

Daily Devotional, February 16, 2021 Joy in Our Suffering

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” 1 Peter 4:12-13

Why is it that self-help is the best-selling category of books in the country? The answers to that question are varied, and most may have some truth in them. But at the heart of all of these answers, is that we know that there is something is wrong with us and we deeply want to be better.

There is a yearning inside of us to be something other than what we are; to be better, to be stronger and to be more like the God we worship. The problem that we run into when we rely only self-help books to guide us, is that we end up worshipping ourselves and not the One who created us in His image to be better than what we have become. That same Creator, however, did not always promise a better way of life for us on this earth even if we are truly serving Him.

The message of Christ, that was carried on by His disciples, is that we need to be about one thing, and that is placing our focus on Jesus, as our Savior. He saved us from being lost in a hopeless cycle of secular self-help books when we have the greatest of all self-help books in the Bible. No matter which book of the Bible you read, it draws a straight line to the cross. Christ is the One who makes us better. Without Him we are lost and hopelessly destined for an eternity we want no part of. We all want better for ourselves and we do not want struggle to be a part of our lives, but we are not promised a life without struggle, quite the opposite.

We are told that in this world *we will* have trouble, and all of us who are believers in Christ have had trouble. We were warned by the Creator of the universe so that we should not be surprised. The best part of all this is, if we are truly suffering, no matter what type of persecution it may be, and if we are doing our best to glorify Christ within it, we ought to be rejoicing. Believe me, I know that sounds like I've fallen off the deep end, but we will all experience events in our lives when the world will judge us on how we react to see if Jesus is real in our lives. My hope and prayer is that I will always be authentic to the call.

Through the work of the Spirit, Peter warns us about the suffering, but tells us that we should celebrate it. Through the whims of our secular society, we have been taught to blame someone or something else for our suffering. But believers in Jesus Christ aren't left with that option; we are to trust Jesus in all circumstances, no matter how difficult that may be. Our hope in the One who saves us is where our attention must be focused whenever we suffer; otherwise, we are left with only "self-help", which is really no help at all.

Prayer: Lord, thank You that whenever suffering is present, You are there with me to show me how to be more like You through it. Help me to focus not on the hardships, but on the divine opportunity to become more like You. Fill my heart with joy, as I not only bask in Your presence, but become more like You. In suffering and in gladness, I praise Your holy name. Amen.