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1 Peter 4:12-17; 5:6-11

BE GLAD THAT YOU SUFFER WITH CHRIST!

It's doubtful any of us would greet each other with, "I'm so glad to hear that you've been suffering lately!" Just the opposite, we're glad when someone is relieved of their suffering. But in this portion of His Word our God reveals that we can be glad for ourselves when we suffer. Not that we enjoy it or look for it. But we can be glad, because as believers we are never an island to ourselves. We are joined to Christ through faith. Whether we live or die we belong to Christ. If we suffer, we suffer with Christ. Therefore, be glad that you suffer with Christ. First, it shows you will also share in His glory, and secondly, it shows your heavenly Father cares.

Suffering is nothing unexpected to Christians. It's is part and parcel of being a Christian. As soon as we have faith in Christ we have inner conflict. Think of how Jesus says, "*Deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me.*" But our own sinful hearts want to have things our way. As soon as we have faith in Christ Satan is also our enemy. He eagerly wreaks havoc on us, makes us truly hurt so that perhaps we will abandon Christ. His willing accomplice is the unbelieving world in general. Perhaps surprisingly, God Himself permits us to suffer because He loves us and He uses it to bless us in numerous ways.

So the Holy Spirit directed Peter to write, "*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something foreign were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed.*" Suffering for being Christians identifies us with Christ. He suffered and was rejected

by the world. The same happens to us who are associated with Him through faith.

Many of us like to wear a Badger Jersey or a Green Bay Packer sweatshirt. Wearing those things associates us with that team. We're especially proud to wear such things if the team is having a winning season. In the same way be glad to wear your suffering because it's one way of knowing that you belong to Christ.

And if Christ shares His suffering with you now, He will also share His glory with you when He returns. Our suffering is temporary. But the glory Christ earned for us by His sufferings, death and resurrection is everlasting. That glory that belongs to us by faith and that we will receive on the Last Day of the world, will instantly, overpoweringly flood out whatever suffering we've endured so that not even the faintest echoes of it remain.

If we are suffering because of our faith in Christ right now, it shows we have the Holy Spirit whom Christ promised to pour out on us when He ascended into heaven. By the power of the Spirit our faith will be preserved in spite of all suffering until we see Christ's glory in heaven. Peter wrote here, "*If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*"

Sometimes we bring suffering on ourselves. It is a direct consequence of our own sin, like drunkenness bringing on a hangover, adultery causing a divorce, avarice bringing on unattainable credit card debt, gossip destroying a friendship. When we suffer as the guilty party it only makes us aware of our sin and God's displeasure with us. We are not sharing in Christ's sufferings then, but with His suffering Christ did take away our sin, and wash us clean with His lifeblood. He forgives us our sins and takes away our guilt. That is the Gospel that brings us back to Him. The Holy Spirit says here through Peter, "*If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 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?”

There are all kinds of suffering that is not our fault, that we have no control over. Either the world inflicts it on us because of our faith in Christ, or God permits it on us because He plans to bless us in some way through it. In this life, Christ and His Church will never look like the winning team. But what awaits us is Christ’s glory in heaven. That is enough to help us endure, yes, even to make us glad that we suffer with Christ.

As we await that glory we may be glad that we suffer with Christ because it also shows our heavenly Father cares.

Any parent who loves his child, disciplines his child. It is not fun or pleasant for the parent to do this. But in the arena of discipline you know a child is loved when he is made to suffer at times. Suffering demonstrates that our heavenly Father cares for us.

If God has kept his promise that we will suffer here on earth as His children –a promise He no doubt hates to keep –then certainly he will make good on the promises He loves to keep –like the promise to save us and give us relief. We are told here in 1 Peter, *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him –all the things that are pulling you in all different directions –because He cares for you.*

If it weren’t for God’s continuous care, we’d be torn apart by the devil in an instant. It says here, *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”* It is only by God’s grace that though we suffer and even when we have only ourselves to blame, He does not permit the devil to devour us completely. To the contrary, God preserves us, blesses us and cares for us in the form of fellow believers who also know what we’re going through and can encourage and comfort us with the promises of God that have helped them. We read from 1 Peter *“Resist [the devil] standing*

firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

If nothing else, our sufferings make it real to us just how weak and desperate we are –just how tenuous life is. Our suffering can make us glad in that it forces us to rely evermore on the God who cares for us. And this is His promise to us who are weak, *“The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power forever and ever.*

In our suffering here on earth we can be glad. For as we suffer with Him, we are assured we will also have glory with Him. And in our sufferings we see evidence of God’s almighty care.