

Still Coming to Christ

1 Peter 2:9-10

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 13, 2017

Well, have you guys been enjoying our music lately? Aren't they doing a great job? They've been very much a blessing. Well, you can go ahead and turn in your Bibles with me to the book of 1 Peter. And as you're doing that this morning, we're in a series called "The Suffering Church," where we're talking about how the church should handle pain and suffering. We've been in this series for a couple of months now - started back in April. And I would have to say that this series is making me nervous because in the past couple of months, I've gotten a flat tire, I backed into a tree, seen both my computers stop working and taken one of my kids to the hospital. I've also seen Chilliwack go up in smoke and the air quality go to a level eight warning on the, whatever the ... I didn't know there was a radar, but apparently, there's a radar. You can check it online and see if you're about to die or not when you breathe.

We had an 80% chance, whatever that means. Anyway, I'm wondering what's gonna happen next. You guys have heard of Murphy's Law, if it can go wrong, it will. Well, there's a Murphy's law in preaching, which says that if you preach on suffering, you will suffer. So my solution is next week, we're gonna start a series on joy. We're gonna call it "The Blissful Church" or "The Church on Cloud Nine". So see how that ... What direction that takes us. I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. But we're in the series because everyone suffers, don't they? We all experience pain. It's something we can all relate to.

In 1955, Dwight D. Eisenhower addressed a group of graduates from West Point, the US military academy, and he told them that, "You're not going out of here to have a good time." He said, "You're going out of here to go to war." He said, "You're going out to suffer." And I could say the same thing to you this morning. You're not going out to have a good time. You're going out to war. You're going out to suffer. It's a suffering world. Suffering is part of life. It's what we do as believers.

As I was studying for this sermon, I came across an article that said that most of the Psalms were written during times of suffering. Chris pointed out Job was written at a time like that. Most of the New Testament was written that way as well. Most Christians in history suffered. John Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress in prison. John Calvin wrote his commentaries amidst tremendous pain. Florence Nightingale reorganized the hospitals in England from her convalescent bed. William Wilberforce stopped slavery while watching his daughter die of a disease. On the secular front, Beethoven was deaf. Julius Caesar suffered from strokes. Abraham Lincoln was depressed. Napoleon had stomach issues. So we could talk about the blissful church but I don't think that would be as helpful to you. I don't think the world is full of bliss. Would anybody say "amen" to that? The world is a painful place and we need to be ready for that.

Augustine said, "God had a Son without sin, but He never had a Son without suffering." Suffering is the lot of all of us. The poet, Tennessee Williams said, "Don't look forward to the day when you stop suffering because when it comes, you will know you are dead." He said that

sarcastically, but he was right. Suffering will end the moment you die as a believer, but not until then.

Friedrich Nietzsche, interestingly, the philosopher said, "To live is to suffer and to survive is to find some meaning in it." Which is ironic because he never found any meaning in his suffering, but he had a good point. To survive suffering, you have to find some meaning in it. And the meaning is this: God is using it for your good. That's why He gives it to you. He's using it to help you. I don't know if you've ever looked at it this way, but you can tell someone is alive by pinching them. Do you guys say "pinching" or "peenching"? Is "peenching" a Tennessee phrase? Okay, alright. Well, I corrected myself. I put that in my notes. I wrote out the way to pronounce it. Dead men don't feel pinches. So you can pinch a dead man all day long and he'll never feel it. In the same way, God pinches us to show us that we're alive. He inflicts pain on us to wake us up spiritually.

I was talking with a friend recently about this, and he said, "We live in a broken world where things break and it's not our job as Christians to keep that from happening." You buy a computer, it breaks. Buy a tire, it goes flat. But it is our job to respond to it in a God-honouring way. It is our job to handle suffering in a way that pleases Christ. That's the meaning of it. That's the way you survive your suffering. You don't go home at night and kick the dog. That doesn't honour Christ. That doesn't please Him. You don't go home and shout at the kids. You don't go home and verbally attack your spouse. You go home and ask, "How would it please Christ to respond to this trial in my life?" That's the way you survive it as a believer. "How would God be honoured in the way I'm gonna handle this?" Which is not an easy thing to think about.

