

Text

James 4:1-10 & Rom 5:1-5

Main Point

Introduction (300)

Hook – Christians Weird?

Do you think Christians are strange?

For those who are not Christians, there are many things that are strange, and even absurd about Christians.

Many things make no sense if Jesus has not risen from the dead.

I am sure you can think of many things. [some strange things...]

One such thing is that Christians rejoice in suffering.

Who does that? Who rejoices in the midst of suffering and pain.

Christians do.

Accounts of rejoicing in suffering

History is full of such accounts

Think of this account in Acts 5:

*⁴⁰ and when they had called in the apostles, **they beat them** and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ Then they left the presence*

of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

The apostle just got beaten to a pulp, and they rejoiced! How is that possible?

Resounding call to Rejoice in suffering

And yet this is the resounding call in scripture in the midst of suffering.

Let me give you a sprinkling of such passages:

James 1:2

² *Count **it all joy**, my brothers,^[b] when you meet trials of various kinds,*

1 Pet 1:6

⁶ *In **this you rejoice**, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,*

Rom 5:3

³ *Not only that, but **we rejoice in our sufferings**, knowing that suffering produces endurance,*

2 Cor 12:10

1 Pet 4:12-13

The consensus is staggering. Peter, James and Paul all say the same thing: rejoice in suffering.

Are these guys crazy?????

No they are not crazy. They understand reality.

They understand the full reality of the Lord Jesus, the cross and the resurrection. This understanding leads us to rejoice in suffering.

Outline

Today I want us to wrestle with some of these texts. I want us to see what these passages are getting at. How do they come to the conclusion that we ought to rejoice in suffering?

And the key answer is rather simple.

You see, **Suffering reveals the real you.**

That is the main point I want you to get from this session. Why should we rejoice in suffering? Suffering reveals the real you.

Today we are going to focus on two things that suffering reveals about you. Two things worth rejoicing about.

1. Suffering reveals the real sin in you.
2. Suffering reveals the real faith in you.

Bottle analogy

As we think about this question, I want you to think about a water bottle.

I have a water bottle here full of water. Now what happens if I squeeze this water bottle? If I shake it?

Water comes out and it makes a mess.

Now, fundamentally, why did water come out?

Some may say, because you squeezed it and shook it. What did you expect would happen? And it is true that the squeezing and the shaking was the occasion for the water to come out.

But fundamentally, the water came out because the bottle was full of water. If I squeezed and shook an

empty bottle, nothing would come out. Or if I squeezed and shook a bottle of milk, milk would come out.

Water came out because water was in the bottle.

The shaking and the squeezing revealed what was already in the water bottle.

Bottle analogy applied

Friends, suffering in the world squeezes and shakes us. Suffering reveals what is in your heart.

Is your heart full of Sin?

Or Is your heart full of Faith in God?

Suffering will either reveal sin that needs to be dealt with, or it will reveal a true faith. Both are worthy of rejoicing in.

Not take joy in the pain

Now just to be clear, Christians are able to rejoice in suffering, not because of the suffering in its own right. The bible never makes light of suffering. Never asks us to pretend that it does not hurt or is not difficult. God does not expect us to pretend that there is no pain when there is. The suffering is not what we rejoice in.

We rejoice in what the pain is **producing**.

Like an athlete can rejoice when she feels her muscles burning during training. Why does she rejoice?

Because it is producing strength and endurance. The muscle pain is still painful.

We rejoice because of what suffering is revealing and producing in us.

Link

So let's begin our first part:

Suffering reveals the real sin in you.

Part 1 – Suffering reveals the real sin in you

Exposition

Sin needs to be take care of

Now we know that Christians still struggle with sin. In fact the bible tells us that if you say that you don't have sin you are calling God a liar. (1 John 1:8)

Christians are not sinless, but they do sin less.

And as we have seen God's will for our lives is that we would sin less and less as we become more and more like Christ. God's will is that we would be sanctified. This is God's will for your life:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification (1 Thess 4:3).

We are sanctified when:

1. we take ownership of our sin,
2. turn to Christ for forgiveness through his work on the cross, and
3. ask for his grace to change.

