

Suffering Various Trials

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[0 : 00] But we are all going to turn now to our Bibles and to read the Word of God from, as you've gathered, the first letter of Peter. If you have one of our big church visitors' Bibles, that's page 1014. And it comes just after James, Hebrews, big letter, and then short letter James, and then first Peter, which also comes before 2 Peter.

Just in case you were wondering. We're going to read 1 Peter chapter 1. And I hope you've all found that. So 1 Peter then, chapter 1 and verse 1.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect, exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with his blood.

[1 : 09] May grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

To an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials. So that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it's tested by fire.

So that the tested genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

[2 : 22] Obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours, searched and inquired carefully.

Inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves, but you in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preach the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Things into which angels long to look. Therefore, preparing your minds for action, being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

[3 : 31] Since it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. And if you call on him as father, who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in these last times for your sake, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart. Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the fire falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.

And this word is the good news that was preached to you. Amen.

[5 : 10] And may God bless to us this, his word. Lord Jesus, may we meet you together in your word.

Amen. Amen. When I was a vicar of a church in Melbourne for 20 years, we'd often see young people leaving to go and work overseas, and my advice was always the same every time I came to say goodbye.

And my advice was, the first thing you must do is find a church, because then you'll find people you can trust, who'll welcome you, and who'll care for you and look after you if you're in trouble.

And it was lovely hearing reports back over the years from young couples who had headed off overseas or single people who had headed off overseas, reporting back on the great church they'd met and become part of.

And one of my privileges now, in semi-retirement, I think would be the best description of it, is to travel different places around the world. I do one overseas trip every year, and I love joining a church, even as a kind of temporary honorary member.

[6 : 36] And I might say, I'd love to belong to this church. I can't, because it's a long way away from Melbourne, and flying around the world twice a week would be a bit much, but it's a great joy to be with you and to share our fellowship in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, tonight I'm taking the theme of suffering various trials, some lessons from 1 Peter. We won't just be looking at the first chapter, but at other sections of the book.

Let me warn you, if you don't already know it, that suffering will happen to you. No one gets through life without scars.

And suffering will catch us out if we don't prepare for it wisely. I remember when I left the school I went to, we had an old boy, he seemed immensely old to me anyway, who came back to speak to the lads leaving the school.

And his wish was that we would have a happy and prosperous life. And I remember thinking at the time, that's probably inadequate. Because no one has a life which is just happy and prosperous.

[7 : 55] Everyone, everyone meets trials in their lives. And the talk I'm giving tonight is for you. You may need it.

It's for others, other believers you talk with as well. We often assume, and the world often assumes, that Christians live in a suffering-free zone.

Indeed, that's what some people accuse us of, using God as a crutch to get through life, looking for the easy option. But I think, in fact, Christians suffer more than non-Christians.

For everyone, I suppose, experiences some kind of rejection and marginalization, or even persecution in our world. But Christians experience more than most.

Everyone, I suppose, experiences some kind of division within family, some kind of family separation or argument.

[9 : 04] But actually, Christians experience that more than most people. A friend of mine I visited last year, who's doing a great ministry in country Victoria, when he became a Christian, his father said, Well, you're out of my will.

What an extraordinary thing for a father to say, I disinherit you. And what a pathetic reason to disinherit somebody, because he's become a Christian.

He's not worried, because he trusts in God. And everyone experiences sufferings that come from serving others.

But Christians more than most, indeed, because the scriptures instruct us to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. And everyone experiences suffering because many hopes are disappointed.

But Christians perhaps more than most, because we have such high hopes, because we believe in God's power and goodness and love. I do meet people who become Christians because they think that if they become Christians, they will avoid suffering.

[10 : 22] And they're soon disappointed. I remember talking to one young man in my kitchen when I was first at St. Jude's Church.

He was giving up Christianity and his marriage to a Christian wife at the same time. He said, I'm doing this because God promised to give me peace, and he hasn't delivered it.

So the gospel he'd heard was, do you want peace? The world can't give it to you. God can. Well, that's true, but only part of the truth, isn't it?

So I said to him, really, God has been your servant, hasn't he? You believed in God because you wanted him to give you peace. In other words, you weren't worshipping God at all. You were worshipping peace.

