

YOU CAN SUFFER FOR DOING RIGHT THINGS

Today's Text: 1 Peter 3

Extracts:

And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness 'sake, you are blessed.' And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.' But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil [1 Pet. 3: 13-17].

On Easter Sunday, 21 April 2019, Sri Lanka, an island nation on the south-east coast of India, was hit by a wave of bombings targeting churches and hotels.¹ At least 321 people were killed and about 500 injured. In Negombo, north of the Sri Lanka capital of Colombo, Rangana Fernando, his wife, Danadiri, and three children all died in the attack on St. Sebastian's church. In their tribute to that family, Danadiri's colleagues said, "She was a dedicated and diligent worker, but above all a kind and caring soul. She will be dearly missed."

Did Danadiri and her family do wrong to go to church to worship God that day? Her colleagues' tribute suggests that she was also a good person. So, why is her family suffering for doing right things? We face similar circumstances. We have not offended people and yet we face persecution (by way of backbiting, lack of promotion at work, etc.). Why do people suffer for doing good things? How can we deal with suffering for our own good?

In today's Bible verses, the Apostle Peter says that even if we should suffer for righteousness 'sake, we are blessed. Let us find out how we can get there.

¹ Story is based on: "Sri Lanka attacks: Who are the victims?", 23 April; 2019; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48002169>

1. **Background: Suffering-by choice or by chance?**

Suffering can be defined as physical or mental pain that a person or animal is feeling.² As we look around us, we can see so many people who are suffering. For example, a couple has been married for many years but there is as yet no child. A young man has been looking for a job since graduation from college/university a year ago and there is still no luck. John is the hardest worker in his department but each year, they bypass him for promotion. You have prayed and fasted over an illness and there is no respite. What is going on?

Apostle Peter states, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed” [1 Pet. 3: 14]. Does that then mean that suffering is inevitable or unavoidable? To be able to answer that question, we need to examine possible reasons why we suffer. Let us pay attention to the following situations:

1) *As punishment for sin/evil*

Suffering may be punishment for sin or evil. For example, God specifically warned Adam in the garden of Eden not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and that the day he did so he would surely die [Gen. 2: 16-17]. He and his wife disobeyed and ate it when they were tempted by Satan [Gen. 3: 1-6]. Suffering has followed therefrom in the form of physical death, labour pains and hard work [vv. 14-19]. When Moses brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, he told them of blessings on obedience and curses on disobedience. For example, one of the curses is an illness “from which you cannot be healed” [Deut. 28: 27].

God forgives us our sins when we confess them, but the consequences of such sins may remain. For example, fornication and adultery may be forgiven when we confess but such consequences as STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) remain. Psalm 51 was the mark of David’s repentance for his adulterous affair with Bathsheba whose husband, Uriah, he also killed. God told David that He had put away his sin. Nevertheless, the sword “shall never depart from your house” [2 Sam. 12: 1-14]. In the next few years, David suffered the death of the child from the adulterous affair [2 Sam. 12: 15-23]; his son (Amnon) raped his daughter (Tamar) [2 Sam. 13: 1-14]; and another son (Absalom) staged a rebellion that forced David to be temporarily exiled [2 Sam. 15:13-37].

2) *As part of the maturation process*

Our suffering may be due to pains associated with growing up or training. The word of God says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” [Prov. 22: 6]. Children have to bear the pains of being raised by their parents and teachers. Students have to follow the

² <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/suffering>

instructions of their teachers and hostel guides. Professional training (military and others) may not be attractive or easy for anybody. Therefore, suffering is also one way that God prepares us for our ministries.

3) *By chance*

Sometimes, our suffering is by chance- we happen to be in a particular place at a particular time. For example, Simon of Cyrene was passing through Jerusalem on the day that Jesus was crucified. The Roman soldiers “compelled [him] to bear His cross” [**Matt. 27: 32**]. David took a census of Israel and Judah without first obtaining God’s consent. God put a plague on his kingdom which killed seventy thousand people [**2 Sam. 10-15**]. Did those people do any wrong? How many sufferings do you bear on account of family membership, friendship, club membership or worship affiliation?

