

Suffering in Public & in Private

1 Peter 2:11-12

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 20, 2017

Well, this morning, we're continuing a series called "The Suffering Church," in where we're talking about how the church should handle pain and suffering. When I first came to Grace Fellowship Church, we did a series called "Foundations of the Church," where we talked about some foundational issues of the church. And now, we're talking about suffering, because everyone suffers. It's something we all can relate to. You could say that we all limp through life. I think we all get banged up a little bit. Steve Lawson said, "No one struts though the narrow gate. You only get in with your head bowed low." And because of this, you have to understand the topic of suffering. You can't even get into heaven without suffering. And you can't understand God without it either.

This may be interesting, but suffering teaches us about God. A man once asked a friend, "Where was God when my son died?" And he was told, "The same place He was when His Son died." You see, God suffers too. God experiences heartache and pain like we do. You could even say that God experiences it more, because He turned His back on His Son. When His Son died, He willingly killed Him for our sins, and so it was way more intense. One author said,

Whatever game God is playing with His Creation, He has kept His own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from man that He has not exacted from Himself. God has Himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life, and the cramping restrictions of hard work, to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, death and despair. When God was a man, He played the man.

People often ask, "Why would God allow evil into this world?" And we don't ultimately know the answer to that, but we do know that God has an answer for that, and the answer is Jesus Christ, amen? And we do know that God suffers too. Whatever game He is playing with His creation, He has kept His own rules. He's not asking us to do anything He hasn't done Himself.

John Stott tells a story of several billion people standing before the throne of God and bringing their complaints before Him. He's about to judge them and send them to hell, so they're complaining about it. And they're saying, "God, this is not fair. You can't do this to us. You need to be judged too." And He asked them, "Well, what do you mean? How do you want me to be judged?" And they said this, they said, "Let God be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of His birth be doubted. Let His friends betray Him. Let Him face false charges. Let a prejudiced jury try Him and a cowardly judge convict Him. Let Him be tortured. Let Him be utterly alone. Then, bloody and forsaken, let Him die." And the room grew silent after the sentence against God had been pronounced. No one moved, because suddenly, everyone knew that God had already served that sentence. Now, you have to be very careful when you talk like this. You don't ever want to say, "God deserves judgment," because He doesn't. And you don't ever want to say that, "We can tell God what to do," because we can't. "Let God be true and every man be a liar." But John Stott has a point: God suffers too. That's all he was trying to say with this illustration. God experiences

whatever trouble we have - He has shared with us. Whatever heartache we have, He has. He's not a divine watchmaker who wound up the earth and let it go. He cares about us.

Which leads to another reason we're studying this topic, because the Bible is full of it. Suffering is on every page of the Bible. As I was studying for this sermon, I came across a list of 14 different types of suffering you see in Scripture. It included everything from demonic suffering to mysterious suffering, where we don't know why someone suffered. It included collective suffering, where people suffer collectively, together in groups. You guys do that every Sunday when you hear one of my sermons. You suffer collectively. You're Biblical in that sense. Consequential suffering, apocalyptic suffering, vicarious suffering, providential suffering, the Bible is full of suffering; it's on every page. You can't understand Scripture, if you don't understand this topic. In fact, there's only four chapters in the Bible that don't have suffering in them: The first two and the last two, because they don't have any sin. You guys get that? There's no sin in the first two chapters, there's no sin in the last two chapters, and therefore, there's no suffering. But other than that, the Bible is full of this topic, which is why we're looking at it together, 'cause you can't understand Scripture without studying this.

And it leads to one more reason we're studying this topic, is because you see it in the world around you. You can just hear it in the men's prayers this morning. You live in a suffering world. You live in a world where things go bad. Some time ago, the New York Times published an article, which said that, "In the whole history of the world, there's only been," get this, "268 years of peace." In the whole recorded history of the world, 268 years. Other than that, the rest of the time, we've been trying to kill each other. It was once thought that technology would usher in a golden age of peace, but it's only allowed us to kill each other quicker. You can add to this, that some statistics say that, "One out of every nine people on the planet are starving, because they don't have enough food." There's enough food on this earth to feed the planet two times over, but we can't get it to them, and as a result, one out of nine people are starving. Many of them are children, which makes this worse. And speaking of children, in the United States last year, more than a million children witnessed a violent assault against one of their family members. In Canada, 360,000 children reported that. That doesn't account for all the ones that were not reported. Why is this? Because the world is full of suffering; it's full of pain. And if you can't process that, then you can't live in the real world, amen?