We've had a lot of people in our church suffer recently, and I've talked with several of you and asked you some good questions so I can think through this with you. But I've asked you, "What is the hardest thing about suffering?" And several people said fear. It's a frightening thing to suffer because you don't know when it will end. You don't know when it'll be over. I talked with a lady in our church who told me that, "If I knew when this would be over I could look forward to that. If I knew when this trial would end, I could count the days and find hope in that. But I can't do that, so I'm scared. I don't know when it's gonna end, so I'm frightened." Several of you have said it's frustrating to suffer. Because when you suffer, your life gets turned upside down. You go from 90 miles an hour to zero like that. You go from running, and running, and running, and going, and going, and going, to sitting and just lying there doing nothing. It's frustrating. It's embarrassing to suffer, people have to wait on you hand and foot, it's stressful to see your body racked with pain. It's uncomfortable, which might be the hardest thing of all. Francis Schaeffer said that Americans, and by extension, Canadians, we worship two gods, money and comfort. And when you take one of those gods away, we fall apart, don't we? When you take away our comfort, we can't handle it. I mentioned the terrorist attacks on September 11th several times in this series, 'cause that was probably one of the worst tragedies I've ever seen. 3,000 people died that day, a little under that, 2,970 something people were murdered in that act of violence. But just a few years later in the tsunami off the coast of Asia, 280,000 people died. That's about 90 times that amount. And a few years before that in the Rwandan Civil War, 1 million people died, that is 300 times that amount. But September 11th affected me so terribly because I'm so comfortable, see. It got my attention because I'm not used to pain, and that's why God put it in my life to get my attention. That's why he allows tragedy to enter into our lives to take us out of

our comfort zone. It doesn't answer all the questions, but it does answer some. God is using suffering to keep us awake.

It is said that you can't get a diamond without pressure and you can't grow as a Christian without it. You can't grow without pain in your life. As terrible as it is, God uses it for our good. That's the meaning in it. And that leads us to the book of 1 Peter. 1 Peter was written to Christians who were suffering. To be honest, we don't know much more about them than that, because that was the point of the book. It was written to Christians who are trying to find some meaning in their pain.

And if you notice in verse 1, the book starts out, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen". I don't know if you noticed this, but this is an interesting thing to call aliens chosen. Typically, if you're an alien, you are not chosen. And if you're chosen, you're not an alien. Does that make sense? You guys follow that? And these people were both because they were different. They were both because God had saved them out of the world. They were aliens, they didn't belong, and they were suffering for it, but God chose to give them a better life in His grace and mercy. If you look in verses 2 through 3, it says, "He sanctified them and sprinkled them with His blood and gave them grace and peace in the fullest measure." Verse 5, He protects them. Even though the world is attacking them, God protects them, gives them an inheritance in verse 4, gives them faith and joy in verses 7 and 8. He gives them hope in verse 13, redemption in verse 18.

And then starting in chapter 2, Peter gives these people a response to all these blessings. He tells them what they should do with these diamonds that are coming out of their pain, with these joys and blessings. And he says this, if you read chapter 2 with me, he says, "Therefore" ... (pointing back to all he has said so far)

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect the salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, for a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." This precious value, then, is for you who believe, but for those who disbelieve; "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very cornerstone," and "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. But you are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and 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; 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, there's a lot in there, but if you notice, this chapter starts out with some action verbs. By the way, one principle of interpretation is you always look for the verbs. The verbs tell you what's going on in a passage. And verse one refers to putting aside all sin and longing for the milk of the word, and growing in respect to salvation. Those are all action verbs, because this is what Peter wants you to do when you suffer. He wants you to act, he wants you to do something. He doesn't want you to let go and let God, he doesn't want you to sit idly by and do nothing. He wants you to get busy pleasing the Lord. And in verse 4, he wants you to come to Christ. That's the next action verb on our list. It kind of carries the thought of this chapter. You come to Christ in verse 4, and as you do that, He makes you into living stones in a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. He will not disappoint you (in verse 6). He'll be precious to you (in verse 7). And that brings us to our passage for today.

