

Suffering Solutions, part 1

1 Peter 2:11-12

(preached Pine Grove 9/15/19 Sun PM)

Introduction

Take your Bibles and turn to 1 Peter 2:11..

Let me read these two verses to us and we will jump back in this fantastic letter..

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may [n]because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of [o]visitation.

Suffering is common to Christianity.

To know Christ in a saving way is to know suffering.

Jesus told the disciples that if the enemies of God persecuted Him, they would persecute them.

But there is also suffering not related to persecution.

There are sufferings that result simply from living in a fallen world.

Some people suffer from disease.

Some people suffer from loss of loved ones.

Some people suffer from the sins of others.

It is simply a way of life for the Christian.

The road to heaven is narrow.

The road to heaven is a one way street through Christ.

But the road to heaven is also stained with tears and filled with bumps.

I know this from my own experiences as a believer but also because I read the writing of other Christians who suffer.

And I counsel believers who suffer.

Now, counseling suffering believers is tough.

First you have to determine the cause of the suffering.

Some people suffer because they are feeling the consequences of sin.

In those cases, repentance is the first order of business.

You cannot expect your suffering to end if you stay in your sin.

Often times the suffering is a wake up call from the Lord.

But if the suffering is not the result of personal sin, you go through a list of possible causes.

Are you sick?

Are you receiving trouble because you are a believer?

Are you grieving?

And on and on the list goes.

But once we identify the source of the suffering, the remedies for are fairly straightforward.

The first is to be grateful for your salvation.

Suffering is often lessened when we are grateful that we know Christ in a saving way and have a secure future in heaven..

So the first help in suffering is an inward gratitude.

But the second help in suffering is an outward servitude.

And what I mean by that is simple.

Suffering is lessened when we get our eyes off ourselves.

And I have said countless times in counseling sessions..

There is someone in the world in far worse shape than you.

In fact, there is likely someone that you know personally who is in far worse shape than you.

So if you are suffering, go serve someone.

Get your eyes off yourself.

Leave your own pity party and find someone to minister to.

Now I realize that is often easier said than done, but if a person continues to look outward, he or she will find some relief from their suffering..

It is only when we retreat to ourselves that the suffering grows..

Now, 1 Peter is great source for help in suffering.

Peter is writing to believers under fire for their belief in Christ.

And how does he offer them help?

Well in chapter 1 and the first part of chapter 2, he tells to look inward.

He tells them to be grateful that they are saved.

He tells them change the way they think.

Change the way they live.

Change the way they love.

Change their desires.

And last week in verses 4-10, Peter gave reasons for inward change ...

Know that God is working on you.

Know that God will finish what HE started.

Know that God would be gloried by how they were being transformed inwardly.

But now as we come to 1 Peter 2:11, there is a transition of sorts..

And this transition is from the inward transformation to the outward reflection..

In other words, our inward change is meant to be shared...

As we ended last week, we said that we renovate our homes for our pleasure but we also renovate our homes to serve others.

We need a kitchen so that we have more people over.

WE need an extra bedroom so that visitors don't have to pay for a hotel..

The same is true in our lives.

God is making us new but there is purpose beyond us in that..

Look end of verse 9 from last week..

so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

So if you want to lessen your suffering, look with gratitude to your salvation..

But also use point others to that glorious truth as well.

Now, how do we accomplish that?

Well, we do it in two ways.

We proclaim truth with our mouths and we live truth with our lives..

And verses 11 and 12 serve to transition us from inward renovations to outward proclamations..

And what you will see in that the rest of chapter 2 all the way to the middle of chapter 3 are commands related to how we proclaim the excellencies of the God who saved us...

WE are going to see how look like a Christian in our relationship to government.

WE are going to see how to look like a Christian in our relationship to our work.

WE are going to see how to look like a Christian in our relationship to our family.

WE are going to see how to look like a Christian in our relationship to the church..

And the application is simple.

Suffering is lessened when we get our eyes off self and onto others..

Tonight, let's simply transition from a change within to a change without in verses 11-12 with what we will describe as..

I. The Exhortation to Excellence (2:11-12)

When we arrive at verse 11, Peter has been laying out pretty good for his readers.

He has been calling them to do some pretty intense renovations in their life, so he begins verse 11 with a pastor's heart..

Beloved..

Now remember, Peter is a pastor at heart.

