

Wilderness Wandering (Part 4)

Our Journey Through Suffering With Christ

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We spent the previous sermon in this series delving further into what we have been called to prepare for in *our* pilgrimage. Our pilgrimage began with our calling, and it will end hopefully for every one of us in the Kingdom of God. What we have been called to is indeed truly awesome. Knowing and believing this provides the proper direction to our lives, and therefore the right use of our time. Our life is time.

This same vision is also very helpful because it makes us know, and *know* that we know, that we do not in any way deserve this awesome opportunity that has been given to us. It is good to help us this way because it is humbling, and God gives more grace to the humble.

In that sermon I continued expounding on I Peter 2:1-12, showing that what we have been called to is to be prepared to fit in perfect unity into a corporate entity—a community—variously described as a building, a priesthood, a generation, a nation, and a people. Our responsibility is to, by faith, humbly submit to God's creative power to conform us into the image of His Son. We spent the bulk of that time on "chosen generation," "royal priesthood," "a holy nation," and "a special or peculiar people."

Our pilgrimage, when these things are all put together, seems to be a daunting task indeed. We are aptly described as "the weak of the world." I want you to turn to that familiar scripture in I Corinthians 1. This is the way God describes you and me.

I Corinthians 1:26-30 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. [These are the kind of people we generally consider to be a success in life.] But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, [Why has He done this?] that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

This, brethren, is the literal reality of what we are. God has chosen you and me, and we are included within this group described there in I Corinthians 1:26-30. There may be some of us who seem to have a great deal more on the ball than most who are part of this group, and that is good. I am glad they are there, but they are few indeed, according to God's own words.

Many have run this course before us, and the Bible is witness to you and me of their wins and losses. God never abandoned them. God did not abandon Peter, nor any of the other apostles despite their weaknesses, and because of our weaknesses maybe we would qualify to be in that original group that He called. The important thing I want to get across to you here is *God did not abandon them*. I want you to get to see some small amount of assurance from that, so despite their weaknesses, God was with them. Instead, if by faith they persevered, He created them into what He wanted.

Moses is a clear example. The early chapters of Exodus show that Moses was insecure and gave strong evidence of a hot temper. He struggled with feelings of inferiority and worthlessness. But Moses' real problem was that he did not know God well enough yet, and that is our problem too. But he did not give up, and neither must we.

Now our problem is much like Moses' and the solution is the same. Like Moses, we too must use our faith in God to become much more intimate with Him in our relationship with Him. We must persevere. Faith and perseverance is the key to success, because God gives His salvation to those who know Him, and it takes a while for us to come to really know God.

We are chosen individually and personally because God loves us, and He will keep His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I am practically quoting Deuteronomy 7:6.

We are *royal*, as it says in I Peter 2. Even though we are the weak of the world, we are royal by God's choosing us. We have been elevated to the highest status under Christ within the God family. We are a *holy* nation because God has consecrated and thus separated us for the purpose of working with Him and Jesus Christ in behalf of the people that we serve. We are *special*, or peculiar, and unlike others, we indeed do love God and love His family, and this love is the sign Jesus said by which we are known. What I described, in one sense, is what we are, and in a second sense, is what we are becoming.

We are not really thoroughly royal yet, holy yet, or special. We are, to some degree, those three things, but we are growing toward being the way God wants us to be. We show all of this in our conduct, and this is what love is. God's love is spread abroad in our hearts by His Spirit. It is this that makes us peculiar in this world of competitive and proud disunity. All of these characteristics reach their culmination in that scripture in Revelation 14, and I want us to turn to that again, because this is what we are shooting for, if you can put it that way, or being shaped to participate within.

Revelation 14:1-5 Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God

I want you to note especially at this time is that the 144,000 have the Lamb's Father's name on their forehead. That is their identification. It is an indication of ownership. It is also an indication of the way they think. They think just like the rest of the Family. They think like the Father. They think like the Son. Their elevated thinking may not be as high as the Father's or the Son's, but they have the same kind of thought patterns that have been ingrained in their minds through the process we see Peter describing there in I Peter 2:1-12. The characteristics given in I Peter 2 are the characteristics needed for what the 144,000 are going to be using in the Kingdom of God, and so in that vision there, they are presented as reality's form because they all think like the Father and the Son now.