In 1 Peter 2:9-10, Peter gives us some more benefits to believing in Jesus. He gives us some more diamonds to pull out of our suffering. I've told you before that suffering is like a magnet that draws us closer and closer and closer to Christ. Or we said suffering is like a boomerang, where no matter how far you throw it, it always leads you back to your Saviour. If you throw it to the hospital, it leads you back to Christ. If you throw it to the funeral home, it leads you back to Christ. If you throw it to your child's sick bed, it leads you back to Christ. If it throws you to the side of the road fixing a flat tire, it leads you back to Christ. You just keep going back to your Saviour. That's what you do when you're suffering. One author said, "Christ is the ABC of the Christian life, right down to Z. He is the Christian's entire alphabet." Another author said, "Christ is the centre of Christianity. All else is just circumference." And this is what I want to talk to you about this morning. I want to talk to you about the centre of Christianity as it relates to your suffering. Let's just talk about the ABC's of the Christian life.

And let's do it this way. If you're taking notes, in 1 Peter 2:9-10, and Peter says you come to Christ for several more things when you're suffering. Last week, we looked at several things you come to Christ for. Here's some more things you come to Christ for when you're suffering. The first one is: acceptance. You come to Christ for acceptance. That's pretty fundamental. You come to be accepted by God, so He will receive you. I think the worst thing about suffering is you don't feel like you're accepted by God. You feel like you're being rejected. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? In his book entitled "Night," the Jewish philosopher, Erick Wiesel, writes about his time in the concentration camps in World War II, and he describes watching several children being executed, and someone behind him saying, "Where is God? And for Heaven's sakes," the person said, "Where is God?" And I think there's nothing worse than asking that when you're suffering. "Where is God? Why did He leave me? Why didn't He stop this. Why doesn't He care?" Peter says here to these dear people, he says, "If you're a Christian, you don't have to ask that. God is still there. He didn't leave you."

And he says it like this in verse 9. He says, "But you are a chosen race." The word "you" here is emphatic. It's at the front of the sentence in Greek. Pointing back to what Peter said earlier in verse eight, "For they stumble because they are disobedient. But you," he says, "are a chosen race. The world rejects Christ, so to this doom they were appointed." he says. "But you were appointed to something better," which is what the word "chosen" means. It means, in the words of Ephesians 1, "chosen before the foundation of the world; chosen before time began." And

Peter says, "If God chose you before that, then He won't leave you when you're suffering." If He chose you before time began, then He's not going to abandon you when you're in pain.

It's interesting that Peter calls these people a chosen race, because they didn't have any race anymore. The Babylonians and Persians had seen to that. When they took over the world, the Babylonians and then later the Persians, to keep anybody from staging a coup, they scattered the people everywhere. They took over, it's called the Dispersion or the *diaspora* in Greek. They took over Rome and they dispersed the Romans to Egypt. They took over Egypt and they dispersed the Egyptians to Rome which means that these people lost their race. Everyone lost their race in the dispersion. They didn't know where they came from anymore. They didn't know who they belonged to. They lost their family tree. This was the days before the internet, where you can go on the ancestry pages and find out where all ... They didn't have any of that. All their records were burned. "And that's okay," Peter says, "Because now you have a new race. Now you are a chosen race. It's okay that you're scattered, because now you have a new family. You have the family of God and God will never abandon you."

