

Serve While Suffering

1 Peter 4:1-11 • 2022-07-24 • 1 Peter Series "From Cross to Crown"



I have to hand it to our student teacher these past few weeks. We asked him to come here and teach music for the summer. But we didn't tell him that he would be teaching with some extra rhythm. One day I walked into the hall to see how one of his lessons was going. I knew he would be up against some special challenges that day. And I don't mean the students. When I entered the hall, he was holding drumsticks and demonstrating how to play a rhythm to one of the students. He played on the snare drum. "Bop, bop, rat, tat tap." As he did this you could hear the student copy him. "Bop, bop, rat, tat tap." But then from overhead there was a sound. "Boom, boom, boom... bang, bang, boom!" It didn't sound at all like a copy. It wasn't another player. And it wasn't played to any beat. But it was loud, and it filled the whole room.

That booming was the noise of the roofers who were removing our old shingles and putting new ones on. Despite all these interruptions the teacher kept at the lessons. At least at the heat of the day the roofers took a break and stopped the noise. But it probably didn't help that in the heat of the day our air conditioning has begun to fail to properly function the last few days. I don't know about you, but when it gets very noisy or too hot it can be hard to keep on serving. The apostle Peter reminds us that people will be speaking against us as Christians, and we will at times face fiery ordeals. We will have crosses to bear while we live out our lives as Christians. How does a Christian continue to serve while suffering under all the noise and heat? We find the answer as we look at the first part of 1 Peter 4. We follow Christ from cross to crown as we serve while suffering.

In the previous chapter Peter summarized how Christ went from cross to crown. Then he tells us: "*Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude.*" As true man Jesus did suffer. We read of times when he was tired, hungry, went weeks without food, was exhausted and tired. He faced everything from being hard pressed and overcrowded to being painfully isolated and abandoned by disciples and friends. He faced the heat. And he faced the noise. He faced insults and mockery. And near the end of his journey his suffering was so great he was face down in the dirt crying out to God the Father asking if it might be possible to take the cup of suffering away. But when he knew it wasn't, he went forward to carry out the will of God the Father. Do you recall Christ's attitude when he suffered in the body? You can't find a single instance of him grumbling or complaining when he suffered. Instead, he fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah as he set his face like flint and went forward to carry out his work. (Isaiah 50:7)

Peter says, "*Arm yourself with the same attitude. (You've died to sin)...don't live anymore for evil human desires but live for the will of God.*" Do you live to do the will of God? That's not easy for us to do. In fact, it is impossible for us to accomplish by our own power and will. Notice that Peter makes it very black and white. He doesn't say, "*live out the rest of your earthly life for good human desires.*" He knows what our natural desires are like. There really is no such thing as a good human desire. Either you will live for evil human desires, or you live to do the will of God. That is all that you will find on the pages of Scripture. There are no in-between desires. That's because the fallen human heart is in direct opposition to the will of God.

Peter lists for us the different types of things that unbelievers choose to do. It is a list of evil human desires. When I look at this list, I see a sad picture of someone living to hurt themselves. The sad part is they might even think they are helping themselves. Peter's list sums up the person who lives with self-destructive behavior and who does it all in a terribly misguided self-interest. In their fallen will they choose to live in all types of evil. The person who loves money more than God might think they are living their best life. But their selfish hearts and evil desires set them against God. They fail to honor God. They remain filled with their own ingratitude and worry. Someone who despises God's Word and sacrament might think they are saving themselves time for other interests. But they cheat themselves out of the gifts God gives us. The one who breaks the command to honor marriage might think it will bring them joy. But it will bring ruin to them and to their family life. The one who thinks they can avoid having to serve others by killing their own child will find it doesn't remove their servitude. It makes them servants of the devil and slaves to sin. All sin is destructive. All the desires of the sinful heart promise to give freedom and life but bring slavery and death.

And Peter tells us what will happen when Christians don't join the rest of the world in their attitudes toward sin. "*They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.*" Recall when Job continued to praise and serve God even while he suffered? Even his own wife turned against him and told him to curse God. Recall how when Christ suffered, those around him mocked him for his life of service. Don't expect the world to love you when you do the will of God. They will hate you for not joining with them in their attitude against the will of God. Go ahead and try sharing your faith on social media. Mention anything about the will of God among your unbelieving peers and you will find they lash out at you.

