Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

The baptism of \_\_\_\_ is a special and joyful occasion. But, of course, he is too young to know what has happened today, so it will be up to \_\_\_ and \_\_\_, with our help, to teach him what his baptism means. But many of us have been baptized, so today is a good opportunity for us all to remember what baptism means. And baptism is about **promises and obligations**. It reminds us of God’s wonderful promises, in Christ, to believers and their children, and of our serious obligations.

And the way that these obligations are expressed in the form we read earlier is that we must “*put our trust for life and death in Christ our Saviour*, *deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him in obedience and* *love*.” And these words connect really well with this passage in 1 Peter. Verse 16 talks about suffering as a Christian. And we have seen that the suffering in view in 1 Peter is persecution. And the Bible is very clear that “a*ll who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*.”

So, as joyful and happy as today is, we need to know, and \_\_\_\_\_ needs to be taught, that **to be a Christian is to be ready to suffer as a Christian**. And we are going to consider this reality using four words that come directly from this passage. So, we will see that to suffer as a Christian is a **testing**, a **sharing**, a **blessing**, and a **judgment**. And I hope and pray that we will *learn* some useful truthes today, be *encouraged*, and *challenged* in terms of Christian living.

1. So, first of all, to suffer as a Christian is to be **Tested**. And we see this in **verse 12**: “*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you*.”
   1. One false belief of many professing Christians today is that to be a Christian is to be rich, healthy, and happily married. It is the idea known as **the prosperity gospel**. But a version of the prosperity gospel existed, already, way back in Peter’s day. For there were believers then who had the idea that Christianity would quickly become popular and spread around the world. But what happened instead was that Christianity soon became despised and banned, and a terrible persecution began. And so, there were those who started to doubt Christianity. Their thinking was, we didn’t sign up for this! We thought we would be successful and popular, not hated and persecuted? What is going on? And as we have seen in recent sermons, this led to some very bad behaviour by these early Christians, which gave them a bad reputation in society. And the reason why those early got it so wrong, as do today’s ‘prosperity gospel Christians,’ is that they don’t know or they forget or they ignore what Jesus said: “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me*,” and “*if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you*.”
   2. And this is why Peter said, “*Beloved, do* *not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you*.” In other words, believer, persecution and suffering should not shock you! And of course, **Peter was well qualified to say this**! You see, Peter had also once been keen for glory but not for suffering. He thought Jesus would seize power and set Himself up as a king, like David, and then smash the Romans. And Peter was all up for a bit of that! It is why he rebuked Jesus when He spoke about being arrested and killed. It is why he took up the sword to defend Jesus at His arrest. And it is why, in the end, he denied Jesus, three times. He thought that all hope of glory was gone. But then Peter met the *resurrected* Jesus. And then he understood that it was *necessary* for Jesus to suffer and die; that that was the pathway to glory. And so, if suffering was the pathway to glory for Jesus, then it would be the pathway to glory *for every believer*.
      1. And some of you will have heard before that this literally came true for Peter. It is commonly understood that he too died by crucifixion. And such was his feeling of unworthiness, he asked to be crucified upside down!
      2. So, the pathway of suffering is the pathway that *every* believer must be prepared to walk.
   3. And one reason why we must be prepared to suffer the fiery trial of persecution is that **the Lord uses suffering to test us**. And this has two parts:
      1. The first is to see **whether a profession of faith is genuine**.
         1. Many of you will know **the Parable of the Sower**, and the different types of ground that the soil fell on, which represents different types of responses to the gospel. And one type of person, described as rocky ground, “*is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises … immediately he falls away*.” You see, no one will endure persecution if they do not truly follow Jesus. And so, persecution is a test that proves whether faith is real or fake.
      2. But in a person with genuine faith, persecution is also **a refining or purifying**. Back in chapter 1, Peter said to these believers, “*for a little while … you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire*.” And we talked then about how gold is purified by being put into very hot fire. And in the same way, faith is purified and deepened through trials, like persecution. You see, persecution strips you of everything but Christ. All the good and helpful tools, like church, family, health, and access to the Bible can be stripped away in a short time and replaced with pain and loss and imprisonment, and all that is left is what you believe. And there is testimony after testimony of believers who have experienced these things who will tell you that they came out the other side with a deeper faith. Just Google Richard Wurmbrand or Corrie ten Boom, or get their biographies out of our church library. Persecution refines or deepens faith.
   4. Now, we are not facing the sort of persecution that many believers have faced throughout history, at present. But one area where there can be challenges is **observing the Lord’s Day**. It is getting harder and harder to tell your employer that you *cannot* and *will* not work on Sunday. And it can be hard for young people to miss out on school sports and events and outings, when many of their Christian friends have no problem doing those things on the Lord’s Day. But the Lord uses issues like this to test you – is your faith genuine? Will you obey His commandments and trust Him and love Him, regardless of the cost?
2. Well, in the second place, to suffer as a Christian is to **share**. And we see this in **verse 13**: “*But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings*.”
   1. Now, this *does not mean* that our salvation is about Christ’ suffering plus our suffering. Our salvation is all about and only about what Christ did on the cross. And we know this because He said, “*It is finished*.” What sharing in Christ’s suffering is about is **fellowship**. As we have heard many times, Jesus said, “*'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you*.” So, it is our connection or fellowship with Christ that leads to persecution. It is in this way that we share in His suffering.
      1. But this fellowship is not just with Christ but also **with all believers** who have suffered for Christ throughout history.
         1. In **Matthew 5:12**, Jesus said about persecution: “*Rejoice and be glad … for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*.”
         2. In **2 Cor. 1**, Paul thanked the Corinthian believers for sharing in the Apostles’ suffering. And they did this because of their love, their prayers, and the financial support of the Apostles.
      2. So, when we are persecuted, we share in or enter into **the fellowship of the persecuted**, which includes Christ, the prophets, the apostles, and every other persecuted believer.
      3. One of the proudest moments for any sportsperson is to be given the team jersey for the first time. Right? Now you are part of the team! And then, one day, you might play so well that you get the player of the day award, and your name gets added to the register of players of the day. Well, without wanting in any way to trivialize what we are talking about, think about baptism as joining the Christian team – you are now a part of the church. But **Revelation 17:6** talks about “*the blood of the martyrs of Jesus*.” And boys and girls, a martyr is someone who loses their life for the sake of the cause. So, being hated or mocked or imprisoned or even killed makes you a **part of the team of *persecuted* Christians**; your name gets ‘added to the board in heaven’ that has names on it like Elijah, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul, Thomas Cranmer, Helen Roseveare, Amy Carmichael, Pastor Wang Yi and many others.
   2. And we ought to see suffering for Christ as an **incredible privilege**: In **Philippians 1:29**, Paul says, “*For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake*.” And you need to imagine Paul rubbing his hands with glee as he says this: Guess what, guys! You get to suffer for His sake also!

