

Why Does God Allow True Christians to Suffer?

Roger Kendall—March 3, 2012

Have you ever asked yourself the question: Why does God allow His people and His saints to suffer in ways that really are maybe not understandable at the human level? Again, we can look into the Bible and we find that the history of God's people down through the ages has been one of struggle, trials and suffering. We can look from the very time of the beginning with the murder of Abel, to the persecution of the prophets and messengers of God, that they suffered severely at the hands of this world.

We can think of the New Testament Church and with the apostles. Everyone except John was martyred for their faith and belief, suffering abuse, imprisonment and death. Let us not forget the suffering of our Savior Jesus Christ, what He went through. Not just on the cross, but He suffered in other ways as an individual Who came down from being God to take on the human flesh.

We realize and understand that why it is that we suffer. One can look at this and say, 'God, if You're an all-powerful God, if You are a loving God, why is it?' Not only do the people of God suffer, but what about all the suffering in the world that goes on? It's extreme! We see it in the news and papers all the time. It just seems like suffering is a way of life. It affects everybody to one degree or another. Some very extreme, some with less suffering, and some, it seems in some cases, that the people in the world who are basically living the way of the world probably even suffer less than others that are trying to live according to God's way. It doesn't seem just either.

In the world we see accidents occurring, tragedies, millions dying from warfare, disease. We look at the extreme elements of suffering in the world and we come to realize that bad things do happen to 'good' people. There's a book that was written many years ago: *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. It's an interesting book to read, written by a Jewish rabbi. It's an interesting look at Scripture about why suffering.

One of the saddest things you can see is a funeral where a widow is there at a military funeral and she is presented a flag in return for the sacrifice and the death of her husband in war—and beside her are two young children. It really tears your heart out, the suffering that they're going to go through. Again, we can look at other aspects of suffering: the death of a child either through sickness or accidents; the death of a mate—husband or wife—and that affects the Church. Over the last year we've seen a number of God's people dying and leaving a widow or widower and the suffering that comes from that. Why does God allow suffering? *It must have a purpose!* We have to think about that, because

it wouldn't make sense otherwise. To know God: God is an all-knowing God, a God of mercy and love. Today, in the message today, we're going to explore this question as to why God allows suffering, not only in the world, but more specifically in His Church and with His people.

At first glance you would say that if you are in covenant with God, that if we truly are serving God, loving God and living our lives as best we can, that somehow you would think that God would intervene and take away a lot of the pain and suffering that we go through, but He does not!

What does the Bible have to say about this? I'm finding that Scriptures have great deal to say about this subject. I'm not going to exhaust it in one message, but here we are approaching the Passover and the spring Holy Days, and we're trying to appreciate the fact that God has raised up a people and to prepare them for eternal life. We recognize that there's purpose and reason behind the suffering that we experience.

Today we're going to try to see what the Bible says about this subject and hopefully we can come away with encouragement and with understanding and realize that when we suffer, even though it's painful and hard, we shed many tears. Yet, *it has purpose*, and that's what we're going to talk about.

Before we explore this subject, it's important that we cover a couple of points first of all, so that we can understand the reality of life.

1. God is Creator and He is in Control

He created all life and put things into motion. He created it and sustains it by His power. God is ultimately in control of everything. I say that because **there's nothing that happens that God doesn't know about**. The Scriptures say that a 'swallow drops from the sky and God knows about that.' That's powerful! Nothing happens that does not fit into His plan and purpose. Nothing can happen in this world that would disrupt His plan of salvation and His plan for the future. He has control! He is responsible for all that happens in life, but in one sense we know that He hates sin, He hates evil, and that is part of the reason why people suffer, because of sin and evil men. He does not appreciate when the innocent suffer. The innocent do suffer because of sin.

Yet, it happens everyday! Brethren, He allows horrible things to take place. He allows it because He's in control, but He does it for a purpose, because in the long term it serves, in one way or another, the great purpose of God. Perhaps as we look at this, we say, 'How can that be?' Scriptures reveal it to be the case. God is in control and nothing happens that doesn't fit into His purpose.

2. This is Satan's world

There is suffering in the world and because we live in Satan's evil world. This is not God's society! We don't live in God's world. He created it, but this is the way of Satan and is being lived in this world today. God created the world, put Adam and Eve in the Garden so that things would be perfect. Yet, what happened? *Because of their sin, sin entered into the world*, and the resulting fact of that was that it led to death, pain and suffering.