That's right, he said. And he was giving up Christianity because God hadn't delivered. Indeed, if you became a Christian because you thought it would make life easier, then you may well be in trouble now as well.

[11 : 30] But Jesus said, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.

That was no invitation to an easy life, was it? We groan more, I think. We Christians groan more because we know what humanity was meant to be and how far we have fallen, us human race, from the glorious destiny for which we are created.

We groan more because we feel the groaning of the world, distorted and in trouble. We groan more because we have the first fruits of the Spirit and we know of the glory that is to come.

And we can't wait for the Lord Jesus to return. And yet, ironically, Christians in the 21st and 20th century are curiously nervous about suffering in general.

Perhaps because we in the West have fallen for the lie that scientific and political progress will rid the world of suffering. But the more frightened we are about suffering, the more we'll be aware of the suffering we undergo and the more difficult we will find it.

[12 : 50] The more frightened we are about pain, the more aware we'll be of the pain we undergo and the more painful it will be. Christians today, I think, have not learnt how to suffer, haven't learnt the secret of productive pain.

It's in striking contrast to Christians from other ages. Christians in the past, and I might say Christians in the two-thirds world, have learnt how to suffer because it is their daily task.

I'll give you some examples from the past just to show you how Christians in the past have responded to suffering. John Fletcher, who was a friend of John Wesley, was on one occasion very ill.

And a friend came to visit him and said, I'm sorry to find you ill. Mr. Fletcher answered with great sweetness and energy, Sorry, sir!

Why are you sorry? It is the chastisement of my Heavenly Father, and I rejoice in it. Well, I've never said that about a headache.

[14 : 07] I love the rod of my God and rejoice therein as an expression of his love and affection towards me. What an amazing response, isn't it? Here is the kindness of God in my illness.

Have you ever responded that way? I haven't. Or here's the young George Whitefield, later a great evangelist in Britain and North America.

He went to be a student, a poor student, at Oxford College, and as a 17-year-old recently converted to Christ, here is his account of his first trials as a believer, as a college student.

But when religion began to take root in my heart and I was fully convinced my soul must totally be renewed, I was visited by outward and inward trials.

I incurred the displeasure of the master of the college who threatened to expel me if I ever visited the poor again. I said if it displeased him, I would not. I immediately repented and visited the poor on the first opportunity.

[15 : 12] My family counted my life madness. I daily underwent some contempt at college. Some have thrown dirt at me and two friends forsook me.

He then evaluated these benefits. Let me read his words. These, though little, were useful trials. Isn't that remarkable?

For a young man of 17 to see the value, the good outcome of those trials. They were useful trials, though little trials. They inured me to contempt.

That is, they meant I could stand contempt without being pushed around. They lessened self-love and taught me to die daily. Well, here's a third example, even more extraordinary, I think.

Henry Venn was a minister in Huddersfield when his wife died in 1767. He raised his five children and one day promised to show them one of the most interesting sights in the world.

[16 : 24] He took them by arrangement to a miserable hovel in which a young man, Abraham Midwood, was soon to die. He took his children into the hovel and said, Abraham Midwood, I

brought my children here to show them that it's possible to be happy in a state of disease and poverty and want.

And now tell them if it is not so. Midwood replied, Oh, yes, sir, I would not change my state with that of the richest person upon earth who was destitute of those views which I possess.

This is nothing to bear while the presence of God cheers my soul and whilst I have access to him by constant prayer through faith in Jesus. Indeed, sir, I am truly happy and I trust to be happy and blessed through eternity.

And every hour I thank God who has brought me from a state of darkness into his marvellous light and has given me to enjoy the unsearchable riches of his grace. What a remarkable lesson for a father to teach his children.

What a remarkable lesson for children to learn that all you need for total joy is Jesus Christ.

[17 : 46] That you're not pushed around by pain or disease or poverty if you trust in Christ. Is that the kind of lesson you've taught your children?

I think it's a very important lesson to teach children in the West because I'm quite sure that over the next 30 years we'll see increased persecution of Christians. That our tolerant society will be tolerant of everything except Christianity.

And I may not experience that persecution I may not go to prison but I'm sure our children will face that persecution for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must prepare them for it because persecution friends is the normal state of the Church of God in every age. I was speaking in India to a conference of village evangelists and in India village evangelists are the lowest form of church life.

And one young man asked me a question which has remained in my mind ever since. He said you in the West are not persecuted and we are what are we doing wrong?

