

How to Cope with Suffering for Christ

1 Peter 4:12-19 (text)

14 March 2021, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Have you ever been mocked or ridiculed because of your Christ-like obedience to God's Word?

You know, last Monday when Annette & I were driving back from Hastings, we decided that we would have lunch at Clareville Bakery (in-between Masterton and Carterton).

Well, many of you will know the owner of that bakery – and that he is a Christian. You will also know that, from the start, this man decided that his bakery would always be closed on Sundays.

Now, I have never been there to see what reaction the general public have when they arrive at Clareville Bakery on a Sunday morning, thinking that they will enjoy a fantastic brunch, then only to see the sign saying, "Closed on Sundays." Yes, I have never been there to see their reaction!

However, it is not difficult to imagine what words of disappointment & ridicule they could utter.

I mean, often in the past, when I was preaching in Masterton, and Annette & I were driving to the one or other congregation member's home for lunch, the whole region of Masterton, Carterton, Greytown, Martinborough and Featherston was abuzz with morning markets and stalls selling their wares.

So, the impression you get is that the vast majority of people in the Wairarapa don't go to church anymore!

For them, Sunday has become a day of relaxation, business, and sport!

So, if people with such habits & mind-sets turned up at Clareville Bakery on a Sunday morning only to find the doors closed, I won't be surprised if they would raise their eyebrows in total amazement, and ridicule & mock the owner of that bakery, saying things like, "Wow, this guy is stupid - crazy!" "How narrow-minded!" "How ultra-conservative!" "What an ancient Puritan!"

Indeed, I won't be surprised if *that* would be their reaction to that bakery owner's heartfelt decision to honour God by keeping the Sabbath set-apart for worshipping God, and allowing all his employees to do the same!

Well, that could easily be *their* reaction!

But what would be *his* reaction to their reaction?

Well, I'm not sure if that bakery owner has ever in-person heard the public's reaction, but if he did, I could imagine that, even though he loves Christ and stands by his decision to have his bakery closed on Sundays, he might perhaps feel at least *some measure* of sadness, knowing how his name is being belittled and dragged through the mud!

Well, my brother & sister, I can assure you: be this bakery owner ever so much ridiculed, *his* hardship is nothing compared to the hardship of Christians in countries of persecution – and nothing compared to the trials of the Apostle Peter's church members!

Those early Christians suffered ridicule, shaming, unemployment and persecution because of their obedience to Christ their Lord!

And, because it is so easy for any human being to give up when you're mocked, ridiculed and persecuted, Peter (by the Holy Spirit) wrote the words of our text (1 Pt 4:12-19). And here is its main message: Christian, are you suffering ridicule & persecution because of your faith in Christ? Well, don't give up (don't lose faith), for look, here are three ways in which you can cope with this kind of suffering.¹

- Keeping Persecution in Perspective
- Suffering for the Right Reason
- Entrusting Your Soul

Keeping Persecution in Perspective (will make Coping with Suffering Easier)

(v.12, 13, 14, 17, 18)

Boys & girls, imagine a family who is *so* happy because they're going overseas to visit loved ones whom they have not seen in years!

So, they're all super excited!

But then, very unexpectedly – and much to their surprise – their travel agent gives them this sobering news: “Before you can travel, you all first need to get your vaccinations!”

Wow! What painful news – especially for little Johnny in that family! After all, Johnny is super-scared of needles! So, Johnny cries and goes almost hysterical! He simply cannot understand why this strange thing has to happen to him.

But, thankfully, Johnny's older sister comes and says, “Johnny, do you want to come with us to Canada to visit our cousins!?”

“Of course,” Johnny says.

“Well,” says his sister, “then come take that injection!” “See, Johnny, the pain of that injection will be over in one minute!” “Johnny, that is nothing compared to the four weeks of holiday in Canada and seeing cousins Harry and Laura and Caitlin!”

See what Johnny's older sister did? She has put Johnny's pain for him in perspective (in the right light)! So, finally, Johnny went with his family to the clinic and got his injection!

Well, in verse 12, Peter does a similar (yet way more weighty) thing for Christians who suffer the pain of being mocked, ridiculed and persecuted for their faith!

