

Working Out Your Salvation

The Wonder and Mystery of Sanctification

January 15, 2017

Part 3- Being Made Holy Through Suffering

1 Peter 5:6-11

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

7 casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

8 Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

9 But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

11 To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.

To the Glory of God

The headline read, "Such a Senseless Tragedy". And we hear that phrase all the time. But this time when I read it, it stuck out. This time I began to ponder just what it means to say that something horrible is a "Senseless Tragedy". So, I began to look closely at the words:

- ✓ Senseless
- ✓ Tragedy

Let's take the second word first, "Tragedy". So, just what is a "Tragedy"? Well, the dictionary defines "tragedy" as:

a lamentable, dreadful, or fatal event or affair; a calamity; a disaster¹

¹ www.dictionary.com "tragedy"

So, a "tragedy" would be the *opposite* of a laudable, wonderful, life-giving event or affair, the opposite of a "blessing", and something that builds rather than destroys. For a "tragedy" to exist is to assume that it is a *departure* from the Standard of "Good" and the Standard of "Blessing". So, "Evil" *assumes* that there exists a Standard of "Good" from which that evil thing departs from. And you can go through the list, the fact that "Sorrow" exists *pre-supposes* that there is a Standard of "Joy". The existence of a "Trial" pre-supposes the Standard of "Peace", "Suffering" pre-supposes "Blessing".

The point is that by using this logic, we, as Christians, should rejoice! Because the very fact that there is something called a "Tragedy" that is lamentable and dreadful and fatal and a calamity and a disaster means that there is, *also*, something called a "Blessing" that is laudable and wonderful and life-giving, and something that builds rather than destroys.

But now look again at the first word, because I find this word very troubling:

Senseless

The word "senseless" means: *nonsensical or meaningless; something that has no purpose.*² And this word is a patently pagan and unbiblical word because the Holy Scriptures describe a God Who is not only Almighty, but Who is *intimately* aware and *intimately* concerned and *intimately* involved in *everything* that happens.

The God Who is revealed in the Bible is completely in charge of the largest events, like the creation of galaxies, as well as the smallest, like sub-atomic particles. And the Scriptures loudly and repeatedly declare that this God is sovereignly working both the large and small things together for the greater "Good" of His Own Glory, and ultimately to the fulfillment of Joy to those He has saved.

The one, true, living God is never caught off guard about the future, because He absolutely *controls* the future. God is never at a loss about what to do, because nothing happens that is outside His Will and Plan. So, by definition, there is no such thing as "Luck" or "Chance". There is no such thing as anything ever being "Random" or "Accidental". And there is no such thing as either a Tragedy or a

² www.dictionary.com "senseless"

Blessing being "senseless". All tragedies, as well as all blessings, are *filled* with sense, they are designed on purpose for that particular individual, at that particular time, by a Good and Wise and Loving and Powerful God that has a definite Plan at work in the life of that person.

So, there is no such thing as anything being without "Cause" or without "Purpose". And that is true whether we are talking about the most honorable and noble act we can conceive of, or the most vile and unjust one. Every detail of every human's life is being "directed" and "allowed" and "caused" by God. And, at the same time that God displays His absolutely sovereignty over every facet of the Universe, God carries out His Sovereignty in such a way that never alleviates Man's Responsibility to do the right thing and to be held totally responsible for what he does or does not do.

So, yes, there are events that exist that we would call "tragedies". But, no, they are not "senseless". There is great "sense", amazing "sense", perfect "sense" in all that comes about. And, in the case of people who have been wondrously born again by a sovereign miracle of God, every facet of their lives, every event, every blessing, and every struggle, and everything allowed or caused *for* them or *to* them or *in* them or *through* them is working together for one very simple but one very profound goal:

Holiness

God wants His people to be holy. Now that doesn't mean you are better than other people. What "holy" means is that you have been called and chosen to be "set apart" from the other people of the world, and have been given the high honor and the distinct privilege of living your life to God's Glory rather than your own ambition.

