

Endurance Finishing the Race

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today's sermon is titled, "Endurance."

Life is not easy. This is something every one of us knows. We have found that time and time again we are faced with difficulties, troubles, and sorrows. Some days we hardly find the energy to get up. Some days, it's hard to put on a smile and continue on with our secular duties and responsibilities. And, sadly, yet worse, some days it's hard to give to God our all. Yeah, some days even, we painfully feel the absence of the comfort of God and the Lord Jesus Christ and are left listless and/or with a feeling of acedia. But worst of all, in these latter days, some have even turned from the Faith entirely.

Now, if you're having a season of sorrow, of backsliding, or of weak faith, does that mean we are failed followers in some respect? Does it mean that we lack salvific faith? Or that we ourselves have been forsaken and left as a reprobate?

To quote Paul, by no means! As faithful in Christ we should be well aware that our life in this world will be filled with struggle. Our Lord Himself assured us as such in [John 16:33](#), "In the world you will have tribulation." It is unavoidable. It is once again one of those perpetual issues from living in a fallen world with fellow fallen beings. Sin has permeated all aspects of this world. Where once the ground gave up its fruit freely, now thorn and thistle pervert, and man only eats bread through the sweat of his brow. It is a sad state of affairs for mankind until the Parousia when God remakes all things.

But, my brothers and sisters, it is not all doom and gloom. No, absolutely not. For our God is a God of hope. And our hope, which is a living hope, is the Lord Christ Jesus, who was raised from the dead for our justification. With this hope we have from God, He enables us to endure all things, and yes, endure in faith to the end. Let us look at today's readings for a deeper understanding on the relationship between faith, hope, and, ultimately, endurance in the faith, and how to restore our countenance should it fall from one ill too many.

We are not the first Christians to ever have suffered or had bad days. That honor goes to Christ Himself and His disciples. And I use the word honor seriously and not facetiously or ironically. In our Acts reading and our Gospel reading, we have

found the abuses endured by the early church. In our Gospel reading it opens with the Apostles hiding inside “for fear of the Jews/Jewish Leader (depending on translation).” They were afraid that they wouldn’t have stopped at executing Jesus, but rather that they would come for them all. And we read in Acts that Peter and the Apostles preached the Word fervently, but what happened to them only a few chapters later? In Acts chapter 5 they were arraigned before the council because they dared to preach Christ crucified. And, after some seemingly prophetic advice from a Pharisee named Gamaliel, the council decided to err on the side of caution and *only* beat the Apostles and admonish them once again for their preaching before letting them go, avoiding, for now anyways, execution. I don’t think many of us in this room can claim to have been physically beaten for professing their faith, nor to have had to hole up in their dwelling for fear of the repercussions of following Jesus. Not that these things don’t still happen in the world, but lucky we’re not at that stage yet here in the States.

Their suffering is undeniable. And yet, what did they do? They rejoiced that they were “counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.” And despite their lives being on the line, they did not stop preaching in His name. And though our sufferings may not be exactly the same, emulating their response is wise all the same. No matter how dark it seems, or what terrible troubles lay at the gate, continue to, with as much strength as you have, proclaim the Lord. It is important to remind ourselves of what we’re for and who we’re living for. We must remember our faith is grounded in Jesus Christ.

Now, I hear you say that they “suffered *for* Christ’s name, while I’m here sufferings just because.” But I want to direct your attention to our reading from 1 Peter. The text today is a very hopeful and reassuring message despite its assurance of struggles. Peter opens with praise for God and then describes our faith and hope. “According to his great mercy, he [God the Father] 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.” What beautiful words. Christ, our living hope, and our inheritance of immeasurable worth. He is saying that through our faith, which itself was a gift, we have something amazing to look forward to at all times. He follows this up, though, with a bittersweet caveat. “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 is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” In here lies the operative phrase, “if necessary.”

On one hand, we rejoice! in our hope in Christ. And this is practical advice for us all. When you find yourself without cheer, meditate on the promises and gifts that God has purchased at the price of Christ our Savior. Recall to mind the wonders that God has prepared for you on that day of Christ Jesus. But then Peter writes those words, “if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.” The NET renders this as “although you *may have to* suffer.” The NLT goes even further and says, “even though you *must* endure many trials.” What Peter is saying here is that, on Earth, there are times where our suffering is *necessary* for some purpose - for our benefit, or for God’s ultimate ineffable plans, or both. Peter doesn’t leave us wondering why we are tested, though, he then explains it is to test the genuineness of our faith. God does not want fair-weather Christians. He wants the bride of the bridegroom, Christ, to be faithful and loyal in every circumstance. Just like when we say our marriage vows and swear to be with our spouse “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. . .till death us do part” so too does God ask of us this. But unlike Earthly marriage, death does not us part with the Lord, but rather consummates the marriage as finally face to face shall we see Him.

