God came to demand the penalty for your debt be paid Jesus paid the debt, and the debt was his very life.
- But God didn't leave him in the grave. Unlike every other sacrifice, God raised Jesus back from death.
- And because your debt has been paid, trust Jesus and be welcomed into God's arms.

So they trusted in Christ, **and because of that Peter knows that something is about to happen.** These new Christians are going to follow Jesus, commit to living out the ethics of Jesus, **and they're going to suffer for it.**

- They're going to suffer social and cultural criticism.
- They're going to come under political criticism.
- They'll experience religious criticism.

In fact, it's getting so bad that Peter actually tells them, “Because of your faith in Jesus, there's about to be a fiery trial.”

And when that happens they're going to ask, “Why?”

- Why, if we're doing what God wants are we going to suffer for it? That doesn't make much sense.
- And how? How is it fair that we do something honorable and good and suffer?
- And if we are about to suffer for doing what God wants, then what good is that?

These are the same questions we ask today.

- Kathryn trusted Jesus! She served in the church! Why did she get cancer?

1 Peter

- Leslyn had the pastor pray for her! Isn't that what God wants us to do?
- I only acted ethically at work. Why am I being criticized?
- I'm trying to live in integrity.

In order to begin answering these questions let's look at this massive portion of scripture today under two headings:

1. THE REALITY OF SUFFERING
2. THE SHAPING OF OUR SUFFERING

First, THE REALITY OF SUFFERING:

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

Peter says—here's the bullet point list of common Christian ethics. He's been talking about husbands and wives, and politics and culture and this is really his summary statement. He's finishing this section on Christian ethics by basically saying, "The bottom line is this: live an honest, and sacrificial life."

*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.*¹

Suffer for doing good. How fascinating. Peter recognizes this, and admits, and holds it up, without dodging, without skirting around it, without glossing over. Suffer for doing good.

Peter, in fact all of the scriptures, know that there is a religious way of thinking that goes something like this:

The key to unlocking God's blessing and favor in your life is to live right. Trust God, honor God, obey God **and you won't suffer**. And, on the surface that kind of thinking sounds right. I mean, if humans are sinners who disobey God, and God is holy and just and is all powerful—then it kind of makes sense that God would use his ability to bestow gifts as a way of motivating good behavior, right? There's only one problem: it's a total lie. What Peter is trying to get you to see when he says "suffer for doing good" is that God isn't rich in **manipulation—he's rich in mercy**. And the rest of the Scriptures disabuse us of this idea that God uses his favor and his power to manipulate us into obedience.

The Bible isn't the story of a bunch of holy people who God was obligated to bless. It's the story of God in his mercy rescuing evil men.

- Abraham was a liar. He carelessly abused the promises of God.
- Moses was a murderer.
- David was an adulterer.

In fact, there's an entire book of the Old Testament dedicated to showing how a man who was, by all outward signs, holy and righteous and just who nonetheless suffered deeply. His name was Job. The Scriptures are trying to show you that God's blessing isn't a result of human obedience, but of divine mercy.

If that's how God really worked. He makes rules and simply rewards those who keep the rules, then we'd never love God. **You and I would always place the gift above the giver. God doesn't want obedience for gifts sake. He wants obedience for loves sake—and you never get obedience for loves sake through bribery.**

Peter is trying to guard your heart against a sinister theology—that says, "God, I don't really care for you. I only care for what you can give me. So, God I'll do what you want. I'll pay lip service to you so

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (1 Pe 3:8–17). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

1 Peter

that you'll give me what I'm really looking for, then I'll go on worshipping my stuff and my circumstances."

And Peter says—there is no straight line between human obedience. In fact, many times you'll do what God wants, and you'll suffer for it. Don't be the kind of Christian who serves God expecting that everything will turn out rosy, only to be shipwrecked when you crash into the reality of a sin broken world. Peter's showing you the reality of suffering.

Notice he also instructs us secondly in,

2. THE SHAPING OF OUR SUFFERING

Go back to verse 17:

17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

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,

Ok, Peter, what's happening here? He shifts from talking about us suffering unjustly for the good we do to the suffering of Christ, and he connects the two. So let's think about that for a minute. We know the gospel right? You, me, everyone has a basic problem.