You and I have been chosen, from before the foundation of the world, to "show forth" or to "display" or to "proclaim" the magnitude and the worth and the value of Jesus Christ both in Who He is and what He has done. Listen to what the Apostle Peter said from **1 Peter 2:9-10**:

⁹ But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

10 for you once were *NOT A PEOPLE*, but now you are *THE PEOPLE OF GOD*; you had *NOT RECEIVED MERCY*, but now you have *RECEIVED MERCY*.

Now look again at the last phrase of verse 9:

... so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Peter says here that we have been called and chosen to "proclaim" or to "display" or to "show" or "to manifest" or "to make visible" the "excellencies" of God, which are the collection of all the particulars of God's Own pristine Holiness. So, we are saved so that we may "display" the Glory of God. God set His Love upon us before He ever made the world so that we would live our lives in such a way that we would "show forth" the infinite Value and the pristine Worth of the Owner and Creator of the Universe.

And, by default, that means that we *cannot* do what the unsaved people of the world do. We cannot *think* or *act* or *believe* or *live* or *carry ourselves* in the same way that people do who do not know God and who do not believe God's Word to be true.

If, by God's Grace, you are one of God's people, then God has not abandoned you or forgotten you. You have not "slipped through the cracks". God has written your name down on the palm of His Hand and He has promised to not only keep you saved all the way to Glory, but God has promised to share His Own Personal Holiness with you.

And yet, there are attributes and qualities and actions and beliefs and patterns of life and ambitions and dispositions and affections of your heart that exist, and that motivate you all the time, and that dominate the way you look at life and the way you understand God and the way you comprehend Truth that will *prevent* you from sharing in God's Holiness.

So, while God will initially save you "just as you are", God has no intention of *leaving* you "just as you are". In His Kindness to us God orchestrates events and circumstances so that these sinful and worldly attributes and affections will be exposed, so we may clearly see them, turn from them in the Power of the Holy Spirit, so that we may share in God's Own Holiness.

And to get a better idea of how God uses suffering in the lives of believers in conjunction with His Holiness, please turn with me to read a very important Passage from **Hebrews 12:3-15**:

3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;

6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."

7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline?

8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may share His holiness.

11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,

13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

Now one thing we need to understand is that only saved people are sanctified. Lost people, by definition, do not go through the Sanctification process, even though they may well suffer in this life.

And what is interesting is that *some* of the suffering that believers go through looks very similar to the suffering that the non-elect go through. *Both* may suffer financially, both may suffer physically, and both may suffer in other ways that are very much alike. But, the *difference* between the suffering of the elect and the non-elect is in the purpose *behind* the suffering.

The Bible teaches that the non-elect, the people that will not be saved, suffer in this life because the way they live their lives bring them underneath the Wrath of God. So, their sin brings them under Judgment. But, the elect have been graciously delivered from God's Wrath by the Person and finished Work of Jesus Christ. And so, we suffer for the Glory of God, we suffer so those acts and dispositions and affections that do not bring God Glory may be revealed to us, so we may turn from them, and so we may share in God's Holiness. Look what Jesus Himself said about this in **John 15:1-8**:

1 I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me.

5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

8 "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples.

Jesus said here that the only way we glorify God and *prove* to be a disciple of Jesus is by bearing an abundance of godly fruit. But, there are remaining traces of Adam in our flesh that fight *against* that effort. We saw last week from **Galatians 5** that there are qualities and attributes and attitudes and desires that continue to reside in my fallen

flesh that do not bring God glory, and that war against me bearing and abundance of godly fruit.

So, in His great Mercy, God the Father, Jesus calls Him the "Vinedresser" here in verse 1, He goes about to "prune" every single vessel that has been attached to the true Vine through the miracle of the New Birth from those unholy desires and ungodly affections and acts. And that "pruning" is called Sanctification.

And notice, at the end of verse 2, Jesus tells us that God does this not because He is angry with us, but so that we may be set free to bring forth even *more* godly fruit. And that means that our fruit-bearing should be "progressive", we should bear *more* fruit the longer we are saved.

