

Open your Bibles to 1 Peter. Let me tell you how we landed in 1 Peter this morning. We've been going through 1 Peter in Men's Bible Study. So I've been teaching it, I've been living 1 Peter, I've been wearing 1 Peter, sleeping 1 Peter and dreaming about 1 Peter. So I knew I wanted to preach today out of 1 Peter, but I had no idea what I wanted to preach. So I scanned the horizon of 1 Peter and nothing leaped out at me and said, "Preach me." So I just thought, "Alright, we'll just start at the beginning and see how far we get." So my goal is to make it through the entire book today. That was just a joke. We're going to go nine verses and no more. But that's how we got there. And the text that we're going to be into today is going to bring up a weighty and difficult question. It's going to bring up the necessity of suffering in the life of the church. In chapter 3, it's going to ask, "Is it the will of God for suffering to exist inside the church?" So for clarity sake, for unity sake, I want to read you my thesis statement. Here it is. "Suffering inside the church is designed by God to move our affections from this life to the Son and produce missionaries willing to live without reservation, both here and abroad."

Let me pray and ask the Lord's covering. "Father, as we walk through the Scriptures, I pray that Your mercy would be clear and evident that Your grace will saturate this room. I pray that men and women who are walking through suffering right now would know that You are a God who is near, not a God who is far off. And for those who are wrestling with a call to the nations, I pray that You would so burden their hearts to move that they can't resist You any longer. And I pray that You might inflame deep affections for You in our people that we might incarnate into the city with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We pray this in His name and His name alone. Amen."

I preached back in July and I asked you guys how many of you listen to and like country music. And the response that you gave to me was simply embarrassing. And since we can't have that because we live in Texas, I feel like if I left here and didn't do any country music discipleship, then I would be cheating you. Because I don't care how many times Chandler rants on country music. I want you to know that you are free to embrace and love the glory of country music as it should be in this great state of ours. There is a song called Real by a guy named James Wesley. Here's how it starts. "Five-hundred channels and there ain't much on tonight. . . Except reality shows about some folk's so-called lives. . . A pretty girl cries 'cause she don't get a rose. . . But she'll find love next year on her own show. . . And they call that real. . . Real is a hand you hold fifty-seven years. . . Real is a band of gold tremblin' with fear. . . It's the first long tear down an old man's face, watchin' his angel slippin' away. . . His heart's so broke, it's never gonna heal. . . I call that real." Here's my point. Most of us live what I call the fluid illusion. We create this illusion of who we want others to think we are. We live in this illusion until people catch on, and then we've got to create a new illusion, which is why I call it the fluid illusion. It's ever moving, ever changing, ever shifting. And this illusion we create and live in is our way of giving the stiff-arm to people to keep them away from us or it's our way of avoiding our own hearts and avoiding what's going on inside of our own hearts. And then God, for some of us, in His mercy and His grace, sends something into our life, be it cancer, a loss of a job, loss of a family member. And the illusion gets stripped away, and we're left with real hurt, real pain and no more illusion.

So we're going to jump into verse 1. We're going to saturate ourselves with verses 1-5. Because before we get to verse 6 and the weight of the question of the necessity of suffering lands on us, we need a biblical and theological foundation to stand on lest we create a god of our own that just pours salt on the wound when that happens. Verse 1, "Peter, . . ." I'm going to stop right there, no joke. Some of you in this room right now are sitting here and you don't feel like you belong here. You're sitting here because of what happened last night, a week ago, a month ago, a year ago or ten years ago.

You feel like all eyes are on you. You feel like the outcast. You don't feel like you belong in church. And I'm here to tell you that you need to know who Peter is. Peter was one of Jesus' inner crew. The night before He gets arrested, they're sitting together and Jesus says to him, "Three times tonight you're going to act like you don't know Me." Peter said, "Not me." And later that night, he denied Christ to His face. He looked at Christ and denied Him to His face. If that's you in this room, you look me in the eye. If there is room for Peter at the cross, there is room for you.

