

Series: "Saving Our Soul from Wasting Our Life"

Sermon: "No Surprises When Saving Your Life"

Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19

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- I've never been a fan of surprise parties. I've learned to be vigilant around my birthday so I can spoil every attempt to surprise me. I am a sworn "surprise-party-pooper." I let my guard down once when I turned 35. The day of my birthday, I had a multi-hour Hebrew final exam in seminary. I found Hebrew tough, so I was absolutely all-in on studying for this exam as my birthday approached.
- I finished the exam. I drove home absolutely exhausted mentally and physically. I was longing to just crash on the couch and rest. I walked in the front door to, "*surprise!*" I had forgotten all week about my birthday so Mary had been successful for once. You can only imagine what a *very, very happy* birthday party that was for me.
- The Apostle Peter wants no believer to be disappointed because they have been ***surprised by suffering*** as a believer living the Christian life.
- In verse 12 of **1 Peter** chapter 4, Peter explicitly raises the subject of believers' suffering for at least the 4th time in this short letter. It's in his introduction in 1:6 "***though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials***"
- He speaks of suffering with submission like Christ rather than with fleshly rebellion as he deals with living under different authorities in this world. We are to bear this suffering by being "***conscious of God***"—that is being fully aware of God's presence, purpose and power even in any unjust suffering of his children. That's in 2:19.
- Then at the beginning of chapter 4, Peter tells the readers to suffer with the same attitude as Christ suffered "***because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin***"
- Now, here it is again—***suffering*** –in 4:12. (SARCASTICALLY) One might begin to conclude that maybe the theme running through the

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RGGJR/FBCCS/10-30-22 UNEDITED

**entire** epistle is **suffering**. If one concluded that, I believe one would be quite correct.

- As I have repeated through our study in *1 Peter*, the NT frequently tells believers that they will suffer in this world. It is clear that the cause of this certain suffering of believers is **not** always a lack of faith, or due to sin and weakness.
- One more time I will emphasize that today's popular *Prosperity Theology*—a name it claims its theology based upon the power of positive thinking and speaking—derives more from worldly new age theologies than from Scripture.
- One of the greatest deficits of this false theology that is so attractive to so many is its unbiblical teaching about believers' suffering.
- **We do not control our future, including our avoidance of suffering, with our thoughts, our words or our great faith.** God is in control. We are not in control of God even by speaking special words, having the feeling of great faith or by powerfully hard praying.
- An *offshoot of this theology* that is more acceptable in our sort of churches is the belief that God tells us how to live our best life now through mystical, internal impulses of emotion we can claim as authoritative. So many believers are misled that whatever it is that they want in this life and world **must** be God speaking to them.
- Faith then becomes a feeling of power that can make God do our bidding for a better life rather than a trust in God that *hands over* our life to Him even as that life continues to be filled with suffering.
- *Prosperity* teaching that fills stadium-size churches here, and around the world each Sunday could not be more diametrically opposed to the teaching of God's Word concerning suffering, faith and sanctification.

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RGGJR/FBCCS/10-30-22 UNEDITED

- No wonder Peter and the other NT writers remind us so often of the true reason for, and purpose of, suffering.
- But, I ask myself, why does Peter do that here **again**? Let's read what he says and I'll give you my reason. **READ 1 Peter 4:12-19**
- After calling his readers, and us, to "be prepared" for the return of Jesus Christ and the "**end of all things**" worldly, Peter tells us not to be **surprised**.
- No English translation is perfect but it seems like lately I have been picking fights with the NIV translators quite often in *1 Peter*. It's usually over a matter of nuance. This time if you have a NASB you'll see it translates "**fiery trials**" where the NIV has "**painful trials**." I would submit that "**fiery**" is a stronger nuance than "**painful**" and that Peter raises suffering a fourth time here, because he is thinking of a suffering that might indeed be so painful as to be **fiery**.
- In other words, he raises the matter of suffering again so that they will not be surprised by even greater suffering that might still come.
- There is no way to prove this next possibility to be correct or incorrect but, Peter may be speaking to his readers in Asia Minor with the horrible suffering believers in Rome are facing under *Emperor Nero* on his mind and heart.
- We don't know exact dates, of writings but this epistle could coincide with Nero's accusing Christians of burning Rome and then burning Christians alive as **fiery torches** for his garden parties.
- In any case, I believe Peter is saying don't even be **surprised** when very bad things happen to very good believers in Jesus—even when some **strange** or **unheard** of suffering comes upon them.
- **Verses 13 and 14** once again tell us how we can respond when we view suffering—even **fiery** suffering—through the reality of the lenses of God.