So, the infallible Word of the living God tells us that the suffering that believers go through is *not* a demonstration of God's Wrath against us, but a very powerful display of His marvelous Love so we may be progressively sanctified. And that is why the writer of **Hebrews** quoted from **Proverbs 3:12** when he said:

Hebrews 12:6

FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."

... and it is precisely because Sanctification or pruning is a Divine Act of Love as to why the writer of **Hebrews** cautions us not to get discouraged when we are being lovingly sanctified by God the Father:

Hebrews 12:5b

... MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;

Now look why we need to associate suffering with our Sanctification from what the writer of **Hebrews** said in **Hebrews 12:11**:

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

So, the sorrow or the suffering of genuine believers as they are being pruned by God the Father, so they are delivered from the sinful impulses and desires of our flesh, so we may bear an abundance of godly fruit and share in God's Own Holiness, is hard. It hurts, after all in **John 15:2**, Jesus called it a "pruning" or a "cutting".

But we need to remember that everything God does *to* us and *in* us and *through* us and *for* us has a Promise attached to it. So, look at God's Promise about the sorrow and pain of Sanctification at the end of **Hebrews 12:11**:

... yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

... the Apostle Peter put it this way:

1 Peter 5:10

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

Suffering in Sanctification *always* leads to the peaceful fruit of righteousness, which will always perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish us.

And so, the writer of **Hebrews** tells us to do four things that will help us to be "trained" by the Sanctification process that will enable us to receive the peaceful fruit of righteousness so we may be strengthened and established:

Hebrews 12:3, 13-15

3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

So, we are told to:

1. Consider Jesus.
2. Make straight paths for our feet.
3. Pursue Peace and Sanctification.
4. See to it that no one comes short of the Grace of God.

And this is where I get the statement that I make about Sanctification: We must pursue Holiness *on purpose* with resoluteness and a determination that is motivated by the Promises of God. Because, nobody arrives at Holiness *accidentally*. Nobody trips and falls into Holiness. We become holy after we are saved, because of two things:

1. Because of the ongoing sovereign Grace of God at work in our lives to “**perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you**” (1 Peter 5:10) or, in the words of Jesus, “**ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.**” (John 15:7)
2. Because we cooperate with God in that Sanctifying process.

Now because of the real shallow and inconsistent teaching that abounds in the modern Church, there is very little mention of suffering in our Sanctification. And the result of not being taught at all, or not being taught rightly, about this results in many believers becoming very confused and getting very disillusioned when God the Father begins to prune them, because every single genuine believer will be sanctified or pruned by God the Father:

Hebrews 12:7

It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline?

John 15:2

Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

... in fact, both Jesus and the writer of **Hebrews** tells us that if we are *not* actively pursuing Sanctification and we are *not* being pruned by God the Father, that this means that we aren't saved:

Hebrews 12:8

But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

John 15:2a, 6

2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away...

6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

And so, the Bible is clear, every genuinely saved person is being pruned by the Father, and everyone who is not being pruned does not belong to Jesus.

But, there are always some who honestly believe that they have "arrived", and they simply cannot imagine why God would ever need to chasten them or allow them to suffer, as good as they are and as much as they have done for God.

But the majority of those in the modern Church simply do not make the connection between a Good and Wise God, Who orchestrates everything for His Own Glory, and our Sanctification and our suffering. And so, when suffering comes, they get offended and discouraged and think God has abandoned them. And this Sermon is one attempt of many that I have delivered to you over the years to prepare your heart that when suffering comes your way, you will know *why* it has come, and that you will not merely *survive* through the suffering, but will *flourish* under the pruning of your heavenly Father.

The good news is that, even though our suffering may seem to be random or accidental and without meaning, the Truth is that our gracious and merciful Heavenly Father is in charge of our development in Jesus Christ. And He will see to it that we are sufficiently pruned so we may share in His Holiness.

Now it is very popular today to tell people that they should come to Jesus so their lives will be measurably better here on the earth. The reason that there are massive crowds listening to these "motivational pied-pipers", who masquerade as preachers of the Gospel, is because

they seldom, if ever, mention pursuing Holiness on purpose, or of the connection between our suffering and being made holy.

