

# Trusting God When It Hurts

## Part #3 - "How Do We Persevere?"

1 Peter 1:3-7

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on January 15, 2017 by Pastor Barton Priebe

### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to 1 Peter 1.
- This morning we are concluding a little three-part series that we have called, "Trusting God when it Hurts." This morning we are going to focus on the need to persevere when it hurts, when the trials feel overwhelming.
  - Everyone, whether Christian or non-Christian, faces hardship in life. Today I want to show how Christianity can give you the ability to persevere through any and every trial that comes your way.
    - Since I have some longer stories and illustrations at the end of the message, I want to jump right into this passage. So in order that you might persevere in the trials you face look with me at how this passage speaks to three things. First, the reality of our trials. Second, the purpose of our trials. Third, the reward of our trials.

### THE REALITY OF OUR TRIALS

- So let's begin by talking about **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** the reality of our trials.
  - Right away in verse 6 we see that Christianity brings together what eastern religions and western secularism cannot do. Eastern religions say your suffering is just an illusion that you can escape. This escape may offer some hope but it is not very realistic to say our sufferings are an illusion. In the West people say suffering is real but you really cannot escape it. This is realistic but not hopeful.
    - Here we see that Christianity is both realistic and optimistic.
- Look at verse 6. **READ 6 - *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.***
  - So these Christians are both greatly rejoicing and suffering – at the same time. It is not that they were rejoicing before and now they are in agony. Neither is it the case that they were in agony and now they are rejoicing.
    - Peter says they are filled with incredible joy and filled with incredible pain at the same time.
- They are greatly rejoicing in all that Peter talked about in verses 3-5. Since Jesus rose from the dead a new world order has begun. God is giving life to people. God is showing mercy. God is saving people and giving them a future inheritance that they will cash in on when Jesus returns.
  - The reason the average person cannot find joy is because their joy is based on circumstances. Christianity offers you something that transcends circumstances; namely, an unchanging relationship with God and the promise of a future when God will bring you into a perfect world where there are no more trials or pain. This is hope. This is reason to rejoice.
- But notice that in this world Christians also get filled with grief, agony, and pain. Look at verse 6. **READ 6 - *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.***
  - Christianity is extremely realistic. It says pain and trials are a reality in this fallen world. In my pastoral ministry I have learned that everyone has a battle they are fighting and it is a battle that you likely know nothing about.
    - The apostle Paul faced such a battle – he called it a thorn in his flesh. A thorn that God would not take away. A thorn that caused him pain and difficulty every day. Everyone has a thorn.

- One of the best books I have read in the last year is by Wesley Hill. It is called, *Washed and Waiting: reflections on Christian faithfulness and homosexuality*. Hill states that he has always felt same sex attraction. Along with the entire history of the church he believes that to honour God, he must not act on these impulses and pursue same sex relationships.
  - The book is so good because it is so raw. You can hear him greatly rejoicing in Christ and yet agonizing over his sexual desires.
- The dual images of “washed and waiting” are the key. In 1 Cor 6 Paul talks about how some in the Corinthian church had lived a homosexual lifestyle but when they came to Jesus they were washed of their sins. Hill writes,
  - ***“I know that whatever the complex origins of my own homosexuality are, there have been conscious choices I’ve made to indulge—and therefore to intensify, probably—my homoerotic inclinations. As I look back over the course of my life, I regret the nights I have given in to temptations to lust that pulsed like hot, itching sores in my mind. And so I cling to this image—washed. I am washed, sanctified, justified through the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Whenever I look back on my baptism, I can remember that God has cleansed the stains of homosexual sin... The second image that describes my struggle comes from Romans 8:23—25. Along with the fallen inanimate creation, “we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Paul pictures Christian believers as having a “down payment”—the Holy Spirit—on their future inheritance. But indwelt by the Spirit, we not only feel happiness at the pledge but also a gut-wrenching hunger for its consummation. Like mothers experiencing labor pains, we can only wait... When God acts climactically to reclaim the world and raise our dead bodies from the grave, there will be no more homosexuality. But until then, we hope for what we do not see. Washed and waiting. That is my life—my identity as one who is forgiven and spiritually cleansed and my struggle as one who perseveres with a frustrating thorn in the flesh, looking forward to what God has promised to do.***<sup>1</sup>
- What is your thorn in the flesh? What is the thing you have battled for years or decades? Perhaps it is an agonizing battle against pornography and lust. Perhaps it is a temper that you try to control but often gets out of control. Perhaps it is prescription drugs or alcohol that destroys you but you keep going back to.
  - Perhaps it is jealousy that continually ruins your ability to truly enjoy friendships with others. Perhaps it is an eating disorder or an obsession with your physical looks that dominates your life. Perhaps it is a never-ending battle with the dark clouds of depression or mental illness. Perhaps it is constant doubts about God’s presence with you.
- What you see here is that Christianity never downplays your pain. **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** Many eastern religions deny the reality of human pain (saying it is an illusion), whereas Christianity affirms the reality of human pain. Christians may “rejoice” but they are simultaneously “*grieved by various trials.*”
  - This is so realistic. But it is right here that we often say, ***“That’s great that God does not downplay my pain. But why doesn’t God take it away?”***
    - This brings us to the second thing we need to talk about today because Christianity is not just realistic – it is also optimistic in that it offers hope.