You see, most of Peter's first readers had just come out of paganism. They had just received Christ as their Saviour! And, most likely, when they first received Christ, they did not realise that they could be mocked for that – and even persecuted!

And so, the fact that people then started mocking, ridiculing and persecuting them – well, that came as a painful surprise to them (much as Johnny's injection came as a surprise to him)!

But Peter, concerned that in their trials, they might give up their faith in Christ, says (in v.12), “***Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you... as though some strange thing were happening to you!***”

Then, for all practical purposes, Peter says the following: “This ridicule (mocking & persecution) is God's way of testing & purifying you so that you will be ready when Judgement Day comes!”²

¹ I will put your suffering in perspective for you

² Yes, this, in short, is the message of the words “...which comes upon you for your testing...” (v.12) and, “***For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?***” (v.17-18; NASB).

You see, the word for “fiery ordeal” in v. 12 is the same as for a *furnace* in which gold is purified.³ And so, mocking and ridicule are ways in which God could purify you and me! Perhaps someone will say, “But, Pastor, if I am mocked or bullied because I have come up for Christ – what does that have to do with Judgement Day?”

Well, you know, just as a mock exam is not pleasant, yet has the purpose of getting one ready for the real & final exam, so, says Peter, are your & my sufferings for Christ here on earth a blessing in disguise – yes, a way of preparing us for Judgement Day (the day of our Lord’s return)! Yes, God sees (and allows) our sufferings for Christ as testing – to make our faith stronger so that we will be ready to meet the Judge of Heaven & Earth on the Last Day!

Boys & girls, have school mates ever mocked you (or laughed at you) because you refused to participate in a bad thing they wanted to do – e.g., that you refuse to abuse God’s Name? Parents, have you ever spoken up against unbiblical teaching in your child’s state-school curriculum – and then you received a frown?

Young people, brother & sister – at your work’s end-of-year party – have you ever been frowned at because you didn’t drink as much, and didn’t stay as long as the rest!? Or have your workmates ever said, “O come on!” “The boss and the IRD will not know!” and you said, “But God certainly knows!” – and then they ridiculed you?

You know, I still remember when we were fresh in New Zealand, and Annette’s colleagues went on a teachers’ strike for higher wages. Annette and a handful of other kindergarten teachers said, “No, we don’t think it’s right before God!” “So, we won’t participate in your strike!” Well, no wonder those who didn’t want to participate in the strike got ostracised – some, later on, gossiped about and smartly bullied.⁴

Well, God sees *our sufferings for Christ* as testing – to make our faith stronger so that we will be ready to meet the Judge of Heaven & Earth on the Last Day!

And look, it is in this light that God’s discipline often starts not with unbelievers, but with His covenant people!

I mean, is this not why also the Apostle Paul told the Christians in Corinth, (in 1 Cor 11:32), “***When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world***”?⁵

³ Cf. e.g., Prov. 27:21 which says, “***The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives***” (NIV 1984). The Greek word for “fiery ordeal” in 1 Pt 4:12 is exactly the same as the one used by the Greek Septuagint in Prov. 27:21 – i.e., *pyrōsis* (πύρωσις), “ ① **process of burning, burning ...** ② **an intense degree of some painful occurrence or experience, burning ordeal...**” (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). [*A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*](#) (3rd ed., p. 900). Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

⁴ My brother & sister, you might have heard that the New Zealand government want to fast-track an anti-conversion law, so that it will be in place before the end of this year (cf. e.g., <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/we-have-an-obligation-ardern-wants-conversion-therapy-ban-bill-before-mps-this-year/P3CZ26M2ZAASJV7HKVCKAYWTW4/>).

It seems that those who push for this law to be made are people who don’t see homosexuality (or people with diverse sexual orientations or gender identities) as unbiblical. And so, those who push for this law want to stop all counselling of LGBT-people!

Well, it is still unsure what exactly the wording of such a law will be, but could it be that, in future, some Christians may be arrested for trying to counsel an LGBT person who has come to him/her for help?

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (1 Co 11:32). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

And is this not why Hebrews 11 (verse 26) says about Moses that “***He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward***”?⁶

See? For the joy of travelling overseas to go see his cousins, Johnny will bear the pain of the pre-flight injections. And, the Christian will bear ridicule & persecution here on earth! Why?

