

## 1 PETER 4:12-19 “SUFFERING EVANGELISM, BATMAN!”

<sup>12</sup> Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. <sup>15</sup> If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. <sup>16</sup> However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. <sup>17</sup> For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup> And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” <sup>19</sup> So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Perhaps the first century believers had as much a problem with the temptation to see Jesus as their magic bullet as we do. Does not the Old Testament promise that if you obey all God’s statutes and commandments all will go well for you ( Joshua 1:8)? Besides, every pagan knows that a god who can’t protect us from suffering is not worth his salt, let alone our allegiance. On the other side of the coin, did not all Israel suffer because of Achan’s disobedience in the Promised Land (Joshua 7)? Throughout the Book of Judges, Israel was crushed by oppression whenever they turned away from the LORD. The first century Christian did not need our secular culture of affluence as fuel for his burning desire for a gospel of prosperity, he had good theological kindling.

No wonder Peter had to remind them that the Incarnation represented a radical paradigm shift. As C.S. Lewis stated it through the lion, Aslan, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, there is a “deeper magic.” The ultimate truth is that disobedience leads to suffering and to redeem the disobedient, God took on our suffering for us. Jesus suffered for us so that we might know the joy of a right relationship with God. What we have now is only a glimpse of that joy. But when the Kingdom is consummated, we know that we will experience unbelievable joy because we have sampled it here. Since that joy lingers in us we want to participate in the mission of Christ, our Suffering Messiah.

Suffering is part of the human existence. I have heard it explained that the difference between humans and other mammals is that while both can experience pain, only humans have the intelligence necessary to process that pain in what we call suffering. When God redeems us, he redeems even our suffering. The focus changes from the event of suffering to the manner in which we suffer. Many a pagan has been touched by the way believers have suffered; and not a few have been so converted. Although we should not actively seek to suffer, when suffering comes we should see it as an opportunity to make God known and to convert our neighbors. In this way, suffering provides an opportunity to fulfill the great commandment, to love God and our neighbor.

**Lord Jesus, you came into the world to save the world through your suffering and dying on the cross. As I follow you, steel my nerve so that I might not deny you in order to avoid suffering. Inspire me to accept suffering as an opportunity to serve you and my neighbor. Amen.**