

# Rejoice While Suffering

1 Peter 4:12-16 • 2022-07-31 • 1 Peter Series "From Cross to Crown"



In the classic film "Casablanca" there are many iconic scenes and lines. One emotional scene involves a group of people in an occupied territory. It is a city which was formerly controlled by the French. But it had been taken over by Germans. German troops roamed the streets, and a puppet government was put in place which served Germany. It was a sad time for the French. The scene took place in a parlor. It showed how the French people hit a new low as the Germans began to sing a song of triumph right in front of them. Talk about adding insult to injury! But as the Germans sang their patriotic song, they were drowned out. A voice piped up with the French national anthem. Soon everyone except the Germans were singing. And they were singing proudly about France. They sang despite the fact that by all appearances the Germans had subdued them. The conquered French didn't seem even the least embarrassed by their plight. Their singing echoed an overconfident hope that their side would still win out in the end. What I find most impressive about this scene is that it was released in 1942. That was a time when in reality the French had no idea if they would ever regain their freedom. To this day the timing of it all makes for a very powerful and moving movie scene. It was a scene which no doubt reflected the feelings of many at that time. Hope led to singing even in the face of suffering.

How would you respond if you were made to suffer and face insult because of who you were? The apostle Peter prepares us to face suffering as followers of Christ. We will face ordeals and face insults because we bear the name of Christ. What will you do in response to that suffering and insult? Last week we saw how we are empowered to keep serving even while suffering. Today we continue our series in 1 Peter as we see in the second half of chapter 4, he tells us to do even more than serve. We go from cross to crown; and we rejoice even while suffering.

Christians will face sufferings. So far Peter has mentioned his readers as suffering griefs in all kinds of trials (1:6), being tempted by evil desires (2:11), as submitting to authority even if it hated them (2:13), enduring ignorant talk of foolish people (2:15), bearing up under unjust suffering (2:19), suffering for doing good (2:20, 3:17), being insulted (3:9), suffering in the body (4:1), having abuse heaped on them (4:4), and again facing insults (4:14).

But he says it shouldn't seem surprising or considered strange that they face all this. It's common for all Christians. It shouldn't surprise us when we hear about the horrific ordeals that Christians face today. It shouldn't surprise us to learn about what so many Christians faced from the time Peter wrote this letter and for hundreds of years afterward. Nero ruled Rome while Peter wrote. He had used Christians as a scapegoat for his own problems. He had hundreds of Christians arrested at one point and had them all brutally killed. Some of them were coated with the skins of animals and used as entertainment as they fought against wild beasts. Others were coated with pitch and burned in the night as torches. For centuries afterwards the persecution continued. Christians lost their homes and property. They lost the right to participate in government. And they were forced under threat of arrest and death to convert. All that was just the beginning of centuries of persecution. But Peter wrote to them that all this shouldn't catch them by surprise. *"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."*

Even though Peter wrote to the ancient Christians across what is now modern-day Turkey, his Words apply to every believer. They apply to you. We all follow Christ from cross to crown. He said that those early Christians shouldn't think something strange is happening when they face suffering. All Christians will face suffering for the sake of Christ. Christ himself said, *"Whoever wants to follow me must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me."*

They literally faced fiery ordeals for their faith. How about you? What is the worst you have come up against for your faith? Maybe someone gave you a hard time for gathering for the Lord's Supper when there were health risks involved. Perhaps someone made you feel embarrassed because your teachings are too outdated by today's progressive society. But how much suffering have you really had to face for following Christ? Picture yourself facing some of the fiery ordeals faced by so many other Christians across time and around the world. Would it shock you?

I don't think any of us are free from shock when the suffering comes. We are tempted to do what Peter once did when confronted with suffering. Once when Peter only saw the cross and not the crown, he turned aside from confessing Christ. He saw the sufferings of Christ as he was betrayed and stood on trial. He saw Jesus being questioned and mocked. Peter responded to the threat of suffering by saying, "I don't know the man." He didn't want to suffer too.

But Peter tells us, *"Don't be surprised... rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ."* Rejoice while suffering along with Christ? Why! How?

Peter doesn't leave us hanging for long. *"Rejoice while suffering... so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."* The reason and the power for Christians to rejoice even while suffering is they are putting their hope in Christ. They know by God's grace they will follow where Christ has gone. The suffering of Christ was followed by the

glorious exaltation of Christ. He went from cross to crown. The same Peter who once denied Christ because he only saw the cross, now had seen the victory of Christ.