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RGGJR/FBCCS/10-30-22 UNEDITED

- There is nothing about this response that will align with how the world responds or with how today's false teachers tell us to respond.
- We are to "***rejoice that we can participate in the sufferings of Christ.***" Again, brother James said nearly the same: "***Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds..."***
- What is Peter's reason for rejoicing in the "***koivonia***"—the *sharing* in—the *participating* in suffering linked to Christ?
- Because then we can have an "***overjoy***" experience when living through that suffering as Christ did we can see the glory of God revealed. We can see that our life is fulfilling our created purpose.
- We will be making God look good like we should. That is our best life in this world even if the prosperity preachers don't think it is.
- A grandson asked me how the *magic* water pen he was using revealed colors on the *magic* coloring paper he was using. I thought a bit and had to admit I didn't know how. But it reminded me of creating art works as a kid by coloring multiple colors on a page then covering them over completely with the thick wax of a black crayon. The *magic* happened as I scratched off the black to draw a picture by revealing the rainbow of colors underneath.
- I picture suffering as scratching to reveal what is beneath the surface appearance of our lives. When faith in God is underneath it all, suffering scratches off the surface covering to reveal the glorious colors of God's glory.
- It's like that picture I used to show you so often of the cracked clay jug in which the glory of God glowing inside could only be seen shining through the brokenness of the cracks in the pottery
- Peter repeats Jesus' teaching that you are actually ***blessed*** when you are cursed by the world because they connect you with the name of Jesus. "***Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you***

Series: "Saving Our Soul from Wasting Our Life"

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RGGJR/FBCCS/10-30-22 UNEDITED

***and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven."***

- I'm sorry if you hoped for the *payoff* for suffering to be paid today in the world's terms of a payoff. It will not be paid that way even if best selling Christian books say it will. However, there is an absolutely certain *eternal reward coming*. Jesus himself promised us that.
- Again, why such a glorious reward? ***Because God's Spirit displays God's glory for all to see when you and I respond to undeserved suffering with humility by entrusting ourselves to God instead of rebelling through our flesh with the same worldly weapons as the world uses.***
- Peter wants to be clear again that he does not have in mind suffering as a consequence of us doing evil things. ***A sinful cause of suffering will not reveal God's glory.*** The Living Stone living by evil will not help the Living Temple shine the Glory of the Living God.
- Peter gives us a few *examples of the evils* he has in mind. They could even be the fleshly reactions to undeserved suffering at the hands of others. First, if they hurt you, don't respond by feeling justified to hurt them, even to kill them. If they take away your stuff don't respond by feeling justified to steal it back.
- At least these first two "*potential evils*" (murder and theft) are clear. How to apply them in every concrete case in a broken world is not as clear for me.
- Some of us go to church on Sunday because we want and expect to get answers. Sometimes we do get answers. However, sometimes, uncomfortably, *we get questions*. Here is a question from me for you ***and*** for me this morning from what Peter writes. ***"Just, how dirty should we get our hands and our feet in dealing with evil in a broken sinful world?"***

Series: "Saving Our Soul from Wasting Our Life"

Sermon: "No Surprises When Saving Your Life"

Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19

RGGJR/FBCCS/10-30-22 UNEDITED

- To put that same question, as it so often is put, "*Should I kill a Hitler?*" Or, to make it more contemporary, "*Should I use violence to stop the murder of babies by abortions?*" Most Christians surveyed answer "yes" to the first question and "no" to the second. There is not much deep thought given to how the justification for the first could also easily justify the second.
- ***I am not saying it does.*** I'm saying we are now confronted with a statement by Peter in God's Word that should most probably make us think about our reasons for things we hold true such as "***just war***" and even the so-called "***right to self-defense.***"
- I am probably as conservative in my views as the more conservative folks in our body but, when I am confronted with such matters in God's Word, I cannot ignore them. ***I must think about them.***
- Now can we see better why it is that Peter called for us to be "***clear-minded***" and "***self-controlled***" in our thinking so we can pray as we live in this world that contains such evil? Can you see why he says "***the end is near***" to make sure we are ***prepared*** to live under such sometimes confusing circumstances?
- Paul did the same when he called on these same believers to: ***Wake up O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!***"
- It would be nice to have all the answers so we don't have to think. Thinking about how to live in a world where everything you touch and everywhere you step gets your hands and feet dirty is not easy or enjoyable.
- It would be nice and easier to know that one cable news station speaks God's truth perfectly and all the others never do. It would be easy to never to need to change the channel or think. However, the reality is that both cable news channels will get your hands and feet dirty.

Series: "Saving Our Soul from Wasting Our Life"

Sermon: "No Surprises When Saving Your Life"

Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19

RGGJR/FBCCS/10-30-22 UNEDITED

- Now can we also see better, why it is that Peter has called on us not to act impulsively out of the flesh with an immediate response of **rebellion** against authorities that cause unjust suffering?
- Now can we see better, why it is that I am always harping against us living life making choices based on our own internal emotions or feelings and then calling them God's will? It is just not that easy!
- These are tough questions we can choose to avoid comfortably or chose to answer with quick, easy, flesh-driven answers.
- These are tough questions that require a believer, and especially those believers who lead less mature believers as elders and teachers and authors and speakers, to be saturated with the revealed Word of God so that we will make God look good rather than make our world what we want it to be—*comfortable and easy*.
- At least we can translate these first two evils (murder and theft). How about the third? The NIV translation I read said "**meddler**." That's as good as other translations. The word only occurs here in the NT so a technical word study becomes difficult. The limited uses in the non-biblical texts we have uncovered suggest the word can be defined by its parts. Not all words can or should be.  
I'll tell you the word in Greek not so I can impress you with my wealth of knowledge of NT Greek, but so you can hear its complicated makeup.
- The word is: "**allo—trei—piskopos**" The dictionary says it is "*a word whose meaning has not yet been determined with certainty*." It seems to be someone who gets "**bossy**" in the affairs of another even to the point of leading in **rebellion**. You can hear the "**episkopos**" part of the word which, by itself, is the word for a "**bishop**" leader in the church.

Series: "Saving Our Soul from Wasting Our Life"

Sermon: "No Surprises When Saving Your Life"

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RGGJR/FBCCS/10-30-22 UNEDITED

- What would Peter have in mind here by using a word that seems to denote "*getting all up in someone else's business*" and trying to be their *boss* about it all?
- The question of specific application is again, a *difficult* one. If ***this world is not our home***, and it is not, how much of this world's "business" are we to be involved in and even be trying to direct?
- So, for example, if I suffer unjustly by being life-time banned from Twitter for tweeting conservative Republican views, does that suffering scratch a place on me that reveals the glory of God?
- Should I praise God publicly that the savior of Twitter, Elon Musk, is now controlling Twitter and *my* views can now be seen again? Or, does entering politics on Twitter fall into the category of "***meddling***" for Peter? These are not easy, quick, comfortable questions.
- Again, Peter tells us if we suffer for our connection with Christ—if someone called his readers the slur of the day—“***Christian!***”—don't be ashamed to be slurred like that. Instead, be thankful that God entrusted you with the opportunity to bear that identity openly in the world. Praise God the world recognized Jesus in you even when they think that makes you an idiot!
- Does Peter even get how difficult *a can of worms* he has opened for us with the questions he has raised? **Yes**, he does understand this difficulty of living in a dirty world and keeping clean hands and feet as we engage that world. That's why he wrote ***verses 17 and 18***. Look at them again please.

• ***READ 1 Peter 4:17-18***

- It is time for a "***judicial verdict***" a "***judgment***" based on God's reality and God's truth. Pronouncing that true verdict begins with the examination and pronouncement over the true nature of the life being lived by those belonging to the family of God. ***Believers***.