My mom had an abortion when she was eighteen years old. And I watched her live her life in shame and guilt. Then eight years ago, I got to sit in a room and listen to this guy preach, and I got to watch the grace of God flood my mom's life. And I got to watch her live the last eight years trying to live in the grace that she's been given. And I know the primary scheme of the devil in her life and probably in yours is to try to make you feel shame where there is no more guilt, to make you feel and live in shame when the guilt has been paid for. Christ paid for your guilt. You will not stand in shame before Him, so why are you standing in shame right now? For those who have said, "My faith, my hope, my trust is in Christ and Christ alone," the guilt has been paid for. The guilt that produces shame has been paid for.

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. . ." Apostle just means "sent one." He was sent by Jesus to preach. And he was sent "To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. . ." Peter was sent to a geographically spread out region and culturally diverse people. He was sent for a mission, to go and gather the elect, to call the elect out. In the same way, you and I have been sent to a geographically spread out region that is culturally diverse for the purpose of gathering up the elect. There is a group of men and women that are sitting, walking right now throughout Dallas who, before the foundation of the world, were chosen in Christ. And we, this body of believers right here, along with the rest of the churches that work and labor in this city, have been sent here to call them out, to find the elect. And if you've been here for a season, you've heard Matt talk about the guy in Flower Mound who is heavy-set, he sits in a recliner with a cigarette hanging out the side of his mouth. I have a different picture. For me, it's a thirty year old young professional in the heart of downtown Dallas who, when they're alone, is buckled over in tears. And we have been sent here with the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ to go find him, to call him out. In John 17:18, Jesus says, "As [God] sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." The word "sent" here is the verb form of "apostle." So if we scanned the Scriptures for "apostle," I see four things. I see the chief apostle Jesus Christ, I see the APOSTLES of Peter and those boys, I see the Apostles in Ephesians 4, those who have been given an apostolic ministry to be sent out and then I see the apostles who are you and me, those who have been sent to apostelló by Jesus to be messengers in the world. So here's what I want to know today. Who are the men and women in this church who are going to be sent out, who are given that Ephesians 4 apostle ministry and who are going to equip our church by leaving our church? And then I want to know who are the men and women in our body who are going lead the incarnational charge into our city. Who is going to lead the charge to infiltrate this city and incarnate this city with the gospel?

Let's keep reading in 1 Peter 1. Verse 2, ". . .according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you." If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you are in this room according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. According to the divine providence of His will, you are in here. If you're in here because a girl said, "I won't date you unless you go to church with me," you're in here by the providence of God also. It's by the providence of God that you're in this room hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. So we are in this room, we are believers in Jesus Christ according to the foreknowledge of God the Father and it's in the sanctification of the Spirit. There is more than just the work of the Son going on at work in your salvation. The work of the Son is by the decree of the Father and is applied to you by the Spirit to produce obedience to Jesus Christ as you are continually covered by His blood. Obedience to Him means that we go where He says to go. Where Jesus Christ sends us, we go. When I read this text, I immediately thought of Justin and Melody Childers. They are a couple inside of our church down here who, when the Lord said, "South Dallas," they went to South Dallas. And I'm not saying that all of us should go to South Dallas, but I am saying that we don't say no when the

Lord says to go somewhere. And I get the desire for safety. My house has an alarm on it loud enough to hear from here if it went off. But if safety was what Jesus was after, the incarnation would have never happened. And in that obedience, we find grace and peace multiplied. It does not mean that promotions are going to abound and sufferings are not going to follow. It means that joy is going to be cultivated everywhere you go.

Verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, . . ." There is again, that phrase "According to His great mercy." You can search for acceptance anywhere you want to, but it only comes by His great mercy. And in that mercy, He has caused us to be born again. Ten years ago, I had some men walk into my life and start sharing the gospel with me over and over again, and I wanted nothing to do with it. There were three girls who worked at a golf course I practiced at who said, "Hey, you can come to church with us." And I thought all three of them were hot, and so I went to church with them, because I was single and 22 years old, and that's what you do. And I sat in that church unaware. At that time, in my mind, I thought, "I don't want to defile a church girl." And I thought, "If I go to church with them, I'll be able to figure out who's not really who they say they are, and Sunday night is going to go really well for me." And I sat in that church, and two pews in front of me, Jason Nutt stands up and puts his hands in the air and starts worshipping. I had partied with this guy a year before, and I didn't know what happened to him. It was the first time I ever saw pagan to worshiper transformation. And I called the guy and we went to Metro, and I went back to church. A week and a half later, I sat on my bed and said, "If this is real, I'm in." And this was not me figuring out a magical, spiritual code. This was God in His great mercy causing me to be born again, awakening me to the gospel of Jesus Christ, to His majesty, to His infinite worth in the world.