I hope you know, when you believe in Jesus, not only do you get joy and protection and salvation, like we talked about in chapter 1, you also get a family, amen? You also get a church that will treat you as one of your own. We don't always live up to this like we should, but the Bible says that the church is supposed to be closer to you than any earthly family. Your earthly family is your family on a physical level. Your church is your family on a soul level. It cuts deeper than that. When I was in seminary, I was a single guy living in Los Angeles and a family who lived right around the corner from our church, not in the safest neighbourhood, told me that their door was always open to me. Now, the door had bars on it, and their neighbourhood had bars on it, but they said their door was always open to me. If I needed a couch, their couch was mine. If I needed some food, their fridge was mine, which meant the world to a single guy. If I needed a car, their car was ... See, they did it for a lot of people. They became my family. They were my home away from home. You can pray for them. They're going to the mission field in Kazakhstan, to do that for people in another country. But the church is supposed to be that way for you. It's supposed to be your home away from home. I remember last time I was out in LA for the Grace Advance Academy, Hohn Cho and I were eating lunch together and I said, "Hey Hohn, I'm not gonna eat all this salad, do you want some?" And he said, "Sure." So, I just started shovelling it on his plate. I just remember thinking, this guy's a corporate lawyer and here I am shovelling salad on, but we're a family, right? It's two people from the same race, the same spiritual race. My food is his food. My salad is his salad. We're there for one another. That's the church. You guys get this. I think you do a great job of this. Someone needs help moving and you move them. You show up with your trucks and cleaning supplies ready to go, then you help with the meals and you feed them. They need prayer, and you pray for them, counsel and you counsel them. You do a great job of this.

And let me tell you why this is so important. This is so important, because this separates the church from the world. It separates the believer from the unbeliever. Jesus said, "They will know you're My disciples, if you have correct doctrine." Did He say that? Now, correct doctrine is important, don't get me ... It's extremely important. But he said, "They'll know you're My disciples, if you have love for one another." See, the world can't love like the church can. The world can talk about love and sing about love and make cheesy TV shows about love, but it can't

love like the church can. It can't see past the colour of someone's skin. I remember we were adopting our first son and going through an adoption agency, which was helping us adopt a child from another race. And they said, "If you're gonna do that, then you're gonna have to put him among his own people." That was the phrase they used. I remember that. "You're gonna have to put him among his own people." And what they meant was, if you adopt an African-American child, you're gonna have to move him to an African-American neighbourhood. If you adopt a Hispanic child, you're gonna have to move him to a Hispanic neighbourhood. You're gonna have to put him among his own kind. Now, I told this adoption agency, very gently, but I said, listen, "If we adopt this child, we're going to be his people. If we bring him into our home, he's gonna be one of us. He's gonna have our last name, he's gonna have all the resources we have to succeed in life. Wherever we go, he goes, wherever we live, he lives, we will be his family." But the agency didn't get that. The world doesn't get that.

We talk a lot as if race doesn't matter anymore. To the world, race matters very much. They can't see past the physical. Warren Webster was a white missionary in Pakistan in the 1960s, who was asked, "What would you do if your daughter fell in love with a Pakistani?" And this was in the 1960s, this was a hot topic. And he said this, he said, "Better for her to marry a Christian Pakistani than a godless white man." You see, that's how the church looks at race. That's how the church looks at the colour of someone's skin. We don't care if you're Pakistani or not. We don't care if your African-American or Hispanic, we just care that you know Christ. We just care that you've been purchased with His blood. And if you are, then you're one of us, period. If you are, then you're accepted. That's all. That's the end of the story. I grew up in a town where we had a white church and a black church. In fact, the town was divided up that way. Everything was white and black. So, we had a white and black grocery store. We had a white and black gas station. We had a white and black restaurant and we had a white and a black church. Can I just tell you that there is no such thing as a white and a black church? There's only a church. And can I just tell you, there's no such thing as a white and a black Christian? There's only a Christian. I also grew up in a town where people said, so and so is a godly person, he's just racist. Or so and so is a godly believer, he just hates black people or white people. That's like saying, "He's a godly person, he just murders people every once in a while." or "He's a godly person, he just cheats on his wife." It doesn't work that way. There is no such thing as a racist Christian.

I mean, look at this another way, stepping away from the issue of race for a moment. You never suffer alone, that's the idea of what Peter is saying here. The word "race" is a plural term. It's a singular term, but it's an all-embracing term; white, black, or whatever. Hispanic, Pakistani, if you come to Christ, you will never be alone. After all He has done for you, God will never leave you. After protecting you and saving you and redeeming you and crucifying His Son for you, He will not leave you stranded in your suffering. You will always have a church, and you will always have a Saviour.