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Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19

RGGJR/FBCCS/10-30-22 UNEDITED

- God speaks truth to his people! He judges them according to truth and doesn't hide their negatives to make them feel better about any compromised living in the world.
- So the truth—the judgment is pronounced first on our living. What then can happen when true judgement is pronounced on those who have even rejected the truth of Jesus the Savior in the Gospel? What is the only true judgement of their living?
- Peter answers his own question with a citation from the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament. If living in this world in a way that is not wasted—if having your life "**delivered**" or "**saved**" from uselessness for your created purpose is a difficult thing for "righteous" people, imagine what outcome that judgment will have on the ungodly and unbelieving!
- Peter is not directly addressing eternal destiny here. He is addressing the **saving of our lives** as humans who were made to image God from wasting that life opportunity.
- Peter acknowledges this "salvation" of life is a difficult process. The questions of how to keep our hands and feet clean when all the world is filled with the "**SKUBALA**" of sin are not easy questions.
- Thankfully, the Lord Jesus washes the feet of those who have already had a bath but have stepped into a mess in this world. He washes our dirty feet if we will acknowledge his true judgement of our lives and let him do his continuing work of sanctifying us.
- The one who cannot appeal (the unbeliever) or the one who can and does not appeal (the believer choosing to sin)—those who do not appeal to this ongoing cleansing work of Jesus can only waste their lives they have been given to glorify God.
- Peter's letter is all about **saving that life—that soul**—for its created purpose even when the questions are difficult, the suffering is real

Series: "Saving Our Soul from Wasting Our Life"

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RGGJR/FBCCS/10-30-22 UNEDITED

and God does not give us an easy answer or an easy escape to the comfort and control for which our flesh longs.

- Peter sums it up 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.**"
- When the confusion and the pain come, don't assume they are always punishment from God. If they come because you are living for God's will—God's glory rather than sin, they are a blessing.
- Our autonomous flesh's first response will always be to look for easy answers that produce illusions of control and ways of escaping suffering even if those ways are the dirty ways of the world.
- Peter teaches that our response should be a commitment—maybe a re-commitment to entrusting ourselves to the faithful Creator's control. Rather than reacting with rebellion, sinful words and sinful acts, we should continue to do what is the **good**.
- Peter has given us the attitude and actions of Jesus while suffering unjustly as the model of that "**good**." We can go back and look at that at the end of chapter 2 if we need to cement that "**good**" in our thinking and in our values.
- He has given us other examples and I personally identify with and need to practice the model of the "*holy women of old*" when they suffered unjustly under human authority. I must nix the external bravado of a loud, absolutely-certain-I-am-right, angry power-projecting response when I am injured. I must exchange it for "**the unfading beauty of a quiet spirit**" in my inner self.
- To respond to suffering of all kinds in that way, I must do what these *holy women* did. They handed themselves over to the LORD. They committed themselves to their faithful Creator and his plan and control of their lives in all circumstances.

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RGGJR/FBCCS/10-30-22 UNEDITED

- Instead of an autonomous flesh control, accepting that true judgement of God on his own people like me will make me see a fleshly response produces nothing good. Rather, when suffering for Christ, I must focus on, as Peter said earlier, "***setting apart Jesus Christ as Lord***" over all of my life even over its suffering and my response to it.
- If I will not be prepared for the accounting at the return of Jesus—prepared by knowing the truth so that I can think clearly—if I will not do this—I will waste my life. "*I will lose my soul,*" in Peter's words.
- In our relatively comfortable lives over which we can often maintain the illusion of autonomous control, there is likely no harder truth than the truth Peter taught here. He got it from Jesus himself in a way he never forgot. Let me read that to you from ***Mark's Gospel chapter 8*** as I close...

***31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.***

***33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."***

***34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life (that is save his "psuche"—that is "save his soul") will lose it, but whoever loses his life (that is "his soul") for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul (What good is it to gain the whole world but waste your life created to glorify for God)? A difficult but very good question to ask ourselves!***