If you want to look at it theologically, the world is fallen, which means it's gone down from what it was before. It's dropped off the edge. It's gone off the deep end, which is why it's so miserable, because when sin entered the world, it flipped everything over on its head. And you have to understand this topic now, which is why we're talking about it on Sundays. I was studying this week for this sermon and I was asking myself, "Why did I pick such a gloomy topic? Of all the things I started talking to you guys about in our second series as a church, why talk about this?" I think we're talking about it, 'cause it's so relevant to real life. They say, "You're either in a trial, you're coming out of the trial, or you're about to go into one." And so, if this isn't relevant for you at the moment, praise God, I'm glad you're not suffering, but just log it in your head, because you will suffer as time goes on.

And that leads us to the Book of 1 Peter. God, in His infinite wisdom, has given us a book like this to teach us about the real world. 1 Peter was written to Christians who were suffering; they

were living in a fallen place. The word “suffering” appears 16 times in the book; that's about three times per chapter, 'cause that's what this is about. And you don't see it much in the first chapter, but the idea is all over the place. If you look in verses 3-5, you can see some of the suffering that's mentioned here, it's behind the scenes. Later on, Peter will get into more details about it, but he says in verse 3,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

And there are several phrases in that passage that are reminiscent of suffering, phrases like, "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away." Peter says that, because their earthly inheritance had perished and faded away. These people were part of the dispersion where the Babylonians swept in, and took over their inheritance, and stole it from them, and left them with nothing. You guys have your inheritance in a bank, I'm guessing. I hope you don't have it buried in the backyard. These people's banks were stolen from them, and Peter gives them hope, and a better inheritance to come. Verse 5 also mentions the protection of God, which is another suffering term. You don't need protection, unless there's a threat; these people had one. They were in deep, deep trouble. It mentioned salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, because they had no salvation in this time, no physical deliverance anyway. Verse 6 mentions their trials. Verse 7 mentions a test by fire.

Skipping down a little bit, verse 24 mentions all flesh withering like grass. And that leads us to chapter 2, where Peter gives us a response to all this. He kind of shift gears for a minute, and he says, "This is how you are to respond to your suffering. Here's what you need to do." And if you look in verse 1 of chapter 2, it says,

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.”

And just skip on down to verse 9, and he says,

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”. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in

which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Now, obviously, there's a lot in here, but I want you to notice all the action verbs in this passage. There's about three times as many action verbs in 1 Peter 2, as there was in chapter 1, and the reason is simple, because this is what Peter wants you to do in light of your suffering, he wants you to act. He wants you to do something. He wants you to, "Put aside sin and long for the Word," in verse 1. He wants you to, "come to Christ," in verse 4, and, "proclaim His excellencies," in verse 9. He doesn't want you to sit still. Christianity is a religion of action. Christians are busy people. When you guys tell me you're busy, I say, "Hallelujah, that's good." And his point here is that, as the suffering kicks up, so does the activity. When you suffer spiritually, you read more, you witness more, you call out to God more, because your mind is more focused on Him.

And that leads us to our passage for this morning, starting in verse 11, Peter gives us a whole new set of actions to take, that could be grouped into this. We could call it "a private and a public response to suffering." If you're taking notes, in 1 Peter 2:11-12, Peter gives us a private response and a public response to suffering. As we just said, suffering is everywhere. You can't avoid it. You're gonna see it in private and you're going to see it in public. You're gonna see it when everybody's looking and you're gonna see it when nobody's looking. It comes from every angle, so let's look at these two angles of it this morning.

First, let's look at the private side of suffering. Here's what suffering looks like when no one is around. Here's how you need to handle it. "The first one," Peter says is, "You need to be urgent." That's how he starts this passage off: "It's your first response privately to suffering, you need to be urgent." If you read in verse 12, he said, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers". Suffering should give you a sense of urgency. It should light a fire under you. Several years ago, I choked on a piece of beef stew and had to be rushed to the hospital. I don't encourage that, by the way. It was on a Sunday morning after church. I was suffering. I was thinking, "Lord, I did a good thing this morning. I preached. And now, I'm choking on beef stew on my way ... " And I was sitting in the hospital bed zonked out, 'cause they'd just given me a muscle relaxer, and my sweet wife says, "Are you ready to preach tonight?" And I said, "Woman, you're trying to kill me." I said, "Look at me. I'm wearing a hospital gown. How can I preach tonight?" But what I should have said is, "Absolutely, I'll preach, 'cause it lit a fire under me." See? It got me thinking about things of eternity, thinking about heaven and a better place. And suffering does that to you, it lights a fire under you.