So wakening lead to a living hope. Here's the thing about hope. All hope transforms. There is a hope that leads to life and a hope that leads to death. The question is: where is your hope? So I wrote down a couple of examples. Is your hope in your kids? If it is, you will spend your life chasing them as they chase a ball. Is it in your career? If it is, you're going to abandon your family in pursuit of it or you're going to rack up tens of thousands of dollars in debt faking a career that doesn't exist. Is it in marriage? If it is, you're going to compromise at best. At worst, you're going to sleep with anyone who you think will give it to you. And let me say something to the single men around here. Will you guys stop waiting on a supermodel who has a quiet time to show up in your life? Driscoll would describe that as "a boy who can shave." And our girls can't wait around forever, and your maturity is causing them to compromise. And it's breaking my heart to watch over and over. But it doesn't have to be this way. There is a hope that's living, that breathes, that is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The fact that He was raised from the grave and is alive right now, if that's our hope, we can enjoy our kid's soccer without being consumed by it, we can pursue marriage and we're going to love our spouses without compromise without falsely exalting someone who doesn't need to be exalted, we can work hard and exalt Jesus in our work ethic without being consumed by our career.

A couple months ago, my mom had a scare with pancreatic cancer. She didn't have any, but we thought she did for a while. During this season, it was a great chance for me to be reminded that I'm not going to be Amanda's husband forever, that I'm not going to be Aisley's daddy forever. I was faced with the reality that one day I'm just going to be His, and is that enough? If I had a magic wand right now and could wave it and give you for all eternity perfect health, all the friends you could ever want, all the sensual pleasures purified but God is not there, would you take it? That's a frightening question. How many of us would say yes if were to be honest?

Verse 4, ". . .to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, . . ." What makes this inheritance imperishable, undefiled and unfading is that our inheritance is Jesus Christ. What is sufficient is Jesus Christ. You can give me all the pleasures you want, but if Christ isn't there, it's not enough. He is the One who is imperishable and unfading. Ten years ago, my step-dad was set to retire at the age of 50, and he had what was called a diversity problem. All of his retirement was stuck in company stock. Then the four founding members of the company sold every

share that they could on the day they were legally allowed to. When he woke up the next morning, their retirement was 34% of what it was when they went to bed the night before. For me and my wife, that means we lost \$9. No big deal. But for him, that means he has to work until he's 65. And this text is saying that there is a retirement waiting for you and me. That retirement is Jesus Christ, and it is going nowhere because it's built upon the resurrection of being kept in heaven right now. Christ is our inheritance.

Verse 5, “. . .who by God's power are being guarded through faith. . .” You are being guarded through faith, not through effort, not through your morals. You can't live up to Christ's morality. He's after faith. “. . .who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” When I was a new believer ten years ago, I was taught that anyone who would walk down an aisle was saved. Now here's the problem. First, I didn't know what “saved” meant. It sounded very Sci-Fi to me, and I didn't do Sci-Fi. So it was very uncomfortable those early days. But as I began to grow and study the Scriptures, I began to hear that they always talked about salvation in the past tense. I began to read texts like this one that would talk about a present tense salvation and a future salvation. I began to realize that there's something everyone is after. Everyone wants assurance, but no one wants biblical tension. So everybody wants Hebrews 4 where you can approach the throne of grace with confidence, but no one wants Colossians 1 where you are reconciled if you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you've heard. The problem is that if you neuter biblical tension, you neuter biblical hope. When you chisel tension out of your life and out of the Scriptures, you're chiseling at your longing for Jesus to return. And that longing to see our Christ come back is the momentum that carries us into verse 6.