We're going to see that in the future it's not going to be that way, but because of sin and because:

3. God has given man free moral agency

Again, how can one develop true character without having freedom of choice and free moral agency. When you give individuals free moral agency and choice, they're going to make decisions and bad things are going to happen: accidents are going to happen, sin is going to take place, people are going to be doing some crazy things, resulting in a lot of pain and suffering.

God sustains the universe by natural laws. He created the universe to function according to physical laws and spiritual laws. Look at the law of gravity: break the law of gravity and things break, bones break or something occurs. When you break certain laws that God has put in motion—i.e. laws of health, leading to disease. We can appreciate that because of the way that God has created the world that He's given man free moral agency and we have the natural laws in place of cause and effect.

If God was to intervene in every event in the world, just rushed in and prevented any bad thing from happening. He couldn't just do it for some because He would be a respecter of persons. There is something else that's working in this mix. There's a future and that future is that **God is creating in us character**, the very nature of God.

We're going to see that suffering has a part in the people of God to create righteousness and character and truth. In the world we can see and understand that if God was intervening in everything that went wrong, would the people learn anything? They would not learn anything; they wouldn't learn from their mistakes; it would be a weird situation.

In other words, it's the way that God has made it. But let's remember that God is going to make everything that's gone wrong, He's going to correct it **in the end** and He's going to reward those who need rewarding and He's going to punish those who need punishing. He's going to make it come out okay in the end. That's the beauty and power of our Almighty God. He's going to make it come out in the end so that it's going to be okay.

Suffering is short term; it's not forever. Even when we go through trials of suffering and pain, God gives comfort, we comfort each other, we are able to deal with it. Not that the tears go away rapidly, or right away. When you lose your mate, it's suffering, and many tears are shed. Even though faith is there, you trust in God, it's painful.

God knows that! He sees that! He's there to comfort and help you. We need to recognize that even though it's painful it's serving a purpose. It's hard to understand— isn't it, brethren? Think about it! To go through that and say: Is this serving a purpose? *God is great and is all purposeful!*

God is putting all of our tears in a bottle (Psa. 56:8)

"You number my wonderings, O put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?"

—our sorrows and our suffering. Why is He doing that? *It's a symbolic thing; He's going to take that suffering, turn it around and produce tremendous joy! Peace and happiness! He's going to turn it around! Christ knows the suffering that we go through! Brethren, we have to understand that God does not intervene in ways that we would choose, because, very simply, we don't have the mind of God.*

Isaiah 55:8: *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways My ways," says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (vs 8-9).*

What this expresses is that God is the Great God Almighty, a spirit being, and we're on the earth, flesh, we're human beings.

We cannot know the details of what God is doing. We grow in understanding, but we don't understand all of the purposes of the things God is doing. He has a tremendous plan, and as time goes on He's revealing that to us. We come to understand that God is working with us to teach us things that we could not learn other than through suffering.

God is preparing a people and right now we are in a training ground. We are being trained by the very lives that we're living so that we can reign and rule with Christ, not only for a thousand years in the Millennium, but all down through eternity. We are going to find that if we do not go through any suffering, how could we administer to the suffering of the world?

Think about that! How could we have compassion and love for those who suffer if we don't know what suffering is about. Suffering is part of our training. As God's people we cannot be perfected or develop Godly character without enduring hardship, pain, trials and suffering. That is the way it is, and we're going to see that this is exactly what God tells us.

Let's turn to 1-Peter and read a very important Scripture regarding a test of faith. Peter probably has the most to say about our human suffering as God's people. I was really amazed at the number of Scriptures that deal with this subject. Sometimes we read across these Scriptures if we're not focused on that and we kind of stumble on them and we just keep going and don't really appreciate what God is telling us about our suffering and the trials that we go through.

1-Peter 1:3: "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again unto a living hope through *the* resurrection of Jesus Christ from *the* dead."

Brethren, this is our goal, this is what we desire. Yet, we have to journey through this life to be able to achieve the resurrection.

Verse 4: "Unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven for us, who *are* being **safeguarded** by *the* power of God through faith...

[God is watching over us; sustaining us and providing us the very tools by which we can achieve eternal life.]

...for salvation *that is* ready to be revealed in *the* last time. In this you yourselves **greatly rejoice**...

[Do we not rejoice in the future?]

...though for the present, if it is **necessary**...

[required]

...you are in distress for a little while by various trials

[sufferings]" (vs 4-6).