Is this how you view persecution? Would you count it a privilege to suffer for Jesus?

1. Well, in the third place, we see that to suffer as a Christian is also to be **blessed**. And we see this in **verses 13b-14**: “*That you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you*.”
   1. And this is really just Paul paraphrasing part of the Beatitudes, which we read earlier in the service; that is where Jesus said, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven*.”
      1. In **Acts 6** we read about **the death of Stephen**. He debated with the Jewish leaders, and we read that “*they could not withstand his wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking*.” And so, they falsely accused him of blasphemy, and he was put on trial before the Jerusalem council. And here is what we read: “*And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel*.” Stephen knew what was coming. But in that moment of intense pressure and scrutiny, the Holy Spirit blessed Stephen with incredible peace and power.
      2. In **2 Corinthians 12**, Paul, who had repeatedly prayed for healing from his ‘thorn in the flesh,’ was told instead that the grace of the Lord was sufficient for him. And he said, “*For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong*.” Isn’t that incredible? What a testimony of faith! Where does peace and contentment like that come from? It is a blessing from the Lord.
      3. So, the Lord will supply strength and peace and courage and refreshment and perseverance to those who share in His sufferings.
      4. And even if death should come, our text says, “***Your reward is great in heaven***.” And we have talked about this in earlier sermons – those who have suffered and/or died for Christ’s sake will be welcomed into heaven, as conquering heroes, by Christ Himself, and given great rewards! And that is the ultimate blessing!
   2. But notice also what it says in **verses 15-16**: “*But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name*.” And as we have noted previously, the early Christians that Peter wrote to were assassinating government officials, setting fires, creating riots, helping prisoners escape, stealing, and just being all round, obnoxious, busybody Christians. And they thought they were doing the Lord’s work. But Peter is clear: that is not suffering as a Christian. That is not being “*content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.*”
      1. And I believe this is a timely warning in relation to the protests of recent weeks. Christians who are thinking about participating in actions like these need to ask: What are the protests *really* about? How are they being done? Who is involved? What is being said or not said? Are Christians who participate earning a reputation for being rebellious, hateful, obnoxious, meddlers, even if it is just by association? These things must be carefully considered.
2. So, to be a Christian is to be **tested**, to **share**, and to **be** **blessed**. But fourthly and lastly, to be a Christian is also to be **judged**. And we see this in **verses 17-19**: “*For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good*.”
   1. And here we return to the idea of purification that we talked about in connection with testing. For the fact is that the church includes hyopcrites or fake Christians. And they will be revealed as hypocrites by persecution and every other type of hardship and suffering that comes their way. For they simply will not hang around. And those who do have a genuine and true faith will have their faith purified and deepened through suffering. And so, in this way, judgment begins with the household of God. God will permit suffering to come your way to make you more and more like the Lord Jesus. And that is because suffering, whether it be in the form of persecution or something else, is designed by our Almighty and Loving Father in heaven to bring us closer to Christ.
      1. One old, much loved hymn is “**Rock of Ages**, cleft for me.” And the rock of ages in that hymn is the Lord Jesus. He is the place of safety and refuge and comfort. And Charles Spurgeon once said this about suffering: “I have learned to kiss the wave that strikes me against the Rock of Ages.” Have you learned to do this? Can you remember suffering and hardship that you would never have chosen in a million years, but you can see now that it drew you closer to Jesus?
   2. And when it is at its hardest, when your suffering feels like a crushing burden, recall the final words of this passage and remember that as hard as things are, they will be much worse for the unbeliever who spends eternity in hell. But for believers, as Pauls says in 2 Cor. 4:17, “*This slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison*.”
   3. Well, brothers and sisters, young people, and boys and girls, we will not kiss the waves that strike us on the Rock of Ages by accident. We will learn to do this only if we are part of a church that preaches the glorious doctrines of grace, and the unpopular truthes of Christianity, and where, as we shall see next week, there are elders who take their calling to shepherd the flock, seriously. And you must preach what we have been learning about Christ and persecution, to yourself, repeatedly.

The Christian life is not designed to be comfortable and easy; to be a Christian is to be ready to suffer as a Christian. This is what \_\_\_\_ needs to be taught. And he will learn it best if he sees us all living this way. And we will only live this way if we count it a great privilege to share in the sufferings of Christ.

May the Spirit of the Lord work this grace in us all. Amen.