How to Live as Suffering Saints

1 Peter

We have been experiencing very challenging times

The corona virus, the political unrest, the increasing erosion and even eradication of Christian moral values within society

There is a real possibility we can lose our health, our jobs, and even our freedom to communicate God’s truths

How should we live as Christians within these unsettling prospects seemingly always at our doorsteps?

This is how 1 Peter can help, strengthen and encourage us

He wrote this letter to believers who were experiencing great persecution and intense suffering

Listen as I read this background and setting information from “The MacArthur Study Bible,” p. 1937

Peter identifies himself right from the beginning as an apostle of Jesus Christ

Apostle means “sent one” and Peter was commissioned personally by Christ to be a messenger of the gospel

Since he was an apostle, this gave what he wrote unquestionable God-given authority and iron-clad credibility

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Peter also identifies his audience within verse one

He refers to them as the “elect exiles of the dispersion”

First, he uses the term “elect”

This means “called out ones,” or “specifically chosen by God”

As Christians, we were chosen by God in eternity past to receive everlasting life

Our election does not abolish human free will, i.e. we are like robots who had no choice other than to become believers

Rather, Peter is establishing this eternal spiritual reality for one express purpose, which was to instill hope, courage and bring comfort into the lives of these suffering Christians

The God who chose you will never abandon you

The God who chose you will always grant you peace in whatever trials you may be going through

The God who chose you will keep His divine promises

“The opening characterization of the readers as elect was meant to strengthen and encourage them in their affliction. The doctrine of election is a ‘family truth’ intended to foster the welfare of believers.” (Hiebert)

When we experience suffering we must maintain an eternity past to eternity future perspective

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This is vitally important if we are to not become bitter, anxious, and ineffective in Christian service and instead stay strong in our daily commitment to live for and glorify God

The next term employed by Peter when he references this letter’s recipients is “exiles”

The idea behind the term “exile” is a temporary resident who is living in a foreign land

Other synonymous terms are “stranger,” “pilgrim,” “sojourner”

Peter uses this terminology again in his second letter, chapter 2 and verse 11, “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.”

The writer Hebrews also utilized it in chapter 11, verse 13: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

Christians should never had the intention of putting their roots down too deeply into this world’s systems, whether this be material possessions, status, wealth, or achievements

We are only temporary residents before reaching our eternal home, e.g. name your address and reference song

Acknowledging this greatly helps us in times of suffering

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This present world is not all we have got and therefore we do not need to put all our hope in it

The apostle Paul was one who clearly understood this

2 Corinthians 4:16-18: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

The apostle John also put great emphasis on having this eternal, not only temporal view of life

1 John 2:15-17: “Do not love the world or the things in the world.  If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

As temporary residents we firmly root our present lives in our eternal future, especially when we experience suffering

Our hope, our only sure security lies in Revelation 21:1-5

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“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful’.”

When we go back to verse one, the text states these elect exiles to whom Peter addresses this letter were dispersed throughout Asia Minor, or present-day Turkey

They were living under Roman rule with it’s harsh, unrelenting accompanying persecution of those who identified themselves as believers in Jesus

By extension, we too are also dispersed, elect exiles in just as these ancient Christians were

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We must remember this amongst all the uncertainty and turbulence within our present world, both in regard to health and political realities

Our hope must be in God not in scientists or politicians

They aren’t the ones we look to for the ultimate answers

This becomes very important to resolutely believe, especially when we’re experiencing suffering or being persecuted for our faith in Jesus

Peter, in verse two, next reinforces God’s election of believers

We have eternal life through God’s foreknowledge

In the eternal plan of God the Father, He knew from all eternity past that we would receive the forgiveness of our sins through Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross

He also foreknew from eternity past Christ would rise victorious from the grave, thus guaranteeing the future resurrection of all who trust in Him as their Saviour

He also foreknew what suffering we would endure in this life

David wrote of this in Psalm 31:15: “My times are in Your hand. Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.”

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Next, notice the trinitarian nature of this verse

God the Father foreknows through His complete omniscience

God the Holy Spirit sanctifies us through His divine power

God the Son forgives us through His shed blood upon Calvary

These truths are unchangeable realities we can trust with total confidence

What God starts He is going to finish

Everything in a Christian’s life centres around God’s limitless power, His overarching sovereignty to conform believers into Christ’s image, based entirely upon an unbreakable eternal relationship

Peter concludes his introductory words by praying for the grace and the peace of God to be multiplied to each person who receives this letter

Christians need God’s grace and His peace in extra measure when experiencing suffering

Peter goes on to outline and expand upon the eternal guarantees we have as Christians, starting in verse three

Please read the remainder of chapter one in preparation and spiritual reflection for next Sunday