But, the Holy Bible is a collection of very mature and sober divinely inspired books that reveal in great detail the pain and stress of Christian living, and the endurance that it takes to run the race and fight the fight and finish well.

The Bible is not a Book that people gravitate toward naturally, unless they have suffered and struggle for some explanation of how that suffering relates to God. In other words, the more pain-free your life has been, the less likely you will cherish the kind of spirituality that is taught in the Bible. And the more you have suffered in this life, the more you will cling to the precious teachings of this Book, if you are willing to believe them.

And that is a big “if”. I was talking with a Pastor on the telephone the other evening, and he was telling me about recent conversations he had had with people in his Church who simply do not believe what this inerrant Book teaches. It is certainly not a “feel-good” document about how you can make the best of your troubles, or even about how God makes the best of your troubles. The sacred Scriptures are a massive statement about the gracious Sovereignty of God over the evil that befalls His own people. And the big “IF” is: will you believe this? Will you accept the mystery of God's Providence in the pain of your life, and be trained by it for the sake of good and peace and holiness and righteousness and life? Or, will you kick against what the Bible teaches about how suffering and our Sanctification are connected?

So, let's examine what the Apostle Peter meant in the Passage that Brother Andy read to us and see if we have the ability to believe what Peter is teaching here.

We must understand that the entire letter of **1 Peter** contains a repeated Call for a condition of heart, and a way of life, that only makes sense if we are absolutely sure we will have a great reward in Heaven. And that is why I am anxious to preach through **1&2 Peter** later on this year after we finish our “journeys” through **Luke** and **Ruth**.

The Apostle Peter calls us again and again to think and feel and act in a way that can only be explained by an unshakeable, all-satisfying hope that is beyond what we have in this life.

And, of course, I don't mean the hope for material wealth, or pain-free health, or reunion with loved ones in Heaven, but the “Ultimate

Reward” that Peter calls us to, the Reward of being with God and enjoying Him forever.

And that is the main thing Jesus died. And, only this can make sense out of the “counter-intuitive life” that Peter calls us to live. Back in **1 Peter 3:18**, which is one of the most important verses in the entire Bible, Peter says:

For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

So, that is why Jesus died, “... **that He might bring us to God...**” And that is our *final* Reward. That is our *ultimate* Hope. And everything else is secondary. If you don’t want God as your Supreme Satisfaction, then you don’t want what the main Purpose of Heaven is, and you don’t want what Jesus died to give. And it is Sanctification, or this “Father- pruning”, that makes this a reality to us.

Sanctification is what allows the Divine, propositional Truth of Scripture to go beyond something we believe in, and to be something that we personally experience in our own lives. And Peter teaches that the way Sanctification works in our lives is through suffering. Here are four examples:

1. In **1 Peter 1:6**- Peter calls us to “rejoice in suffering”. But how does that make sense? The very next verse tells us:

1 Peter 1:7

so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

2. In **1 Peter 3:5**- Peter calls Christian wives to:

... do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

But how does that make sense? The previous verse says:

1 Peter 3:5b

... in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves,

3. In **1 Peter 3:9**, Peter commands us:

... not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead;

So how does this make sense? The end of that same verse says:

1 Peter 3:9b

... for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

... so returning good for evil, even when it may cost us our lives in this world, is possible, because we put our hope in a blessing that is *beyond* this world. And then, finally:

4. In the first part of **1 Peter 4:13**, Peter calls for a powerful behavior that is inherently counter-intuitive:

but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing...

Why? How does that make sense? Look at the last part of that same verse:

... so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

So, the call of the Apostle Peter is for us to think and feel and act in a way that can only be explained by an unshakable, all-satisfying hope beyond this life, the hope of being with God and sharing in His Holiness.