Notice why,

v 7: "In order that **the proving of your faith**..."

Your trust and confidence in God. Let's face it, if everything went smoothly, never had any trials, suffering or difficulties in our life, would that keep us close to God? *or* Would that keep us close to our self-sufficiency, thinking that things are fine? It wouldn't help us keep a close relationship with God if things went well all the time.

As a human being I would like to say, 'Yeah, I would like to have the music and the good things, the abundance, but human flesh goes the way of self-aggrandizement. That would not work! So, proving our faith, our confidence in God, has to be tested, brethren.

- God wants to know how much you love Him!
- God wants to know if you're going to be in there for the long haul!

We're going to see examples of **testing of faith**, and that's one of the key things we need to understand why we go through the trials and suffering that we do.

"...which is much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is being tested by fire...

[the analogy is rather graphic; fire is heat, hot and painful. In the crucible of trial *character* is forged.]

...may be found unto praise and honor and glory at *the* revelation of Jesus Christ; Whom, not having seen, you love; in Whom, *though* at the present time you do not see Him, **you believe...**" (vs 7-8).

In other words, as we go through life we have trials, we pray to God, He then comforts us, carries us and helps us to endure. So, we believe! We have trust and confidence in God because we go through life's difficulties! We trust in Him and God produces, God provides!

"...and rejoice with unspeakable joy, and filled with glory; *and are* receiving the end of your faith—even *the* salvation of *your* souls" (vs 8-9).

We see how this verse is so very important in seeing and understand part of why we suffer. It produces character, the fruits of the Spirit.

4. As the Son of God suffered greatly, so to we must endure suffering as He did

In other words, one of the requirements of being a follower of Jesus Christ is that we must understand that we must suffer even as Christ suffered. This is helping us. It's very profound. This is exactly what Peter is saying here, and there are several examples of this.

1-Peter 2:19: "Because this *is* acceptable: if, for *the* sake of conscience toward God, anyone endures sorrows, suffering unjustly."

If you on your own accord do something that results in an accident or you do something where you suffer for it, then that's acceptable.

Verse 20: "For what commendation *is there* if, disobeying and being beaten, you endure it? But if **while doing good you endure suffering**, this *is* acceptable with God."

We try to live a perfect righteous life and we suffer for it, Christ said that this is *acceptable to Him!* This is something that is needed for us, so that we can appreciate what God is doing in our lives.

Verse 21: "**For to this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His footsteps.**"

This is really profound when you understand it.

If your life is without any trial, pain or suffering it really means that you're a reprobate, you're not with the program with God. God says that you will endure suffering if you are one who is a Christian, one who is following the true way. Christ said that we would face

tribulation in this world. Let's look at some examples where Christ and some of the apostles said that we would face tribulation *because* we are called of God.

Christ said during His last Passover meal, John 16:33:

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation. But be courageous! I have overcome the world."

Because He has overcome the world and because we are in covenant with Him we, too, will overcome the world, but it will be with tribulation and trial and suffering.

When we are called out of this world, brethren, we are strangers, separated from mankind by a very interesting barrier. I don't know if you feel it or not, but I've felt it for a long time. You don't quite feel as though you're fitting into the world. You just don't fit in! The world is set on different goals, different ways of living—their lifestyles—and we see more and more the sinful way is the way of the world. You see it and you just want to step back from it and not be a part of it.

In that there is suffering because we can't be part of the world. There's this feeling of separation and it needs to be because we're not part of this world. Our citizenship is in heaven.

Again, during the Passover meal, Christ said, John 15:18:

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. However, **because you are not of the world, but I have personally chosen you out of the world, the world hates you for this**" (vs 18-19).

Brethren, another reason why we endure suffering; we're not part of this world. We suffer because the world hates Jesus Christ, and as we express the very character and way of Christ by the way we live, the world—those in the world—despise and hate us. Eventually, we'll face persecution because of it.

Verse 20: "Remember the word that I spoke to you: a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also. If they kept My word, they will keep your *word* also."

We see this is part and parcel to our Christian way of life: trial, persecution.

Paul says the same thing. This is one of the trips that he was making,

Acts 14:22: "*Where* they established the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *declaring* that we must through **much tribulation** enter into the Kingdom of God."

Matt. 7:13-14—entrance into the Kingdom of God is a hard, straight and narrow entrance.

Enter in through the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it; For narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way that leads to life, and few are those who find it.