We are going to go back again to I Peter 2 as we continue on here.

I Peter 2:11-12 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

We are called there "sojourners and pilgrims." In our day, during our lifetime, "sojourners" is better translated, better understood by the word "alien." An alien is a person living in a country foreign to him, but at the same time this person is one who keeps his citizenship from the country of his physical birth. We will blend this together in just a moment.

We are going to go to Philippians 3:20 to pick up a little bit of additional information.

Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

A Christian's citizenship is in heaven, but he lives on earth. We are a resident alien. Now aliens do not have rights of a citizen where they are living. You know that people who are aliens in the United States of America have no right to vote. Is that not correct? That is correct. So an alien may have residence in one country, but as an alien he has no right to what a normal citizen of that nation would have.

We do not have the rights of a citizen where we presently live, because our citizenship is really in heaven, so we have to count ourselves, to some degree, as being *apart from* the United States of America even though we were born here. Now why? Why do we not want this? Because the United States is a nation of this world. The Kingdom of God is *not* of this world. We want our citizenship to be in the Kingdom of God, not in the United States of America so as much as there might be within us a natural patriotism for the United States because it is the land of our birth, we have to draw a line somewhere. We are going to be the citizen of either one or the other, which we will go on to show here.

A pilgrim is understood to be a person who is on the move. On one hand, an alien is not necessarily being physically on the move. He might appear to have a permanent residence within the nation he is in, but a pilgrim is on the move. So we are an alien, and we are a pilgrim, and they have two discernable meanings, application. So a pilgrim is understood to be a person on the move, but he is on the move to a special place—a holy place. You know that the Muslims make a pilgrimage to one of their three holy places, so they are on the move to go to those places.

The term "pilgrim" emphasizes that though the residence is here and now, our residency is not permanent. We have been here a long time, but our residency is not permanent. So the reality is, we are just passing through. That is why Peter had to give both those terms. "Sojourner" and "pilgrim" are not exactly the same. A sojourner can be pretty well planted and not on the move, but a pilgrim is on the move. We are both at the same time. We are an alien, and we are a pilgrim.

Let us go on here. Peter appeals to us to abstain from fleshly lusts *because* we are strangers and pilgrims. You will see that directive here right after both of those terms.

This has two aspects to it that are closely related, and the first is because we are part of a holy nation. This is partly why he says this. That is because we are part of the holy nation. If we follow through on satisfying our lusts, we will no longer *be* part of the holy nation. This is why he tells us, "Don't satisfy your lusts." If we follow through in satisfying our lusts we will lose our status as an alien and as a pilgrim, and I will tell you why.

The second reason he says this is that following through on our lusts is what causes us to put down our roots in the world. It is the means by which we become worldly. The world is filled with people following their fleshly desires. We are going to turn to a scripture that will make this very clear. Jesus said this to the Jews.

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires [or the lusts] of your father you want to do. [So what did they do? They did them.] He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth.

A person who stands in the truth cannot follow through on his lusts, because what happens when he does that is he begins to make the world his homeland.

Let me straighten this out a little bit. Following through on our lusts is the means by which we become worldly. That is what Jesus said there in John 8:44. If we follow through on these things, then we are doing what Satan wants us to do, and the world, brethren, is filled with people following their fleshly desires. It is by this process that the world was created, if you understand what I mean. I am not talking about the physical creation. This is what Adam did. This is what Eve did. This is what Cain did. They introduced worldliness by following through on the desires that Satan put into their mind.

If we pick up on the principle here in John 8:44, Jesus' spiritual brothers will control themselves to do what pleases the Father, as Jesus Himself did. He said, "I always do what the Father wants Me to do." And so He did not follow through on His lusts. This is why Peter is telling us in I Peter 2:11-12 to not follow through on these worldly desires, because it causes us to put down roots in this world and makes us begin to feel a necessity to defend it. It becomes ours. Not good.

Let us go to Proverbs to see what Solomon had to say about this.

Proverbs 11:6 The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the unfaithful will be caught by their lust.

Now how will the righteousness of the upright deliver them? Well, they will make the right choice. It is as simple as that. But the unfaithful—those who are not faithful in keeping God's commandments—will be taken by their own lusts, and they will follow through with their lusts.

Here is what David said:

Psalms 7:14-16 Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity; yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made. His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown.

