

Coming to Christ

1 Peter 2:4-8

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 6, 2017

If you would, go ahead and turn there with me in your Bibles to the book of 1 Peter. And as you're doing that, I told you last time that the church that suffers together stays together. Suffering unites us. It brings us closer together. When it's cold outside we huddle together for warmth, when it's hot we huddle together for shade. And in a similar way, when you suffer, you huddle together for support, for protection. We could add to this that the church that suffers together grows together. You can't really grow as a believer or as a church until you suffer, until you have a tiff, as Carl Hargrove said in my installation service. Everyone gets along fine when they agree. But what do you act like when you don't agree? See, that's how you determine the maturity of a church. Everyone's godly when they get their way. But what do we act like when we don't get our way? See, that's how you determine growth. What are you like when you suffer?

And when you think about the greatest problems that face the human race, I think we would all say the problem of suffering might be at the top of the list. Why do people suffer so much? Why is there so much pain and death and evil in the world? In one of his novels, Sherlock Holmes said,

What is the meaning of it all, Watson? What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance which is unthinkable. But what end? That is the great problem that faces us. And we are as far from an answer as we have ever been.

I think he's probably right. The greatest detective that ever lived could not figure out the problem of suffering and evil. And I think we as a society are a long way from figuring this out. When I was in high school, a friend of mine committed suicide. And we went to the guidance counsellor for help and she really couldn't help us. I mean she was there to give us a hug and encourage us, but she's didn't know what to say. She was in shock like the rest of us. I remember another time a friend of mine died in college and we all went to the funeral and just responded the same way. We were numb.

My friends, I want to tell you as a believer, there is an answer to the problem of suffering. As a Christian this morning, there is an answer to the problem of evil. God allows evil for our good. That doesn't answer all the questions, but it does answer some. The cycle of misery and violence and fear is used by the sovereign Lord of the universe to help us. Randy Alcorn says,

If we have no eternal future, then our present sufferings will ultimately be worth nothing. But if we have such a future with Jesus, then no present suffering regardless of its scope will be wasted. In fact, such sufferings are a means to our eternal good. The dysfunction of the present is the exception not the rule. This is a small fraction of our history. This is all a blip on the radar, a drop in the bucket, a speck in the sands of time. One day evil, suffering and death will end forever.

I've been watching the fires this past week. I think we all have been wondering, "What purpose does this serve in eternity?" I'm driving around with my folks and I'm like, "Man British Columbia's beautiful." That is a mountain over there it's you can see ... I mean what's the point of all of this? Well, there is no point if God doesn't exist. Do you get that? Does that make sense? There is no point in suffering if there is no God. It's just a chance. It's just mindless. But if there is a God, if there is a creator and a maker who designed all of this just the way He wanted it to be, then isn't it possible that He could use all of this for our good? Isn't it possible He could use this to sanctify us and point our minds toward eternity?

I don't know about you but when I see suffering, I don't want to stay in this world anymore. It's too painful. I'm not comfortable here anymore. And that's why God gives us pain to make us think of eternity.

He uses it for other things as well. If you want to write some of these down. If you're wondering why does God allow us to suffer? A couple of other reasons why. To humble us. I don't think I have to tell you that suffering humbles you. How many of you thought you were something special until you suffered? Anybody know what I'm talking about? You were riding high on the spiritual food chain, you were living on a throne of self-righteousness, until wham, something bad happened in your life and all of a sudden, all this sin starts gushing out. You know what I'm talking about? I've been sweating while I'm sleeping at night because our ACs aren't ... With the smoke, you know? And there's sin gushing out of me with the sweat. God uses this to humble you. Charles Spurgeon said, "The grace that I received in times of comfort is almost worthless to me." He said, "I've learned nothing from times of ease." He says, "But the good that I received from sorrow and pain is incalculable because that humbled me."

God also uses it to make us thankful. It's another way he uses suffering in our lives. It makes us thankful. They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder. And sometimes God takes things away. He creates an absence of them to make our heart grow fonder of them. He takes away our car or our house or the beautiful views around us to make us grateful for them and appreciate them.

