

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas

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Sharing Christ's Suffering

1 Peter 4:12-13

4:12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

4:13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

1. Suffering For Christ

When I was a student, I visited to some seekers in a sanitarium for tuberculosis. A seeker I visited kept journal every day, to describe their mental pain caused by staying in a sanitarium and their loneliness at their real home. While reading the journal and listening to the story, his sufferings gradually became my sufferings. One day, I was about to go home after visiting, some tuberculosis patients surrounded me because they heard of I came from a church. No one hurt me, of course, but they asked me, "How did you determine your faith? You are a young student. Have you experienced terrible things like dying?" Many people tend to think faith is the salvation from sufferings, and after having faith the pain will pass away and the life will be joyful.

Surely, God saves people from their sufferings; I'd like to quote two of the verses; Psalm 50:15, "And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." And James 5:13,

“Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray.” Also, The Lord’s Prayer teach us, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Through faith, we will be saved from lots of pain and sufferings. The joy coming from the forgiveness of sins and the healing of wounds of heart is unimaginably great. After believing, you might be saved from your specific problems in life because your habits become healthy. Or some people got healed from their illness and pain of bodies. I have experienced such miracles and witnessed the testimonies of people. However, that would not mean the believers would not encounter any of sufferings after having faith. The Bible never promises light-hearted life.

Believers experience the sufferings caused by faith; you would understand that sinful acts are sinful after having faith, even though you didn’t recognize that those acts are sinful. Your heart desperately wishes to be purified from the nature of sin, in addition to being forgiven. The deeper your wish to be, the more sufferings you might get.

Also, you might experience some frictions in human relationship; once you were doing the same things with others, but you already know those things are sinful and would like to quit. The early believers received 1 Peter, actually were persecuted. It was more than the little frictions and troubles the present believers may experience. They often lost their properties and had to leave their town just because they believed in Jesus Christ.

God saves the believers from the sufferings of sin; yet at the same time, God gives the sufferings for Jesus Christ. If we interpret that faith to believe in Jesus Christ would “benefit” or “merit” us, you

might think, “I believe in God, but I still suffer. Why is that so?” The believers in the persecution didn’t believe in Him for “merit”; they knew that they would be going to be persecuted if they believed in. Still, they knew Jesus Christ is the truth and He is the God to believe in. That’s why they believed. People might seek faith along with their respective reasons; some want benefits, and others want to get out of their sufferings. After all, we all shall be guided to the same faith and confession of the early believers; “Jesus Christ is the true God and the Lord.”

However, the persecution got more crucial and sometimes tempted the believers regardless of how solid had they faith in their mind. So Peter in 12th verse, taught, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” and let them stand firm and keep believing in Jesus Christ in order to encourage the believers faced persecution.

2. Suffering With Christ

Verse 13 says, “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings....” This verse teaches the suffering for Christ is the suffering with Christ.

Many of you had experiences that you have had more pains from the problems of our society since you had believed, knew the will of God, and seen the society from the eyes of God. If we have such pains, Jesus Christ has more when he sees our society. When Lord Jesus saw that the people of Jerusalem had been neglecting and resiting God’s invitation, he said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her

brood under her wings, and you would not!” (Matthew 23:37) This was more than the word of judgment. This was the word of mercy and love for Israelites called “the people of God” and Jerusalem called “the city of God”. When he said this, there might be tears in his eyes. I think today’s world is worse than the world when Jesus grieved over. The Lord must grieve over our society. And, Jesus must ask us, his followers, to share his suffering, as well as to suffer for him.

I visited a girl who had suddenly become unconscious several times at a hospital and a hospice. Her mother was beside her day and night. Once the mother said to me, “If could suffer for my daughter. I really want to share her suffering.” We have desire to share the suffering of whom we love, and want to ask them share our suffering. Apostle Paul asked Timothy, his dear disciple, saying, “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 2:3) It was when he was in prison immediately before his martyrdom. Jesus also wants us, his disciples, share his suffering. Let us know his desire and answer his appeal.

Lord Jesus has the fervent desires in his heart. They are the desires that the people hear the Word of God, repent and return God; and that the believers keep their faith until death, not being defeated by difficulties and temptations but being sanctified as the people of God; and that the believers keep witnessing Christ and his gospel in good season or in bad season. We will encounter various kinds of suffering when we try to answer his desire, but we will bear them patiently. Why? Because we have to do so? No. It is because Lord Jesus is suffering and fighting for the sanctification of the believers and the progress of the Kingdom. The believers are loved by the Lord and

love the Lord. Therefore, the believers are called “beloved” in the Bible. The believer want to share the fight for the Kingdom with the Lord because of the love.

To suffer for Christ or to suffer with Christ is not just painful things. Since we do so because of the love of Christ, it should be our joy. Verse 13 says, “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” Those who love Christ know this “joy.” It is the gift of grace to suffer for Christ, and it is the privilege to suffer with Christ. It’s the most valuable thing. Let us pray and seek that our love to Christ may become richer and the suffering with Christ may become our joy.

(Prayer)

Heavenly Father, you taught us that Christ want us to suffer with him because his love for us. You also taught us the suffering with the Lord would become our joy because of our love to the Lord. Help us to accept the suffering for the Lord as the suffering with the Lord when we face pains and difficulties. Support us with the joy you would give and fill us with the joy. We pray this in the name of Lord Jesus.