## THE PURPOSE OF OUR TRIALS

- Let’s turn now to speak about **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** the purpose of our trials.
  - Christianity offers you tremendous hope because it says there is a purpose for all your trials. This is so different from secular thinking in the West that is realistic but not optimistic. Richard

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<sup>1</sup> Wesley Hill, *Washed And Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*, Kindle Edition, Location 478-497.

Dawkins rightly points out that if there is no God then in the universe *“there is at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference.”*<sup>2</sup>

- **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** Western secular thought offers no ultimate hope for human pain (saying there is no ultimate purpose to our existence), whereas Christianity says a loving and all-powerful God has purposes in every trial we face.
- What is that purpose? **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** Sufferings function as the crucible for faith in that they reveal whether or not our faith is authentic. Look at verse 7. **READ 7** - *so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire...*
  - Gold is a precious metal but it is filled with impurities. A jeweler heats it up to 1900 degrees Fahrenheit. The impurities then rise to the surface where they are skimmed off or burned off. The gold is then proved to be pure.
    - Peter writes that our faith in God is far more valuable than gold. And so he says God’s purpose in all your trials is that they might burn away the impurities so prove that your faith is real.
- Trials do for us what comfort cannot. In comfort we easily forget God, we feel in control, we trust in ourselves. But trials strip us of all we trust in. We then have a choice – turn to God or keep trusting in what always fails us.
  - God’s purpose in trials is that our trust in him would increase for only in him is lasting security and joy.
- This is the story of Job. Satan accuses Job of only loving God because of what he can give him. So God allows Satan to take everything from him. Yet, in Job 23:10 we read, *“But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”*
  - And Job’s faith was proved genuine for in the midst of tremendous pain he cried out in faith, *“Though he slay me, yet I will trust him.”*
    - That is genuine faith. He does not trust God just because of what God gives him. He trusts God for who God is.
- This all sounds good when you are not in a trial. But when you are in the midst of a trial, it is very hard to feel that God is loving toward you and has your best interests in mind. But listen, you can know for a fact he does.
  - For God loved you so much that he sent his one and only Son to rescue you. If he would give up his Son, whom he loves, does this not prove his love for you? Because Jesus was abandoned by God for you on the cross so that you will never be abandoned. Jesus cried out *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* so that you might never worry about being forsaken of God.
    - Jesus faced the ultimate trial so we do not have to. He faced the trial of the red hot anger of God against our sin, so we might never fear God’s wrath. He faced the judgement of death so that we might pass unscathed through death. He faced the trial of punishment so that we might God might pardon us.
- So you see, when the trial is so overwhelming and you feel that God has abandoned you, Jesus is the ultimate proof that God is actually for you not against you. When you are convinced of his love then you can know that he has good purpose in your trial. Your pain is not meaningless. It has a purpose and that purpose is to draw you closer to your Creator, to take you deeper into a relationship with him.
  - So Christianity is both realistic and optimistic. It affirms the reality of your pain and it says there is a sovereign and loving purpose in it.
    - But it goes much further than this.

## THE REWARD OF OUR TRIALS

- Finally, we must talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** the reward of our trials. Look at verse 7.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Dawkins, *Rivers Out Of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 133.