You get the comparison that entering into the Kingdom of God is a struggle. And indeed, it is, because we struggle through spiritual warfare, against our flesh, against the world and Satan. We're basically fighting against all of these elements. Entering into the Kingdom of God requires effort, work and resulting from there will be difficulties.

You go through and put it all together and you didn't realize they were all in here. There are many references to what I'm talking about.

2-Timothy 3:12: "And indeed, everyone who desires to live Godly in Christ Jesus shall be persecuted."

Brethren, I don't know about you, but I feel we're kind of in a 'time warp' as far as persecution is concerned. We do feel some, but do you really feel persecuted? Are people knocking on your door? Is your house being burned down because you worship Christ? Are you suffering? *No, we're not!*

What is he talking about here? *As time goes on that all those who live Godly will be persecuted!* We see that in the history of God's people down through time, but what is coming in the future not too many years away? We're looking at a time when the rise of the antichrist and the beast power and the people of God will be at war and they will lose, at least short term, and they will be martyred.

Rev. 6:9-11—talking about the fifth seal, the martyrdom of the saints.

"And when He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony that they held; And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, do You not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And white robes were given to each of them; and they were told that they should rest a short time yet, until *it* be fulfilled *that* both their fellow servants and their brethren also would be killed, just as they had been."

Brethren, we are living now in a time of great abundance, of peace, as far as our personal lives are concerned, because we live in a society that's kind of tolerant. It doesn't really attack us for our beliefs as long as we don't get in their faces we're okay. But do you think the time is going to come when God is going to say that we're going to be 'in their face' a little bit? *Yes! We have to prepare for that because we are to be a witness to this world.* The time is going to come, brethren, when this is going to happen to us, the people of God:

Mathew 10:17: "But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and you shall also be brought before governors and kings for My sake, for a witness to them and to the Gentiles" (vs 17-18).

The warning is going out; the Gospel is going out, but we are not 'in their faces' as far as the world is concerned. When we do, this is going to be the consequence.

Verse 19: "Now when they deliver you up, do not be anxious *about* how or what you should speak; for in that hour it shall be given to you what you shall speak."

We're being prepared now to be witnesses in time of struggle, in pain, anguish and suffering. They're going to throw us into jail. Their going to berate us, and they're going to bring great suffering upon us.

Verse 20: "For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you. Then brother will deliver up brother to death; and *the* father, the child; and children will rise up against *their* parents and *have* them put to death. And you shall be hated by all for My name's sake; **but the one who endures to *the* end, that one shall be saved**" (vs 20-22).

Again, the Scriptures reveal that even though now we live in a time of relative peace and tranquility, the future pictures something quite different, and we know it's coming.

Some are sitting back and saying, 'This is a hard message. He's really focusing on some really tough things.' I want to prepare you emotionally and spiritually so that you recognize **it's the short term. We need to look beyond. We need to recognize what God is doing now and what He's going to be doing in the future. Otherwise we're going to lose it! We've got to know! We've got to understand what God has in mind!**

It's an interesting situation when we look at the two covenants between Israel and the Old Covenant and New Covenant with the people of God. The blessings in the Old Covenant are quite different from the blessings in the New Covenant.

I did hear a message that really kind of opened my mind to some things here. Christ revealed in the Sermon on the Mount that blessings under the New Covenant is quite different because under the New Covenant blessings are to face Godly sorrow and suffering for righteousness sake. That's a blessing! Christ tells us right here:

Matthew 5:1: "But seeing the multitudes, He went up into the mountain; and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth *and* taught them, saying, 'Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven'" (vs 1-3).

He didn't say, 'blessed are the proud.' NO! He said, "...Blessed *are* the poor in spirit..." the humble! The individual with a contrite spirit. One who has been pressed down. One who has been maybe 'beaten up' a little bit, not having all the pleasures and things of this world.

Verse 4: "Blessed *are* those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Mourn means to have *Godly sorrow*—sigh and cry over sin. Yes, we're sighing and crying over sin in this world.

Ezek. 9:4—an example where God instructed Ezekiel to send out certain individuals with a sword in their hand and he said to 'spare those who sigh and cry over the sins of Jerusalem.' But slay those who are basically caught up in their own pride and vanity and their false worship of God. In other words, He's separating by pointing out 'sighing and crying' over sin. 'Blessed' means *happy, to be fulfilled!* We're reading these Scriptures and it's pretty revealing.