I will tell you what you have just read. You have just read an expanded version of "whatever you sow you reap."

I Peter 2:9-12 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

These verses can very easily give a summary to this paragraph, and indeed I believe that they do. To me, what it is saying is that whether we are described as a body, generation, stone, building, priesthood, or nation, each term indicates a place or a position within a functioning group, and each person fits into all of these because Peter is simply using different metaphors, different descriptors, to define all of them so we will see what he is getting at.

What is the important point for you and me? Unity with all of those is necessary. Now in order to fulfill this, it requires preparation because we are not fully prepared to do what is being asked of us now so that we can function within these groups. As we continue to see that verses 9 through 12 are a summary of what the whole paragraph is about, Peter stresses a few points of character. He mentions our election and privilege through God's mercy in terms of access to God and becoming a special people. And then he makes clear that our responsibility is to proclaim God's praises, abstain from carnal lusts, making sure that our conduct before the unconverted glorifies God. That is the sum of that paragraph that begins in verse 1 and goes to the end of verse 12.

The things Peter named here we are to do by faith. Let us notice some of the reality that those in the past experienced in order to help keep us on track. In other words, what do we need to accomplish what Peter assigns us as responsibilities here in I Peter 2?

Let us go to Hebrews 11. Where else can we talk about faith? We will go right to the father of the faithful.

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, . . .

We might limit this to Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, but I think in the larger sense Paul is including everybody that is named in this chapter. "These all died in faith." Now look at the next phrase.

Hebrews 11:13-14 . . . not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them [made them a part of their life, a part of their thinking] and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

See, they had citizenship, but it was in heaven, but it was not accomplished yet. *We* have received citizenship in heaven, but even though we have this citizenship, we are not there yet. It is there in His promise, and God's promises are good, but are we going to tell Him we *believe* what He said?

Hebrews 11:15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out [We have been called out of our country—the United States of America.], they would have had opportunity to return.

We have that same opportunity. We can go back to the world of our birth. The choice is ours. Are we going to go forward like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Abel, and Noah, and Enoch, and Moses, and on and on?

The point to here is this: Neither Abraham, Isaac, nor Jacob ever received the inheritance promise. Do we have to receive the promise in order to really submit to God, or can we be like they, who operated their lives believing, and were faithful without ever having to receive the promise from God before giving themselves to God? There is the example. The important part is because they really did believe God, they conducted their lives as though that promise were a reality that they were not going to give up, and so they submitted themselves to God.

What do we need that they had, and they apparently had it in spades? *They had a vision of the world tomorrow.* I do not know how else I can say it. They had in their mind a picture, a vision that God had given to them to which they dedicated their lives.

Now Moses at least got to look at the Promised Land, but he never got to enter it. So regardless of when these people lived and how long they lived, the entire time that they lived after God gave them their calling, these people's faith held firm. That is the lesson for you and me. They had a vision in their mind of the Kingdom of God. How sharp and clear that vision was I do not know, but God has given you and me enough so that we are able to channel our life and all of its energies in the same direction as those people did. *God will never abandon us*, and if we submit ourselves to Him, then He is going to keep on supplying us with what we need to enable us to make those choices in our life.

In Hebrews 11, Paul clearly shows that the Kingdom of God, especially through Abraham's example, is the overall goal in life, and it must be *our* overall goal in life. So this promise of the Kingdom of God is what becomes a guiding beacon for our life.

Now, our movement, our pilgrimage, is not in the form of physically moving from one place to another. Our progress is in the form of a change of heart, and therefore of character and attitude. This requires our pilgrimage from one way of life to another, from one citizenship to another, and this process is going to produce suffering. The movement is accomplished through an educational process requiring formal instruction and practical experience while going through the processes of life.

A very important spiritual reality is that this world is no longer our home. If we put down roots through our lusts and following through with those things, it will begin to become our world once again. We just cannot do that. So one of our major responsibilities, then, is to hold, clarify, and magnify the vision of the Kingdom of God as we go through life's experiences. So please, brethren, do not become impatient and quit because you perceive that your needs seemingly are not being met. This comes down to a simple question. What is more important to us—what we perceive as our immediate need, or God's preparation of us for the Kingdom of God?

