

Hope in the Face of Suffering

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Preacher: Alan Barts

[0 : 00] All right. Sure. Thank you, Jesse. We are so excited about the community group term starting this week. We love our group. It is just a group full of energy, full of competitive spirits, board games, just exciting, and they never want to go home. I mean, I don't know how JD and Brittany do it, but we're supposed to be 6 to 8, and most oftentimes it's after 9 before we leave, and I have no idea when the rest of the crowd leaves, but I have to go home and go to bed.

But anyway, man, just if you're not in a community group, please take that into consideration. It is a life-changing experience. As Jesse just said, my name is Alan, and I am one of the pastors here at One Harbor Havelock.

I just want to say thank you so much for being here. There are so many great churches operating this morning, proclaiming the good news and the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the fact that you chose to be here is really humbling and honoring to us.

So thank you for that. So we typically work through books of the Bible chapter by chapter, which is really cool in some aspects because we really get the chance to dive into the Word of God.

But this also means that we are forced to talk about subjects that are not so fun or easy, but good, all in the same point. We're currently working through a letter or book called 1 Peter, and we have decided to call this series, as you can see, Hope in Exile.

[1 : 26] What does that mean? You know, Peter wrote this letter to a group of newly formed churches full of new Christians within the Roman Empire. The Romans were not known for being kind to Christians.

If anything, they were known for being really brutal and savage at times. So Peter is writing to them to try and help them understand what it looks like to live out this new life, having hope in Jesus in their homeland.

They were called sojourners or aliens in their land due to the drastic change in their lifestyle and values from that of the society they were a part of. They were, in essence, exiles in their homeland. Many of you today may feel like an exile in your day-to-day life. Being a disciple of Christ means that we are in the world but not of the world, if you will. We are here being a part of this society. We're living. We're working. We're raising our families. We're going to the beach. We're out on a boat or hiking or you fill in the blank, whatever you like to do. But hopefully, you at times know what it feels like to be in exile because the ways of this world are not the ways of Christ, and we must be different.

[2 : 36] If you're here and no one at your work or home can tell the difference between you and everyone else, then something's not quite right or you live in a bubble.

The Bible refers to you and I as new creations when we accept Christ. Something must be different. The difference must be evident even when we are walking through those always pleasant times of life when we experience valleys or better known as suffering.

It's a great subject matter. So that's right. Yep, we wrapped up chapter 3 last week talking about suffering. And guess what chapter 4 is all about? You guessed it, suffering.

Can I have an amen, brother? So if you're new to Christianity or, man, are you even just checking out this Jesus, I would argue that this subject could be super helpful to you too. Experiencing suffering is just part of life regardless of your beliefs.

We are all exposed to suffering, whether it occurs in your personal life or somewhere on the news, Facebook, some other form of social media. It is impossible to turn on the news today and not see people suffering all over the world or even down the street.

[3 : 46] If you're here and life seems like you're just kind of tiptoeing through the tulips, then I don't want you to have a panic attack worrying about when your next suffering event may occur or even

feel guilty because you're not suffering at this moment.

That's not the goal here. You may be here today and life is not on the mountaintop. And you are currently suffering in ways that maybe even no one on the planet knows about. Now, the really awesome thing about God and Jesus is that they know all about suffering.

And they care about it. And they care about how it affects you. Jesus was not immune to suffering here on earth.

Jesus experienced grief. He mourned the death of one of his best friends. The Bible says he wept when he heard the news of Lazarus. Jesus lived a life during his ministry where he encountered people suffering every day.

A widow whose only son had died. A demon-possessed man. Another woman with a debilitating disease. Blind people. Lame people. The list goes on and on and on. This was his normal.

[4 : 51] And I think if we really are disciples of Christ, then we must understand that we are called to not ignore suffering and act like everything is okay. I know for myself growing up in the South, you know, the Bible belt, that we try to avoid the subject of suffering and focus on living in some kind of fantasy land like we were already in heaven.

You know, life was perfect. It wasn't about what was really going on. It was about looking good, which I had down to a T. Amen.

That's what I'm talking about, brother. Saying the right things. Man, I could say the right things just like that every time and walking around with this little fake smile on my face. You know, in the meantime, the only time people were really willing to be real was when their entire lives were falling apart and they couldn't hide it any longer.