[19 : 08] When I thought of that verse in 2 Timothy all those who live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. I said you're doing nothing wrong.

It's we in the West who have escaped persecution by various methods and means and circumstances. But what does Peter tell us?

Let's look at chapter 1 verses 6 and 7. You rejoice in this salvation ready to be revealed in the last time though now for a little while if necessary you've been grieved by various trials so that the genuineness of your faith more precious than gold that perishes may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We're used to the idea I think of productive pain we know that if we have a toothache that's a productive pain because it tells us something is wrong. Well what does suffering various trials do to believers?

And the various trials I think mean every kind of trial from the kind of difficulties that every person faces whether they're a believer or not but also the persecution of Christians the trials of Christians you've been grieved he says by various trials why?

[20 : 33] So that the tested genuineness of your faith more precious than gold that perishes though it tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Christ so how will God increase our faith? How will God test our faith? How will God exercise our faith and increase our faith?

It is by sending trials to us. Now if you say to God please make me a strong believer according to Peter how will he do that?

Well the answer is he will send you trials to test your faith it's a bit like exercise it's years since I've done exercise but I understand the point of exercise is that you go through the pain barrier that's it you know if you're kind of the person who runs marathons twice a week or something like that the exercise means you'll learn to go through the pain barrier and you train your body to persist a wonderful story in the newspaper in Australia of a woman who went into a marathon intending to run a half marathon but at the halfway mark she took the wrong turning and ended up running the whole marathon and won imagine that but think of the training that went into it think of the pain she endured to win the marathon without meaning to do it Paul Bilheimer wrote a book called Don't Waste Your Sorrows and James wrote count it all joy when you miss various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing and I must say that the best lessons of faith

I've learnt have been in times of trial disappointment of illness of difficulty of frustration and failure that's when I've learnt the important lessons of life and if I want some good advice from somebody I go to somebody who's been through those trials and their faith has grown as a result the trial itself you see increases the faith because trials either drag us away from God or drive us towards God our sorrows either pull us away from God or they take us to God who is the God of all comfort comfort and consolation and if we know that journey from sorrow to God's comfort we can help other people on that journey as well you see and what a precious gift that is to others so that the tested genuineness of your faith more precious than gold that perishes for whom is faith precious for whom is tested faith precious for whom is it like gold like gold to God so beautiful you see tested faith anyone can believe on an easy day can't they that's not difficult but when trials come who will still be faithful who will still be trusting their gracious

[24 : 07] God tested faith is precious to God it's precious to others as I just pointed out because people whose faith has been tested and who are still enduring as believers are a great strength in our day of trouble and of course it is precious to the believer strengthened faith faith which has endured trials faith which has been tested and grown by trials is more precious than gold that perishes and not only is that faith precious but it may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ that's 1 Peter 1 7 so if you look at half the picture you'll be disappointed if you look at the whole picture you'll find God's great purpose now what is this praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus

Christ some commentary some writers say that this is the praise and glory and honour that you win through enduring faith it may I think rather be the praise and glory and honour of Jesus Christ at his revelation but of course Jesus is honoured by his saints who trust him isn't he Richard Sibbes wrote these wonderful words listen carefully to them glory follows afflictions not as the day follows the night but as the spring follows the winter for winter prepares the earth for the spring so do afflictions of sanctified prepare the soul for glory glory for glory follows afflictions not as the day follows the night that is you have one and then the other that's the time in which they occur but as the spring follows the winter for winter prepares the earth for the spring and so do afflictions prepare the soul for glory glory or

Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 4 this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure this shouldn't diminish the pain of the suffering we should not diminish the pain of suffering but we must not diminish the value of suffering nor should we diminish the glory and honor that is to come some Christians I'm sorry to say do try to diminish the pain of suffering a friend of mine's daughter's husband had died and at the funeral a well-meaning elderly person said don't worry dear you're a pretty girl you'll find a new husband soon that's a way of avoiding the pain you see that's a stupid thing to say don't say that at a funeral let me tell you don't say it don't say well Peter Adams said that it must be alright don't say that at a funeral because of course what the grieving girl should do is to mourn the great loss of her husband and to say well I can find another husband tomorrow if I need it is to diminish the significance of the marriage isn't it it's to underplay it's to insult the value of the marriage no when we experience loss we will experience pain we mustn't diminish that but as we must not diminish the pain of suffering we must not diminish the value of suffering nor should we diminish the glory and honour that will be at the end when