Verse 10: "Blessed *are* those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when they shall reproach you, and shall persecute you, and shall falsely say every wicked thing against you, for My sake. Rejoice and be filled with joy, for great *is* your reward in heaven; for in this same manner they persecuted the prophets who *were* before you." (vs 10-12).

Heb. 11—read through what the suffering of the people and prophets of God went through. Brethren, it clearly points out that these are blessings.

What about under the Old Covenant? (Lev. 26:3-6) and you can read very clearly there that it was a physical covenant, 'obey My voice, keep My laws and My commandments and I shall bless you with peace, abundance, good crops, healthy children, good things and peace from your neighbors around you.' That's what the blessings under the Old Covenant were, very physical.

What did they do? *They disobeyed God! They broke His covenant!* And then God did bring sorrow, calamity, trial and suffering upon Israel so that they would repent? Likewise, this gives us another clue about why God would bring some suffering upon us. It helps to keep us on the path to the Kingdom of God. It keeps us in a repentant attitude.

We can see the difference here between the Old and New Covenant and what God looks upon as being blessings. So, He allows trials and sufferings to come upon His people for a great purpose. Here we're seeing that it has to do with developing faith, trust and the very mind of Christ. Christ went through it and Peter says that we need to go through it, as well, to develop the full mind of Christ. Let's look at sufferings as being a means of spiritual growth.

Many in God's Church may have an unrealistic expectation that somehow, some way, if they are in covenant with God that things are going to be rosy and good and everything is going to be fine. I counsel people when they come to baptism and I say, 'I basically want to help you understand that when you come in covenant with God it doesn't mean that your life is necessarily going to be all roses, abundance, joy and peace, because you are going to face trials and difficulties because you're not of this world. Because of the burdens that you carry because you love God and hate the ways of this world.'

We need to understand that God is not promising a rose garden. He's promising us trial and testing. Remember, it says that

- He will comfort us!
- He is there!
- He strengthens us!
- He doesn't abandon us, brethren!

Ecclesiastes 7:3: "*Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.*"

Sorrow is better than laughter? Wouldn't you rather have a good belly laugh rather than tears? That's not what this says!

Verse 4: "*The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.*"

This is like a proverb stuck in the middle of Ecclesiastes. You can read right through this until you realize that's profound! It's true because suffering has a purpose. Going back to this issue, it's not just haphazard. It would not be this way if it didn't have purpose.

Psalms 34:17: "*The righteous cry, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles.*"

We know this is true, brethren, but we also know that sometimes it takes a little longer than shorter. Sometimes we have to go through the 'valley of dry bones.' We have to go through the desert, the storm.

Verse 18: "**The LORD is near to the broken-hearted and saves those who are of a contrite spirit....**

[God's there! He sees our struggle, our tears and our crying.]

...Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all" (vs 18-19).

- That's a promise!
- We can take that to the bank!
- He will deliver us!
- He will carry us through!
- He will be there for us!

It doesn't mean the journey is going to be easy with no problems or difficulties, but it means He's there for us. That is comforting to know that.

Let's go back to Peter and look at some other Scriptures about dealing with suffering and why we endure suffering. 'Here a little and there a little' we have to go through and put these Scriptures together, and then with God's Spirit we're able to glean and come out with a sharper, better perspective of what this is really talking about.

1-Peter 4:1: "Consequently, since Christ has suffered for us *in the flesh*, arm yourselves also with the same mind, because the one who has suffered in *the flesh* has finished *living* in sin."

It says the one who suffers in the flesh has finished with sin. This clearly teaches us that through trials and suffering we can overcome sin in our lives. We realize sin brings hurt. Sin brings suffering and pain. Therefore, here it says that when we suffer in the flesh, if it is a result of sin, we change. That's part of God's correction, guidance and helping us to go through trials.

Verse 2: "*To this end: that he no longer live his remaining time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.*"

We turn our attention, our focus, from this world and look to the will of God and His purpose for us.

Verse 3: "For the past time of our lives *is* sufficient to have worked out the will of the Gentiles...

[the time that we were in the world]

...when we ourselves walked in licentiousness *and* lusts, *and were* debauched with wine, carousing, drinking and wanton idolatries. In *seeing this difference in your behavior*, they are astonished *that* you do not rush with *them* into the same overflowing debauchery, *and they revile you*" (vs 3-4).

Again, if we walk in the Truth and in righteousness, we can be reviled and attacked and persecuted for that. Peter had a lot to say about this subject.