By that time, more often than not, the damage had been done. Note, we are called to run to suffering and make a difference in the lives of people all around us. One of the big takeaways from today that I really want you to get and understand and take home is that God is sovereign.

And no matter what may happen or not happen, he is faithful to see you and I through it. Why? Because he cares. Because he loves you and I.

[6 : 12] Period. One issue that I would like to clarify is the actual type of suffering we're going to focus on today. I'm not talking about self-inflicted suffering. For instance, if you commit a crime and are sentenced to jail, you are not suffering for Jesus.

Okay, let's just get that clear. No, you're an idiot and now you're lying in the bed you created. Okay? My wife told me not to say that, but I did anyway. I'm talking about suffering that is not justified.

We didn't seek it out. It just seems to come out of left field. So let me read the passage of Scripture to you and we will work through it the best we can today. There is a lot of information in here, but the words will be up on the screen behind me, so follow along, please.

We're out of 1 Peter 4. Since, therefore, Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking. For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions, but for the will of God.

For the time that has passed suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do. Living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

[7 : 23] With respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you. But they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

For this is why the gospel was preached, even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. The end of all things is at hand.

Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God, whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies, in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 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. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

[8 : 33] If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 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. 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. And this is the word of God. So the first thing we see here, right from the beginning, verse one is, we must not be surprised when suffering comes our way. How many of us have experienced some sort of suffering and felt totally surprised?

I know I have. People come to me all the time and are utterly shocked when bad things happen. The Bible clearly states that we will walk through times of suffering or trials and tribulations.

[9 : 41] But it seems like, for many of us, when it does happen, we are totally shocked. Then we go to the mindset of, what did I do wrong? What did I do wrong?

Why did I deserve this? Peter even goes to the point of saying in verse 13 that we should rejoice when we encounter suffering. Now, you may be thinking like me and say to Peter, man, you need to lay off the wine, brother.

But what he is saying is that we are beginning to identify with Jesus and some of his pain and sorrow. We are having a small taste of what his suffering must have felt like.

And one time, I don't want to clarify something right here. So I personally know some people that were experiencing suffering and were told by church leadership, not this church leadership, but other church leadership, they were suffering due to unresolved sin in their life.

I'm telling you, that was not only wrong, it totally destroyed their faith in the local church and now they only experience church from a TV. Man, that example, that was 15 years ago when that happened.

[10 : 55] And they still do not trust a local church leadership. Man, if that is you today, if you've experienced that, I want to say I'm sorry. I'm sorry and I hope somehow you can be healed of that deep wound.

The Bible, the Bible does refer to the law of the harvest and reaping what you sow. But oftentimes we suffer just because we live in a fallen world and it has nothing to do with sin.

Take this, listen to this. If suffering were only due to sin, then we have no hope for eternity because Jesus suffered more than all of us. If suffering were only due to sin, then we have no hope for eternity because Jesus suffered more than all of us.

The next thing we see is we need to prepare ourselves for suffering. There's a difference in expecting it and not being surprised and preparing for it.

We need to understand that we live in a fallen world and we will encounter suffering. So why not prepare for it? Why not be proactive? For instance, many of you in here are Marines.

[12 : 05] I guarantee you have spent countless hours preparing for combat so that when you do go to battle, you are not caught off guard and you are prepared to defeat the enemy. If I were deployed as never served in armed forces to face the enemy, well, the only part of me you would see would be my backside as I was running in the opposite direction.

I mean, let's just be honest. When the bullets start going by your head, I'm going pew that way. I'm also the chaplain of the Newport Fire and EMS Department.

Those guys and gals train all the time to fight fires and help people in emergencies. When someone dials 911, their training kicks in and they respond to the situation. They prepare and when bad things happen, they don't have to think about, man, what's the best way to extinguish this fire or help this person with a medical need?

They're not breaking out the smartphones Googling it. They just do it. And many people's lives and property are saved every day. We as Christians should prepare ourselves too.

We should spend time in the Word of God every day. Not just here on Sunday. Every day. Many of us are in this CBR training, community Bible reading program. It is super easy to do.