Verse 6, “In this you rejoice, . . .” Now nothing I've said, nothing I'm going to say is going to matter to you if you don't rejoice in the fact that we've been awakened to the gospel of Jesus Christ, given an inheritance that is going nowhere and that is grounded upon the resurrection. “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, 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—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” This text forces the question upon us. It's a weighty and difficult question. Is suffering necessary to produce praise and hope and glory and honor at the revealing, at the coming of Jesus Christ? Is it the purpose and plan of God for suffering to exist inside the church? Yes it is.

I'll give you two reasons why. Suffering produces transformation and suffering produces redemption. But don't take my word for it. Turn to Romans 8. Starting in verse 28, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good. . .” Now the word “good” usually gets ripped out of context and is made to mean whatever you want it to mean. We want that to mean that you're going to get that mortgage rate you want, you're going to get that promotion you want, your kids are going to be healthy and you're going to be healthy. But the text is going to define “good” for us. “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” So all things are producing, all things are bringing about good, which is our conformity to the image of the Son, which is bringing about the exaltation of the Son. And all things include suffering. So that means suffering in this world is not simply evil running wild, but it is a means that God uses to shape His church.

We just had our staff retreat a couple weeks ago. We wrapped it up with a flag football game at Lewisville stadium, which was really a bunch of 30 year olds living out high school fantasies. I however was the referee. The game is wrapping up, it's a tie game and the last play of the game on the 1 yard line. Adam Thomason comes up and takes the snap from the center and reaches forward for the touch down. They win the game and I put my hands up to indicate a touch down. But I

blew the call. It was an easy penalty and I blew the call. And my fear for you for you is that when it's your turn for cancer, when it's your turn for whatever suffering, whatever hardship the Lord might see fit, that you're going to think He is a ref blowing the call. My fear is that you're going to think that He doesn't see it or doesn't care. And neither one of them is true. He cares enough to pry your hands from around this life. Suffering exposes idolatry in us, it presses on us and it purges it from us. That's the point of the illustration in 1 Peter. As our faith is being refined, those impurities are being forged out of it.

Before my daughter was born a year ago, I think I had a normal fear of death. Nobody wants to die. Death is the last enemy conquered. It's not our friend. And I would pray normally, "Lord, give me a full life, a lot of years with my wife." But since my daughter was born, that prayer has changed. I consistently pray, "God, I'm not being greedy. I'm not asking for 110 years. But please give me 20 more. I just want to watch my little girl grow up. After that, You can do whatever You want with me." Now, have I made an idol out of my daughter? Probably. But more than that, I think she is exposing idolatry that already existed. If you don't think that's suffering, try not sleeping for four days. I think she is exposing idolatry that already existed within me. And then that idolatry being exposed can be dealt with. The affections of my heart are being reoriented from this life to Christ. And that kind of reorienting of our affections is transformation, and it's the only kind of transformation God is after. He is after the heart. He's not after your moral and ethical behavior. He's after the affections of our heart. And it's only in this kind of transformation that missionaries are born.

And this brings us to redemption. Let's turn over to Acts 7, starting in verse 58. Before we jump into this text, what did Acts 1:8 say? Jesus said, "You're going to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria." Remember that order: Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. "Then they cast [Stephen] out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul." Saul later would go on to become Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament. If this man Paul can write most of the New Testament, there is room for you at the cross and don't let anyone tell you differently. "And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, . . ." The church is still in Jerusalem. And look what happens. ". . .and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria." The church was still in Jerusalem. They had been told by Christ to go to Judea, to go to Samaria, but they were still there in Jerusalem. And the chosen means by God to scatter the church to where He had already told them to go was persecution, suffering in the church. ". . .and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word." They were scattered throughout these regions and they went about preaching the gospel of King Jesus resurrected and returning. "Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. 7For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city." So suffering has always been a friend of the gospel. If we traced the history of the early church, the gospel exploded because of suffering and persecution. Peter was writing to elect exiles, people who had been exiled. And part of their exile is how the gospel got to us. Suffering has always been a friend. The problem is that often we think of suffering as a tragedy. And a lot of times it is. I do not in any way want to minimize the tragic things that we walk through in this life. I know what it's like to sit there on your bed with your wife and cry till your eyeballs hurt. I know what it's like to sit there with your bride until you have nothing left in you. But the suffering we see as tragedy is often meant to prevent a greater tragedy that we would treasure this life above Christ.