Our calling is to be kings and priests, and that pretty much sets the parameters of our training. That is why I have gone through I Peter 2. It sets the parameters for our training pretty clearly. God is doing

pretty much the same thing with us as He did with ancient Israel, only on a much higher level, and thus our training is going to be more intensive because of the higher calling, and having to live and move by faith, which is something that we have had very little experience with before our calling.

Let us go from here to II Corinthian 5:5-10. Remember, we already have one thing in place here. We must have a vision of some sharpness, of some clarity of the Kingdom of God in order to serve as a beacon upon which to focus our time and energy. The difficult thing is this beacon, this vision, is going to be in our mind. It is not something that we can literally see.

Just remember this. God made the Israelites march through the wilderness for forty years without ever seeing the Promised Land. He is not asking something of you and me that He did not put these unconverted people through, so He is not asking us to do something that is impossible for us to accomplish. Now this we know: They did not do well, and God expects us to do better because He has given us a spiritual gift to enable us to sharpen the vision without literally having to see the Promised Land; not only to sharpen the vision, but to enable us to do it.

Notice how this begins:

II Corinthians 5:5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God.

Do you see this? God has prepared us. He is enabling us to do what He requires of us, and that is to live by faith to accomplish the things that are listed, one right after the other, in I Peter 2:1-12. The most important thing there is for us to recognize that we are being made a part of a living community, and that community is the church, and that community is the family of God, and that community is the Kingdom of God described in about five or six different ways. He described it using that terminology so that we would get the point. If we did not get one, we will get the other. We are being blended into a community—a living community.

II Corinthians 5:5-10 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body [in the flesh] we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

To live by faith is, at times, very difficult to do. This is because we spent our entire life walking by sight, but we may have to change virtually every aspect of our life, most especially our attitudes toward God, other people, and ourselves, to conform to the way of a God we cannot see, but whose word we must trust.

I want you to notice that God has prepared us for this very purpose and has given us His Spirit as a pledge that He will continue with us. So we are prepared for living by faith in order that we will be prepared for living and serving in His family Kingdom as kings and priests, and thus we can be very confident of the future. This is what Paul is saying here.

The word "walk" suggests movement. It may appear to be the single most frequent movement virtually everyone on earth performs in going through the daily activities in life. Our movement is

not one of activities, but one that involves spiritual, moral, and ethical decision-making. I said "involves." Maybe I can make it stronger: **Requires**. It is demanded of us that we make moral and ethical decisions.

The word "sight" in this context represents living and making decisions based on things discernable to the spirit in man. Now "faith" in this context represents trust while living and making decisions based upon the insights given by God's Spirit into the reality of the eternal truth of God's Word. This is a special gift, brethren. People with brilliant minds can read the Bible, and they may as well be blind. It just does not register the same way that it does on a converted person's mind. That is a gift of God so that we can do what? So that we can live by faith and submit to what He says to do, and because we submit, He then empowers us to obey Him, and thus character—the mind of God—begins to be formed.

To the Christian, Christ is present in his life. It is not to his sight, but to his faith, and therefore the Christian disciplines himself to live his life as though God is right beside him. But the reality is, He is much closer than that, and we are going to see this all the way back in the beautiful chapter 30 of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 "For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

What did I say a little bit earlier at the beginning? The people of faith have to be moved on words. Even though we cannot see Him, *we have to believe what He says*.

Do you understand that for what God is doing in creating Himself and His Son in us that it is better that it be in us than actually having Christ walking beside us? In John 14, it says, "The Father and I will come to you." "We will be *in* you." "We will make our abode in you." That is pretty awesome. We cannot get closer than that—right there in our mind, in our mouth, if we believe in living by faith.

As we begin to draw this series to a close, I want you to take a close look at something that is an overall reality regardless of where we are on this path. We are going to add another factor here that is part of our life of living by faith. What we are going to focus on here is a bit more sharply on the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Why would we want to focus on the sufferings of Jesus Christ? Why should we do this? This is very important to our understanding because of who He was and why He did the things that He did, and what He endured and overcame. If we are reading it, thinking on it, meditating on it, it will build in us an appreciation for Him and what He did. This in turn will add incentive to our effort to please Him.

The process, the procedure here, is very simple. It is basically this: If our Leader did this, if our Savior did this, why should not we have to do it? Look what He has now as a result of what He did, and what He suffered in doing what He did. Should we consider our lives more important that we should not have to suffer?—maybe not to the intensity that He did, maybe not to the measure that He did, but to follow Him in what He did and what it produced in Him?

