REJOICE AS YOU PARTICIPATE IN CHRIST’S SUFFERINGS

1 Peter 4:1-19

Key Verse: 4:13

“But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

 Jesus is our good shepherd, so we lack nothing. Even he came to lay down his life to save us and to give us life to the full. Though it was short, we could taste abundant life in Jesus during the conference. In John 21, Jesus had called his disciples, saying “Follow me!” Even in his last moment with his disciples, he said to them, “Follow me.” Following Jesus, the good shepherd, we will experience wonderful changes in our lives. Following Jesus is full of joy!

 However, believers cannot avoid suffering and hardship because the world hates Him, the light of life. Then, how would you respond to it? The book “Pilgrim’s Progress” shows how a Christian endured sufferings and overcame hardships during his journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, the Kingdom of God. Though the journey was filled with trials, troubles, distress, and pain, it was through this very process that his faith matured and he grew to be a man of faith. In Christ, suffering and hardship are meaningful and even essential for through them Christians grow to be God’s holy people and enter the kingdom of God. Paul said in Acts 14:22, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”

 In this passage, Peter encouraged the scattered believers who were suffering to seek God’s will in their trials even. In doing so, they would not just endure their suffering, but also rejoice as they participated in the sufferings of Christ, discovering the blessing that comes upon those who suffer as Christians.

**First, arm yourselves with the same attitude as Christ (1-6).**

In 3:18-22, Peter spoke of Jesus’ suffering and death to pay for our sins, and His resurrection to save us and to give us new life. This grace of forgiveness of sins and the new life are given to Believers who are baptised with the water and the Holy Spirit. In verse 1, Peter urges us to arm with the same attitude, the attitude of Jesus, saying what Jesus had done for us again - “Christ suffered in his body for our sins” “Through his death on a cross, Christ solved our sin problem once and for all and gave us new life in him.” Therefore, arm yourselves with the same attitude.

“Arm yourselves” is a military term that means to pick up weapons in preparation for battle. It signifies that we are engaged in spiritual warfare, and that “the attitude” is the weapon we must take up to stand against our enemies. What attitude should we have toward unavoidable suffering in order to live New life?

Firstly, we must learn Jesus’ attitude and be equipped with the same attitude. Even though Jesus is the Holy son of God, he suffered in his body like one of us with humility. He endured suffering in obedience to God’s will. Most of all, he willingly took the suffering - the death on a cross - for our sins - trusting in God’s sovereignty and his love. In the same way, we must cast out our natural attitudes such as complaining, grumbling, or unwillingness. Instead, we must arm ourselves with humility, obedience to God’s will, trust in God’s sovereignty, and a willing heart to endure sufferings for Christ.

Secondly, we must die to sin but live for righteousness. Look at verses 2-3. “As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do - living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.” Peter said, “whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.” It means that Jesus suffered and died on a cross for our sins once for all. So, By faith in him, our old self was crucified with him and bruised with him. As he died on a cross, we also died to sin. Since we died with Christ, we have been set free from sin. We are no longer slaves to sin. Rather, we live to God in Christ Jesus. By offering ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness, we live for the will of God.

 In the past, we had spent enough time in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry (3). We had wasted precious life given from God to indulge our sinful and selfish desires. However, since we came to know Christ Jesus, our purpose of living has changed from gratifying evil human desires to doing the will of God. But the time for sin is over. We died to sin when Jesus died on a cross. Some young people may think, “I need to spend a little more time doing these things. I’m too young to stop.” But Peter says, “No! You spent enough time in the past doing these things.” When we believed in Jesus, God gave us a new life. Our value system has changed. Now, we live a new lifestyle, not following evil desires, but doing the will of God. Instead of indulging in our desires to enjoy the pleasures of the world such as drugs, alcholas, games, porno graphy, sexual pleasures, we share the gospel of Jesus, we serve campus students with bible studies and delicious food, we struggle to accept and obey the word of truth by meditating and writing testimonies faithfully, and by putting his words into practice; we love our neighbors by living life of serving and giving. Instead of seeking partners based on lustful desires, we seek a godly partner who will share a holy pilgrimage with us. Instead of seeking benefits from others, we serve them sacrificially. Instead of following the national trend to become like Sodom and Gomorrah, we pray to raise up a royal priesthood and a holy nation for God’s world salvation purpose.