I don't know how many of you follow Voice of the Martyrs or Nations Be Glad on Twitter, but you should. They are daily reminders to me of God's global movement and the martyrs that are bringing it about. And Nations Be Glad sent this out last week. Of the Teli people in India and the Digil-Rahawiin of Somalia, a combined 17 million people, 0.00% are evangelical. Think about this. That would be like twice the combined populations of the Dallas/Fort Worth and Austin areas, and not one of them is a believer. How are these people going to hear without a preacher? And I'm praying and I'm praying and I'm praying that God would raise up men and women in this room who are going to go to the Teli people, who are going to go to the Digil-Rahawiin people. We have a group of men and women in our church who have so bought in to the gospel, sensed the burden, the calling on their life that, Lord willing, they will go to a place where they might not come back from. And if they don't, I'm going to cry. I love these men and women. I'm going to go to my house and cry with my wife, but it will not be a tragedy. Them giving their life, losing their life to plant a church in a place where there is not church is not a tragedy. You giving your life to the accumulation of green paper, that's a tragedy. You spending your days solely focused, abandoning your family in pursuit of green paper, that's tragedy. And I'm praying that God, in His mercy, is raising up Ephesians 4 men and women to be sent out of here and that you would equip this church by leaving this church.

But not all of us are going to be sent out from the Village. Some of us have been sent to the Village for the work of the Village. I have never sensed the Lord burdening me to go and live my life in India or somewhere else. Although I plan on going to India every year to teach the same conference in July. I love the people of India. I love the ministry that we got to be a part of. I can't wait to go back with Matt Younger and, Lord willing, Bill Seal. I can't wait to be in that room with those pastors and those orphans again. I'm going every year, but I've never sensed the Lord calling me to leave and move there. But I pray that you and I would see that if we're not being sent out from the Village, then we have been sent already. We are a sent people right now. As the Father sent the Son into the world, we have been sent to the city for the incarnation of the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a city, that we might give your lives living for the redemption of the city, for the good of the city. And I pray and I'm asking Him to bring to the forefront those men and women who need to go to Matt Elkins right now and say, "I've got a burden for the nations. Help me." And I'm praying that He would raise up those men and women who are saying, "I've been burdened for Dallas, Texas. Let's go."

And I also want to pray for you men and women who are sitting in the middle of suffering. I want to pray for you who would look me in the eye and say, "I don't care about redemption and I don't care about transformation. I want to know where I stand right now. In the middle of this, where do I stand?" We stand in 1 Peter. We stand right where we came from. Now we have been awakened to the gospel of Jesus Christ to a hope that is eternal, that is going nowhere, that is kept in heaven for you and me. And then we stand in verses 8-9, that say, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." There is an outcome of our faith coming, and the outcome is the salvation of our souls and that we might see that we exist to magnify Jesus by enjoying Jesus until the day that we meet Jesus. And on that day, there will be no need for the Sun, no need for the moon, because the glory of God radiating through the Son will provide all the light that we need. May that day fuel us to love Jesus right now in the midst of whatever we're going through, and may that day fuel us to live and love our city to the redemption of this city, knowing that whatever God sends us, be it riches, be it cancer, is sent as mercy meant for mission.

Let's pray. "Father, I pray for our men and women in this room right now, that You might stir in them a desire to be a part of the nations, that You might stir in them a desire to incarnate into this city with a reckless abandon. And I pray for those who are in this room who are hurting, who are sitting in the middle of it right now saying, 'I don't care about this. I don't care about redemption right now. I don't care about transformation right now. I just want this pain to go away.' I pray that they would know You are a God who is near and not a God who is far off, that You are a God who has made Yourself near in sending Your Son. We love You, and we love our people. I pray this in Christ's name. Amen."