Several years ago, I met a young man who was very passionate about evangelism. Every chance he got, he was sharing his faith in Christ to people. He would go do it for the homeless people, he would go do it for anyone he could, and I asked him why? And he told me this, he said, "Several years before this, I was caught robbing convenience stores and sent to prison. And while I was there in prison," he said, "I was contemplating suicide, I was thinking about ending my life and someone gave me a Bible and they gave me the Gospel and that changed everything

and now I want to do the same for others." And he said, "I was locked up, but I was free." He said, "I was rejected by the world, but I was accepted by God." This is what Jesus has done for you at the cross. He has accepted you even though the world has rejected you. He has made you free even though you were locked up, even though you were suffering. Here's a little theology behind this. Hebrews 10:12 says, "But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, 'sat down at the right hand of God.'" And Ephesians 2:6 says, "And God raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." What that means is that, Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, and we're seated there with Him. He has the Father's attention, and we have His attention in heaven.

So, He will never leave us. He will never abandon us in our suffering. Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." Hebrews 7:25 says, "Therefore, He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

And can I just make this comment too, about the issue of a chosen race? If you have problems with people from other races, then you're gonna have very, a very big problem with the Christian religion, because your Saviour is from another race. If you're a Gentile, if you're a non-Jew, you are part of an interracial religion. Our Saviour was part of another race, and, in His mercy, He gave His life for us. And in these passages that I just read to you say, that He lives to make intercession day after day, night after night, He is making a request known to the Father. And again, the point is, He will never leave you alone in your suffering. If you come to Him, you have a faithful church and you have a faithful God. You have a Saviour who loves you very, very much.

And that leads to another thing you come to Christ for. When you're suffering, you come to Him for acceptance, and you come to Him for access. You come to Christ, so you can have access to God, so you can talk to Him. The reason so many people ask, "Where is God?" when they suffer is because they don't feel like they can talk to God anymore. They don't feel like God hears their prayers. I told you before about the writer in the Scotland Herald newspaper, who said after the Asian Tsunami. He said, "If there is a God, He should be ashamed of Himself." He said, "I hope I'm right that there is no God, for if there were, then He would have to shoulder the blame for this. In my books, He would be as guilty as sin and I would want nothing to do with Him." See, he said that because he thought God didn't hear his prayers anymore. He said that because he thought he did not have access to God in his suffering. And Peter says that you do have access. He says that, "Through Christ, the pathway to heaven is wide open."

And he says it like this in verse 9, he says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood." That's the phrase he used earlier in verse 5. There it was "holy priesthood" now it's "royal priesthood". In the Old Testament, the priests were the only ones who had access to God. They were the only ones who could come into God's presence. Ordinary people like you and me couldn't do that. It had to be a priest, it had to be someone from the tribe of Levi. They were the middlemen between us and God. If you wanted to go to God, you had to go through them. But now that Jesus has come, He is our great high priest. And Peter says, "He has made us into a priesthood." This was a very interesting thing to say to a group of non-Jews, Gentiles, from all these different

provinces. He said, "You have the same place in the kingdom of God as these Old Testament priests did." It's a revolutionary thing to say. He said, you don't need a middle man anymore. Jesus was your middleman and now you go to God through him.

The word "royal" here is also an interesting term. It could be translated "kingly". It means, "top of the line, cream of the crop". There's nothing higher than a king. And in God's eyes, there is nothing higher than a Christian. At least on this list, humanly speaking anyway, which means that, not only do you have access to God, but you have ultimate access to God. Not only do you have a pass into His presence, but you have a pass at the highest level. You have a VIP pass. You have the golden ticket. You have the keys to the kingdom. Jesus whispers your name to the Father, if you trust in Him, which should give you a very different perspective in your suffering, amen? It should give you a very different outlook on things like flat tires and sickness and pain.