God uses it to get rid of our idols. Suffering is a wonderful idol smasher. I've talked with young families who made an idol out of parenting until they couldn't have kids anymore. See that was God's way of smashing that idol for them. He threw it to the ground. I've talked with young single people who thought the same way about marriage. They had to get married, they had to find someone special to the point that it consumed them, and swallowed up everything, so God kept them from marriage, until He swallowed up everything. So that's His way of doing you good. It teaches us endurance and patience. Suffering gives us assurance of salvation and security. It teaches us courage. One believer in China said,

True gold does not fear the fire. I've been through the valley of the shadow of death, and He was with me in the valley, and because He was with me there, I know He'll be with me anywhere, I will not be afraid. I will have courage.

You see, suffering teaches us those lessons. God gives it to us for our good. He wastes none of our suffering, He cares about us deeply, He loves all of his children and He would not let any of

them suffer to no purpose. There is an object to be served by the circle of misery and violence and fear. On September 11, 2001, Lieutenant Colonel Brian Birdwell was walking through the Pentagon in Washington DC when it was hit by a plane hijacked by terrorists. And the crash where he was at in the Pentagon burned 60% of his body and seared both of his lungs, but he didn't die. The doctors then gave him a 1% chance of survival and after 39 surgeries and three months of treatment, he still didn't die. In fact, he went on to live a productive life and minister to critical burn patients, and he said this, he said, "An 80-ton 757 jet airplane came through at 530 miles an hour, with 3,000 pounds of jet fuel in it, and I'm still here and the plane isn't." He said, "You don't survive that because the army made you tough, you survive it because God has something else in store for you."

And friends, this is how you get through suffering by remembering the Lord has something else in store for you. This life is not the end of the story. This life is not the end of what you're trying to achieve, this is just the beginning. And this leads us to the book of 1 Peter. In the book of 1 Peter, Peter is telling a group of Christians that there's more to their story. That's the gist of this book. He's telling them God has something else in store for them. If you read in verse 1 he starts out this way it says, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."

I know I've read that verse to you a lot and in this series, but I think it's so interesting, because I've never read a letter addressed to aliens before. I don't know about you guys. Maybe you've had different experiences in life, but I've never read a letter or an email addressed to E. T. or Yoda from Star Wars, the first one here. And he calls them aliens to jump right into the issue here. You guys are not from here, that's how he starts the letter off. He says, "You're from somewhere else. This world is not your home, you're from another planet, another galaxy and you're suffering for it. It's uncomfortable for you." He'll get into their suffering later in the letter, but he sets the tone for it right here. These people are in pain, life is hard for them. Many of you are from other countries. We all know that can be difficult. That's sort of the background for this letter for these people. "But in the midst of that," he says, "God has more in store for you. There's more to your story." Like an inheritance in verse 4, of chapter 1, and salvation in verse 5. He mentions, if you skip down a little bit, redemption in verse 19 and a new birth, in verse 23, and it goes into chapter 2.

In chapter 2, Peter gives us a response to all these blessings. And chapter two kind of starts a new section of the letter in which he tells us how to respond to these things. And if you read in chapter 2, verse 1, Peter says, he says,

1 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, 3 if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. 4 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, 5 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. 6 For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone," "And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." 7 This precious value,

then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone," 8 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.

There's a lot in here on the back end, and we'll get to that in a moment. If you notice, chapter 2 starts off with the word, "Therefore," which points us back to all Peter has said so far. He says, "Since you have an inheritance, and salvation, since you have joy and redemption and a new birth, since you have all these good blessings, therefore put aside all sin, long for the word, and grow in respect to salvation." If you notice, these are all action words. In other words, this is how you respond to suffering. This is what God wants you do. He wants you to act on it. He doesn't want you to just let go and let God. He doesn't want you to sit on the couch and do nothing. He wants you to get up and act.