- **READ 6-7** - *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>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.*
- When I first read this I assumed that it meant that God’s purposes in our trials is to prove our faith genuine in order that God might receive praise, glory, and honour when Jesus returns.
  - I was really shocked when I discovered I was wrong. Grammatically it is God who gives the praise. God honours and praises his people. So the New Living Translation translates this to say, **“So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.”**
    - The context also suggests this is correct. In verses 4-5 Peter encouraged these believers in the fact that God has a future inheritance awaiting them. In verse 7 Peter has emphasized how precious genuine faith is in God’s sight even if it receives little or no reward in this world. It follows logically then that since God puts his people through so many trials in this world he will reward them on the day Jesus returns.
- I checked 13 commentaries on this and they all agreed that this verse is saying that **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** on the day Jesus returns God will give praise, glory, and honour to all whose faith has proved genuine.
  - Even if all the commentators and I are wrong about this verse, the rest of the New Testament clearly teaches this. 1 Cor 4:5 says, **“Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.”**
    - Do you see how amazing this is? Do you see how much hope it gives you in the midst of your trials? Not only does God have a purpose in the midst of your trials he also says a day is coming when all who persevere in faith will receive the greatest reward imaginable; namely, praise from God himself.

## PRAISE THEM WITH GREAT PRAISE

- I recently re-read *The Lord of the Rings*. Near the end of the book I came across a passage that perfectly captures this. It moved me deeply. It is not in any of the movies.
  - In the story the whole world is being taken over by the evil Sauron. The only way to stop him is to take his ring, the ring of power that possesses his spirit, to Mt Doom where it was formed and drop it in lava. Two hobbits, Frodo and Sam, carry the ring across Middle Earth to Sauron’s land of Mordor. They face many trials. The ring’s evil power torments and destroys Frodo. They suffer. Finally the ring is destroyed and Sauron is defeated.
    - Frodo and Sam are rescued from the mountain. They sleep for days. When they wake up Gandalf the wizard is there.
- **‘A great Shadow has departed,’ said Gandalf, and then he laughed, and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count. It fell upon his ears like the echo of all the joys he had ever known. But he himself burst into tears. Then, as a sweet rain will pass down a wind of spring and the sun will shine out the clearer, his tears ceased, and his laughter welled up, and laughing he sprang from his bed.’**
- They are told they will meet the King who is about to ride to his crowning but he waits for Frodo and Sam. I will read you an extended section. It begins with Sam asking a question.
- **‘What shall we wear?’ said Sam; for all he could see was the old and tattered clothes that they had journeyed in, lying folded on the ground beside their beds. ‘The clothes that you wore on your way to Mordor,’ said Gandalf. ‘Even the orc-rags that you bore in the black land, Frodo, shall be preserved. No silks and linens, nor any armour or heraldry could be more honourable. But later I will find some other clothes, perhaps.’**

- *When they were washed and clad, and had eaten a light meal, the Hobbits followed Gandalf...As they came to the opening in the wood, they were surprised to see knights in bright mail and tall guards in silver and black standing there, who greeted them with honour and bowed before them.*
  - They are led into a large field where all the army has gathered and standing at attention.
    - *And as the Hobbits approached swords were unsheathed, and spears were shaken, and horns and trumpets sang, and men cried with many voices and in many tongues: ‘Long live the Halflings! Praise them with great praise! Praise them with great praise, Frodo and Samwise! Praise them! Praise them! Praise them! The Ring-bearers, praise them with great praise!’*
- As they approach the throne of the King they realize it is their old friend Aragorn. He is the king and he sits on the throne with a great sword laid across his knees. Frodo and Sam had met him in a town called Bree. Aragorn speaks and says,
  - *‘It is a long way, is it not, from Bree, where you did not like the look of me? A long way for us all, but yours has been the darkest road.’ And then to Sam’s surprise and utter confusion he bowed his knee before them; and taking them by the hand, Frodo upon his right and Sam upon his left, he led them to the throne, and setting them upon it, he turned to the men and captains who stood by and spoke, so that his voice rang over all the host, crying: ‘Praise them with great praise!’*
- A minstrel then comes and sings to the whole gathering of how all that Frodo and Sam had done, of all they suffered, and how they had persevered. He sang,
  - *“until their hearts, wounded with sweet words, overflowed, and their joy was like swords, and they passed in thought out to regions where pain and delight flow together and tears are the very wine of blessedness.*
    - *And at the last, as the Sun fell from the noon and the shadows of the trees lengthened, he ended. ‘Praise them with great praise!’ he said and knelt. And then Aragorn stood up, and all the host arose, and they passed to pavilions made ready, to eat and drink and make merry while the day lasted. Frodo and Sam were led apart and brought to a tent, and there their old raiment was taken off, but folded and set aside with honour; and clean linen was given to them.”<sup>3</sup>*