People who are thinking about what is going on in their life are going to be led in appreciation of what Christ did, especially when it is compared to what He did and who He was, and God made Him do it despite the fact that He never ever sinned, and still He suffered to a degree that we will never have to suffer as He did.

Where do you think we are going to go to pick this up? We are going to go right back to I Peter, because we are going to see, in one sense, that Peter formed that entire pickle around the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

I Peter 1:10-11 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Pick up on that, brethren, what Peter just said. Do you want to be glorified? Do you want to be with Christ? Do you want to be with the Father? Glory follows suffering. It is within our nature to want to avoid suffering, and that is not unusual. Christ Himself asked, "Father, do I have to go through this?" What did the Father say? "Yes." Are we better than Christ? If He said that to His own Son who never sinned, and we sin so frequently, should we not suffer?

I Peter 2:19-23 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: [Suffering wrongfully is part of the step of following Christ.] "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth" who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

Christ just took it even though it was not deserved in any way.

I Peter 3:17-18 For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God [He suffered so that we can be brought to God], being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.

Are you beginning to see what I am saying here? This whole epistle is built around the sufferings of Christ, and then expounded before the word "suffering" appears, and after the word "suffering" appears.

I Peter 4:1-2 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

Glory follows suffering.

I Peter 4:15-16 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

Let us step back just a little bit and look back again on the wilderness analogy given in Exodus through Deuteronomy. This reveals that what Israel went through was no Sunday walk in the park. It was especially psychologically difficult, extremely tedious, and boring.

Can you imagine spending forty years in a wilderness? That is a place with no roads. Everywhere they looked was sand and rock, scrubby trees, stone mountains. They must have thought they were going around in big circles. They kept seeing the same things. You get bored. We get bored very quickly. I believe, in one sense, it drove them to distraction. No wonder they complained and murmured so much. "Ah, not again! Haven't we been there before?" It was difficult. It was tedious.

Brethren, we moderns get bored so quickly. I think young people today get bored a lot more quickly than kids did when I was a kid. By comparison, we had nothing. We barely had radios. We became good at creating our own games. Kids do not do the same thing anymore, and they get bored so quickly it is incredible, and if they do not have a game they can play on a computer, they go bonkers.

You can see it on the road. People cannot drive an automobile without also talking on the cell phone, whether they are conducting business or just gabbing. They are bored, brethren, while they are in the car in traffic. I know I have some of those same things in me. I can hardly sit still anymore. If I sit down, I have got to do something. Read or do something. It probably drives Evelyn halfway up the wall. "Hey, pay attention to me!"

Those people in the wilderness endured a great deal of uncertainty they expressed in their fears, in their many murmurings. Never forget, brethren, that they endured these things with having little or no spiritual faith. Well, are we up to having to live any less than what God required of them when the stakes are so much higher and greater to what God is drawing us toward?

Consider often that God did not put off withholding suffering from our Savior. He shared suffering with us despite His high status, and He did this to be perfected to carry out His job as our High Priest and Savior.

In I Peter 1, Christ's suffering is primarily focused on the crucifixion. However, it can also include such things as rejection by His hometown. If you ever read there in Luke 4, He preached that sermon just as He was beginning His ministry. That sermon was preached in the synagogue He normally went to in His hometown, and the first thing you know, they wanted to throw Him over the cliff. Rejection in His own hometown. "A prophet is not without honor except where He is from." How about betrayal by His friends? Right up to the day He died, His friends were betraying Him. His

closest friends. He was forsaken by His flock. And then He had to go through scourging and dealings with cynical people giving Him tedious arguments dealing with things that were of no spiritual value.

In I Peter 2 and 3 the crucifixion is still in the picture, but some emphasis begins to shift to *our* conduct in duress, and toward Christ's conduct under duress as being our example. Bearing undeserved suffering is good for God's creative purposes in His children.

In I Peter 4, Christ's crucifixion has shifted almost out of sight into the background, and *our* conduct under duress is almost completely Peter's focus. So, in I Peter 1, sufferings is plural, indicating magnitude and variety. It means *all* sufferings that He went through to prepare Him for His present responsibility as our High Priest.

Now is it God's will that we suffer? Let us look at a verse we just read a few minutes ago.