When you suffer for the sake of Christ, rejoice! Don't do it as you try to muster up the strength in yourself to endure. Do it as you look at Christ who endured the suffering for you and went from cross to crown. Yes, he suffered greatly. The pain he faced in his body was the price he had to endure for us. It is the pain that comes when a sinner stands in the glory of a holy God. We were not conquered by some foreign army. We were not subdued by some oppressive regime that took over. We had forfeited our citizenship in God's kingdom and exchanged it for our place as God's enemies. We were under slavery to the devil. We were destined to face the curse of sin, death. We were set to lose the battle along with the devil and be bound in chains held for judgment. And the Scriptures make it clear that the sufferings an unbeliever faces in this life is only a foretaste of the greater judgment yet to come. Christ will come as judge in all his glory. And he says there will be weeping at the glory of his coming to judge the world.

But because he came to suffer that pain is forever removed from us. He exchanged his glory for the cross. He exchanged his throne of glory in heaven for the lowliest place and greatest fiery ordeal. But he went from there back to life and returned to glory. He sits on his throne crowned in glory everlasting. And he promises us that all the suffering we face now is no longer punishment for sin. It is as Peter says, "a test." And those who remain trusting in their King can rejoice even while suffering. They know where they are going. By the work of Christ and by his grace they will go from cross to crown. When the glory of Christ is revealed, we will be overjoyed!

Imagine what it would be like to have all the suffering you ever face behind you! When a mother goes through the stages of pregnancy it is not easy. She suffers pain until even the worst of the birthing comes. But when she thinks about the life God has blessed her with, she rejoices. And when that life is revealed on the ultrasound or at the time of birth she is overwhelmed with joy. I can tell you eight-times over that a mother's joy overwhelms all the pains when she sees her child. Imagine our joy when we see our eternal home. Imagine our joy when we have our new and glorified bodies that will last forever. Imagine our joy when we see our living Lord and he welcomes us to his eternal celebration. We will be overjoyed when Christ is revealed in glory.

Peter has reminded us constantly throughout this letter to keep our eyes on the victory of Christ. He once suffered but now he lives. Let his journey from cross to crown be your strength and your song.

So, Peter can conclude *"If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed."* No word of anyone can undo what God has done. He has called you his child. He has baptized you. Peter mentions the Triune God, *"The name of Christ, the Spirit of glory and of God."* We have this name resting on us.

*"If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."* What will you do when you are insulted and made to suffer because you are a baptized child of God? If you bear the title "Christian" and consider the Word of God to be your source of truth, you will face insult. The title Christian only comes up three times in Scripture. And if you look carefully at it you will see that it first came up as a term that brought some derision with it. People didn't look up to Christians in the early Church. They considered them foolish. They thought Christians were outsiders and odd. They considered them foolish for worshipping a man who died on the cross. They thought them to be odd for confessing that they received the Holy Spirit in baptism and the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. They still think that the Christians who hold to the teachings of Scripture as true are odd. They will try to make you feel ashamed for believing ancient truths confessed by Christians across all the history of the Church. They will consider some of your practices to be culturally backward. I've even preached sermons where I could see visiting friends or family members openly mocking the things their Christian friends or family do in worship. I have had people mock me for my beliefs and for my confession of faith. You will too. Don't be surprised.

Instead, rejoice that you bear the name Christian. Many churches have practiced what is called "confirmation." It was done in the ancient church as early as the first generation after the apostles. They confessed their Christian faith using the Apostle's Creed. They did what Scripture urges as they confessed Christ with their mouths and made a public confession.

Today we have a youth who is being confirmed. She is dearly loved by her church family. She is dearly loved by her Christian parents. But most of all loved by her God. She bears the name "Christian" and confesses it today. Confirmation is your chance to confess his name and let it be known that you bear his name. Don't ever be ashamed of it. Praise God for it.

Even if it will involve suffering to test you, look to Christ. See where he has gone from cross to crown. Trust his promises that all who believe and are baptized will be saved. Trust his promise that he gives you his own body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Bear his name here and everywhere you go. If you are insulted, remember you are blessed. If you suffer as a Christian, praise God that you bear that name and follow him from cross to crown.