The word "urge" here that Peter uses, is *parakaleó* in Greek, which means "to beg someone" or "to implore them." In some passages, it means "to come alongside, and put your arm around them, and plead with them." There's a sense of urgency; there's a sense of desperation here. These people are hurting. They're in a tight spot. They're laid up in a hospital bed, they're choking on beef stew. And the verse says, "They're aliens and strangers," which we'll talk about in a minute, so Peter urges them to take that seriously.

There's times as a pastor when you're talking with someone and you're almost blown away, because there is no sense of urgency about them. I've preached at funerals before and wondered,

"Am I the only one here thinking about death?" I remember a lady was working on my teeth one time. She said her husband was a funeral director and I asked her, "Does your husband ever think about death?" And she looked at me like I was insane. "Well, lady, do you ever think about teeth?" Suffering is supposed to create that sense of urgency. And as William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania said, "Without fire, there is no acceptable sacrifice." And this is why God allows you to suffer, to make your sacrifice acceptable, to create a fire in you.

I think one reason many of us don't feel this sense of urgency anymore, is 'cause we don't suffer enough. We don't feel a fire burning within us, 'cause our lives are far too easy. The only time we see death is on the television. The only time we see pain is in a book. We're like the T-shirt that said, "Jesus died, so I could take a nap." Or the bumper sticker that said, "Jesus is my fire insurance." For some of us, that's all He is: He's fire insurance. He's a soft, fluffy pillow. And when we start thinking that way, God allows us to suffer, to change our mind. When we think that way, God, in His grace and mercy, sends us to the hospital, in order to wake us up from the delusion. Just a few passages on this, Hebrews 12 says, "And you have forgotten the exhortation, which is addressed to you as sons, for what son is there whom his Father does not discipline? 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." This is why God brings discipline into your life, to give you the peaceful fruit of righteousness. This is why He lets you suffer, to train you up under it and give you a sense of urgency. Because of this, Job 5:17 says, "How happy is the man whom God reproves, who does not despise His discipline." Psalm 94:12 says, "Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O Lord." How many of you ever feel blessed in your chastening? See, that's the Biblical response to this.

And it leads to another private response to suffering, and that is, you need to abstain from fleshly lust. And Peter goes on in the verse, and he tells you how to express discipline and urgency. He says, "You need to abstain from fleshly lust." That's what the verse says, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts." We don't know if lust was a real problem for the people Peter was writing to, but he mentions it earlier in chapter 1, he's gonna mention it again in chapter 4, and here he says to, "abstain from it." That word is *apecho* in Greek, it means "to hold back, to keep away from something." That's the way you show urgency towards God, you keep away from sin. Christians who are living in sin have no sense of urgency.

And then he says, "as aliens and strangers," the idea here is, "You don't belong in this world. This is not your home. Don't get too comfortable here." I've told you before, that a young girl was once asked, "Are you scared walking through the cemetery at night?" And she said, "No, because my home is on the other side." Friends, your home is on the other side, so don't get caught up in the lusts of this life. It's all just temporary. It's just transient. I'm guessing most of you don't get too finicky about your hotel room before leaving it. Why is that? 'Cause you're just passing through. It's not your home. For those of you on a tighter budget, you don't get too caught up on the campground, when you're leaving the campground, 'cause you don't live there. I don't know if you've ever seen someone go to hospice care or go to their deathbed. I know we have some doctors in this room and you've probably seen that a lot. But if you talk to people in that kind of place, they'll often say things like, "I want to go home. I want to go someplace else." Why? Because that hospital bed is not comfortable, it's not their home. Friends, this world is not your home. And when you forget that, God brings suffering to remind you. It's like a calling card

that calls us back home, suffering is. It's like a divine pager. Do you guys remember the pagers? Do they still have pagers, by the way? A pager that pages you and snaps you out of it for a minute, "Hey, you don't belong here."

You could look at it like this: Jonathan Edwards said he was resolved never to do anything, which he would be afraid to do, if it were the last day of his life. And you don't want to be caught sinning, lusting, on the last day of your life. "You don't want to go to heaven while indulging in a sin, so abstain from it," Peter says. "Keep away from it."