In short, we are sanctified when we repent from our sins. That is how we sin less and that is how we become like Christ. That is how we change.

But notice that we need to take ownership for our sins. To repent you need to admit that you're actions were wrong. You need to see your behaviour as God sees it.

You need to realise what is in your heart, so that you can bring it to Jesus on the Cross and strive to change.

If there is no ownership of sin, there will be no repentance. If there is no repentance there will be no sanctification. If there is no sanctification you are not living according to God's will. (1 Thess 4:3).

And that is where suffering comes in.

Suffering brings our sin to the forefront so that we can take ownership of it.

Real you revealed only when things are hard

You see we all have a certain view of ourselves. We all think we are pretty good. Patient and kind and loving. And when the sun is shining, you are warm and the holidays are before you, that is how you present yourself. That is how people see you, that is how you see yourself.

But what about when you are wet, cold or hungry? What comes out of you then? Patience? Kindness? Love? Thinking of others first?

Whatever comes out in those moments reveals the real you.

A great example is when we say that people get "hangry". We think hunger and anger are linked so closely we have created a word to combine them.

But do you see what happens there.

People get angry not because they are hungry. They get angry because they have anger in their hearts. It is

easy to be kind and have self-control when your belly is full, but a bit of suffering, a bit of hunger changes things. Their hunger “squeezes” them and what is in their hearts comes out. In this case anger comes out.

If there was no anger there, all the hunger in the world would not reveal any anger. If the love of God was there, only the love of God would come out.

Intro to James 4:1-10

Please turn with me to the book of James. Here we see this truth being taught.

We are going to look briefly at the first 10 verse of chapter 4.

Now in this letter James is addressing Christians who are facing difficulties. They are being oppressed, they are facing financial difficulties and they have much uncertainty in the future. These people are suffering. They are facing many trials.

And in the midst of the trials these Christians are starting to quarrel and fight. Even murder has happened. And notice what James says is the ultimate cause. The trials may be the occasion for the quarrel and the fighting, but it is not the cause.

Ultimate Cause of fights

Look at verses 1-3

¹*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that **your passions**^[a] are at war within you?* ²***You desire** and do not have, so you murder. **You covet** and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.* ³*You*

*ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on **your passions**.*

The trial reveals their selfishness. The trails reveal that they are living for themselves. They are selfish, self-centred and self-sufficient. The trials reveal that their passions and their desires have top priority. Not love for God, nor love for neighbour

They have been squeezed and shaken and what has come out of their heart? Self-centeredness and disregard of God. This is sin. This is rightly offensive to God. This is treason. This is betrayal. In fact, this is the worst kind of betrayal.

Selfishness is a worship disorder

Look at verse 4.

⁴ You adulterous people!^[c] Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Being selfish is not just a bad character. Selfishness is in fact a worship disorder. It is a matter of worship. When James calls them “adulterous people” it is one of the worst kind of accusations. It shows a betrayal of God.

Let me put it this way. Everything we do has one of two motivations. Either we do something to please ourselves or we do something to please God.

We either serve our kingdom or we serve God’s kingdom. Suffering reveals if we have ourselves as the end goal of our lives or God as the end goal. Suffering shows if we seek to obey our desires instead of obeying

God. Are we loyal to please self or to please God? Do we worship ourself or do we worship God?

Suffering shows the state of our hearts.

God worthy and Jealous

The thing is, only God is worthy. Only he is worthy to be the end goal of our lives. Only he is worthy of worship.

Look at verse 5.

⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?

God is rightly jealous. He deserves to be the ultimate goal in our lives. He has created us. He is God and we are not.

So suffering reveals the state of our heart. It shows it is rebellious, adulterous, self-centred and self-reliant. Suffering reveals the sin in our hearts at a deep level.

He gives more grace

But that is not the end of the story. Sin is revealed so that we can repent. And we can repent only because of his grace. Look at verse 6.

⁶ But he gives more grace.

Ours sins are many, but he gives more grace.

- We turn to other gods again and again. but he gives more grace.
- We murder and fight, but he gives more grace.
- Our hearts are full of sin, but he gives more grace

There is such relief in these few words. He is the one who gives that grace. We do nothing to earn it. He chooses to save even though we have done everything to deserve destruction.