## “IT WILL BE WORTH IT”

- Now let me pick up Wesley Hill’s story again because he powerfully shows how we are all characters in God’s great story and how the future reward fills us with strength as we deal with the thorns in our flesh.
  - *There was a time in my struggle with homosexuality when I felt that the world was caving in on me. I had been living in Minneapolis for only a few months, and I felt burdened—physically so, at times—by loneliness, confusion, and fear. During a brief visit back to Wheaton, Illinois, where I had graduated from college, I arranged to meet with my good friend Chris, and on a cold winter afternoon, I told him how I was feeling and asked for his help. Out of all the things Chris said to me in response that day, one sticks out. With compassion in his voice, he said: “Origen, the great Christian theologian of the early church, believed that our souls existed with God before we were born. What if he were right? I don’t believe he was, but imagine for a moment if he were. Imagine yourself standing in the presence of God, looking down from heaven on the earthly life you’re about to be born into, and God says to you, ‘Wes, I’m going to send you into the world for sixty or seventy or eighty years. It will be hard. In fact, it will be more painful and confusing and distressing than you can now imagine. You will have a thorn in your flesh, a homosexual orientation that is the result of your entering a world that sin and death have broken, and you may wrestle with it all your life. But I will be with you. I will be watching every step you take, guiding you by my*

<sup>3</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of The Rings*, Kindle Edition, Location 19064.

*Spirit, supplying you with grace sufficient for each day. And at the end of your journey, you will see my face again, and the joy we share then will be born out of the agonies you faithfully endured by the power I gave you. And no one will take that joy—that solid resurrection joy, which, if you experienced it now, would crush you with its weight—away from you.’ “Wesley,” Chris said, looking me in the eye, “wouldn’t you say yes to the journey if you had had that conversation with God?” I nodded, and Chris’s grew stronger, his eyes flashing deep care and concern, “But you have had it, in a sense. God is the author of your story. He is watching, supplying you with his Spirit moment by moment. And he will raise your body from the dead to live with him and all the great company of the redeemed forever. And the joy you will have in that moment will be yours for all eternity. Can you endure knowing that? Can you keep walking the lonely road if you remember he’s looking on and delights to help you persevere?” Your struggle isn’t a mindless, unobserved string of random disappointments, I heard Chris say that day. And faithfulness is never a gamble. It will be worth it. The joy then will be worth the struggle now.<sup>4</sup>*

## CONCLUSION

- This is the realistic and optimistic message of Christianity. Jesus does not downplay your pain. He says it is real. But because Jesus died and rose again, you can also possess tremendous hope that enables you to “greatly rejoice” even when you “suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”
  - This is how you persevere. You recognize that God has a purpose in your trials. They are not meaningless even if you cannot even discern one ounce of meaning. And one day, you will receive your praise.
- Can you imagine this? For all those who persevere there is a day coming when we will stand before the throne of God. And then you will hear the archangel call out, “Praise her with great praise! Praise him with great praise!”
  - You will say, “No, I do not deserve any praise.” You are right but God delights to give it. Would it not be just like Jesus to also come and kneel before you, not in worship of you, but in honour? Did Jesus not do this when he knelt before his disciples to wash their feet? Peter rebuked him for he thought it was beneath Jesus to do so. Jesus would not hear of it for he is the humble king. Would this not make all the pain worth while to hear Jesus, the sovereign King, say “well done, good and faithful servant.”
    - Oh the grace of our Lord, that he would give honour and praise to his weak people. Such astounding humility only increases his glory and that is why no matter how much he may honour his people, we will all cast our crowns before his throne and cry out, “Worthy is the Lamb! Worthy is the Lamb! Worthy is the Lamb!”
- We have been washed. We are now waiting. We rejoice and we suffer grief in all kinds of trials.
  - Persevere through the trials. It will all be worth it in the end.

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<sup>4</sup> Hill, Location 878. Another section has a similar theme: “Many times in my experience with homosexuality I have wished my life was different, that I had some other burden to bear—anything but this one. But I have also felt that if Someone is watching—taking note; caring about each footfall, each bend in the trail; marking my progress—then the burden may be bearable. When the road is long and the loneliness and sheer longing threaten to extinguish hope, it helps to remember that, like Frodo and Sam, I, too, am in a grand tale, with an all-seeing, all-caring Reader or Listener who also happens to be in some mysterious way the Author. Sam of The Lord of the Rings trilogy believed there would be listeners and readers who would want to know the story of this struggle. I believe that in my case, too, there is Someone who cares about my story. Unlike Sam and Frodo’s, my story and the depths of my struggle may never be observed or known by any human watcher. But I can still endure—I can keep on fighting to live faithfully as a believer bearing my broken sexuality—so long as I have the assurance that my life matters to God, that, wonder of all wonders, my faith pleases him, that somehow it makes him smile.” Location 1733.