Corrie ten Boom lived at the same time as Elie Wiesel and she suffered through many of the same concentration camps that he did, but she had a different perspective on it. She had a totally different outlook. And in one of her books, she says that, one day, she was complaining to her sister Betsy about the lice in their sleeping quarters. Their beds were filthy and covered in lice and so she was complaining about it and her sister said this. She said, "Corrie, don't you see, those lice are God's lice sent from heaven to help us?" She said, "They are the only thing keeping the Nazis out of our room." God sent them to save us. See, Betsy said that because she was a Christian. She said that because she understood what Peter is saying here, "Jesus came to give us access to the Father, so that we can see God's lice." He came to bring us into God's presence, so that we can see things from a higher perspective. My friends, that tire is not just a flat tire, it's God's flat tire. It's sent from heaven to help you. It's sent from God to do you good. Now, you may not immediately know what the good is, but that's not for you to know. The lice is not just lice, it's God's lice sent to keep the Nazis out. The cancer is not just cancer, it's God's cancer. The flu is not just the flu, it's God's flu. The upset stomach is not just an upset stomach, it's God's upset stomach sent to bless you.

Let me say this another way. There are lessons you can learn (we've said this before) with an upset stomach, that you can't learn anywhere else in life. You guys know exactly what I'm ... There are prayers you have prayed on your sick bed, that you have never prayed anywhere else, amen? There is a sincerity and a depth of feeling that you have. Well, God puts you there for that reason. Lessons like patience and humility and perseverance. You only learn perseverance by persevering, there's no other way to do it. Lessons like contentment and thankfulness and trust. Being a father of little children, there are lessons you learn at 2 AM rocking a baby, that you don't learn at 2 PM watching TV. And God gives you that restless baby in order to teach you those things. See, He's treating you like a king. He's treating you like a priesthood. Doesn't seem that way at the time, but He is.

By the way, my assumption is that kings are generally happy people, at least I assume they are, I've never really met a king before. But they seem happy, they're always smiling. They have the world at their fingertips, they've got a million people at their beck and call. The Bible says we're the same way as Christians. Ephesians 1:3 (just some helpful passages on this) ... Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." When you're reading a passage like that, your

eyes should jump out at the word, "every." That's an all-inclusive term. God gives us every spiritual blessing, He doesn't hold anything back. He's not being stingy with the blessings, if you're in Christ. Psalm 84:11 says, "For the Lord God is a sun and shield and no good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless." That's another all-inclusive term. "No good thing," means "no good thing," God doesn't hold anything back from you. Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work for good, to those who love God who are called according to His purpose." Psalm 34:9, "Oh fear the Lord, you His saints, for to those who fear Him there is no want." Psalm 57:2, "I will cry to God Most High, to God, who accomplishes all things for me." But you get the idea.

As Christians, you should have a very different perspective in your suffering. We don't see things the way the world does. We don't look at trials the way they do. We don't talk about them the way they do. The way some Christians talk, it's almost as if the whole world rises and falls based on whatever gets spouted out in the news. Let me tell you something, the world doesn't rise and fall by anything in the news. It rises and falls at the throne of heaven and that throne is secure and it will always be secure, amen?

It was said about the Puritan Matthew Henry, that he possessed the desirable disposition and power of looking on the bright side of everything. So there was a loveliness in his spirit and a gladness in his heart, which caused others to feel how happy a thing it must be to be a Christian. So this cheerfulness pervaded his entire life. One reason for his great power over many who were not religious, lay in the constant happy spirit with which they witnessed and desired to have. And the interesting thing about that description of Matthew Henry is that he had a hard life. He had what some would consider to be a miserable life. His father was thrown out of his church for preaching the Gospel, which means that he lost his job and they grew up poor. Matthew was not allowed to attend any kind of public school or university. The guy who wrote what's considered to be one of the most popular commentaries of all time never went to school, in the official sense of the word, because the government threw him out. By the time he was old enough to preach, he had to preach in a barn. I've preached in a lot of places, but I've never preached in a barn, and he had to preach there because the government wouldn't allow him to have an official church. But he had the power of looking on the bright side of everything. He had a loveliness of spirit. Gladness was in his heart because in Christ, he had all he needed. In Christ, he was his King. That's the point here. That's how we look at our suffering.