And what is that peculiar way of thinking and feeling and acting that only makes sense in the light of hope beyond the grave? It is *a joyful, humble willingness to suffer wrong, and serve, rather than return evil for evil*. So, what does that look like:

1 Peter 2:19-20

19 For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

1 Peter 3:14

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,

1 Peter 3:16b-17

16 ...keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

1 Peter 4:1

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

1 Peter 4:19

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

This is the strange, counter-intuitive way of life Peter calls us to, the kind of life that causes people to ask a reason for the hope that is in us. It is a *joyful, humble willingness to suffer wrong, and serve, rather than return evil for evil*. Another name for this is *love*.

So, when we come now to the final chapter of **1 Peter**, this other-worldly mindset and this other-worldly hope are the two threads that are woven through Peter's final thoughts. Look again at verse 6:

1 Peter 5:6

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

It is a perfect example of denying the Fall on a fundamental level along with sinful human arrogance and pride to assume that Salvation will only bring physical health and material wealth and an absence of trouble. The most godly people in the history of the world suffered

terribly in this life, and that includes the only sinless man Who ever lived, Jesus Christ. So, rather than seeking to *avoid* suffering, we should *embrace* it as part of the Sanctification process that God uses so we may share in His Holiness.

But, how can that make sense in a world where humility and lowliness and servanthood do not get you a political nomination and do not get you a job, a world where self-promotion and self-exaltation are woven in to the fabric of modern American culture? Answer:

1 Peter 5:5b

... GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

... but what grace? Don't we already have grace? Yes, we do. But there is a *future* grace, more grace, that is coming to believers who clothe themselves with humility toward each other. And what is that?

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

... and this is why this strange, humble, self-effacing attitude, that is willing to suffer and serve rather than return evil for evil, makes sense. It makes sense because just over the horizon of this world, all the lowly nobodies who suffered in obedience to Christ will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father (**Matthew 13:43**). And so I suggest to you that whatever God has to do in us and to us and through us and for us so that we will be humble now and exalted later is a good thing. And that is what Sanctification does. And this is the unshakable foundation behind why we can obey verse 7:

casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

... now look again at **1 Peter 5:8-10:**

8 Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

9 But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

This is where Peter tells us how to deal with the roaring lion of the devil who wants to devour us. The devil is not pictured here as a sly snake who sneaks up on you and bites your heel. He is portrayed as a "roaring lion". So, why "roaring"? Lions roar when they're hungry and angry. This devil is not trying to sneak up on you. He is trying to terrify you. Make you afraid. Fill you with anxieties. Keep you off balance and nervous. So, how does this roaring lion devour people? Verse 9b explains:

knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

This lion is roaring and biting and clawing by causing people, Christians, in particular, to suffer. His goal is to destroy Christians through suffering. He means to make us doubt the Goodness of God or the Presence of God or the Power of God, or to doubt that God sees or cares. And Peter tells us in verse 9a,

resist him, firm in *your* faith

... now does that mean that if you are successful in resisting this roaring lion firm in your faith that his claws never cut? Or that his teeth will never sink in? No. It means that when the claws *do* cut and when the teeth *do* sink in, don't stop believing! Don't stop being humble. Don't stop returning good for evil. Don't stop rejoicing. Don't stop loving. That is successful resistance to the roaring lion, even if it costs you your life.

Really? Keep on returning good for evil? When the adversaries are agents of the devil? When they go on reviling and threatening us? Really? Keep on blessing? Keep on doing good? What could make sense out of that response to the lion? Answer: Verse 10:

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

Resist the lion with unwavering joy and humility and love. Keep on doing good to those who hate you. How? By believing verse 10 with all your heart. Keep on hoping in this eternal glory, this promise of total restoration and confirmation and strength everlasting, unshakable, established glory, this future beyond the suffering of this world, *that* is the key. But how can humans being do this? By yielding to the God ordained process of Sanctification. **Hebrews 12:11** says:

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

So, how do frail humans get to this place? In the rock-solid hope of what the Apostle said in **1 Peter 5:10**:

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

... everything good that you lost in your suffering will be restored in that glorious day. So, this condition of heart and way of life is *a joyful, humble willingness to suffer wrong, and serve, rather than return evil for evil*. And your reward in heaven is *a crown of glory and exaltation in the presence of the all-satisfying God*.