Because he/she is looking forward to that day when the ultimate Judge will say, “***Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.***”⁷

Boys & girls (Brothers & sisters), will you/I be in that group?

Well, look, the Christian will not just *bear* mocking, bullying and persecution! No, v. 13 says such Christian will even *rejoice*!

Why?

Because, if the Christian (if you/I) are being ridiculed or persecuted for our faith in Christ, then we are actually *sharing in the sufferings of Christ* (v.13) – yes, then *we* are ridiculed just as our *Lord* was ridiculed.

And you know what such sharing in Christ’s suffering does? Well, it ties us in a special bond with our Lord who also suffered – and suffered for our salvation!

You know what sharing in Christ’s sufferings does? It gives us joy – just like Paul & Silas were singing hymns of joy when they were sitting in the stocks of the Philippian jail with blood oozing from their backs because they had witnessed for Christ!

Rejoicing in sharing in Christ’s sufferings!

See why also Rm 8:17 says, “If we have shared in Christ’s sufferings, we will also share in His glory”?⁸

My brother & sister, the Christian who suffers ridicule or persecution because of his love for Christ, such Christian can rejoice for two reasons: 1) because this kind of suffering prepares him/her for standing at the right-hand side of Christ on Judgement Day; 2) because this kind of suffering gives him/her opportunity to bond with Christ by sharing in Christ’s sufferings.

Can you now see why v.14 says that if you & I are reviled (ridiculed, bullied, persecuted) for the Name of Christ, we are blessed?

Can you see why even Christ Himself told His disciples (in Mt 5:10), “***Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven***”?⁹

v. 14 says, “***...Blessed are you because the Spirit of Glory and of God rests on you!***”

My brother & sister, I’m sure none of us likes it when we are bullied or ridiculed and mocked! None of us will like the hardship & pain of persecution!

Also cf. Amos 3:2, “***You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your sins***”?⁵

⁶ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Heb 11:26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 25:34). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ Rm 8:17, “***Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.***”

⁹ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 5:10). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Yet, if (when) it comes to it that you & I get ridiculed, bullied or persecuted for our faith, and we find it hard to cope, then let us remember point 1 of our text which puts Christian persecution (ridicule) for us in perspective!

What else should we remember when we suffer for Christ?

Well, this brings us to a very small, yet important, point 2 – a condition when ridiculed/reviled for Christ...

Suffering Must Be for The Right Reason (will remove shame) (15-16)

My brother & sister,

As v.16 indicates, the one who takes a stand for Christ in this world, will become a shameful thing in the eyes of unbelievers. The world will think little of the Christian who, in the face of opposition, does what is God-honouring!

Now if that's you, says Peter (in v.16), then do not be ashamed, but rather praise God that you bear the name "Christian."¹⁰

But...! (Yes, there's a condition as to the reason for your suffering! And v.15 gives that condition)

But... *"make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler (i.e., as one who busies himself in the affairs of others in an unwarranted manner).*¹¹

In other words, in v.15, Peter is repeating what he has said so many times before in this letter, i.e., that even under extreme circumstances, Christians should live immaculate lives! Why? Well, so that they will not drag the Name of Christ, their Lord, through the mud!

Sadly, that's not what a notorious Pentecostal leader and his wife did two weeks ago when, on the Saturday night, our prime minister announced a snap lockdown for the Auckland region.

You see, late that Saturday night, as soon as they heard that Auckland would be in lockdown from 6 a.m. the next morning, these church leaders left Auckland and went to Rotorua where, the next morning in church, they boasted with great arrogance how they escaped Auckland. Of course, the behaviour of this couple did not go down well with government and the New Zealand public at large – especially because government's concern had already been mounted over some churches that were (and are) defying lockdown rules and spreading misinformation about the Covid-19 pandemic.¹²

And so, this Christian couple were not acting like good ambassadors for Christ!

But, as if that was not enough, then, in that same Sunday morning church service in Rotorua, this same Christian leader's wife preached a "gospel" which was no gospel at all – the so-called "prosperity gospel," when she exhorted that congregation to not just tithe, but to give more than their tithing, for if they did that, God would bless them more! Then she boasted how God had given her and her husband even a Tesla car – in other words, a car that few of the tithers in that church could afford!