Opportunity to repent

When sin is exposed in our hearts, we can own it and repent of it. And this brings us close to God and more like Christ. This gives us opportunity to changes us into his likeness.

Look at the second half of verse 6.

Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God.

God will give grace, but only to the one who repents. The one who does not repent, the one who is proud, God opposes that person.

Resist Devil

And what does repentance look like? This passage tells us.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Repentance is to resist the devil. Not to go with the flow that will put us in situations where we will sin. We flee those situations. We flee those groups of people. We flee those scenarios. We walk away. We don't pick up the phone. We turn and run the other way.

Draw near to God

But there is also a positive element. Verse 8

⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

To draw near to God is to put our hands and our hearts to work to obey him. To fill our minds and our actions with things that honour God. What you love, what you treasure and what you desire must be God honouring.

As well as the way you treat others, use your words, use your time and use your money. Your actions also must be God honouring

Mourn sin

And our attitude towards sin is completely different. Look at verse 9

⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

When we sin, we must mourn as if we had lost a friend or the ability to walk. Our sorrow for sin should far exceed our glee for participating in it.

Exalted

And James repeats in verse 10 that we must humble ourselves before God. And he adds a promise. I don't want you to miss the promise. This is why we rejoice in suffering.

¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

What does it mean that he will exalt you?

You may think a life of Pleasure, Prestige and Perfect health would be great, but He promises something better.

Remember, He promises that you will be conformed to the image of his Son. Remembers Rom 8:29

Rom 8:29

*²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

That is the exaltation.

In our fallenness, we want gold, glory and comfort, but he promises us much more. He promises to exalt us to the likeness of his son, for us to know him more so that we can glorify him to the fullness that he deserves.

Everything else is worthless compared to knowing Christ.

Phil 3:8

*⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the **surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus** my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*

Rejoice because suffering reveals the real you

So can you see why James begins his letter by saying:

*² **Count it all joy, my brothers,**^[b] **when you meet trials of various kinds,** ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Can you see why Christians can rejoice in suffering?

We rejoice in suffering because suffering gives us the opportunity to do battle on sinful passions and desires.

Because suffering reveals the sin in our lives and gives us opportunity to repent and receive God's grace. It gives us the opportunity to be transformed into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Link

That is why we rejoice in suffering.

And if that was the only reason, it would be enough.

But there is another reason I want to show you.

And this brings us to our second point: Suffering reveals the real faith in you.

Part 2 – Suffering reveals the real faith in you.

We are all sinners in need of saving

For the Christian, suffering produces assurance of salvation. To be sure being saved from eternity in hell is something well worth rejoicing about.

In the passage in James we have just read, we were reminded of how serious Sin is and how Holy God is.

- God is a jealous God and we have betrayed him.
- He requires absolute allegiance, and we have rebelled.
- He is a consuming fire and we are mere grass.
- There is nowhere to escape his justice.

A sinner should have a sense of fear, apprehension and even terror at the thought of standing before a holy and just God.

Grace because of work of Jesus

But as we read before *“He gives more grace”*

He gives us what we do not deserve. He makes a way for sinners to be reconciled to a holy God. He saves us. He saves us by sending his Son on the cross to pay for the penalty that our sin deserves.

Justification

When Jesus died on the cross, he paid the full penalty that sin deserved to save sinners like you and me.

The work of Jesus on the cross means that God can wipe your record of sins clean. When Jesus died on the cross, he made it possible to clear your debt.

And the stunning thing is that not only is your debt wiped clean, bringing your account from the deep negatives to zero. But all of the Lord Jesus' good works are put to your account. You now become rich in good works because all of Jesus's good works are seen as yours.

A Christian exchanges their debt of sin the riches of Christ in a legal sense.

We call this double exchange Justification. Where God declares you righteous because of the work of Christ.

Received by faith

The stunning thing is that we accept this gift of grace by faith. This gift of salvation is received by faith. By believing God. By taking him at his word.

But how can you know you have Faith? How can you be assured that you are taking God at his Word, and that you will not spend eternity in Hell?