[13 : 16] It takes five to ten minutes a day and it's just awesome. You are guaranteed to be in the Word of God every day and it's so helpful to me personally. That's just a little pitch for that on the side there. We should spend time in prayer on a consistent basis.

Man, one of the big cultural shifts that Jesse wanted to make this year here at One Harbor is to emphasize the importance of prayer and to have many opportunities for corporate prayer. Just to let you know, we pray every Sunday morning at 1040 in the kids ministry area.

Every Sunday morning we pray as a corporate body. Let me encourage everyone to join us next Sunday. I want us to be busting out of the seams next Sunday joining together praying for this service and for our lives in this community and proclaiming the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is very, very important. We should strive to be in community groups. I just saw this whole, the whole thing up here was covered with leaders and host families. We should strive to be in one of those groups surrounded by like-minded individuals living out gospel-centered lives.

Man, being transparent in that group, it is unnerving to let someone else into your closet of secrets. But the freedom it brings is so worth the short time of feeling vulnerable.

[14:31] Don't be afraid to let people know you are going through a hard time. Pray together as a group. Hang out and enjoy life. The guy who started one, Harbor Donnie, he always uses this phrase, lone rangers are dead rangers.

So who do you think the enemy is going to try and attack first? A group of close-knit friends living out what we see in first century church or the individual trying to make it on their own? I'll just pick myself up one more time and keep on going.

No one really understands what I'm going through. Oh, anyways, you know, why bother? That kind of mentality. And if that is you today, you are exactly where the enemy wants you to be. You are a prime target.

The next chapter in 1 Peter talks about the enemy, Satan, being referred to as a hungry lion, actively prowling around, looking for someone he can devour. Don't be that person.

We are all sinners saved by grace. We are not called to judge, but we are called to extend grace and forgive just like we ourselves have been forgiven. One thing I would like to say is that when we are preparing, we should not do it from a standpoint of fear.

[15:37] We should do it from a standpoint knowing we have an enemy that is actively trying to destroy our lives. Be prepared. If you and I knew, for instance, if someone was going to break into your home tonight, I guarantee you I would take the day and prepare.

The doors would be locked, Shelly and my kids would be safe, and the shotgun would be loaded. You know what I'm saying? Be prepared. The next thing we see in this passage is that we should avoid the pleasures of this world as a coping technique.

Verse 3 says, For the time that has passed suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do. Gentiles are non-Christians, non-believers, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

The 2019 version of that scripture might include something like work, Netflix, substance abuse, food, etc., dot, dot, dot. We have to look to the one thing that can fill our void, not throw our lives away in the empty promises that are guaranteed to do one thing, disappoint.

I've been there and done it. I bought the t-shirt and I was a charter member of the country club.

Okay, I tried for years to deal with the stresses of life with the things of this world.

[16:54] And you know what the crazy thing is? No matter how hard I tried to run away from the struggles of life, they always seemed to be right back the next day. It was not until I put my hope in Christ and trusted Him that I experienced peace during times of struggle.

All around me, my life could be in chaos, but the peace of God kept me still. He kept my heart from being anxious, from being worried about things out of my control.

Jesus says it like this in Matthew 11, 28, says, Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gently and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

And Jesus is saying that the things of this world, though they may appear to bring a reprieve, they will only lead to disappointment. Jesus, and Jesus alone is the only way to experience true rest in a fallen world.

He is saying that He and He alone will be able to fix you, the only one you can depend on and never be disappointed or let down. One commentator states, Jesus Christ will give assured rest to those weary souls that by a lively faith come to Him for it.

[18:10] Rest from the terror of sin in a well-grounded peace of conscience. Rest from the power of sin, in a regular order of the soul and its due government of itself. A rest in God and a

complacency of soul in His love.

Oftentimes, when suffering occurs, many of us feel like we walk around with a huge scarlet letter on our chest. I would rather say, man, we should not be ashamed when suffering occurs. Now, what I'm not saying is we should go around with a bullhorn announcing to the world, I'm suffering for Jesus!

Suffering for Jesus, that would be weird. I mean, come on, let's be real. That would be weird. What I am saying is that we should feel free to share this information with your community group or other trusted small group of people to help pray, encourage, and walk through it.