And it leads to one more thing you come to Christ for when you're suffering and that is, and I'll unpack this term, "affiliation." You come to Christ for acceptance, you come to Christ for access, and you come to Christ for affiliation. This one kinda echo some of the other ones, but like we just said, the people Peter was writing to had no affiliation anymore. They were vagabonds in every sense of the word you could call them. You guys know what the word "Hebrew" means? It means "wanderer, someone without a home". These guys were wanderers in 1 Peter. When the Babylonians came in, they took everything. Which means that when these people were suffering, they couldn't call their uncle so and so to come help. Uncle so and so wasn't around anymore. They couldn't go and phone up their government and ask for help from them, the government was gone. So Peter addresses that issue here. And he says in verse 9, "But you're a chosen race, a royal priesthood and a holy nation".

That's another play on words here, because the church is not a nation. Romans 13:1 tells us to submit to the governing authorities, not become one. And later on in 1 Peter 2:13, Peter says, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king, as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers." So this is kind of a play on words, but the idea is that when you come to Christ, you get a new affiliation. When you come to Christ, you join a group of people that have the same role in your life or a similar role to that of the government, even more so, really. The church is in authority over your life.

The way this is worded in Greek is interesting, because "nation" is another way of saying Gentile. It's the word *ethnon* from which we get the word "ethnic". And it was kind of a derogatory term by the Jews. To the Jew, a Gentile was a dirty person. They often called them dogs. If you read some of the rabbi's writings in the centuries before the book of 1 Peter, they would call Gentiles some pretty rough names. And Peter says, "Now that's changed. Now that Christ has come, that's all changed now. Now that Christ has come, you're not dogs anymore." He says, "The dirty has been made clean, the defilement has been washed off of you, and now you've come into another kingdom." That's what this is really getting at.

When you're saved, you come into another realm, another domain. And again, you see things differently. When I first moved to Canada, a buddy of mine from Alberta, who's living in Los Angeles, said, "Everything is gonna change for you when you come to Canada. You can't go around asking for Walmart all the time." You guys have a Walmart, by the way. I'm very blessed by that. He said you can't go around looking for McDonalds. I've passed out because I gotta have my McDonalds. He said you can't go in there talking about miles and inches and gallons, asking where Kentucky Fried Chicken is. He said, "You're going to Canada, this is a different country." He said, "You have to learn how to process things as the country does." That was his point. That's what this verse is saying, "When you become a Christian, you come into a new country and you have to stop thinking like people from the old one. When you come to Christ, you enter a new realm, and you have to stop processing life like you used to."

Donald Grey Barnhouse gave a good illustration of this in his commentary on Romans, and he said that in the revolutionary war, when the colonists left England, they came under a new law, the law of America. He said, they didn't become lawless. They didn't practice anarchy, they submitted to a new law. When you come to Christ, you do the same thing. You're not lawless, you come under His law, which means that when you suffer, your first goal is not to make the suffering stop. Your first goal is to please Christ. When you're in pain, your first job is not to make the pain go away and go back to feeling comfortable. Your first goal is to please Christ. He is your King, He is the ruler of your domain. He is your President, Prime Minister, whatever word you want to put in there, which is what the rest of this passage goes on to say.

In verses 9 through 10, he says, "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. For you were 'not a people' but now you are 'the people of God'; you had 'not received mercy', but now you have 'received mercy'." Peter says, "This is the point of your suffering so that you may proclaim the excellencies of God." That's the first action verb we've seen in a little while, at least the one of

any great significance. This is what? This is the action when you suffer, to proclaim God's excellencies, to make them known.

“Excellency” means “anything wonderful or good or excellent”. Your job in suffering is to tell people how wonderful and good and excellent God is. That's the meaning behind it. That's why God gives it to you. When you suffer, people need to say, there's something different about that person. What is it? And then you tell them. See? They need to say, "You don't handle this the way everyone else does. Why is that?" And then you proclaim it. You make it known. In early 2000, James Montgomery Boice, the pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia was diagnosed with liver cancer, and he's given eight weeks to live. And he showed what it means to proclaim the excellencies of God. His cancer came out of nowhere. One day he was perfectly healthy, the next day he was sick. And the doctor gave him a few weeks to live, and he said this to his congregation. This was one of his last sermons. He says, "Should you pray for a miracle?" He said, "Well, you're free to do that, of course. But my general impression is that the God who is able to do miracles, and He certainly can, is also able to keep you from getting cancer in the first place." He said,

Here's how you should respond to this. You should say that God is in charge, and when things like this come into our lives, they're not an accident. It's not as if God somehow forgot what was going on and something bad slipped by. If God does something in your life, would you change it? If you would, then you would make it worse, not better. I would not change this cancer for the world.