There are a number of things that help give us assurance that our faith is true.

And suffering is one of them.

V1-2 - Justified by faith

Please turn with me to Romans 5. In verse 1-5 we see how suffering helps give us assurance of salvation. And we see this assurance as a worthy reason to rejoice in suffering. But it is founded in the knowledge that we are justified by faith.

Only Christians can rejoice in suffering in this way.

Look at verse 1

¹Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith^[b] into this grace in which we stand, and we^[c] rejoice^[d] in hope of the glory of God.

So here we have the amazing truth of justification by faith alone summarized. We now have peace with God. We used to be rebels, adulterers and criminals. Now we have peace with God.

It is all by his grace, and we have obtained access through Faith thanks to the work of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross.

Rejoice: Endurance – endure more suffering

But Paul goes on. Look at verse 3. Here we see Paul rejoice in his suffering because of what he knows to be true.

*³ Not only that, **but we rejoice in our sufferings**, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character,*

This echoes what we have already seen in James. Suffering purifies us. Suffering produces Christ like character. We become more like Christ and we are able to face suffering in a Godly way.

We are able to endure the suffering without sinning.

Rejoice: Suffering produces Hope of future vindication

But then we see something else that suffering produces.

From suffering, to endurance, to character comes hope. Look at the second half of verse 4.

and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

This is the hope of redemption. The hope of standing before the throne of God and being declared innocent. The hope of being declared righteous. The hope of heaven.

That hope is generated through suffering.

What is your faith in?

When we suffer, we show what we rely on. And again, the options are simple:

1. Do we rely on ourselves? Or do we rely on God?
2. Do we rely on our money or on God?
3. Do we rely on our strength or on God?
4. Do we rely on our ability or on God?

Suffering reveals the object of your faith. And we rejoice because this is revealed before it is too late.

Rock climbing analogy

If I go rock climbing, I want to test the rope before I trust it with my life. I may tie it to a tree and hang my weight on it only 500 mm off the ground. Now if the rope then breaks and I hurt my feet in the process, I would rejoice because I was saved from placing my trust in that rope and falling to my death.

God uses suffering so that you would not deceive yourself. So that you can know your faith is in the right place. You may suffer for a little while but if your faith is in the promises of God you will not suffer for eternity.

Is the love of God in your heart

How you react in suffering shows if your faith is in God.

- Are you His or not?
- Is your faith genuine?
- Or are you deceiving yourself?

How can you know the answer to these questions?

- Does the love of God come out of your heart when you are squeezed?
- In suffering, do you draw near to God or do you run the opposite direction?
- Do you want God to be glorified in your suffering (v2) or do you use suffering as an excuse to gratify the desires of the flesh?

Knowing the answers to these questions is critical. Knowing the answers to these questions assures you of salvation.

There is nothing more precious than genuine faith. To know you have genuine faith in God is worth temporal pain.

Listen to how Peter puts it in 1 Peter 1:6-7

⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

You can rejoice in suffering because it reveals the genuineness of your faith. We rejoice in suffering because it shows that we rely on God and not on ourselves.

Only God can rescue us from sin and eternal death.

Conclusion

So as we conclude, I hope you can see why Christians rejoice in suffering, as strange as it may seem

We rejoice in suffering because it reveals the real us.

On one side it is an opportunity to rid ourselves of sin and become more like Christ.

And on the other side it is an opportunity to grow in the hope of salvation. To show the genuineness of our faith.

We can rejoice because we know that suffering is not the greatest enemy. The greatest enemy is Sin. Sin is

the greatest enemy of joy, of peace, of good relationships, of contentment, of satisfaction, of life, and of all good things.

When we realise that sin is the greatest enemy we will rejoice in suffering and say with Paul:

2 Cor 12:10

¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Let us pray

Questions

Can anyone cause you to sin? Can any situation cause you to sin? Why or why not?

Are you ever surprised by your reactions when you are put in a pressure situation?

If trials help grow our faith in God, and faith is so valuable, should we seek out trials?

Why is a genuine faith so precious? (1 Peter 1:6-7) Is it worth the trials? Why or why not?