

Sermon Brief
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June 26, 2022

Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19

Title: “Rough Ride to Heaven”

Subject: Believers are to rejoice in the midst of suffering for Jesus.

Complement: Believers are to focus on their present and future experiences of glory.

Textual Idea: Believers are to rejoice in the midst of suffering for Jesus by focusing on their present and future experiences of glory.

Sermon Idea: Suffering for Jesus is a road sign that tells you that you’re on the right road...even if it’s bumpy!

Interrogative: Are you willing to take the rough road to heaven?

Key Points:

It’s a rough road to heaven, but rejoice because...

1. future glory is assured. Vv.12-13
2. present glory is experienced. Vv.14-16
3. the God of Glory is in control. Vv.17-19

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that suffering is part of living for Christ in this dark world, but that they can experience joy even in the midst of it. This is done by focusing on the nearness of Jesus as they suffer and the hope of future glory.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) “not lose the dove,” (2) speak God’s truth to yourself, (3) entrust their suffering to God.

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need to find strength in Christ in the midst of persecution.

“Rough Ride to Heaven”

1 Peter 4:12-19

June 26, 2022

One of the most influential books of all time, outside of the Bible, is **(LCD) Pilgrim’s Progress**. Written in 1678, it’s been translated into over 200 languages and has never gone out of print. It’s the story of a man named Christian and **(LCD) his journey** from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. It’s an allegory of the Christian faith. The thing that really stands out about it is that in spite of Christian trusting in Jesus early on here at the Cross, and being given permission to eventually enter Celestial City, he still has to go through tons of trials on his way there. **(LCD) There is the Slough of Despond** where he is plagued with doubts; the Village of Morality where he’s tempted to self-righteousness; Difficulty Hill where he encounters the shortcuts of hypocrisy, formalism, and laziness; the Valley of Humiliation where he is persecuted and reviled; the Valley of the Shadow of Death where he is confronted with demonic beasts and lies; Vanity Fair and it’s worldly temptations; Doubting Castle and Giant Despair where he wrestles with his pride; and, finally, Dark River which lies before the Celestial City and has no bridge. One must cross the river by faith alone. In other words, Pilgrim’s Progress teaches us that it’s a **(LCD) rough ride to heaven**. That’s what Peter’s been teaching us too. And like Christian, our only hope is faith in Jesus. Your road bumpy at all? Let’s see what Peter has to tell us.

We’re in a sermon series on the book of 1 Peter which I’ve entitled, **(LCD) Alien Living in a Chaotic World**. The people Peter wrote to were struggling to live faithfully for Jesus in a pagan society. We’re entering the last major section of the letter and it largely summarizes what Peter’s taught up to now...starting with suffering for Jesus. It’s a rough road to heaven...but don’t despair. 1 Peter 4, verse 12, *“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” 19 So then, those who suffer according to God’s will, should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”*

“Dear friends” or “beloved,” signals that Peter is starting to wrap up the letter. These are beloved ones of God, yet that doesn’t mean things will be easy. Actually, Peter tells them that they should not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on them, as though something strange has happened to them. In other words, if you follow Jesus, you should expect suffering...like Christian found in Pilgrim’s Progress and like Jesus Himself. Suffering is part of the deal for Christians so it shouldn’t shock us when it happens.

But it's still hard...Peter describes it as a "fiery ordeal." The word for "fiery ordeal" is a rare one and it usually refers to burning for the sake of purifying or refining which is why Peter says that this fiery ordeal has come in order to test them, to show the genuineness of their faith. Peter actually made this point at the beginning of the letter, **(LCD) "In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."** Like with Christian, the fiery trials separate the true believers from those with a shallow or false commitment. As a result, persevering through a trial of faith brings joy since it shows that your faith is real.

But there's another reason for joy...it results in great honor when Jesus is revealed. Peter makes that same point again here in verse 13, "*But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*" Faith says, "I believe Jesus is Lord," even when the road is bumpy. It does so because it sees beyond the present circumstances to the ultimate joy. Think of Jesus, **(LCD) "And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."** Jesus' endurance was based on His future joy. He could see His glory eventually being revealed...but it required taking the rough road to heaven. Are you willing to take the rough road to heaven?

Jesus' disciples were. I love the description of their reaction to being persecuted in Acts 5, **(LCD) "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."** They could rejoice because they believed that the Name of Jesus will one day be glorified! In verse 13, Peter is saying that we can rejoice in suffering because we know that one day we'll be overjoyed in glory. The Greek here is very strong, it uses two words for "joy" back to back – the NIV translates them with one word, "overjoyed," massive joy! The joy that Jesus looked forward to. Our present persevering joy pales in comparison to the future overjoy that awaits those who willingly join Jesus in His suffering. Our first point this morning, **(LCD) It's a rough road to heaven, but rejoice because our future glory is assured.** Our faith will not be disappointed when we see Jesus revealed in all His glory. Rejoice!

But this isn't a promise for all suffering, it must be true suffering for Jesus. Verse 14, "*If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.*" The promise of joy for suffering only applies when it is suffering in the name of Jesus. In other words, when it's for doing good. If you do evil, like the list of examples that Peter gives in verse 15, you deserve the suffering! Don't expect glory in that case! No, no! If you suffer, it must be because you are doing good in the name of Jesus.

But there's something else here that is very cool that I don't want you to miss. Notice that Peter says in verse 14, "*you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*" That's present tense, you "are blessed." In other words, there is a present glory available to us now when we suffer for Jesus. What does that mean? My opinion is that it's referring to an intimacy with Jesus that only those who suffer intensely for Him have. We saw that even in verse 13, "inasmuch" or "to the degree" that you participate in the sufferings of Christ. To the degree that we suffer is the degree that we experience the glory of Christ NOW! There is a sharing, a deep intimacy with Jesus, that is reserved for those who share in His suffering. Even in Revelation, the ones nearest the throne are the martyrs who suffered.