I Peter 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

The answer, brethren, is a resounding "yes!" God wants us to suffer, and Christ is the example.

We are going to go back to another very familiar passage, and that is in the book of Deuteronomy, because God wants us to suffer.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

God caused the Israelites to suffer when He was in a perfect position to give them a "life of Riley," and Peter uses Christ as an example, that despite the fact He never sinned, He nonetheless suffered. So let us do what Peter says there in I Peter 4. He said "Arm yourselves with the same mind." In other words, we are going to suffer even though we do well, and when we suffer when doing well, God is not punishing. He is testing, and He is bringing it on us in order to get more out of the experience than we would otherwise get. So we are to understand then that suffering comes with the territory of being prepared for the Kingdom of God, and it becomes clear that the path to glory lies through suffering—through suffering for righteousness' sake

I am going to help you with that definition. Suffering of and by itself has no intrinsic good value, but suffering that results from godliness indeed *does* have intrinsic good value. Sometimes, brethren, God has to bring that upon us. That is one of the lessons of the wilderness wanderings of the children of Israel.

And so, as they followed that path, and they were unconverted, we are going to follow that path, and especially so now that we can see that His Son suffered even though He never sinned.

Therefore, suffering is not necessarily the result of sin. It is because we have been good. In a way, we are in a little bit of a trap there, are we not? If we are good, we suffer. If we are bad, we suffer. Let us make sure we are suffering for the right reason. That is the point. That is, do good, and you still

suffer; but nonetheless, we know that it is not because we have been bad, and so we can suffer in good conscience. It is not good to suffer when we know we are guilty.

The suffering that results from godliness does have intrinsic good value, and its value lies in being loyally committed to God personally, committed to His purpose, and committed to His will in steadfast devotion, thus overriding personal comfort. Brethren, when we know that, we will take it, and we will take it in good attitude—so good, I believe we will even rejoice, because that is what Paul said.

Paul rejoiced in his suffering because he knew he was not being punished. He was suffering according to God's will, and that made him feel great. Now why did it make him feel great? It is because that suffering for that reason impresses God, and He joins with rejoicing as His gift in spite of the suffering. It is His gift, and so, like Paul said later in that chapter, it is as though we are being tested by fire—a refining fire—and so the rejoicing becomes the natural consequence of rejoicing for righteousness' sake. So because Christ did it, we can be confident that those joined to Him can also do it by being willing to delay gratification while still faithfully carrying out their responsibilities.

Peter advises us to arm ourselves with the same attitude as Christ. Incidentally, this word "arm" is a military term. We do not arm ourselves with military battle gear, but we do arm ourselves with *spiritual* battle gear so that we will be prepared for the spiritual battles that we are suffering.

We should understand that even as Christ had to bear the sins of the whole world, we, as priests in preparation, must also, in small measure or in principle, bear some of the measure of the sins of others and the suffering that it will bring.

A conclusion here, and it is important that we understand this thoroughly: Every problem, every offense, cannot be resolved. Grin and bear it. That is what Christ had to do. Everywhere that Man looked He saw evil. He saw horror. Could you imagine how that made Him feel? But what did He do? He gritted His teeth, and went on because there was a bigger goal to accomplish, and that goal was for Him to be prepared for His crucifixion. It was to be prepared to be the sacrifice for the sins of others, and so He grinned and bore it, knowing what it was going to accomplish. Now if Christ did that, we know that we are going to get some small measure of that as well.

If you look in I Corinthians 6, you will find that Paul told those people, "Why don't you rather take loss and remain in a good attitude than get upset with your brethren?" He said, "Grin and bear it" (verse 7). There are times we have to do that, and that is part of the suffering that we have to do. It is not for *our* sin. It is the bearing, in that case, of a measure of somebody else's problem.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy, [because your glory is going to be revealed too].

That is the implication of what he is saying.

So what can we conclude from Peter here in suffering? Peter sees suffering as inevitable. He is not saying that we are to seek out suffering. He is saying though that suffering will come if one is devoted to God and His way. We are then to rejoice if the suffering is not coming from our evil, and that we are not undergoing punishment. Rejoice, because it is the best supply by God's discipline by

His training of us, and rejoice because it is a sharing with Christ of His sufferings, and rejoice because it is the way to glory.