Verse 12: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial among you *which is* taking place to test you, as if some strange thing *were* happening to you. But **to the degree that you have a share in the sufferings of Christ**, rejoice; so that, at the revelation of His glory, you also may rejoice exceedingly" (vs 12-13).

In other words, if we share in the suffering, we're going to share in the resurrection; we're going to share in the reward of living through this life and making it into the Kingdom of God. Notice that he said here that through fiery trials and "**...which test you...**" We're going to see examples of others who were tested by trial. Their faith was tested, and God wants to know what's in our heart. He wants to know whether or not you're going to go the full course; **He tests us!** How do we respond to suffering and pain? **We turn to God!** We turn to God because He's our only recourse. He is our only help in time of this kind of need, and we cry out to God and He comforts us. Therefore, we build faith and trust in Him because He does comfort us and bring us through the trial.

Verse 14: "If you are reviled for *the* name of Christ, *you are* blessed because the *Spirit* of glory and the Spirit of God is resting upon you; on their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified."

That takes a lot of meditation to think on that Scripture. We're glorified when we suffer for Christ's sake. In the flesh we're glorified! With God's Spirit in us we give glory back to God, because we know that it's producing a good work in us. That's the way we have to look at that. If we sit down and just sit on our 'ash heap' and say *woe is me, God doesn't love me, God hates me, I'm deplorable, I'm a wreck*, you can't stay there, brethren. You might just hit that bottom, but realize that's not true. We give God glory because we know that He's there to comfort and guide and support us.

Verse 16. Yet, if anyone *is suffering* as a Christian, he should not be ashamed; but let him glorify God because of this."

We should glory in the suffering that we receive because of the fact that we love God, keep His commandments and walk in the Truth. Again, over and over Peter covers this subject.

1-Peter 3:14: "Now on the other hand, if you do undergo suffering for the sake of righteousness, *you are* blessed....

[We just read that, what Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount. Peter is just repeating what Christ already said.]

...But you should not be afraid of their terror...

[We should not be afraid of terror because God is with us and He Who is in us is greater than he who is in them. Always remember that!]

...and you should not let yourselves be intimidated; but sanctify the Lord God in your own hearts, and always *be* prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you the reason for the hope *that is* in you, with meekness and reverence" (vs 14-15).

What does this refer to? What this really means is that in the time of suffering—say you're being persecuted, perhaps being thrown into jail or worse—you demonstrate resilience, hope and power of God in you, they're going to look at this and say, 'Why is this?' You can then witness to them:

- the Truth
- the Gospel
- God is in charge
- God is bringing about a great transformation

but it *requires repentance!*

We hope in the resurrection, which is a living hope. This isn't something we just kind of *think* is going to happen. We **KNOW** it's going to happen! We can face those days, brethren, with absolute hope and encouragement. God will give us that strength. Right now I'm not looking forward to this kind of situation, but God will provide.

Brethren, trials and suffering lead us to salvation! Trial and suffering is part of the very process by which God is leading us to salvation and into the Kingdom of God. God will comfort us and lead us there. God has called us, and we go through suffering for very, very important reasons and purposes.

Romans 8:17: "Now, if *we are* children, *we are* also heirs—truly, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if **indeed we suffer together with Him**, so that we may also be glorified together with Him."

I've heard different people say that *before we can share in the crown we've got to wear the thorns*. Again, this is part of the process. This should not come as a strange teaching; this is what God says.

Verse 18: "For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

Short term! Very short relative to all eternity. Have hope, faith and trust that the suffering we go through now is working a great purpose and that God is with us through all of the suffering and pain that we go through.

God is storing our suffering 'in a bottle.' We can realize that God is going to, in the end, reward us according to how we respond to our suffering. He's going to reward us and give back to us abundance, and just profoundly give us a tremendous future in the Kingdom of God. Paul

says that we are not to look back on all the pain and suffering of this life, but we are to look forward—*press forward*—to the goal.

2-Corinthians 4:16: "For this reason, we do not lose heart; but if our outward man is being brought to decay..."

As we get older we wear out, we dry out and we fall apart physically. That's part of the natural laws. God says that all mankind has to go through the first death. That is part of what He has ordained.

"...yet, the inward *man* is being renewed day-by-day....

[That's conversion. That's the process by which God is building the character of His Son in us.]