Jesus restored him on the bank of the Sea of Galilee and called him to feed and care for the sheep.

Peter is a preacher with a pastor's heart.

And you see it hear in how he address his readers..

Beloved.

Your translation may say "dear friends" or "dearly beloved", but the point is the same, -Peter has a heart for his people.

He is not writing a particular church in this letter but that doesn't lessen his love for those reading his letter..

Peter loves the church.

He has been given a ministry to believers by Christ Himself, so he refers them in a tender way.

And you can even see that in the command that follows..

11 Beloved, I urge you

Some translations say I beseech you or exhort you, but the world has more a begging aspect.

Peter is begging believers..

HE is urging them with love..

And what is he urging them to do?

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

This is really a summary of all the commands of the Bible..

We are urged to stay away from the fleshy lusts...

Now our minds go to sexual sins, but fleshy lusts are any temptations that come from the flesh..

Now what is the flesh?

What does that mean when you see it in the Bible?

Well, it can mean literal flesh.

It can mean someone who is human..

But it often refers to our sinful nature.

The Bible calls it our old man.

Salvation brings us new desires and new attitudes and new way of thinking.

But all the new is trapped inside an unredeemed body.

We have a 2019 motor inside a 1919 Model T body.

Our fleshly lusts are the sins of the old nature..

Galatians 5 lists them..

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: [i]mmorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, [j]factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

So the command from God through Peter here is to abstain from fleshly lusts..

To abstain is to keep away.

Don't even get near the lusts of the flesh.

Flee from them.

Reject them.

Refuse them.

And why should you abstain from them?

Simpel.

They wage war on your soul.

Nowhere does the Bible say that salvation can be lost but the joy of salvation can surely be forfeited if you don't stay away from fleshly lusts.

If you have lost the joy of salvation, the first question you should ask yourself is this..

“Am I abstaining from fleshly lusts?”

I would also add that fleshly lusts attack your assurance of salvation as well..

You see, though sin is forgiven, it still has consequences..

Sin will still wage war against you as a believer.

IT will make you question your salvation.

IT will rob the joy of salvation.

IT will silence your message of salvation to others..

Now note how Peter describes believers here..

I urge you as strangers and aliens..

The reason we abstain from fleshly lusts is because we don't behave like the world around us.

An alien is a non native person living in the land.

A stranger is a non native person just passing through.

Both of those words describe the Christian.

The world is not our home.

WE are simply passing through.

In other words, we don't give into the lusts of the flesh so that we make it clear that we don't belong.

Let me tell you something..

If I head to your house and you throw some Hellman's mayonnaise on the counter to put on my hamburger, I will immediately think, "You must be a stranger to the area."

If you put Miracle Whip out, I will immediately think, "You must be an alien from another planet."

Church, don't act the world simply because you are not of the world.

Abstain from the lusts of the flesh and it will be clear that you don't belong here and are simply passing through.

In a sense, verse 11 is really a summary of the first part of Peter's letter..

Get yourself in order...

But now in verse 12, Peter takes us the purpose of inward renovations..

12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may [n]because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of [o]visitation.

And the purpose of getting our lives in order is to see them make an eternal impact on others..

So how does our changed life make an impact on others?

Well #1 - Our changed life shuts the mouths of our accusers.

Look, the unbelieving is ready to slander the believing world at every opportunity.

The main reason unbelievers speak ill of believers is to silence their own conscience.

You see, unbelievers have the law of God written on their heart.

They know when they commit sin.

They see the evil of their words and deeds.

And as a believer, you don't even have to say a word to them.

You just need to be around them.

Your presence often draws out the worst in them.

When they attack you, it is like they are attacking God.

So believers become their targets..

And again, you don't have to do anything to become a victim of their slander.

You simply need to have the reputation of being a believer, and their slander against you will begin.

So how we end their slander?

Do we go up to them and ask them to stop?

You can try that if you like but what you find is that they will use your words against you.

So we go up them and make them stop physically?

No, that will only give more weight to what they are saying about you.

Do we slander them in return?

Well no.

Scripture is clear.

We don't return evil for evil.

So what do we do?

Look at the first part of verse 12..

We keep our behavior excellent among them.

In other words, we live rightly.

We speak kindly.

We act graciously.

Now, this excellent behavior accomplishes a number of things..

#1 - It prevents our enemies from having evidence of sin in our lives.