And that brings us to one more private response to this: wage war with your sin. Wage a war with your sin. If you read all of verse 11, it says, "Your sin is waging war with you, so you need to wage a war back." It says, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul." "Wage war" is a military term. It means "to carry out a campaign against something, to start an all-out war to the death." This is not a tickle fight; this is a deathly fight. There's no room for peace here; there's no room for friendship with the flesh. John Owen said, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you." You could put that in here. "Be putting it to death or it will put you to death."

I remember listening to a John Piper sermon several years ago, when he said, "A lot of Christians murmur about their sin, they murmur about their shortcomings. They murmur, murmur, murmur." He said, "Make war! You don't mess around with this. You don't play around with temptation." They say, "You don't feed the lions at the zoo, 'cause they're gonna turn around and eat you." You don't feed your lusts, because they're gonna turn around and eat you. They're gonna take everything you have. I can't tell you how many times I've seen someone fall apart spiritually, because they took one wrong glance at a computer screen, and then it was over. How many times do you see marriages break down, because someone started watching soap operas in the afternoon, or reading trashy romance novels, and then they wanted a divorce, because they can't understand why their husband doesn't act like that. See, you have to kill a thing like that. They say, "Sin always asks for more than you're willing to pay and takes you farther than you're willing to go, so you can't give it an inch." The best way to defeat poison is never to drink it. You starve it out. Some of you here this morning may be sipping on poison and you're wondering why your spiritual life is a wreck. Well, the way you fix it, is you stop sipping the poison.

And let me summarize it this way, if we could put all of verse 11 together, we could just say it like this, is, "A godly response to suffering starts in the mind." It starts in the mind. This is where you get victory, in your mind. The battle lines are drawn in your head. When you suffer, you get so caught up on the physical side of things. You get so caught up in the hurts and the pains going on outside of you, that you forget that the war is in your head. The battle's in your head. The victory or defeat is in your head. It's not out here. J. C. Ryle was the bishop of Liverpool, England from 1880 to 1900. Some of you have probably read his writings. He was a very successful author. He wrote over 200 pamphlets and more than 20 books. He sold in the millions, but he had a hard life. His father went bankrupt when he was a young man and he had to spend the rest of his life paying his father's debts back. As a matter of fact, interestingly, J. C. Ryle got into writing to help pay off his father's debts. And he buried two of his wives, he had to raise three of his sons almost alone. And he said that, this is one of the lessons he learned in the midst of all of this suffering, he said, "There is nothing which shows our ignorance so much as our

impatience under trouble. We forget that every cross is a message from God and intended to do us good in the end. Trials are intended to make us think; they're intended to impact our minds." "Anything", he says, "Anything is better than living in carelessness, and dying in sin, and God makes us suffer to keep us from that dreadful state."

I'm guessing I'm not the only Christian in here who turns off his mind from time to time. Does anybody else identify with that? Let's be honest. Did some of you come in here this morning with your minds turned off, and when I shouted a moment ago, you woke up? That's why preachers shout; it helps that way. But we forget we're at war, don't we? Canada's a comfortable place. You can come to church this morning without fear of death, without fear of threat, without realizing that you're in a conflict, so God, in His mercy, lets you suffer, so you'll remember it. He lets you suffer, so you'll turn your brain back on again. And if you're wondering how to do this, how to go to war, Peter doesn't go into that here. He goes onto something else, which we'll talk about in a minute, but let me just say a few words about this.

If you're wondering, "How do I wage war against the flesh? How do I fight this sin?" Let me just give you a couple things. We'll go through these quickly. One is, you need to see this as a daily struggle. You need to see this as a daily struggle. A lot of times, people come for help, they come for counselling, and they say, "I need to fix this problem in my life." It's taken them 20 years to get here and they want it fixed like that. It doesn't work that way. It's a daily fight. You can't win the war overnight. If you read your Bibles, you'll see there's numerous times when the Christian life is described as "a walk" for this reason, 'cause you have to live it one step at a time. When you walk, you don't get out of your car, and boom, you're right here in the sanctuary. You gotta put one foot in front of the other and get there slowly, gradually, sometimes painfully. The war with sin is a walk. You fight it everyday. You get victory over the flesh everyday. You read your Bible one day at a time. You go to church one day at a time. You pray, and give, and serve, one day at a time. One man asked his doctor, he said, "Doctor, how long do I have to stay in this hospital bed?" The doctor said, "One day at a time." That's how you win the victory over sin.