See, that's what Peter is talking about here. It's what it means to proclaim the excellencies of God. It is to tell people that God is in charge, no matter what happens. It's to tell them that this is not an accident. This is not a mistake. This is a good thing because God is good. This is wonderful because God is wonderful. You see? That's talking like a person from another country. Right? A lot of people don't talk like that, they don't handle cancer that way. Only Christians do.

We could say it this way. Your nation gives you a certain perspective. It gives you a certain outlook on life, and you reflect that in how you handle suffering. One author said that as a Christian, you see both sides of the tapestry. If you've ever seen a tapestry or an embroidered curtain, you know on one side there's all these gnarls, and knots, and tangles. And on the other side, you have beauty; picture of a sunset or ocean or something like that. Your life is like that as a believer. On one side, it is tangled, and knotty, and messy. It's nasty-looking. You feel like God has abandoned you at times, you feel like everything is falling apart. And on the other side, there's beauty. On the other side, you have sunsets and oceans. On the other side, you have protection, and an inheritance, and salvation, and redemption. And as a believer, it is your job to proclaim both sides of the tapestry. You live in the same world as lost people live in. You deal with the same problems they do.

The difference is, you see the other side of it, which leads me to kind of round all this off this way. How are you doing with this? How are you doing at proclaiming the excellencies? Can you see both sides of the tapestry this morning? Can you see the beauty amidst your suffering? Can you see all the things in chapter one that are good, and lovely, and wonderful? When you're

fixing a tire by the side of the road, or when you're sick and in bed, do people look at you and say, "Wow, he's different. Wow, she's different. They must be from another world. They must be from another planet."? Or do they look at you and say, "Dah, he's just like us. He handles things the same way we do."? Do you believe God is treating you like royalty when you suffer? Do you feel like He's doing it for your good? Do you see that He's pulling diamonds out of you? Friends, that is the point of your suffering. That's why God gives it to you, to remind you of all the good things that He's doing.

As I was studying for the sermon, I came across an article of a man who climbed Mount Everest, but the interesting thing about this man is that he did it while he was blind. Couldn't see a thing. He climbed the tallest mountain in the world without having any sight. And he didn't know when he started, he didn't know when he was in the middle, and he didn't know when he was at the end. He had to be led every step of the way. And I was struck by that 'cause I thought, "That's what we're like in this life. We're like a blind person climbing Mount Everest." But the good news is, God doesn't leave us to do it on our own. He holds our hand the whole way. He guides us through it, and let's close in a word of prayer and thank Him for that this morning. I want you to let Him lead you over the mountain. Let's pray.

Father, we do pray for Your help in thinking through this issue of suffering and pain, as we've prayed many times before. It may be one of the biggest subjects we could wrestle with. But Lord, we want to do this because we want to live in a real world to Your glory. And we do want to see both sides of the tapestry. Father, I pray for my brothers and sisters in Christ this morning who are suffering, who are wrestling with pain. May you be a God who is gracious and merciful to them. May you encourage them in the dark times. And above all, Father, I pray that you will show Yourself to be a good guide to them. May they see Your loving hand as You're leading them through the mountain of pain.

And I pray for any here who have not trusted in Christ, and they read over these words about a chosen race, and a royal priesthood, and a holy nation. And they scratch their heads and they say, "I don't have any of that. I don't know what you're talking about." Lord, I pray you would break their hearts this morning for their need for a Saviour. Show them they can't go through life on their own. They cannot conquer pain on their own. Thank you, Father, that You're so accessible. Thank you for what Christ has done, to build a bridge between us in Your holy presence. Thank you for the advocate that we have, and may we praise Him some more this morning and the rest of our service. We pray this in Jesus name, amen.