And in verse 4, He gives us the next action to take when you're suffering. He wants you to come to Christ. Or, in the Greek, keep coming to Christ. This is in the present tense in Greek, which means it's an ongoing thing. You need to come to Christ and keep coming over and over and over again. This is the pattern of your life as a Christian. And Jesus ... We can say it this way, suffering, is like a magnet that keeps drawing you closer and closer and closer to Christ. Every time you get away, God lets you suffer a little bit to draw you back to Him. Or you could say suffering is like a boomerang which gets thrown out and comes right back to Christ. One author said, "Christ is the A-B-C of the Christian life, right down to Z. (Or, we might say, "Zed," in Canada.) He's the Christian's entire alphabet." Another author said, "Christ is the center of Christianity. All else is just circumference." And suffering helps you remember that.

That's why some of the most successful people in the world who just have the world at their fingertips, they're not Christians, 'cause they're not suffering enough, and life isn't hard enough for them. I told you last week, some people think that the godlier you are, the better you are at basketball. Some of the best hockey, basketball, players in the world are evil people. Suffering is what God uses us to grow us in the faith, and that's what I want to talk to you about this morning.

If you're taking notes, in 1 Peter 2:4-8 Peter says you come to Christ for four things when you're suffering ... three things, excuse me. You come to Christ for three things when you're suffering. The first is this: you come to Christ for rest. I don't have to tell you that suffering leaves you restless. It wears you out. Some of you have had sick kids. You know what this is like. There's nothing that weighs on you like that, right? You just want to sleep all the time. If you've been to a funeral recently, you go to a funeral, come home, feel like you just got in a fight with something, right? Peter says here, in the midst of all that, you can come to Jesus Christ for rest. Matthew 11:28, says, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

And our passage says this another way, in a very creative way, in verses 4 through 5. It says, "4 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, 5 you also, as living stones ..." As he's writing to encourage these believers, Peter points to images they could understand from the Old Testament. And the first one is that of a living stone which is choice and precious. If you remember your Bible history for

a minute, 1 Kings 6 says that Solomon built the temple with choice and precious stones, stones that were prepared at the quarry and carried to the temple. They were special, they were different kinds of stones. They weren't just, "Any kind of stone would do." You come to a stone like that. Peter said this is not an ordinary stone. This is not a random rock picked from the pile.

To kind of highlight this a little bit, we can look at one of the stones that Solomon picked. It's actually still at the temple today. You can go see it. It's called the Western Stone and it's located at the lowest corner of the Wailing Wall. The interesting thing about the Western Stone is that it's 44 feet long, nine feet high, and 10 feet wide, and it weighs 600 tons. Now, that may not mean a lot to most of us, so I looked it up. The maximum weight that a semi-truck can carry is 40 tons. Did I get that right, Marcel? Is it about 40 tons, or something like that? Yeah. Now how would you like to haul 600 tons up to Kamloops? That's how big the stone is, one stone. And they know they didn't build it from the rock beneath because it cause it's different rock than the rock. It's one of the largest objects ever moved without modern machinery. Scientists today have no idea how Solomon got it there. But Peter says you have to come to something greater than this if you're a Christian. He says you can come to something bigger than the Western Stone. You come to the Son of God.

And if you come to Him, in this passage, it says, "He will make you into a living stone." Living stone here in verse 4, it's an oxymoron because stones don't live. I think you understand that. They're dead objects, but they're strong and they're secure and they don't topple over when the wind blows, they don't fall to pieces when the waves come crashing down. And Peter says, "You will be that way if you trust in Christ." You can look it at another way. They say that the more stress you put on a rock, the more it rests on the rock below it. The more it leans on the rock under it and it's the same way with Jesus. If you trust in Christ, the more stress life puts on you, the more you lean on Him. The more pain and suffering and misery you endure, the closer to Him you draw, because you just can't help it. The weight pushes you onto Christ. You could look at it like this, if you ever feel like you can't handle life on your own, it's because you can't. You weren't meant to. You were meant to lean on Jesus. You were meant to rest on the rock and that means with the big things and the little things in life.