As we already established earlier, suffering and sin do not necessarily coexist. Jesus ran to suffering. He was prepared. He accepted the cost and had the perspective of the Father to see the end goal.

the night when Jesus was arrested, says in John 18, verse 4, it says, Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, Who do you seek?

[19 : 24] They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I am he. Man. Jesus is the ultimate hero of every story ever told.

He looked the worst suffering imaginable square in the eyes and said, I am he. My friends, Jesus was not ashamed of the mission and task at hand.

He struggled with it. He even pleaded with his Father to take the task away from him. But when the struggles came, he fully embraced it. He knew the ultimate prize was to pay the way for you and I to have our relationship with God reconciled.

The greatest love story ever told. The greatest hero of all time. The one and only perfect person to have ever walked the face of the earth ran to suffering.

Fully embraced it and came out on the other side victorious. We are called to do the same. We are called to run towards suffering so that perhaps others will see our lives played out during difficult times.

[20 : 37] They will see how we respond not by running to the things of this world but by maintaining a peace that is only through our faith in Christ. Maybe, just maybe, think about this, maybe, just maybe, God will use a time of suffering not only in helping to make us more like Christ through the process of sanctification but could also use the same suffering to draw another person destined for destruction to himself and save them to have eternal hope.

Man, what a win-win combination that would be. That perspective totally changes our mindset and minimizes the size and effects suffering may have on our lives. If my suffering, if your suffering will help save someone from eternal damnation, then isn't it worth it?

Man, I hope all of us will gladly say, yes, yes, Lord. Man, how do we accomplish this perspective and mindset? It can only be done by being dependent upon the power of the Spirit.

Verse 7 of 1 Peter 4 says, the end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins.

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace. Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God, whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

[22 : 05] To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. So this portion of this passage is all about being dependent upon the Holy Spirit and allowing him to guide and direct every aspect of our lives.

Being self-controlled doesn't look like it. Being self-controlled doesn't look like expressing a friendly gesture to all those wonderful people that pull out in front of you, especially when you're running late and they want to go five miles per hour below the speed limit.

Don't they know we have a seven mile per hour grace limit? I mean, come on. I personally have never experienced anything like that. I believe I read about it on Fox News one time. I don't know what they're talking about. Loving one another, it looks like assuming the best when a gray area of concern occurs.

Do we assume the best or do we assume the worst? Hospitality without grumbling, man, it has to be my favorite. I mean, I mean, how many community group leaders have experienced this?

Shelly and I led a group before this group. Shelly and I led a group at our home and I can remember on a couple of occasions where peace and harmony were not in abundance before people started arriving.

[23 : 22] However, it always amazed me how much the atmosphere changed when the doorbell rang. I mean, I don't know what to say.

It was my fault. Okay. Okay. The Bible talks about spiritual gifts and using those gifts to benefit the body.

We are on an endeavor to change our communities through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Each one of us have a gift given to you by the Holy Spirit. Man, we need you to raise your hand.

Use your gifting no matter how small or valuable you feel it may be or may not be and get out on the playing field. Step up to the front lines. Our communities are suffering without hope.

They are suffering without hope and many of them are collapsing with the weight on their shoulders of this and ending their lives and or turning to some form of substance abuse.

[24 : 22] It's happening everywhere. Every community, every neighborhood, everywhere. It doesn't matter. People are living and dying without hope. So how do we continue to endure suffering?

And we do this by entrusting our souls to a faithful creator. Verse 19 says, Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good.

What does this term soul refer to in this verse? What does it mean? And it is the real you. It is the most authentic version of you. It is the version of you that may be for many of us in this room that no one, not even your spouse, knows about.

Yet, if we wish to succeed in continuing to follow Jesus, then this, this right here is where the rubber meets the road, if you will. When the pressure is on and your life seems to be falling apart, are you and I going to continue trusting Jesus with everything?

Or are we going to succumb to the first lie ever told by Satan to man? Did God actually say? Did God actually say, can you really trust God with everything or is he holding out on you?

[25 : 37] Does he really have mine and yours best interest at heart? that lie has been told to every last one of us over and over again. And it worked on Adam and Eve when there was no suffering.