How shameful! And what damage to the Name of Christ!

And how in contrast with what v.16 says about true Christians who truly suffer for Christ – that such Christians do not have to be ashamed for what they are suffering, but that they can praise God that they bear the name *Christian*!

¹⁰ 1 Pt 4:16, **"However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name"** (NIV 1984).

¹¹ In Greek, *allotriepiskopos* (ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος), "...one who busies himself in the affairs of others in an unwarranted manner..." (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 767). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹² Cf. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/437524/destiny-church-leaders-brian-and-hannah-tamaki-leave-auckland-on-eve-of-level-3-lockdown>

The Apostle Paul says, "...*I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*"¹³
Here's the last small point as to how to cope with suffering for Christ...

Entrusting (Your Soul to Your Faithful Creator) (v.19)

Yes, Peter says in v.19, "...*those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator...*"

*Entrust!*¹⁴

How can one illustrate this entrusting – this committing your soul into Christ's care?

Well, I think I once told you the story of Charles Blondin¹⁵ who in the 1850's became the first tight-rope walker to walk across the Niagara Falls!¹⁶

On this tight-rope, Blondin even pushed a stove in a wheelbarrow across the Niagara Falls. Many spectators *saw* him doing it!

So, we can say that all these spectators had the *head-knowledge* (and intellectual assent!) that Blondin can indeed carry a heavy load safely across the falls!

But what about their *hearts*, their inner conviction, their *reliance*?

Well, the answer to this question came when Blondin walked up to one of the spectators & said to him, "You have seen me pushing the stove across. Now let me push *you* across!"

How did the spectator answer?

"No way!"

See? See the difference between *intellectual assent* and *entrusting* oneself?

My brother & sister, it is similar to the difference between knowing that Jesus is *the* Saviour, versus you entrusting your life & circumstances to Him!

¹³ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Co 9:27). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁴ Young people (Boys & girls), do you remember what the three components (parts) are of a true faith?

It's abbreviated by the acronym K.A.T. – Knowledge, Assent (i.e., intellectual assent), and Trust.

Yes, the believer is the one who will not just have the *knowledge* that Jesus is the Son of God – I mean the Bible shows us that the devils know that, too! (Cf. James 2:19 ***You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!***)

Neither is the believer one who will just give *intellectual assent* (who will just understand with his head) that Jesus is God's Son – I mean, the Bible shows us that the devils have even this (intellectual assent)! (Cf. Matt. 8:29, "***What do you want with us, Son of God?***" *they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?"* Mark 1:24, "***What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!***" Mark 5:7-8, ***He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!"*** ⁸ ***For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"*** Luke 4:33-34, ***In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, "Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"*** Acts 16:17, ***She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."*** Acts 19:15, ***One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?"***).

No, the true believer is one who has, added to the first two, something which the devils don't have, i.e., *trust* – *entrusting* oneself to the care of God Triune!

¹⁵ His real name was Jean Francois Gravelot

¹⁶ cf. <http://houdinireappears.blogspot.com/2007/09/12/imagine-me-on-a-tightrope> for the story of (not Houdini but) Jean Francois Gravelot who on 30 June 1859 became the first tight-rope walker to cross the Niagara falls.

Well, that was the third component of a saving faith, *reliance* (or *personal trust*; in Latin, *fiducia*).¹⁷

Heb. 11:1 says it well, “*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see...*”¹⁸

My brother & sister (Boys & girls), do you/I have such faith?

Blessed are we if we do!

Here, to recap: How will the Christian (you & I) cope with suffering for our Lord?

Only...

- By Keeping Persecution in Perspective (in the light of Judgement Day)
- By Suffering for the Right Reason (i.e., not because we did an evil thing)
- By Entrusting Our Soul to our Faithful Creator and Saviour

AMEN (2,713 words excluding footnotes)

¹⁷ Cf. The Heidelberg Catechism LD 7, A 21 *True faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in his Word is true; it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit³ through the gospel that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation.*

¹⁸ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Heb 11:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.