- It's not a parent problem.
- It's not a societal problem.
- It's not a problem of environment.
- It's not a problem of upbringing.
- It's not a work problem.
- It's not a relationship problem.

The problem we all have in common is that all of us have rebelled against God. Religious people, irreligious people. Bankers and Pastors—even your pastor.

We've all committed cosmic treason against the creator. We've all

shook our fist in his face and said, "You won't be the boss of me." We've all broken our relationship with him.

He wanted nothing but to give himself to us, and we rejected, and spurned his love. And you know what the penalty for cosmic treason is right? It's death. It's chosen, eternal, exile from the presence, and love, and life of God.

And there is only one way you could ever return. One way to get back home. You couldn't get yourself there. God's holy righteousness is so dazzlingly bright that your unrighteousness would incinerate in his presence.

The only way you could get back was for someone who is righteous to exchange their righteousness with you, so that you could be treated like they deserved. But because of that, they would have to stand in your place, and they would be treated like you deserved.

Peter tells us that's exactly what Jesus did.

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,

Now this is something I wish you would understand—Jesus isn't just your example. He isn't just someone who held up faithfully under suffering so that we can look at him and say, "See, he was faithful, so I can be too." Christ was not one in a long line of faithful sufferers. He is THE sufferer. He suffered unlike anyone in history ever will.

If your friend abandons you, it hurts for a while. But, if your spouse abandons you, and some of you have been through this—you never get over it. Why? **Because, the more intimate the relationship the deeper the loss.**

No friend has ever been as intimate.

No spouse has ever been so close.

Not even your soul and your body are as intimate as the eternal love relationship between the Father and the Son.

1 Peter

And there on the cross the Son of God cried out, and the door was barred. He died alone in the dark, under the heat of a thousand suns. That's why he screamed in his suffering, 'Father, why have you forsaken me?'

Peter is saying, "The only way that the love and mercy of God came to you is because someone who was righteous suffered. Jesus, in his suffering actually brought you to God. You got to stand in his place and be treated the way he deserved. And he was cast out. He took your exile. He became your unrighteousness and was incinerated in the holy light of God's wrath. He suffered for you to bring you to God. And, therefore, he isn't just your example. He's your substitute. He's your rescuer first, but watch this—**now he is doing the same thing through you.**"

Remember at the beginning when I said Peter would show us a deeply theological understanding of suffering, that is rooted in and grows out of the gospel. That's what he's doing. He's saying that the gospel isn't just what rescues us—it's what actually shapes our suffering.

The shape of our suffering, when we suffer for doing good, is cruciform. It's cross shaped. When you suffer, the righteous for the unrighteous, your life is actually painting a mural of the gospel for the world to see. It's a testimony of the grace God has lavished upon you.

Earlier in chapter 3 Peter said, always be ready to give someone a defense for the hope that is in you. We typically think of that verse in general terms. "Be ready to share your testimony." But think about it, the context is suffering unjustly.

What he's really saying is that, "The gospel should be sunk so deep in your heart, it should be the rock bottom of who you are, so that when someone runs you over for doing good, your initial reaction isn't, 'I'm

going to get them back" but instead, "When Christ tried to love me, I ran him over and he absorbed my sin. He took it upon himself without reviling me."

He isn't saying, be a doormat. He isn't saying always be cheerful. He's saying, "Do you not know the depths through which you have been carried?!"

If you're losing yourself over suffering in this life, think of the suffering of Christ until your sorrow melts! Do you think you've done so well in your obedience that you deserve more than what God has brought into your life? Look at the suffering of Jesus until your pride is humbled.

When that happens, people are going to look at you and say, "How can you stand this? How come you aren't coming apart?" You'll answer, if you only knew what Jesus went through for me, you'd understand that I can bear this.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
**That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul**

My sin, **oh, the bliss of this glorious thought**
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul

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. If Christ went through the fire, so will you.* ¹³ ***But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.***²

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (1 Pe 4:12–13). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.