Peter also compares our faith to gold as it “tested by fire” but adds that our faith is more valuable. And in this he gives us a very good metaphor for our Earthly troubles. Gold starts off looking nothing like the pretty, shiny, and expensive jewelry we’re used to. Either it is found in small, and lowly amounts, or it is found mixed with impurities. It takes tremendous energy to collect enough of the native gold or ore to make something of it. And before it can be worked, it has to be smelted and purified. And finally, once you have a gold bar, it still needs further work before becoming a work of art. It has to be heated, hammered, cut, stamped, filed, and worked into shape. Now, I don’t suspect that if the gold could feel and express those feelings, that it would be all too happy with this “supposed” edifying work being done to it. I was fine where I was, it would state. But you’re removing parts of me, it would plead. It hurts, it would cry. Every step towards perfecting the gold would seem almost torturous if you were the gold. And yet, once done, its beauty and brilliance are unequaled. So, it is with the gold as it is with us, but Peter says that our faith is worth even *more* than this gold.

Now 1 Peter isn’t the only portion of Scripture that explains why we may suffer *if necessary*. Paul opines on this several times too. [Romans 5:3-5](#), “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” According to Paul, suffering produces within us

hope which does not put us to shame. When we live through the bad times, it helps us to look towards the eternal rather than the transient. It's one of the reasons why the Bible warns of wealth as a stumbling block. Many a soul has been led astray because they trusted in their wealth and lucre before they trusted in God. Paul also says in [2 Corinthians 4:16-17](#), "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison," What does Paul say this affliction is doing in us? Preparing us for "an eternal weight of glory." He makes it clear that our sufferings are refining us, preparing us, in some tangible way, for our eternity with Jesus. And to round it off, Paul says again in [Romans 8:18](#), "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Paul assures us that whatever it is we suffer here in this world, it cannot even begin to compare to what we have to look forward to in the next.

Hope is what links all these considerations on suffering. We are told our suffering produces hope. We are being prepared for that which we hope in by our sufferings. And our sufferings cannot compare to that which we are being prepared for and which we hope for. And, according to Peter, what are we rejoicing in during these various trials? Our living hope, Jesus Christ.

And so, whenever you're low in spirits, whenever life is rough, whenever you can't seem to see the sun behind the clouds, turn your face to Jesus Christ and hope in Him. Look forward to that which "may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Or, as the saying goes, keep your eyes on the prize. Our walk with Christ, our Christian life, has been describe in the Bible at times as a race. And by staying the course and completing it, we may be given an imperishable wreath. Will you truly have run so far, done such amazing things, been the benefactor of such great gifts, only to then quit at the penultimate minute? Remember that our God, who is the sovereign of all things, has brought you safely thus far; that our God, who has promised not a hair falls from your head without His knowledge, has plans to prosper you; that our God, who so loved the world that He gave His only Son to die for us, works all things for the good of those called according to His purpose. In those moments of great exhaustion, do not tire of doing good, because you are working towards the finish line, step by step.

Though we know the race won't be easy, I will mention one more bit of practical advice. When you are in the midst of a season of suffering or in the middle of a trial, give thanks and praise to Lord however you can. I know that in those days

you may not have a lot of energy to give, but even a simple, “Thank you God,” uttered with a sincere heart will do your spiritual health good. If you need inspiration for what to pray or how to give thanks and praise, look no further than the Psalm, the prayer book of the Bible. Take for example [Psalm 148](#), it is all about praise. It is counted as one of the three “Laudate” Psalms. Named for the Latin word of the same name which is found heavily in them (*laudate* is the present imperative of *laudo* which is to praise, extol, or call upon).

So keep these words in mind whenever affliction takes hold of you and cracks start to form in your bulwark, or when you feel like your legs are going to give out: hope in Christ and look forward to the prize promised to believers; continue to proclaim your faith in Christ with what energy you have; and likewise offer praise to God for what He has done for you, and for His majesty and glory. Keep striving in this fallen world as witnesses to Christ so that you may say with our brother Timothy, “I fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day.”

Let us pray for everyone struggling to fight that good fight and for those who are in a season of trials.