You also have to fight it with all your heart. That's another tip for waging war against the flesh. You fight it with all your heart. You can't kill something half-heartedly. Does that make sense? You can't kill something halfway. You either kill it or you don't. In World War II, the British General, Bernard Montgomery, was fighting the famous tank commander, Erwin Rommel, and losing. Every time he attacked Rommel's forces, he got beat back with heavy losses, to the point that someone asked him, they said, "Are you going to quit, General Montgomery? Are you gonna give up and go home?" To which he said this, he said, "We're gonna stay here alive or we're gonna stay here dead." Friends, you're gonna have to fight the flesh that way. You're gonna stay here alive or you're gonna stay here dead. Peter says, "You're not cuddling the flesh, you're killing it." You're not playing with sin, you're putting it to death.

And that leads to one more tip ... And we're just breezing through these quickly ... Fight violently. We could say, "Fight actively." We could even say, "Fight Biblically." You can't be passive about this problem. You can't sit around and wait for a victory to fall from the sky, you have to do something. No one ever won a war by sitting down. No one ever won a war by being passive. You have to actually fight. If you struggle with lust, get rid of your computer, cancel your internet subscription, do whatever it takes. There may be other ways, but you've gotta do

something. If you struggle with discontentment in your marriage, cancel the cable, throw away the trashy novels, turn off the soap operas. But fight violently. Don't hold anything back with your sin, 'cause it's not gonna hold anything back from you.

1 Peter goes on, later on, and he calls the devil, "A roaring lion, prowling around for someone to devour." He doesn't say, "The devil is prowling around for someone to nibble on." He doesn't want munchies. He wants to devour you. He likes targeting Christians too, by the way, 'cause he loves to bring dishonour to the name of Christ. I like this story - this story is told of a time when John the Apostle went into a house where Cerinthus, the heretic, was staying. He didn't know the heretic was in there, and when he saw him, he fled from the house, and didn't stop until he'd run for several city blocks. And when someone finally caught up to him, they said, "Why'd you do that, John? That was a little bit extreme." And he said, "I did it, because I thought the roof was gonna cave in on my head." You see, you have to fight sin that way. You have to fight sin, as if the roof is gonna cave in on your head, as if God's gonna come at you through the ceiling. Yes, there's grace, and mercy, and forgiveness with God. There is peace, and kindness, and grace upon grace, upon grace, if you are in Christ. But don't forget, God hates sin and He hates it with a deadly hatred. He killed His Son over your sin, so you need to hate it too. It's been said, "Don't love the sin for which Christ died." We have to hate it with a deadly hatred.

But this is how you respond to suffering in private; this is how you respond in your mind. You need to be urgent, and abstain from lust, and wage war against your sin. You need to remember that you win the battle or you lose it up here in your head, so you need to learn how to fight it in your head.

And that leads to another response we should have to suffering ... We'll go through this one quicker ... And that is a public response. "You respond to suffering in private," and Peter goes on to say, "You respond in public." To say it another way, our response starts in the mind, but it doesn't stop there. It bleeds out into everyday life. The poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "A man is what he thinks about all day long." And Peter says this next, in verse 12. He gives our first response, when he says in verse 12, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles." That's the first public response to suffering: "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles."

"Gentiles" is another way of saying "unbelievers". Earlier, in verse 9, Peter called the church, "A chosen race," and now, playing off of that, he calls those outside the church, "Gentiles." And he says that "When you suffer, you need to keep your behavior excellent among them." Tying this to a verse just above this, he writes in verse 9 that, "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." "And the way you proclaim His excellencies," in verse 12, "Is to have excellent behavior." You proclaim God's excellencies by keeping your behaviour excellent. In other words, "Unbelievers are watching you, so don't forget that. Lost people have their eyes upon you, so keep that in mind."

If we were to go around the room this morning, I'm guessing that some of you, maybe many of you, would say that you became a Christian by watching someone's behaviour. They didn't say anything to you at first, that came later, but they got your attention, because of their behaviour. You wanted to know why they were different, and when you asked them, they told you, they

gave you the Gospel, and you believed, and you were saved. It's what Peter is talking about here: someone is always watching you when you suffer. Suffering is a private thing, but it's never purely private, it's always public as well.