...For the momentary lightness of our tribulation is working out for us an immeasurably greater *and* everlasting fullness of glory; while we consider not the things *that are* seen, but the things *that are* not seen. For the things *that are* seen **are temporary...**

[the pain and suffering is but a short wink of time]

...but **the things *that are* not seen *are* eternal**" (vs 16-18).

To me this is encouraging, and hopefully to you. I know that it seems like it just drags out and we're just not getting there. We endure and struggle, but **have hope, have trust in God!**

Let's consider for a few moments the suffering of Job. Job could be considered the 'poster child' or person in the Bible if you will of the person suffering. Indeed, Job suffered greatly under hands of Satan and God allowed it. Why did Job suffer the way he did? *Because God allowed it! God said to Satan, 'You can have at him.'* Yet, was God being mean? *No, there's purpose to this!*

Did Job learn from his suffering? *He learned a tremendous amount!* Job was righteous! God said twice that Job was a righteous man, upright. It wasn't a matter of his being punished. Job was being tested and being 'refined in the fire.' Tested for his faith and trust and confidence in God, but he was also being refined so that his character could be made stronger.

One of the key Scriptures in Job that I think is very profound about the suffering of Job. This is the attitude that Job had. The suffering of Job, you know what that is, but then he's talking to God and realizing that he doesn't know why he's being punished like this. 'I don't know why I'm being beaten up, but I trust in You, I have faith in You, I am not going to revile against You.' And nowhere in the Scripture does he do that.

Job 13:13: "Be quiet. Let me alone so that I may speak, and let come upon me what may. Why do I take my flesh in my teeth and put my life in my hand? **Though He slay me...**

[talking about God]

...I will trust in Him...

[That's profound! Even if God slays me, I'm going to trust in Him.]

...but I will maintain my own ways before Him" (vs 13-15).

Here he also reflects a little bit of his problem here. His ways were good, but he had an attitude that somehow he was doing it under his own power. He thought that he was as good as God. He was challenging God toward the end of the book. God had to come down and show Who He was. Then Job recognizes that without God he was **nothing**. That's what Job learned!

In the end he learned to love God and he was refined. The punishment he went through and the trial that he went through he was refined. Likewise, brethren, that is with us. We can see that our suffering and pain is not pleasant, but yet, the reasons why we go through it, let me just summarize suffering:

- for righteousness sake
- because of God disciplining us

God disciplines us and corrects us through some of the suffering so that we will repent and turn back to Him. Understand that it is through suffering that we

- Draw close to God
- God is the Source of our help in time of need

Here's a key Scripture on God's correction upon His people. It shows very clearly why it's occurring.

Hebrews 12:9: "Furthermore, we have had our fleshly fathers who chastened *us*, and we respected *them*; should we not all the more *willingly* be subject to the Father of spirits, and live *forever*? For in the first case, they chastened *us* for a few days in whatever way seemed good to them; but in the second case, He *chastens us* for *our own* benefit that we may be partakers of His Holiness" (vs 9-10).

So, the suffering that we experience through God's correction is so that we will repent, recognize that we need to change and grow in the character and the mind of Christ so that we can ***be there at the resurrection*** of the living.

Here he says that,

"...we may be partakers of His Holiness. Now truly, no chastisement for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards **it yields *the peaceable fruits of righteousness*** to those who have been exercised by it" (vs 10-11).

Brethren, when God corrects you it's not very pleasant, but it produces good fruit. That's what we need to understand. Our suffering as a Christian can be a way that God tests our faith. God allows us to endure suffering so that we can have our commitment to Him tested so that we may remain faithful.

- Abraham was tested when he was called upon to sacrifice Isaac
- Job was tested through suffering
- We are also challenged to pick up our cross and follow Christ (Luke 9:22-25)

What is the cross that we are bear as we follow as disciples of Jesus Christ? That cross can represent:

- Mortification of the flesh—the death of the fleshly mind
- The sorrows, suffering and pain that we bear because we are following Christ.

We're willing to carry the *cross of suffering* because we love God, and we love God more than the things that are in this world. We do it because we want to serve God and love God, and we must carry our cross. God is preparing us for eternal life.

Romans 8:28: "And we know that **all things** work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose."

It doesn't just mean the good times and the times of abundance—it means ALL things that happen to us. But notice there is preface to this: "...to those who love God..." and serve Him.

If we are in the hands of God and being led by Him, and comforted and carried by God, all things that happen to us—the suffering, pain and anguish we go through in this life—is serving a great purpose.