Jesus Christ is revealed Charles Spurgeon the great Baptist preacher if everything works together for our good then nothing is left to work for our ill I love that or here's Spurgeon again all the way to heaven we shall only get there by the skin of our teeth we shall not go to heaven sailing along with sails swelling in the breeze like seabirds with their fair white wings but we shall proceed full often with sails rent to ribbons with masts creaking and the ships pumps at work both day and night we shall reach the city at the shutting of the gate and not an hour before isn't that wonderful so he looked like a successful minister he was a wonderful minister wonderful preacher but on the inside it felt like a bitter battle to the end it felt as if he wouldn't be sure that he'd make it except that he did believe in a gracious God that's what the life of faith is like you see you look at somebody a great Christian from the outside and you see them it looks so easy doesn't it it looks as if they're just sailing through life full of faith and joy and love and ready to land on heaven's door but if you ask them on the inside what does it feel like the answer is I am trembling and I am suffering and I've been through trials that I might be a man a woman of faith one missionary was being prepared for death by an unfriendly native and he was asked what do you think of your future now his reply the

future is as bright as the promises of God or here's John Payton a good Scot heading out to the New Hebrides or Vanuatu as it is now to be a missionary and one man in his church was trying to stop him going away from safe

[30 : 04] Scotland to dangerous New Hebrides the old gentleman's crowning argument was always cannibals you'll be eaten by cannibals at last John Payton replied Mr.

Dixon you are advanced in years now and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave there to be eaten by worms I confess to you that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus he will make no difference to me whether I'm eaten by cannibals or by worms and on the great day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen redeemer what a splendid way to think of being eaten by cannibals I recommend it of course our society finds suffering hard work doesn't it so we outsource it we buy cheap clothes and goods because others have worked hard for no pay to make them we outsource our entertainment so other people do the exercise and we enjoy the sight others are beaten up or murdered or others exhaust themselves in sport that we might be amused but we

Christians can't outsource our suffering because God calls for authenticity of life next when we suffer we suffer following the example of Christ let's pick it up at 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 19 for this is a gracious thing when mindful of God one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly for what credit is it if you sin and are beaten for it and endure it but if when you do good and suffer for it and endure this is a gracious thing in the sight of God for this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in return when he suffered he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly he himself bore our sins and his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds you have been healed for you were straying like sheep but have now returned the shepherd and overseer of your souls you ask the question will suffering achieve anything the answer must be yes because the sufferings of

Christ the pain of Christ achieved your redemption if you ever wonder if suffering can do anything in the world look at Jesus Christ and see the Son of God suffering on the cross and there you will see productive suffering in its clearest and most beautiful form and the lesson here is that Christ not only suffered for us but he dignified our suffering we feel sorry for people who suffer we feel sorry for ourselves when we suffer but we shouldn't feel sorry for those who suffer for Christ's sake for God's sake because to suffer is to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ Christ has dignified suffering as he has dignified serving our society tends to despise serving but I think the people who serve are visible reminders of

Jesus Christ it's true in a church isn't it the people who serve us in our church whatever way they do it they're visible reminders of Jesus Christ because he was a servant I remember speaking at a preaching conference once and it was held at a college in France and the students did all the work so every time somebody gave me a cup of coffee or did something for me I said you remind me of somebody I know oh it's Jesus Christ he was a servant too see Jesus dignified suffering because he used suffering for our redemption and left us an example that we should follow in his steps if you happen to be reading your Bibles you may get at one stage to

[34 : 55] John chapter 18 which is headed the betrayal and arrest of Jesus but if you read through John 18 it's a very odd arrest because the soldiers come and Jesus says whom do you seek they replied Jesus of Nazareth I am he and they drew back and fell on the ground not a very effective arrest was it so he asked them again whom do you seek he said Jesus of Nazareth Jesus of Nazareth Jesus said I told you I am he so finally they arrest him and bound him because you see what happens in the garden suffering that's a fine idea isn't it embracing suffering that is taking it willingly on himself deciding to suffer not an easy decision to make not deciding to suffer because he is engaging in self destruction not that he thinks he's somehow making up for his failures not to punish himself but he is embracing