4) *Punished for being good*

Our suffering may simply be for our being good. Take the case of Paul and Silas at Philippi. Paul had commanded an evil spirit to come out of a slave girl that fortune-tellers were using to make money. Her masters lied to the magistrates that Paul and Silas were teaching unlawful customs to Roman subjects. They arrested them, laid many stripes on them and threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks [**Acts 16: 11-24**].

Your suffering may be tied to your insistence on doing what is right, such as refusing to give or take bribes, insisting on following rules and procedures or refusing to tell lies. Peter assures us, “And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed” [**1 Pet. 3: 13-14**].

5) *God’s will*

Peter writes, “For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” [**v. 17**]. Our suffering may be the wilderness experience that God is using to bring us to where He wants us to be. For example, when Moses ran away from Egypt at the age of forty after killing an Egyptian that had killed a Hebrew, little did he know that it was to prepare him to lead the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt forty years later. Sometimes, when we are too comfortable in complacency and mediocrity, God uses suffering to drive us forward to where He wants us to be. That is what we call a wilderness experience.

From the foregoing, we can see that suffering is not all bad. What is important is for us to know what it is all about and what we can do about it.

2. Lessons for us

We should note the following lessons, among others, that we can learn:

1) *Understand why you are suffering*

If we are honest with ourselves, we may have a good idea of why we are suffering if we do an audit of our situation. For example, after the prodigal son had squandered what he had taken from his father, he began to suffer. We are told, “He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.” That was when he came to himself and said, “I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son’” [Lk 15: 11-32].

Many of us blame others for our suffering, even when it is obvious that we are responsible for it. For example, a student who refused to study and then failed a critical examination would say, “They failed me!” The word of God says, “He who covers his sins will not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” [Prov. 28: 13]. Once you are at peace with God, by owning up for your mistakes and transgressions, the matter is now in His hands.

2) *Let go and let God*

God does not see things as we do; we look on the outside but God sees the heart [1 Sam. 13: 14]. For example, while the children of Israel were in a seventy-year exile in Babylon, they saw hardship and deprivation. But God assured them, “I know the thoughts I think toward you...thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” [Jer. 29: 10-13].

Once you have reconciled with God by confessing your sins and avoiding new ones, you should let go and let God. He will take charge of your suffering and deliver you at His most appropriate time.

3) *All is well in the end*

Joseph was held in Pharaoh’s prison for an offence he did not commit. Even after helping the Pharaoh’s chief butler to be restored to his position in the palace, he was forgotten and remained in prison for another two years. Then, suddenly, the Pharaoh needed help which only Joseph could provide. He was set free and overnight became the governor of Egypt, second in command only to the Pharaoh [Gen. 41: 1-41]. King Herod visited violence on the early church. He killed James, the brother of John and put Peter in prison, hoping to kill him a few days later. What did Peter do with his suffering? Even with

chains on both his hands, he fell asleep! The angel sent by God to set him free had to wake him up [**Acts 12: 1-7**]. Those stories suggest that, if you let go and let God, all will be well in the end. We may be hard pressed on every side but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed [**2 Cor. 4: 8-10**].

In the words of Apostle Peter, “It is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” [**1 Pet. 3: 17**]. Is your suffering due to your sins? Confess and get right with God. Is it punishment for your being righteous? Hang in there, because God is on the way!

3. Conclusion: Jesus remains your best role model!

Peter reminded us that Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit [**v. 18**]. On the night that He was betrayed, He went to the Garden of Gethsemane, knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done.” In agony, He prayed more earnestly and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground [**Lk 22: 39-44**]. Even though Jesus was innocent, God did not remove the cup of suffering because Christ’s death on the cross was God’s purpose for sending His only begotten Son into the world. Christ’s suffering was in God’s will. Therefore, Jesus is our role model.

Be sure that your suffering is not punishment for sin. If so, repent and return to your Father. Thereafter, trust God to navigate you through your wilderness experience. The going may be rough; the suffering may seem unbearable; but hang in there. All shall soon be well.