

9. The Life and Ministry of Peter

9.9 Suffering for Jesus (Acts 4:1-31)

Christians are not promised success in the eyes of the world. God does not say you will have a good reputation or plenty of friends or an easy life. In fact God promised the exact opposite. *Paul* suffered for his faith (2 Timothy 2:8-9; 3:10-12). *Peter* wrote that Christians should expect to suffer (1 Peter 2:20-23; 4:12-13). *Jesus* said in the Sermon on the Mount that when we suffer for his sake, we are blessed (Matthew 5:11-12). Suffering can be God's way of making us effective for him. I want to show you the circle of events in Peter's life that illustrates this.

Witnessing brought suffering

A crippled man had been healed. The crowd were amazed. Peter seized the opportunity to bear witness to Jesus (Acts 3:15-16). The opposition seized the opportunity to attack the Christian witnesses (4:1-3). They called Peter and John to account for what they were saying, what they were doing and how they were doing it. They threatened them, intimidated them and punished them. When you *dare to be different* the world will go for you.

Suffering brought opportunity

Acts 4:8-13 shows us that Peter did not fall into the trap of thinking that his suffering was the end of events. When he was called to account for what he had done he saw both the opposition and the opportunity. Since we can all expect to suffer, we should work out how we will respond to it. Jeremiah's vision of God was not blocked by the pit he was in. Job knew that even if he changed his view of God because of all the boils on his body, God would not change in reality. Paul could have thought he had mistaken God's call when he ended up in a city jail, but instead of entertaining any doubts he entertained the prisoners by singing hymns to them at midnight!

The opposition were astonished and began to be aware of God in Jesus Christ as Peter and John turned suffering into opportunity (4:13).

Opportunity brought praise and prayer (vv.23-24)

When they were released from the jail, though not from the threats, the believers immediately began to praise God. They reflected on his power in creation, his power over world affairs, his power in their own land. They did not concentrate on their own situation, but on God's sovereign power. They also petitioned God (vv.29-30), but again notice carefully what they asked for. They did not ask for freedom from suffering, or protection from the authorities, but instead they asked God to help them proclaim Jesus Christ and to work miracles in his name.

Praise and prayer brought power (4:31)

God was pleased with what they were asking for so he granted their request. He filled them afresh with his Holy Spirit. They had been filled already on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4), but now having used the Holy Spirit's power in both miracle and message they were refilled for future use. Maybe you do not know the power you seek because you do not use the power you have got. God cannot refill a man who has not become empty through usage.

Power brought witnessing (4:31, 33)

Here is the full circle. God did not fill them for the sake of fullness itself but for effectiveness. This was unction for usefulness, power for preaching, dynamite for distribution. God was bringing all this about through suffering.

There can be no doubt that suffering could be God's way to make you and me more effective in his service. Paul knew it and he said, 'When I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Corinthians 12:10). Do you need to change your view of success? Should you start praying for something different? Are you blessed with suffering for Jesus?

Discussion guide for 'Suffering for Jesus'

1. Summarise in your own words, what Jesus, Paul and Peter taught about the Christian and suffering.
Refer to Matthew 5:10-12
2 Timothy 2:8-10

2 Timothy 3:10-12

1 Peter 2:20-23

1 Peter 4:12-13

2. What does this tell you to be ready for?
3. What caused Peter and John's imprisonment and Sanhedrin appearance? Was this reaction good or bad for them? Why?
4. Explain Acts 4:13. How can this testimony be an inspiration to you in your everyday life?
5. Make some time to listen to God by yourself. What do you believe God is calling you to be and to do?