Several years ago I was talking with a farmer in Illinois who fought in the Vietnam war in the 1960s. I was thinking about this on the drive to church today, because I'm driving through corn fields and I had this conversation with this guy in a cornfield in his pickup truck. And he was telling me he had just seen his son go to war in Iraq. And he said, "It was easier for me to go to Vietnam than to watch him go to Iraq." He said, "It was easier for me to fight, than to see my son go fight. I don't want to lose him, I don't want to see him suffer." And if you think about this, this dear friend was trusting God in the big things in life but not the little things, because if you were to say, "Peter, do you believe God is sovereign over war?" He would say, "Absolutely God is sovereign over War. Of course He is." But if you said, "Do you believe God is sovereign over your son going to war?" he would say, "I don't know. I'm not sure."

We all talk like this from time to time, if I were to ask you, is God sovereign over the economy? You would say, "Of course He is." But if I said, "Is God sovereign over your job?" You would say, "I don't know. My boss is a real jerk." My co-workers are hard to get along with, see we're really struggling to make ends meet right now. If I said, "Is God sovereign over Chilliwack?"

You would say, "Of course He is." But if I said, "Is God sovereign over your family in Chilliwack? Is God sovereign over your home in Chilliwack?" You would second guess it. See Peter says here that God is sovereign over everything. Big things and the little things. You can trust Him with the mountains and you can trust Him with the pebbles. You can trust Him with war and you can trust Him when your son goes to war, you can trust Him with everything. And here's why.

Let me just give you some passages that talk about the greatness of Christ, some verses that talk about the hugeness of the Rock that we're talking about. Hebrews 1:1-3, says, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power." The author of Hebrews says, "Jesus upholds all things." All things means "all things", you get that? (You go to seminary to learn stuff like that.) It means everything big and little, great and small. Jesus upholds all of it by His word, all He does is speak and the mountains go where they're told. All He does is whisper and the pebbles do what they're supposed to do, so you can trust Him, you can rest in Him.

Later on in Hebrews chapter 1, the author says, "But of the Son, God says let all the angels worship Him, 'For your throne, O God, is forever.'" That means not only does Jesus up hold all things, but he upholds it forever. There will never come a time when Jesus Christ loses control of the universe. Does that encourage you this morning? Do You feel like you picked the right God to worship? There will never a come when He'll let you down. If you put things on the rock, they stay there. If you put your burdens on the mountain, they're not gonna fall off. He can carry the weight, He won't buckle under pressure. Hebrews 13:8, says, "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever." Hebrews 7:24, "He's the priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." Mathew 28:20, the Lord says, "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." But the point is that the rock is always with you. He will always be there, therefore you can trust Him. If you have trusted Christ for a thousand years, then you can still trust Him for thousand more. If you bring a thousand problems to put on His shoulders, you can bring a billion more. Right before He died, the Roman authorities told Polycarp that if he denied Christ, he would be spared and the 90-year-old man (he was about to be burned at the stake) said, "For 46 years, I've served Christ and He has never let me down. How then can I blaspheme the Lord who saved me?" Friends, if you give your life to Christ, you can be assured He will never let you down. Ever. He will be your living stone.

And that leads to another thing we come to Christ for when we're suffering. You come to Him for rest and here's another one (I'll un-package this a little bit): you come to Him for direction. You come to Him for direction. The passage says, you come to Him to be built up. We'll get into that in a minute, but I think the worst thing about suffering is that it feels so directionless. It feels so pointless. Sherlock Holmes said, "What is the meaning of it all, Watson? What object is served by the cycle of misery and violence and fear?" Suffering is miserable when you think that way. I remember studying philosophy at university years ago and coming across the Nihilists who say that nothing is true. Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, men like that say that nothing is true, there are no absolutes, which is very strange because that is an absolute statement. And it's also strange 'cause after you read 500 or 600 pages of these guys, you're like