#2 - It keeps our consciences clean so that we sleep well.

#3 - It assaults the consciences of our enemies.

It takes a really evil person to continue in slander when the one they are slandering never loses their cool.

Most of the time, unbelievers will move on to their next victim if we exercise self control and refuse to return evil for evil.

The bottom line is this..

They could care less about the slander.

Unbelievers slander everyone all the time.

However the purpose of their slander against a believer is to draw into their trap.

Because the moment you slander them, game over.

They are pleased.

They will feel vindicated that you are as bad as they are.

They will continue to reject your God since He must not have the power to change you..

This is the ugly side of Christianity when a believer cannot exercise restraint and lets their behavior become less than excellent.

It is often said that actions speak louder than words but that is especially true if those actions are sinful.

As the saying goes, it takes years to build a clean character but seconds to lose it..

And that loss often happens when we let our fleshly desires take over and become like the unbeliever who is attacking us.

The best way to shut the mouth of the unbeliever is to keep yours shut as well.

Jesus was accused of all sorts of crimes but like a lamb before his shearers, he was silent.

The best evidence of a life well-lived is not a loud mouth to proclaim it.

But a quiet life that evidences it.

Some of the best defenses of excellent life are silent defenses.

Now there is one more thing to see here.

Do we just keep our behavior excellent to silence the critics?

No, we also keep our behavior excellent to win the critics to Christ..

The end of the verse is clear..

evildoers, they may [n]because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of [o]visitation.

Look, I am a competitor.

Sometimes I just want my enemies to hush so I can win.

But Peter is clear.

Excellent behavior is not about winning a personal feud, it is about winning the unbeliever to Christ.

Our objective is not our victory over someone else.

Our objective is victory over the evil one.

Though our enemies slander us, we pray for them to be saved.

Peter says our good deeds and excellent behavior can cause our enemies to glorify God.

It is often very difficult to see our enemies as the mission field but that is what we must do.

Nero was an evil man doing evil deeds against Christians, but he was not the enemy of Peter.

HE was the mission field.

We often see evangelism in nice settings filled with nice people that listen to our gospel presentations and rush forward to be saved.

But evangelism is dirty work and people needing to be saved are often those that we consider least likely to be saved.

However, the command here is to live with excellent behavior to stop the slander and to save the sinner.

Simply put, the ones that target you should be our targets as well..

However we don't shoot back or slander back.

We simply live right in front of them and ask God to save them.

Conclusion

I want to say this before I end.

This is not easy obedience.

In fact, many of you have been taught to hit back those who hit you.

But that ain't Bible.

The Bible says that our response to being hit is to not to ball up our fist but to clean up our life.

The Bible says that slander offered about us is an opportunity to offer excellent behavior in return..

In the end, our lives and reputations are not what's most important..

Jesus gave us his life to his critics so that we could be saved.

There are things far worse than being mistreated.

To those who know Christ, their aim is to make Christ known to others.

And often times our words fall on deaf ears but our lives really open eyes.

Pine Grove, keep your behavior excellent in the world.

Don't return slander for slander.

When hit don't hit back.

Return good for evil, and may God use your excellent behavior to win others to Christ.

The honors of WW2 are well known, but John Macarthur tells the story of one particularly brutal Japanese concentration camp.

The camp was run by a Japanese lieutenant named Konishi.

He was a hater of Americans but especially American Christians.

Instead of killing them, he tortured them.

One one occasion, he starved them but then gave them a heaping helping of rice in the husks.

Not knowing the dangers of the sharp husks, the prisoners scarfed them down only to find the pain of the husks slicing their digestive systems.

Many died.

Others got dreadful diseases.

Konishi's camp was eventually liberated by Douglas MacArthur, but he escaped.

HE was captured many years later and sentenced to die for his war crimes.

As he stood to be hanged, he told the story of how he had come to faith in Christ.

And the main reason for his conversion was the excellent behavior of the Christians in his camp.

According to Konishi, "the harder he tortured, the kinder they got."

Church, I remind you that this life is not about you.

It about the spread of the gospel.

IF you know Christ, live like it by keeping your behavior excellent and praying for your enemy.

Let us pray.

II. The Command to Citizens (2:13-17)

III. The Directive to Servants (2:18-25)

IV. The Order to Families (3:1-7)

V. The Expectations for the Church (3:8-12)