And that will be all wrongs against us set right. All patience under mockery vindicated. All shame in this world taken away and replaced with honor. All pain removed. All losses restored. All brokenness mended. All humiliation exchanged for garments of glory. All slander revealed to be false before the whole world. All anonymity in quiet faithfulness replaced with global fame among the millions of the redeemed.

So, the reason that God the Father is continually pruning you, the reason He is not satisfied with the level of fruit that you're bearing now, and the reason God desires you to bear even more fruit, is because He

has called you to a kind of heart and a kind of life that makes no sense in this world, a *joyful, humble willingness to suffer wrong and serve, rather than return evil for evil*. And that only makes sense if we are sustained by the hope of glory. And that brings up a very important question:

Is the devil really in charge of our suffering?

... when believers suffer, is it simply the devil roaring and clawing and biting? What about God? What's God doing when the devil roars?

God's goal in the suffering of His people with joy is to show the all-surpassing Value of Jesus Christ, and to win as many people as possible to share in His all-satisfying Holiness. And that means that Grace is not a zero-sum game, as if there was a limited amount, so that if I get some, you get less. It's exactly the opposite. Your sharing in God's Holiness through my service *enlarges mine*. A shared Holiness is a doubled Holiness!

So, what is God doing when the devil roars? Listen again to **1 Peter 5:9**:

But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

Here it's clear that Peter means that satan is causing this suffering. So our suffering is satan's roar. And this is exactly what Jesus told the Church in Smyrna in **The Revelation 2:10**:

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

So, there are times that God allows satan to throw godly saints into prison and keep them there until they die. But, Peter would add, from **1 Peter 5:10**, that after you have suffered in prison and died,

... the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

... therefore, don't give up your faith. Trust Jesus unto death. And you will be raised from the dead. And you will be glorious.

But that's not the whole story, is it? Because satan is not the *ultimate* Authority behind our suffering. Satan caused Job's suffering, but he had to get God's Permission to do it. But, Job saw the Plan of God behind satan and said:

Job 2:10b

... "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this [his suffering] Job did not sin with his lips.

And Peter had the very same theology of God's absolute Sovereignty in our suffering. Consider **1 Peter 4:19**:

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

And **1 Peter 3:17**:

For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

And **1 Peter 1:6-7**:

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

⁷ so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

So yes, satan roars in our suffering. And his roar is all the louder because he knows he cannot act on his own. He can do no more harm to God's people than God allows for the refining of the gold of their faith, which is their Sanctification. He roars with anger and frustration that his evil aim to punish God's elect ends up purifying their faith and allowing them to share in God's Holiness, the very thing he wants to destroy!

So, I don't send you home today with a simple formula for when to accept being slandered and when to confront it or when you turn the other cheek, or when you endure mistreatment as a believer or when you rebuke and admonish, or when you spank a child or when you are lenient, or when you confront your husband about a shortcoming or when you forbear, or when you endure discrimination against yourself for your faith at work, and when you plead for justice, or when you move to a dangerous place for Christ's sake, and when you leave a place because of danger.

But, instead of a formula, I do send you home with the resounding message of **1 Peter** in your ear, that you think and feel and act in a way that only makes sense if you are absolutely sure we will have a great reward in heaven, a way of life that can only be explained by an unshakeable, all-satisfying hope beyond this life. It is a way of life, as **1 Peter 3:15** says, that will cause people to ask about the hope that is in you: *a joyful, humble willingness to suffer wrong and serve, rather than return evil for evil.*

How? Because you know that through the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, that a crown of glory awaits you. You will be exalted at the right time. **After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. (1Peter 5:10).**

You know He will, because **1 Peter 5:7** says:

casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

And in verse 11, he says:

To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.

So, this is "total care" along with "Absolute Dominion". So, God will not fail you because He *cannot* fail you. The glory of your future is absolutely certain. This is the grace of God! Stand firm in it!

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.