well if nothing is true, why am I reading all this stuff? But I listened to them and I remember asking my professor very sincerely, I said, "Professor Malden, why don't these guys kill themselves?" I said, "If they're writing all these pages, I mean you got me reading thousands of pages of these guys. If they're writing all this stuff looking for truth and they're coming to the conclusion that there is no purpose in life, it's all meaningless, why don't they just end it?" And he says, "Well, that's a great question of philosophy." He says, "Do I kill myself?" He didn't have an answer. I'm going to tell you, friends. When you suffer with that mindset, it's miserable. As I was studying for this sermon, another example of this, I came across an article entitled, "Dear Millennials, A letter to the lost generation." And it said that when the soldiers came back from World War I, they were called the lost generation because they had no purpose in life, they had no direction. And now this author is saying that history is repeating itself. The millennial generation is the lost generation. And as such, the article interestingly says, they can't handle pain. He said, when Starbucks burns their latte, they want to burn Starbucks to the ground. They can't handle it. They go home and they blog about it - angry blogs with capital letters and frowny faces. Or when their computer doesn't work, they throw a fit and they threaten to sue Best Buy for emotional damages. Because they have no direction, they have no meaning. Peter says you don't have to be that way. There is meaning to your suffering. You don't have to burn Starbucks to the ground.

And if you read in verses 4 through 5, he says, " 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, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house ..." That word "built up" is the same word Jesus used in Matthew 16 to say, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church." - very interesting, it's the same word in Greek. Apparently, that had an impact on Peter. We don't know when he wrote this letter, but, however long it was after the Lord said that to him, it stuck in his mind. And now he uses it here to say that God allows us to suffer in order to build us up. That's the point of all this. That's the reason for your pain. That phrase "built up" could be a reference to encouragement. God allows us to suffer to encourage us, to remind us of things of eternity. But it's also a reference to the church.

If you notice the word "house" is singular here. Where the stones are plural, the house is singular. He is building these stones into a house, into a church. Which means that as a Christian, you have a purpose as a believer. All the pain and suffering and misery in the world is being used to build you into a church. I honestly think (and you guys may have another thought on this) but I think one of the reasons our church is getting along so well, is 'cause you guys have suffered a lot. I don't pray that for you, by the way, I don't pray for you to suffer. But I think the reason that we have such harmony and unity is because you guys have been through a hard time together. God builds His church that way. You could say it this way, this is Jesus' house and if He wants to build it through suffering, He can do that, and you have to be okay with it. After all it belongs to Him.

We have several contractors in our church and I don't think any of them would let you come to their construction site and tell them how to build a house, because it's their house. They bought it. See, this is His house. The Lord bought it, and if He wants to build it up through suffering, we have to get on board with that. We have to accept His will and the pain.

Some of you are familiar with the name Joni Eareckson Tada. That name familiar to anybody? Joni Eareckson Tada is a Christian author who became paralyzed at the age of 17 from a diving accident. She was diving in the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia, when she misjudged the depth of the water and broke her neck, leaving her paralyzed from the shoulders down. And she says that her immediate response is ... (we just talked about this a moment ago) her immediate response was to kill herself. She wasn't a Christian at the time. And she says this in her autobiography called "Joni". She says, "I desperately wanted to kill myself. Why on earth should a person be forced to live out such a dreary existence? How I prayed for some accident or miracle to kill me. The mental and spiritual anguish was as unbearable as the physical torture. But there was no way for me to commit suicide. The frustration was almost unbearable." She said, "I wished for strength and control enough in my fingers to do something, anything, to end my life." But the great thing about her autobiography is ... (she goes on to say that was not the end of the story) she says, "God has chosen not to heal me, but to hold me. The more intense the pain, the closer His embrace." She says,

My weakness, that is my quadriplegia, is my greatest asset because it forces me into the arms of Jesus every morning when I get up. My wheelchair was the key to seeing this happen. God's power is always perfected in my weakness. So here I sit, glad that I have been healed on the inside, but also glad that I have not been healed on the outside. He has healed me from all my self-centred wants and wishes, and that is way more important, by far.