Now verse 14 describes this blessed sharing as, "*the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*" As Peter Davids says, **(LCD) "Those suffering for Christ experience through the Spirit now the glory they are promised in the future."** Wow! The same Spirit that accompanied Jesus in His trials accompanies us in ours. And that Spirit enables us to experience future glory now. I immediately think of **(LCD) Stephen again...as I mentioned a few weeks ago. As he was being stoned, we read, "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."** He experienced future glory now. Wow. Our second point, **(LCD) It's a rough road to heaven, but rejoice because present glory is experienced.**

In his book, "The Message of Salvation," Philip Ryken tells the story of **(LCD) Helen Roseveare** – "*a British medical doctor who worked for many years as a missionary in Zaire. She often faced brutal beatings and other forms of physical torture. On one occasion, when she was about to be executed, she feared God had forsaken her. In that moment, she sensed the Holy Spirit saying to her: "Twenty years ago you asked me for the privilege of being identified with me. This is it. Don't you want it? This is what it means. These are not your sufferings; they are my sufferings. All I ask of you is the loan of your body."* The privilege of serving Christ through her sufferings overwhelmed Dr. Roseveare. After she was delivered, she wrote about her experience with God: "*He didn't stop the sufferings. He didn't stop the wickedness, the cruelties, the humiliation or anything. It was all there. The pain was just as bad. The fear was just as bad. But it was altogether different. It was in Jesus, for him, with him.*" I'm telling you – there is an intimacy with Jesus reserved for those who willingly climb into His wounds and suffer with Him. I'm not saying seek out persecution but know that, if you're called to it, Jesus is with you in it.

And no suffering we undergo can compare to what awaits those who reject Him; verse 17, "*For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* 18 And, "*If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?*" Peter's point here is a comparison. He's saying that our earthly sufferings for Jesus now are just a sliver of what's in store for those who reject the gospel. As we've seen repeatedly through this letter, God is going to judge humanity. Actually, Peter seems to

say that in some way, that judgment has already begun with His own people, in other words, the persecution they withstand is part of the overall judgment of God. Combined with what we said earlier about verses 12 and 13, the idea is that God's judgment brings earthly refinement to His people, but eternal punishment to the disobedient. Sounds weird to us but this was the common Jewish understanding, **(LCD) "Jewish tradition often emphasized that the righteous experienced their sufferings in this age but that the wicked would experience theirs throughout the age to come."**

Commentators point out that Peter may have Ezekiel 9 in mind here. In that passage, God begins the process of removing His glory from the Jerusalem Temple because of the sin of Israel. He appoints some men to execute His judgment and tells them, **(LCD)**

"Slaughter the old men, the young men and women, the mothers and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the old men (elders) who were in front of the temple." God's judgment began with the elders who were at the temple. This would have been shocking to the Jewish people.

Listen, as I've said before, we're in an age that idolizes tolerance. But God is holy. He cannot and will not tolerate idolatry and disobedience. He will judge it – first by purging it from His church through the discipline of suffering, and then in the ultimate judgment at the end of time. Our God is loving, yes, just look at the Cross, but He is also holy, just look at the Cross. I'm reminded again of what Paul says about God's discipline, **(LCD)**

"Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world." Scott McKnight comments, **"The persecution these Christians are experiencing is the act of God whereby he purges his people to prepare them for his final display of salvation, insofar as he makes them fit for that judgment through suffering."**

Suffering prepares a people who can bear His glory.

So what are we to make of all this? Sounds pretty bleak. Peter concludes, verse 19, *"So then, those who suffer according to God's will, should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."* The key is to commit ourselves to our faithful Creator. Look to the One who is sovereign over all the apparent chaos in the world. He's ultimately in control and because of that we can trust Him. The word for "commit" or "entrust" is **(LCD) paratithemi which means, "deliver over to; to entrust for safe keeping; hand over something of value to the care of another."** We're urged to hand over the most valuable thing we possess, our very souls, to the care of God. This is what Jesus did on the cross where the same word is used, **(LCD) "Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."**" We forget that in His humanity, Jesus had no power to raise Himself from the dead. He plunged headlong into the dark abyss of death completely trusting that His Father would raise Him out of it. That's what we're called to – faith. Belief. Trust. That's how Christian crosses the Dark River in Pilgrim's Progress and how we reach heaven too. Our final point, **(LCD) It's a rough road to heaven, but rejoice because the God of glory is in control.**

So the question is how do we stay on the rough road like Christian did, like Jesus did? I think it comes down to remembering these points. When we do, we experience what we read in verse 14, *"for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."* In his book, "The

Sensitivity of the Spirit,” R.T. Kendall points out that at His baptism, **(LCD) a dove landed on Jesus** and remained on Him. It’s incredible because of how sensitive doves are. It’s one thing for pigeons to land on people, but doves? Doves don’t land on people, they’re too skittish, too sensitive – just a loud voice or a slammed door shoos it away. But on Jesus, the Prince of Peace, the dove remains. What “peace like a river” courses through the heart, soul and mind of Jesus. He loves the Lord His God with all His heart and all His soul and all His mind –He is at rest in His Father. Are you? Am I? Don’t lose the dove!

I want to close by showing you a video I showed several years ago on one of our Days of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. It’s the true story of the founder of Voice of the Martyrs, Richard Wurmbrand. It’s hard to watch...but worth it.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQ4iYxOEnZs>

Friends, we’re going to heaven because we believe in Jesus...but that doesn’t mean the road there is easy. It’s not. But take heart because suffering for Jesus is a road sign that tells you that you’re on the right road...even if it’s bumpy!