Verse 29 explains what that purpose is:

"Because those whom He did foreknow, He also predestinated *to be conformed to the image of His own Son...*

[Did we not read that we are to share in the suffering of Christ so that we might have the mind of Christ, that we might have the empathy, that we might have the attitude toward others that Christ had because of the suffering that He went through? *Yes!*]

...that He might be *the firstborn among many brethren.*"

James 1 is a key Scriptures about trials and developing the character of God. James also expresses the same point.

James 1:2: "Consider *it* all joy, my brethren, when you are beset by various trials."

Trials can come in different sizes and shapes, but usually they represent some pain and suffering—*emotional, physical and also spiritual*; there are different types of suffering.

Verse 3: "Knowing that the testing of your faith...

[Same thing that we read earlier that Peter said]

...produces endurance....

[That we're able to endure though this life so that we may grow in the character of God.]

...But let endurance have *its* perfect work, so that you may be perfect and complete, not lacking in anything" (vs 3-4).

This is something that needs to be added to our life so that we can be perfected, brethren. It's a hard sell, but that's what God says. Yet, brethren, we can really appreciate what God is doing in our lives today.

I have tried to shed light on why God allows people in the world to suffer. That's the way He set it up, but eventually He's going to make that come out okay.

For us in God's Church—His people—Why are we suffering and going through trials that are extremely painful—grief and many tears? I'm not answering this question in its total aspect. I can't answer all questions for you personally. But God has revealed in His Word that the suffering we do in this life is for character development and becoming more like the mind of Christ, that we can be prepared to rule with Christ. God is there to comfort us and bring us through every trial that we go through, and to give us rest and peace.

- We have a compassionate God!
- He cares for us!
- He loves us very much, brethren!

Christ said, Matthew 11:28:

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are *overly* burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls" (vs 28-29).

This is a promise! In our deepest sorrow, Christ is there to carry us through the troubles and sorrows that we bear.

I want to read to you a poem to conclude the message today. It's written, probably, from a Protestant point of view, but let's realize there is some great Truth in this, and we need to glean from it the elements that will truly help to comfort us and help us to realize what's here:

Footprints
by Mary Stevenson

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.
In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,
other times there were one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed
that during the low periods of my life,
when I was suffering from
anguish, sorrow or defeat,
I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord
"You promised me Lord,
that if I followed you,
you would walk with me always.
But I have noticed that during
the most trying periods of my life
there have only been one
set of footprints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most,
you have not been there for me?"

The Lord replied, "The times when you have
seen only one set of footprints,
is when I carried you."

He's carrying us in His very arms. This may be very emotional and sentimental, but, brethren, it is the absolute spiritual Truth. God cares for us, and He's carrying us through our times of trouble and sorrow.

Finally, we've looked at the past, we've looked at the present, but what about the future? God reveals that suffering and pain and anguish are going to be done away. Then trial and suffering and pain is not going to have any purpose in the Kingdom of God.

Revelation 21:3: "And I heard a great voice from heaven say, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men; and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people; and God Himself shall be with them *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and *there* shall not be any more death, or sorrow, or crying; neither shall *there* be any more pain, because the former things have passed away'" (vs 3-4).

Brethren, let's be filled with hope and encouragement and let us realize that even though we go through a lot of trials, suffering and pain, it's for a purpose and in the future we will rule and reign with Christ and we will be able to teach, help and guide others through their times of trouble and difficulties in the Millennium.

Let us rejoice that even in our suffering we can give God glory.

Scriptural References:

- Isaiah 55:8-9
- 1 Peter 1:3-9
- 1 Peter 2:19-21
- John 16:33
- John 15:18-20
- Acts 14:22
- 2 Timothy 3:12
- Matthew 10:17-22
- Matthew 5:1-4, 10
- Ecclesiastes 7:3-4
- Psalm 34:17-19
- 1 Peter 4:1-4, 12-14, 16
- 1 Peter 3:14-15
- Romans 8:17-18
- 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
- Job 13:13-15
- Hebrews 12:9-11
- Romans 18:28-29

- James 1:2-4
- Matthew 11:28-29
- Revelation 21:3-4

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Psalm 56:8
- Matthew 7:13-14
- Revelation 6:9-11
- Ezekiel 9:4
- Hebrews 11
- Leviticus 26:3-6
- Deuteronomy 28
- Luke 9:22-25
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Also referenced: Book:

When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Harold S. Kushner

RK:bo

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