Isn't that awesome? Can we say "amen" to that? She went on to write 17 books and start an organization called "Wheels for the World" that provides wheelchairs for disabled people. She started a radio program called "Joni & Friends", which reaches a million people per week. She's spoken on "Grace to You", "Ligonier Ministries", "Desiring God," but the point is, the Lord uses situations like that to build His church. He uses tragedy to build His house. We don't know all the reasons why. We don't know the mind of God, but that's His method. He uses ... His strength is perfected in weakness.

Just consider, some of the men in the Bible, almost all of them really, they experienced tremendous pain. Let me talk about irony. Do you know of Moses, who wrote the law, was a murderer? Can you imagine sitting down with Moses, while he is writing the law thinking, "Well, you broke that one. You broke that one too you know." God uses things like that. He used David, the adulterer, to write the Psalms, Psalms on purity, Psalms on holiness, Psalms on being singly minded devoted to God. David wrote those. He used Paul a pharisee to preach the Gospel of grace. He used John, the son of thunder to preach ... to write books on love. He used Peter, a coward, to write this book on suffering. This is how God builds His church. He uses broken people. He uses damaged goods. He makes beauty out of ashes. He restores the years that the locusts ate. So, if you are suffering this morning, I just want to encourage you. You're in good company. All the people in the Bible suffered as well. All the heroes of the faith went through hard times. People burn their lattes. Their computers broke down. Their kids got sick. And God still used them to build His house, and He will use us too. Martin Luther said, "If God could speak through Balaam's donkey, then He can speak through me and He can speak through you." And he is right. If you're struggling through life right now. I want to encourage you. You've come to the right place. You've come to the right God. He loves those who struggle.

And that leads to another thing you come to Christ for when you're suffering. And this is the last one we're gonna talk about. You come for worship. You come to Him for rest. You come to Him for direction. And third, you come to Christ, for worship. You can't come to Christ unless you worship Him, because He's God. So, the people who say, "Jesus was just a good moral teacher." They don't understand the things that He said about Himself. As C. S. Lewis said, "Either He was a lunatic, He was a heretic or He is the Son of God." And therefore, if you come to Him, you have to come and bow. And that's what Peter says in kind of in a roundabout way in verse 5. He says, 5 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."

To a first century audience, the word "priest", was another way of saying worship leader. The worship service back then was led by the priests. Who were the only ones who could approach God's presence. They would take your sacrifice and bring it into the presence of God for you. You couldn't do that yourself. And Peter says, "Now that Christ has come, we are all a priesthood unto God and you can draw close to Him yourself, you don't have to go through a priest anymore." "As Jesus has gone to the Father and poured out His blood for you. So now, you can go to the Father and offer spiritual sacrifices," he says.

One of the commentaries I read, said that there are seven spiritual sacrifices you can bring to the Lord. And they cover everything from music, to service, to prayer and evangelism. But through Christ you can offer those things to the Lord. I think we all understand that our sacrifices are not acceptable, they are covered in sin, but Christ has taken care of the sin problem and now we can come to Him.

And by the way, it might help to mention that as modern-day believers, as Protestants, we don't realize how important this is anymore. We kind of hear that and go, "Yeah, I know that, I learned that in Sunday school." But let me tell you, for centuries, the church didn't get this. For the first about 1,500 years of its existence, the Church, particularly the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Church, thought that there were two types of Christians. There were the priests and then there was everyone else. This was known as the sacerdotal system, from sacerdotalism or sacred. There were the leaders who were sacred. They were the holy men. And then the rest of us had to go to God through them. We could not go on our own. Prayer, evangelism, music and service, we had to do it through them. And the reformers came along and said, "No." They said, "Yes, God is holy and our sacrifices are not acceptable to Him, but that's why Jesus came so that they will be acceptable." Jesus is our middle man. Christ is our high priest. He provides a way or a bridge to the Father. So that we can approach God through Him. It was because of this that William Tyndale said, "A plough boy can approach God just as confidently as a Priest can." He said, "A kitchen page or a milkmaid, or a blacksmith can do that". That was revolutionary back then, nobody talked that way. This was so revolutionary that the reformers actually rearranged the church furniture for this. They took the communion table out from behind the pulpit and brought it out front, to show that you can come to Christ on your own, without a priest. You can come directly to His body and His blood.