God's will for his life in his death he is embracing suffering that's a lost art I think in our world you see if you run away from suffering it'll be even more painful won't it if you embrace it confident in God's kindness and grace God's sustaining power it won't hurt you it may pain you but it won't damage you that's the point Oswald Chambers wrote our notion of sacrifice is the ringing out of us something we don't want to give up full of pain and agony and distress the Bible idea of suffering is that I give a love gift the very best I have and one of the best love gifts we can give to God is to embrace the suffering he sends for our good for his glory or for the benefit of others two young girls

went from

Melbourne in the 1890s to be missionaries in China they were both killed and so their mother went out to replace them but here are some words from the letters the girls wrote home to their mother when they were still working in China and still alive of course and as for talking about the self denial and discomfort my experience is that God is never our debtor and we would jump around this little boat we are so overflowing with joy only there's not room and it would shock the boatman that was topsy Nelly wrote rather more spiritually I think the highest of all honors which Paul prayed for is to know the fellowship of his sufferings if only in this life we have the privilege of being partakers in Christ's sufferings and the priceless honor of glorifying him in suffering for him another example from the 20th century young boy

Cambodian 13 year old boy was in Cambodia in 1977 when his whole family were murdered by the Khmer Rouge and thrown into a pit along with 3 million other people murdered at the time but he came to although he'd been beaten he didn't die and climbed out of the pit and hid in the forest and vowed revenge death to the murderers of his family a Buddhist monk advised him to bury the pain to bury the pain that is try to ignore it not very helpful advice he later became a Christian believer he said there was no easy way to forgive the murderers of his family many many years later he went back to the village found the murderers of his family and assured them that he had forgiven them one of them by the way had forgotten what he had done isn't that extraordinary the other one was terrified that the boy was coming back for revenge why did he go back why did he find the find the murderers to say to them that he had forgiven them here are his reasons

I had to live for the glory of God I had to pass on the forgiveness that I had received from God I had to imitate the example of Christ to be like Christ I had to love my enemies as God loves his enemies there is a man embracing pain that he might forgive yes our pain may benefit others as C.S.

[40 : 27] Lewis wrote to be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the excusable in you pain is productive for our own growth pain is productive for our service of others pain is productive of the glory of God next we discover from 1 Peter that when we suffer we should trust God the judge back in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 23 talking about the Lord Jesus 1 Peter 2 23 when he was reviled he did not revile in return when he suffered he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly it's easier to trust God when all goes according to our plan not so easy when his plan is not the same as our plan but if you do suffer persecution if you do suffer unjustly one thing you can do is follow the example of the

Lord Jesus Christ who didn't want to find perfect justice in this life didn't need to find revenge because he entrusted himself to him who judges justly that is he entrusted himself to God the Father knowing the life and his death that God the Father would use his suffering for his great gospel purpose and for our forgiveness for the cleansing of his people yes even Jesus Christ had to entrust himself to him who judges justly and how wonderful to know that we can do the same that we can in times of unjust suffering trust God who judges justly and will judge justly at the end when the Lord Jesus returns so don't play the victim don't avoid suffering whatever the cost drink the cup embrace your cross offer your sacrifice follow

Christ for as God is doing good through our sufferings we should not fight his good gifts God works through suffering God blesses us in our suffering and God blesses others through our suffering I was once speaking at a preaching conference and an elderly minister sent a question to me through somebody else he didn't bring it to me the question was this will I be bitter for eternity because of the pain I've suffered in my ministry what a question will I be bitter for eternity because of the pain I've suffered in my ministry question anybody might ask isn't it will I be bitter for eternity because of the pain I've suffered in my life when I thought hard and prayed hard before I gave the answer the next night I was reading out questions and giving answers and my answer was this when you meet

Jesus Christ and he says well done good and faithful servant all the pain will disappear I think that's the message of revelation isn't it he will wipe away all tears from their eyes you see this gospel is a free gift that we cannot pay for but the gospel may cost us everything to receive it's a free gift we can't earn it we can't pay for it can't pay for our forgiveness can't earn our salvation but it may be costly to receive it's a bit like marriage I understand I'm not married but your partner is a free gift but goodness knows what the cost will be of enduring this marriage what will you be asked to do don't answer that question publicly it's a bit like children you can't earn children they're a gift of

God but you've no idea what loving them will cost you it's a bit like life itself it's a free gift isn't it a gift of God the moment you were conceived it was a gift of God your life was a gift of God you don't know what the joys will be you don't know what the pain will be it may be a painful life there may be trials it's so with the gift of God's son a free gift for us to receive but it may be costly to receive here's Mr.

