
HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME

How Faith and Suffering Work Together

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God has been reminding us that He comes to visit our desert places—those places in our minds and hearts that have been blighted by evils done to us or by us. He promises to recover us from our memories, our entrapments and our confusions. And when He comes, He will open our ears to things we have been unable to hear; He will have us see what we could not see before; He will give us expressions and words as a language of renewal; and He will give us strength to walk where we feared to go.

“Take courage, fear not. Behold your God will come.” ~Isaiah 35:4

That is our hope. We serve a God who is coming—to meet us where we live and to take us to where He lives. That is true of our passage to Heaven, but it is also true of our progress though life on earth. How we make it is by believing in Him and hoping for His coming.

HEBREWS 10 AND 11

We will have need of endurance, for in a little while He who is coming will come!

“For you will have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay.” ~Hebrews 10:36-37

Faith keeps seeking God in the midst of our trials and afflictions.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen... By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible... And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” ~Hebrews 11:1,3,6

PEOPLE OF FAITH:

1. Believe that God's purposes go beyond what we can see.
2. Understand that they are strangers and aliens in the natural world.
3. Live by promises even though there is a time/space gap between those promises and their complete fulfillment.
4. Choose to surrender rather than to shrink back.

SOME EXAMPLES OF LIVING FAITH: HEBREWS 11

- V. 11:4 **Abel**—Offered God what *He* wanted.
- V. 11:7 **Noah**—Spent many years *preparing* a means of salvation.
- Vs. 11:8-10 **Abraham**—Moved out *without knowing* how everything would turn out.
Lived as a nomad in his future inheritance.
- Vs. 11:11-12 **Sarah**—Conceived and gave birth when everyone thought it was too late.
- Vs. 11:20-22 **Isaac, Jacob, Joseph**—Saw the future not as a continuation of present conditions, but as the intervention of God.
- Vs. 11:23-27 **Moses**—Refused to live by the king's edict.

Refused to become a child of the culture.

Refused to enjoy the pleasure and comfort of sin.
- V. 11:31 **Rahab**—In the midst of a sinful life, chose to welcome what would overthrow her world system.

DEVELOPED OR DEVoured BY SUFFERING (1 PETER)?

Throughout his letter to believers who have been dispersed abroad because of persecution, Peter contrasts the visible and immediate circumstances of life with the unseen and eternal truths of the kingdom of God. He commends those who keep loving and believing in Jesus in the midst of trying

and troubling situations—even when He can't be seen by them (1 Peter 1:8). He reminds them that their *“faith and hope are in God”* (1 Peter 1:21), not in the thinking of the “futile way of life” lived by the rest of humanity.

In chapter 2, Peter begins to focus on the implication this has for the way believers in God should live. Since we have been reborn by the word of God, we will be grown up by it as well. According to God's word, our natural inclinations for how best to survive and to get what we want actually *“wage war against the soul”* (1 Peter 2:11)—meaning they work against what God is trying to do to develop our spirituality. By living differently than the rest of the world lives, we *“proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9).

One of the most significant ways of living differently is by submitting ourselves, like Jesus submitted Himself;

“...But kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” ~1 Peter 2:23

“For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up [endures] under sorrows when suffering unjustly.” ~1 Peter 2:19

Instead of taking matters into our own hands and insisting on our rights, we are encouraged to let God be the one to orchestrate the affairs of our life. Not only is He far better able to affect our circumstances than we are ourselves, He also understands what real life is all about...and we don't. Submission is one of the most powerful forces in God's redemptive order for our lives. *There are things that will happen in our lives only as a result of submission.* If we opt out of submission—in the name of making our life better—we actually forfeit part of God's plan to develop us.

The reason we don't want to submit is because we don't like to suffer. As long as we are submitting to someone or something that has us do/be what we want, we feel fine about it. But when we suffer as a consequence of submitting, we want out of it. Little do we realize that suffering itself is also a key element in God's intentions in our life.

The world sees suffering as only bad, a thing to be avoided. In spiritual matters, however, suffering can be the crucible of character transformation and development. That is why 1 Peter 4 begins with the peculiar-seeming encouragement:

“Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose...” ~1 Peter 4:1

Of course, not all suffering is good; we can suffer because of our own sin, and that is not a testimony to the world, nor is it something God can utilize for His purposes. But if we suffer

because we have chosen to trust in God, then the sorrow and pain act as catalysts for tremendous spiritual growth.

1 PETER 4:19 (THEME VERSE)

“Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”

1 PETER 5:1-10

In the Kingdom, suffering gets translated into future glory (brightness, substance)—see Philippians 2:1-11. Spiritual leadership, therefore, is more about suffering than about privilege. Rather than exacting a price from those we lead, we must pay the price of suffering for their sakes. (V. 1-3)

The issues of true spirituality are mostly invisible to others. Just as Jesus suffered without much recognition or immediate benefit, we will lead the way for others through our sufferings and sorrows. Only later will the fruit of our pain be made known by God. (V. 4)

The essence of humility is not taking matters into our own hands. By believing that God has everything under control—that He is forcing all things to work together for good (Romans 8:28)—we allow Him to lift us up out of what we have been under and up into what He wants us to be over. (Vs. 5-7)

We are the most vulnerable to spiritual assault and deception when we are in seasons of suffering. (Vs. 8-9; see also Genesis 4:6-7.)

Suffering has a purpose!!! What seemingly makes us weak actually makes us incredibly strong!! (V. 10)