 How would people respond to our life of faith? They will not support your decision. Look at verse 4. The first reaction of my unbelieving friends and family members was surprise, followed by discrimination against my new life of faith. They were surprised when I stopped drinking and decided not to bow down to idols. As I continued to invite them to Bible study day after day, they began to mock and avoid me. At times, we may feel peer pressure or fear losing friends and being outcasted because of our faith in Jesus.

But we do not have to fear them. Rather we must fear God who will judge the living and the dead. Look at verses 5-6. “but they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are not dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.” Let us arm ourselves with the attitude of Jesus Christ! Fear God, not man and continue to live by faith

**Second, love each other deeply and serve as God’s stewards (7-11).**

 Peter urged us to live for the will of God, not for our evil desires. Then, what is living for the will of God?

 Firstly, it is to love each other deeply. Look at verse 7-8. “The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” Since Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, we are living “the end times.” Here, “the end of all things” refers to Jesus’ Second coming. As we learned from the book of Revelation, Jesus’ second coming will bring all things to an end and there will be a new beginning in the kingdom of God. We do not know how long this end time will last, but we know that Jesus’ second coming draws near day by day.

Waiting for His coming, we should be alert, sober-minded and pray. Otherwise, we easily become complacent, and go astray. Those who are alert could not but pray because prayer is the way to live victorious life of faith at the end times. It is because with our own strength or wisdom, we cannot survive. Through prayer, we can gain strength and wisdom to serve the will of God; Through prayer, we can overcome hardships and temptation. Through prayer, we can wait for His coming as wise and faithful servants.

Look at verse 8 again. “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” One of the signs of the end time is that “the love of most will grow cold.” People become self-centered. They do not have room to care for others, but care only for themselves. They become indifferent. How should we Christians overcome this world and live as God’s people? Peter said, “Above all, love each other deeply.”

Here love is forgiving love. “Love covers over a multitude of sins” does not mean condoning sin, but practicing Jesus’ forgiving love to each other. God forgives our sins by sacrificing his son as the lamb for our sins. This is an amazing love of God for us. When we remember God’s forgiving love through the blood of Jesus, we are able to love our brothers and sisters by forgiving one another. In this way, love covers over a multitude of sins. as We practice Jesus’ forgiving love, we grow in his love and become a blessing to others. Let us love each other deeply!!

 To love is not only to forgive, but to serve others as the Lord serves the church. Look at verses 9-11. The Lord Jesus served us even to the point of giving his life as a ransom for our sins. By serving us, Jesus displayed God’s love for sinners, and also glorified God the Father. Peter said in verse 10. “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” Everyone has received at least one spiritual gift from God by His grace. These gifts are not given to make us proud, or to cause envy or feeling of inferiority. Whatever our gift may be, they are meant to be used to serve others and build up the church. Serving includes helping or encouraging others in many ways for their benefit in the church. This should not be done merely as a human favor, but with a deep awareness of God’s presence for his purpose and glory (11a). We are stewards of God’s grace, not owners because everything we have is given from God by his Grace. As a steward of God’s grace, we have the responsibility to use the gifts to bring praise and glory to Him.

There are many ways we can glorify God with gifts. By teaching the word of God with 1:1 Bible Study; By sharing our testimonies; By praising God with our voices and music instruments; By serving others with delicious food; by helping others with their studies; by giving someone a ride, and also by enjoying fellowship together. We had a wonderful praise and prayer night. Thank God for the service of the Praise worship Team! Thank God for 5L2F Orchestra - they served with wonderful music! Thank God for Messengers, Testimony sharers, Bible Teachers who fed us the word of eternal life. We may serve others as faithful steward of God’s grace.