You could say it this way, "If you're a parent, your kids are always watching you," amen? Kevin, when you're on a trip. Yeah, they're always watching you. Those little eyes are always upon you. I've had a couple times, when I'd turn around, and there's these two little eyes looking up at me, and I'm thinking, "What was I just doing? Was I doing something ... " When you choke on beef stew and get laid up in the hospital, they're watching. If you're an employee, your co-workers are watching you. They want to see how you handle trials. They want to see how you handle their dirty jokes and their gossip, don't they? They want to see, "What do you do when I sin?" If you're a husband, your wife is watching you. If you're a wife, your husband is watching you. If you're a neighbour, the neighbourhood is watching you. Someone's always watching you, so Peter says, "Keep your behavior excellent, keep it above water."

And then he goes on to explain what that means, he says, "Learn how to handle slander well." That's the next public response to suffering, "Learn how to handle slander well." Verse 12 says, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers ... " That word "slander" means "to speak down on someone, to cut them with your words." This is interesting, 'cause it's the first specific example of suffering in the book of 1 Peter. We've been talking about this topic, this is the first time you actually see a specific example of it, and he mentions it, I think, because slander is hard to take, amen? Does anybody here like being slandered? They say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." I think that's a lie, words hurt. There's times I would rather someone throw sticks and stones at me, little stones. I should clarify that. I can duck behind the pulpit here ...

And it might be helpful to mention, as well, that Christians throughout the ages have always been slandered as evildoers. You see it here, but it doesn't stop here. In the first century, we were called cannibals and gluttons, because of our stance on the Lord's Supper. They misunderstood it; they thought we were eating literal flesh and blood, and that's what they said, they called us cannibals. They blamed us for the burning of Rome, which was ridiculous. The historian, Tacitus, says that we didn't do it, Nero did that. But he actually lined the walkways to his gardens with the bodies of burning Christians, because he said, "They burnt Rome." In the years to come, we would be called traitors and heretics, 'cause we would not worship Caesar. The Romans actually called us atheists, because we worshipped an invisible God, and because we only worshipped one God, they said, "That's atheism." And it got so bad, at one point, that the church, in and around the second, third centuries, had to go underground because of the persecution. They met in caves or what's called "catacombs," tunnels of caves. You can go to these catacombs today and see paintings from the ancient church, describing how they worshipped a risen Saviour down there among the dead. But it's always been this way, the church has always been slandered. We've always been abused and cut down by the Gentiles. We've always been mocked. And I say that to say, when it happens, don't be surprised, don't be shocked. And Peter says, "When it happens, keep your behavior excellent. You don't do what they do."

The way some Christians act on the radio or the news sometimes, it's like, "If the world gets louder and more violent and angry, then we're gonna get more loud and violent and angry too."

That flies right in the face of this passage. It doesn't mean we can't speak out and explain ourselves, but we don't respond in sin. I remember riding on an airplane going from Los Angeles to Seattle. The West Coast is a little different from the Midwest, let me just tell you that. And riding on an airplane from Los Angeles to Seattle next to a lady who said, "You Christians are fine, as long as you keep your opinions to yourself." And I thought, "Well, you're not keeping your opinion to yourself. You're telling me exactly what you think." See, you can't say that. Or if you say that, you better be very gracious and gentle. You see, you don't respond in kind. You have to be different and that brings us to one more response.

One more public response to suffering is, you need to glorify God; that's the whole gist of this thing. That's where it all should lead to. That's your motivation in everything you do as a believer: You need to glorify God. If you read all of verse 12 with me, it says, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation." "It's the goal in your suffering," Peter says, "to glorify God."

"The day of visitation" here is a little vague. It refers to any time that God ... or it could refer to any time God visits us. It could refer to Judgment Day. It could refer to the day that we die. But the idea is, that you want to handle suffering in such a way, that unbelievers will glorify God on that day, on the day they die, on Judgment Day. You want to respond in such a way, that the lost will look at you and come to faith in Christ over it. They'll look at you and say, "Why do you act that way, when the boss cusses you out?" Your kids'll look at you and say, "Daddy, why aren't you mad when such and such happened?"

A couple passages in the Bible, I think would help us get a perspective on this: Matthew 5:14-16, you're familiar with this. It says, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ... so let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." The idea of light there is in contrast to darkness. This world is a dark place, it's an evil place, and you need to stand out in the midst of it. Your behaviour needs to stand out. They're not going to get light from the lost world, they get it from you. And you're to live that way.