And here's what this means for us. You can come to Christ directly when you're suffering. You don't have to go through someone else. You can come to God directly when you need Him, you

don't have to wait for a priest to show up. The way to God is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, God is always listening. He is always available to help.

So what Peter goes on to say in verses 6-8, he says,

6 For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone," "And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone," 8 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.

I won't go into the details here for the sake of time but Peter quotes from the Old Testament to say that those who come to Jesus will not be disappointed. He will not let them down. But those who refuse to come will be crushed. There is no middle ground with Jesus. Either you stand on Him or He stands on you and crushes you.

Which leaves me to ask the question, how are you handling your suffering this morning? Is it leading you closer to Christ or farther away? Is it drawing you to Him like a magnet or like a magnet tends to do, is it repelling you from Him? How is your attitude in all this? When Starbucks burns your latte or your computer breaks, or there's fires all over, smoke all over the city, how are you handling this? They say suffering can make you bitter or better? So, which one is it? Are you becoming bitter or better over this? Are you responding to trials like Brian Birdwell and Joni Eareckson Tada and saying, "Yes, I see God's sovereignty and His grace in all this," or are you responding like Sherlock Holmes and saying, "What is the meaning of this, Watson? I don't get it." God gives you suffering in order to see His grace and His mercy through this.

In 1990, Robert McQuilkin was the president of Columbia Bible college and a long-time scholar. But in that year, his wife contracted Alzheimer's disease and he left everything to take care of her, to suffer with her essentially. He left his job. He left academia. And in an interview 20 years later, after taking care of his wife for 20 years he said this. He said, "I never think about 'what if.'" He said,

I don't think "what if" is in God's vocabulary, so I don't think what I might be doing instead of changing her clothes or spending two hours feeding her. It's the grace of God, I'm sure. I don't feel like I've given anything up. Our life is not the way we plotted or planted. All along I've just accepted whatever assignment the Lord has given me. This was His assignment and the Lord has sustained me through it. Sometimes I meet angry people who are suffering and they're angry at God for letting bad things happen in their lives and they ask me "why." And I say that, "If you want peace, you have to accept the will of God. That's all I know. This is His will for me.

He finishes this way. He says, "Why fight it? We need to let God be God and let man be man." My friends, can you do that this morning? When you suffer, can you let God be God and let man be man? Can you say, "This is His will for me. This is what I know and I accept it. I'm not gonna

be angry at God. I'm not gonna be bitter." Friends, there are answers to the great problems in life. We don't everything, but we know some things. We know God is using this for our good. He is bringing good things out of our suffering and we need to trust Him and come to Him. Would you do that today? Let me close us in a word of prayer.

Father, we pray for help and reverence as we think to the subject of suffering. There are deep things here and there are raw things, I'm sure for some of our dear people here this morning who are thinking through the problem of evil and the problem of pain. I'm sure there's people here who suffered more than we could even, I can even imagine. So, we pray for reverence on this subject, but at the same time Lord, we pray for You to be glorified as Your Word is taught.

This book, the Bible, is written by suffering people. It was written by people in a hard world going through a hard time. And this is what You have drawn out of it, is that we are to look toward better things in eternity and better things in Christ. I pray for those who are here this morning, who are wrestling with this, that you would give them grace and mercy to see the truths in Your Word, that if they come to Your Son, they can have all these wonderful things mentioned in the first part of 1 Peter.

If there are any here who have not come to Christ, I pray Lord, you would draw them, be merciful to them and gracious and that they would see that they have to trust in the living stone to be saved. Thank you for the Word of God. We pray that we would apply it as we go out this morning. In Christ's name we pray, amen.