There was no suffering in the world when that lie was told. And I guarantee you it will work on you and I if we do not entrust our whole selves to our faithful creator. So how do we go about doing that?

Only one way. We must look to the cross. We must recognize that a father who puts his only son on an altar to pay the debt created by you and I has earned the right to be trusted.

Famous passage Romans 8 verse 38 says, For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thank you Jesus for that truth. Amen brother. Finally, we can endure suffering in this world by continuing to do good. And there's just something about helping out those in need that really just does a body good.

[26 : 56] It is good for your mind. It's good for your soul. It's good for your emotional state. It's good for your tolerance. It's good for your grace level. And when you are burnt out the first thing we all want to do is make everything about us.

It's all about me. We get self-consumed and all of our issues become magnified to the point of total blindness to those around us. Galatians 6 verse 9 says, And let us not grow weary of doing good for in due season we will reap if we do not give up.

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone and especially to those who are of the household of faith. I mentioned earlier about the community group Shelly and I led at our house and how it was hard at times to get motivated to want to have people in our home week in and week out. The reality was they would come and destroy our kids room. The kitchen looked like a Moab bomb exploded. Some of you know what that is. The mother of all bombs.

Moab. Dirt and grass tracked all over the house. Many times we just wanted to throw in the towel and say, Enough! We're done! D-O-N-E We're done!

[28 : 11] Let somebody else do it. Man, every time we felt like this, our community group the next time would be the best meeting ever. I mean, afterwards we would sit around and talk about seeing God work and how good it was motivated us to keep us going.

Yeah. Good times. This is not about I'm going to tell you this, this is not about pulling yourself up. This is not about a grin and bear at motivational speech. Put it on some fake smile so you can put your little check in the box.

This is not about that at all. No, this is about seeing God at work through you. Seeing God at work around you. Reminding you that He is faithful and He is worthy to lay down our agendas, our complaints and keep going.

Keep doing good. Even when walking through times of suffering. Man, as the band comes up, if you're here today and you're not a Christian, first of all, thank you so much for being here.

It's awesome that you're here. I hope, my hope, my prayer is that you are able to understand that Jesus is a God that knows suffering like no other. That He loves you like no other and He wants nothing but the absolute best for you.

[29 : 27] His plan from the beginning was to never have suffering here on earth but unfortunately the author of all lies ruined that plan. But the cool thing is that even though that plan was ruined, God had a better plan.

That plan was Jesus. I would love to talk with you about this Jesus after the service. man, if you're here today and you're already a follower of Christ, already a disciple of Christ, let me tell you, the challenge you and I face is man, when suffering occurs and it's going to occur, how do you react? Man, do we run to it? Do we help those facing it too? Do we believe the lie that so many of us have believed in the past? You know, did God really say? Or do we can trust ourselves wholly to Him? And this is a good time to reflect on past times of hardship and the reaction that followed. Great thing is that Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us of all of our sins.

My prayer is that you will make today the day when life as you know it forever changed. Put your whole selves in the trust and care of God and see what He can do and will do.

[30 : 38] We do that, come up, and we remember by celebrating the feast, the communion feast. Take the bread and representing the broken body of Christ and the cup representing the blood that washed away all of our sins.

Taking that time to reflect on the fact that Jesus earned our trust. He is worthy to lay down all of our agendas, all of our goals, all of our life's ambitions.

He is worthy to lay all that down at His feet and say, God, use me. I trust you. Lord, we're just so thankful, God, that you did pay the way for us.

We're thankful that you came here fully knowing what was going to happen, fully knowing that you were going to be rejected by your friends, you were going to be rejected by your family, you were going to suffer the most brutal death possible, and yet you fully embraced it, you ran to it, you spoke up and said, I am He.

Thank you so much for that, God. God, I pray that we would begin to have that perspective, God, that we are on mission, that we are here to embrace suffering, we are here to run for it, we are here to prepare for it, we are not to be surprised about it, but we're here to make a difference in this world, that maybe, just maybe, you can use our suffering to help somebody know that you are God, to save them from eternal damnation, God.

[32 : 07] May that be the case in our life today, tomorrow, and forevermore. Thank you, Jesus. Amen. Amen. You