**Third, rejoice in suffering as we participate in Jesus’ suffering (12-19).**

In this part, Peter challenged the suffering believers not to just endure suffering, but to rejoice in sufferings. We often expect that good things will always happen to us when we live by faith, as King David confessed “Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.” (Ps23:6a) Yet, strangely we experience the opposite. Instead of blessing, suffering seems to follow us.

Look at verse 12. “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” We should not be surprised. Rather, we should expect suffering, be prepared for it, and rise to the challenge when it comes. Peter compares this suffering to a test - a trial by fire that refines our faith. This suffering is the process of refinement that purifies our faith. It is the opportunity to experience God’s love and power and grow to be like Jesus.

On the way to the Celestial City, Christian had to pass Swamp of despair and guilt, Hill Difficulty, Valley of Humiliation, Valley of the Shadow of death, The Dungeon of Doubting Castle, and so on. Christian learned that -1) trials refine his faith, much like gold is purified by fire. Each hardship teaches him to trust more in God. -2)suffering is part of His life of Faith and a way to test and prove the genuineness of faith. He testified that through suffering he was shaped into a pilgrim who longed for the Celestial City. In every suffering and hardship, he found Jesus Christ who was with him, sustained him, and strengthened him. He entered the City through many hardships.

Knowing the meaning of suffering, Peter encouraged us to rejoice as we share in the sufferings of Christ. Let’s read verse 13: “But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

In the past, when we suffered for our sins, such suffering crushed us and left us miserable. We suffered as thieves, criminals, self-righteous and proud sinners, lazy-lonely idolators. The burden of shame and guilt ruled over us. those sufferings were meaningless, and without any value.

But now, when we suffer as Christians; when we suffer for bearing the name of Jesus, we can rejoice because we are participating in the sufferings of Christ. This kind of suffering enables us to share in His glory. As Romans 8:17 says “Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” When the apostles boldly preached the gospel in the temple courts, they were arrested by the religious authorities, flogged and released. Yet, when they left the Sanhedrin, they rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name (Ac 5:41).

**Then, what are the sufferings of Christ that we can participate in?**

Jesus was rejected and insulted as he taught the word of truth. We can participate in this suffering when we share the gospel of Jesus and invite students to the bible study. Therefore, let us rejoice when we are rejected or even insulted for doing so - because we are participating in Jesus’ suffering. Jesus loved his disciples to the end. Especially Peter, whom Jesus embraced, served, and loved despite his failures. We can participate in this suffering when we become a good shepherd for one lost sheep. In serving one lost soul, we may be ignored, misused, despised, or even forgotten. but Let us rejoice for we participate in Jesus’ sufferings.

At the Latin American Bible Conference, I have received much grace through testimonies of Missionaries and their sacrificial love for the lost souls of Latin America. One missionary was kidnapped and threatened. Another was shot twice on the street by gang members. Another had to change his self-support job again and again due to its terrible economic situation. Another was repeatedly fired for refusing to participate in illegal business practices. Still they remained in their mission fields, serving God’s flock with great joy and praise and unwavering love for the sheep. Their love and sacrifices moved many campus students to repent of their sins and even dedicate their lives as servants of God for campus mission.

Let us rejoice when we struggle to gather daily bread and to write a sincere testimony because Jesus himself devoted himself to prayer early in the morning and struggled to hold on to and live by the words of truth. Let us rejoice when we serve others sacrificially, even without recognition or reward of the world. Let us rejoice even when students give fake numbers. Let us rejoice when a sheep broke his promise and stood us up. When we are sure that we are suffering for Christ, we should not be ashamed, but rather praise God that we bear the name of Christ (16). For the Christian, all kinds of painful trials are not meaningless. They are a form of God’s instrument that sanctifies us. (17). But for the ungodly, suffering does not have any meaning. It is simply deserved punishment (18).

Peter concluded in verse 19. “So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”

God is our loving and faithful Creator. He never fails to take care of his people. He works all things together for the good of those who love him. Our God is sovereign God. So when we suffer, we can entrust our souls to God. As we continue to do good, he will turn all our sufferings to glory. Following Jesus, we may welcome suffering, embrace it, and rejoice in it. In this way we can overcome the world (Jn 16:33).