[45 : 48] John Bunyan's Mr. Valiant for truth and though with great difficulty I am got hither I do not repent me for all I have been at to arrive at where I am my sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage my courage and skill to him that can get it my marks and scars I carry with me to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles who now will be my rewarder order finally we're encouraged by the suffering of others turn to 1 Peter chapter 5 let's pick it up at verse 8 1 Peter 5 8 be sober minded be watchful your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour resist him firm in your faith knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world and after you've suffered for a little while the

God of all grace who's called us called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore confirm strengthen and establish you yes the brotherhood of suffering is such a help I've tried to give you some examples from the past and in a way the examples of our brothers and sisters in the faith do encourage us don't they even at that moment you know somewhere around the world someone will be facing death for the sake of Christ somebody saying to them well either you renounce Christ or we kill you and I pray that they will not renounce Christ and they will face death bravely for the sake of Christ and their example encourages us when we read of the saints of old the noble army of martyrs who suffered pain and death for Christ sake we are encouraged by their example I read this morning these words from the Christians persecuted in the Middle East today please don't pray for us pray with us if you pray for us you'll pray for the wrong things you'll pray for our safety if you pray with us you'll ask

God to bring millions to faith in Christ you'll pray that when the inevitable backlash comes because of our witness we'll be faithful even if it costs us our lives you know when we hear of these men and women and children facing be able to escape that they wouldn't face perhaps the death of their father and mother or the parents wouldn't see the death of their children for Christ's sake we can't bear to think of the pain of that but here they are saying don't pray for us pray with us pray that millions will be converted and when we face the backlash we'll stand till death that's a challenge isn't it for our lives and the instruction about how to pray for them pain can be productive for ourselves it proves the genuineness of our faith it can be productive of the glory and honour of God and it can be a way in which we serve others and we'll see how productive our pain and suffering has been when the Lord Jesus Christ returns yes we may have to suffer various kind of trials that the genuineness of our faith may be tested more precious than gold we may suffer various trials but that will result in praise and honour and glory when Jesus Christ is revealed we may need to suffer but in doing so we follow the example of Christ who suffered for us leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps we may have to suffer but we can trust God the judge and we may suffer but also know that the same experience of suffering is being felt by our brothers and sisters around the world today and indeed has been experienced by them over the last 2000 years

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote these words cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance baptism without church community without confession absolution without personal confession cheap grace is grace without discipleship grace without the cross grace without Jesus Christ living and incarnate costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field for the sake of which a man will gladly go and sell all he has it's the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods it's the kingly rule of Christ for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble it's the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him such grace is costly because it calls us to follow and it's grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ it's costly because it costs a man his life and grace because it gives a man the only true life it's costly because it condemns sin and grace because it justifies sinners above all it is costly because it cost

[51 : 16] God the life of his son and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us let me finish with a poem from the great Indian missionary Amy Carmichael the poem is entitled Hast thou no scar Hast thou no scar no hidden scar on foot or side or hand I hear thee sung as mighty in the land I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star Hast thou no scar Hast thou no wound yet I was wounded

by the archers spent lean me against the tree to die and rent by ravening beast that compassed me
I swooned Hast thou no wound no wound no scar yet as the master shall the servant be and
pierced are the feet that follow me but thine are whole can he have followed far who has no wound
no scar let us pray lord jesus we thank you that you indeed bore our sins and your body on the tree
and we thank you that by your wounds we have been healed we thank you too for your example of
suffering which you left for us that we might follow in your steps please increase our faith by the
trials you send us please give us confidence that our sufferings will result and praise and honour
and glory when you are revealed please help us to follow your example in your steps please help us
with you to trust our heavenly father god our judge and encourage us by reminding us of the same
experience of suffering by our brothers and sisters around the world today please help us to
embrace productive suffering productive pain productive for ourselves productive of glory and
honour for you and our gracious heavenly father and productive of encouragement and service of
others we ask this prayer for your name's sake amen thank you amen