Just before this, in Matthew 5:13, Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth." Salt gives the idea of flavour. This world has no flavour, spiritually speaking, it has no taste. I've heard some of you, you've been out in the world all week and you're like, "I can't wait to get back among the saints, 'cause it just refreshes my soul." Well, there's salt in this room. There's no salt out there, there's no flavours, like sugar-free cookies. You guys know what I'm talking about. You go to the Christmas party, someone brings in sugar-free cookies, and you go, "Agh! You need to put a sign on that." (I'm about to get in trouble here. I'm starting to meddle now. I'm not preaching, I'm meddling. Let me move on.) "You put flavor in the world," Jesus says. "You put taste back into it. You're salt." Proverbs 4:18 says, "But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, it shines brighter and brighter until the full day." As lost people get to know you, your light should shine brighter and brighter in their lives, like the sun rising in the sky. Philippians 2:14 and 16 says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, so that you will prove yourself to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse

generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world," but you get the idea. Live in such a way that has an impact on the Gentiles. Live in such a way that your life is a light to the lost.

In World War II, at the same time General Bernard Montgomery was fighting in North Africa, Herb and Ruth Clingen were in a Japanese POW camp for three years, that was run by a man named Konishi. They never knew his whole name, but in his journal, Herb said this, he said, "Konishi found an inventive way to abuse us, even more than the ordinary prisoner of war camp." He said, "He increased the food ration, but gave us palay - unhusked rice. Eating rice with this razor sharp outer shell would cause intestinal bleeding that would kill us in hours. We had no tools to remove the husk, and doing the job manually by pounding the grain or rolling it with a heavy stick, consumed more calories than the rice would supply. It was a death sentence for all internees." And the interesting thing about this story is that, several years later, after getting out of the camp, the Clingens learned that Konishi had been found working as a grounds keeper at a golf course in Manila, and sentenced to death by hanging. But just before he died, he told the jury that he had converted to Christianity, because of the behaviour of the inmates of the camp, because of people like Ruth and Herb Clingen. You see, their behaviour was excellent among the Gentiles. They appeared as lights in a dark world. We need to learn how to suffer like that.

Whatever the suffering is, in the hospital, in the funeral home, getting slandered on an airplane, you need to handle it in such a way, that people glorify God for it, maybe not in a moment, but over time. They say, "Something is different about that person," which leads me to ask you, how are you doing with this? How are you doing in keeping your behaviour excellent among the Gentiles? How are you doing at being salt and light in this dark world? Do you live like people are watching? Do you suffer in such a way that it will bless your kids, and your wife, and your husband, and your co-workers?

Looking at the private side of things, is there a sense of urgency about you? Are you fighting sin? If I asked you right now, could you identify several sins in your life that you're putting to death at this moment? Are you waging war against the flesh? Are you doing it daily, actively, violently?

Are you thinking like an alien, like someone who's just passing through? A businessman was walking by some stone masons who were working on a church, and he asked them what they were doing with the particular odd-shaped piece they were working on. And they said, "You see that spot way up there? We're working on this piece down here, so it will fit in up there." And the businessman said, "That's what God is doing through my trials. He's shaping me down here, so I will fit in up there." Do you have that perspective this morning? My friends, do you see things that way? God has a higher purpose in this. He's preparing you for another world and we need to live like it. We need to suffer like it. We need to handle our trials like we're going to another place.

Now, let's pray for His grace this morning, as we seek to do that. Father, I do pray for my brothers and sisters in Christ this morning. I don't know what everyone's going through. I know from talking with several folks, that we do have some serious challenges among our body. But they're good challenges, in the sense that You've given them to us, to prepare us for another

place. May we have that perspective, Father. Give us grace. It's a supernatural thing. In our flesh, we don't want to look at suffering this way. We don't want to suffer at all, and yet, You've given it to us, that we may reach a lost and dying world, that we may put our sins to death. Will You give us grace in that, Father? Those who are in Christ this morning, Father, would You bless them, as they look back on their salvation and praise You, that they had resources to fight their sin?

If there's any who are lost here, and they're hearing this discussion of fighting sin, and they're going, "What in the world does that have to do with me?" Lord, I pray You would convict them of their depravity, convict them of their lostness, and draw them to the Saviour, whose cross is wide open for all who would believe in Him. Lord, may You be glorified in the rest of our service. Thank you for this time in Your Word; we pray that it would profit us for eternity, in Christ's name, we pray, Amen.