

Sandy's Sunday Sermon Summary ~ October 31, 2010

"Suffering is a normal part of the Christian walk - just be sure to suffer rightly!" Pastor Tim's message, "Right Suffering" was based on I Peter 4:12-19.

A couple in our congregation recently were in Japan. While they were there, Pastor Tim suggested that they try "natto," a Japanese dish that is disgusting to most foreigners. When the congregation here at Grove viewed the videotaped responses of each of them, there was not much reaction. They both said that it wasn't bad since they only tried one bite, and since they were expecting it to be bad. In other words, there were no surprises. Peter tells us that we shouldn't be surprised when fiery trials come our way. He gives us three right responses to suffering.

I. The Right Attitude (12-14)

A. The Wrong Attitude: Surprise (Shock!) "*Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you*" (12 NLT). Jesus prepared us for suffering when He said, "*The people of the world will hate you because you belong to me, for they don't know God who sent me.*" (John 15:21 NLT). Peter used the image of fiery trials back in 1:7, "*These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold - and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.*" (NLT). Peter may have been alluding to actually fiery trials that were already beginning at Rome. In A.D. 64, Nero began to use Christians as human torches to light his gardens at night. Peter states in 5:9, "*Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.*" (NLT) Suffering doesn't come about by some random act of chance (like "bad luck" or "bad karma"). It comes at the hand of our completely sovereign all wise God. Some lessons God can only teach through suffering, so don't have the wrong attitude of "Surprise" when fiery trials come.

B. The Right Attitude: Joy. "*Instead, be very glad...*" (13 NLT). Three reasons for this joy:

1. Your sufferings enable you to partner with Christ's suffering now. "*because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering*" (NLT) Whoopie-doo, you might say! I can gladly live without this one! This wasn't the attitude of the apostles (Acts 5:41) Be very glad that God counts you worthy to suffer with His Son! On the flip side, be very concerned if you don't experience suffering for your faith.

2. Your sufferings enable you to share in Christ's glory later. "*and afterward you will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory when it is displayed to all the world.*" Understand that God doesn't replace suffering with joy. Instead, God transforms suffering into joy. Jesus used the illustration of a woman giving birth (John 16:21). Jesus' cross that at the time brought shame and pain ended up bringing glory! In the same way, our sufferings now will be transformed into wonderful glory. (Romans 8:17).

3. Your sufferings enable you to experience Christ's Spirit now. (14). We already have the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion, but at times of intense persecution, the Holy Spirit gives supernatural strength to endure (i.e., Stephen, the first Christian martyr.) This idea of glory also draws from the O.T. description of the "Shekinah glory" that filled the Temple and that same glory powerfully fills the believer undergoing persecution.

II. The Right Reason (15-16)

A. The Wrong Reasons: Murder, Stealing, Criminal Activity, Prying. Make sure that God is getting the glory in your suffering - don't suffer for bad choices!

B. The Right Reason: Being a Christian. "*But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his wonderful name!*" (16 NLT, See also Philippians 1:20, II Timothy 1:12, Mark 3:38, Luke 9:26).

III. The Right Outlook (17-19)

A. On the Present (17-18). In the present, everyone, regardless of their faith in God, experiences God's judgment to prove us - that we're strong and true. It separates us from false believers. Verses 17-18 tell us that as hard as it is for us believers now, it will be infinitely worse for unbelievers for eternity.

B. On the Future (19). If you are in one of those times, Peter summarizes your needed response: Keep doing right - don't quit! God is making you the person He wants you to be. Trust God.

This section emphasizes the sovereignty and initiative of God, even in the suffering of his own people. God is in control, and He has a plan. Are you suffering rightly for the right reason, and with the right outlook?