That's because the world wants to normalize evil human desires. It wants to make the will of God appear wrong. The world makes sinful desires like drunkenness seem normal. It makes it to seem normal to watch sexually explicit

entertainment. It makes it seem normal to kill your own child. On the other hand, it makes it seem odd and wrong to spend regular time with the Word and sacraments. The world hates your devotion to God. It makes it seem wrong to mention God's will. Peter says, *"They heap abuse on you."*

But the noise and heat Christians face right now is nothing compared to what all will face from God. *"He is ready to judge the living and the dead."* One day all of us will stand before the judge of all. He will raise us on the day of judgment, and he will judge everyone for everything done while in the body. The solution for suffering is not to turn aside from the will of God. Such a solution can only end up with the judgment of a holy God and the fires of hell. That's where the evil human desires lead and where the human solution to suffering leads.

But God has dealt with the suffering for us. His will is to carry us from cross to crown. Peter shares God's solution to a world filled with sinners who suffer. *"The gospel was preached."* The people Peter wrote to had spent considerable time doing all the same things as the unbelievers around them. But there was one difference between them and the unbelieving world. They had the gospel preached to them. And they believed the gospel.

They heard the message of Jesus who suffered in the body. They heard of the unblemished man who never had any evil human desire. He had only served and followed the will of God. But he suffered so that he might make payment for our evil desires and evil actions. The holy Son of God died for sin so that we might have the good news that our Savior has covered our sins. The good news was preached. It told them about the Christ who rose again in victory. And as we read last week, he gave the gift of baptism for salvation. Then he ascended into glory. Jesus went from cross to crown to be our Savior from sin and hell. We have escaped the judgment of a holy God by the work of his holy Son.

The good news that was preached in ancient times is still preached today. By that good news you have come to believe that Jesus died and rose again to be your Savior. The world will judge you and all Christians according to the way they appear lowly in this life. Christians suffer, they serve, and they receive abuse from unbelievers. Then they die. But the world will see a whole different side of those who died in Christ. *"The gospel was preached even to those who are now 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."* All will one day see what God sees: someone who is holy by the sacrifice of Christ. They will see a believer who has followed Christ from cross to crown.

That day will come sooner than many might think. *"The end of all things is near."* Our journey from cross to crown will soon be over and the glory of eternity will soon be here. The glory of Christ awaits!

With that truth in mind, we live a life of serving the will of God even while we now suffer. Instead of turning to alcohol and drunkenness when you face suffering, turn to God. *"Be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray."* Do you see how different that response is from those who do not believe the gospel? When suffering comes believers remain alert. They don't try to escape reality or numb their mind. They use whatever time God has given them to pour out their hearts to God in prayer. They have the gospel. They know he hears and answers for good!

"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." Instead of lashing out against those around you when you suffer, love and forgive. The evil human desire is to look out for self when you are suffering. The Christian's desire is to serve the will of God by loving others and forgiving others even who caused them pain. They have the gospel! They follow Christ as they love and forgiven even while suffering.

"Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." The evil human desires know how to offer hospitality. But it shared at a price and not always so cheerfully. But you have the gospel preached to you! You know how God has given us a place in heaven! How could we not offer help and hospitality to one another?

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." We all have a gift from God. We have the gospel preached to us and our God equips us to serve others with that gift. We do it because God has given us the greatest gift.

"If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God." Far from heaping abuse on others, we build each other up. We do this since we have his holy Word. That means teaching and preaching the law. But we also have the gospel preached to us. We build up the repentant sinner with the good news of forgiveness in Christ.

"If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides..." It is not easy to serve. It is especially hard to serve while suffering. But we don't serve by our own will or strength. It is God who works in us to will and to act according to his purposes. He gives us his gospel to strengthen us for every good act of service.

Finally, we serve while suffering for the glory of our Savior. He went from cross to crown. He did this to bring glory to God the Father. And now so do we. We serve even while suffering because Christ has the crown of glory. And he invites us to praise our God forever, *"so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."*