

RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

Matthew, Chapter 7

Insight on the Word: The Meaning of Suffering for the Christian

BY MICHAEL LINDSEY,

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The Bible text for next week's Sunday School lesson is 1 Peter 3:13-18; 4:1-2, 7-11. We encourage you to read and study each of these scriptures carefully this week, and then to join with other Bible-believing Christians this Mothers Day to worship the Lord.

This week the Sunday School text is three separate passages in 1 Peter 3 and 4, and it deals with several important themes of the Epistle. Our commentary will narrow the focus to just one of those themes, the Christian's response to suffering, for this is the most important single issue Peter deals with. If we understand suffering the way God does, we will have much less anxiety in life, and more confidence to share our faith with others.

I stand amazed sometimes to read or hear Christian people teaching that suffering is not God's will for his children—that poverty or sickness or adversity result from a lack of faith. I'm amazed because I know all too well the suffering of many great men and women of faith throughout church history, people who suffered loss of everything because of their faith, and many even died because they would not renounce their faith. In Hebrews 11, the record of heroes of the faith, we read:

... others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, ... And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were

sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented. ... And these all ... obtained a good report through faith. (Heb 11:35-39)

If you have come to Christ, expecting a life of happiness and prosperity and spiritual blessing, then you have been misled. The Christian can expect to be ridiculed, despised, misunderstood, ostracized, and discriminated against. In many parts of the world today, the Christian can still expect to suffer imprisonment, torture and even death.

So why should anyone become a Christian? Because the Christian faith is true, and those who follow Jesus Christ will have a joy, and peace of heart, and confidence that will overwhelm the watching world. Jesus gave this word to his disciples: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Peter instructs believers in the practical issues of suffering as part of the Christian life. So as we center our attention on 1 Peter, we learn that we must distinguish between suffering for doing evil and suffering for doing good. Peter knew that some Christians were suffering disgrace or rejection, or even governmental judgment, because they were doing illegal or immoral things: "let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a

busybody in other men's matters" (1 Pet 4:15).

Others found themselves in disfavor because they were preaching an unpopular message about righteousness, about Jesus Christ as the one and only way to know God and receive eternal life (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Pet 3:15). In the first century many people accepted many different religious ideas, drawn from the eastern religions of Persia and India, as well as the classical religions of Egypt, Greece and Rome. The Christians stood out because they taught and believed in the uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth. Christians are still labeled intolerant and close-minded today. We are also ridiculed because we don't live the immortal life of people around us (4:3-4).

We need to be careful, as Christians, not to do things in the name of a Christian cause, which contradict the Christian faith. For example, if we are convinced that abortion is the destruction of a human life (and that is the clear teaching of the Bible), we need to speak out clearly and consistently against it. We may even protest this abominable practice by public demonstration. No doubt, we will be ridiculed and rejected; our ideas and words will be twisted and then denounced. But this is suffering for speaking the truth in love.

But if a Christian thinks he is serving the Lord by destroying the property of a medical (abortion) clinic, or harassing or physically restraining

women from entering a clinic for an abortion, that Christian is sadly mistaken. Such acts will be punished by the state, as they should be. Let no-one think such a believer is suffering as a Christian.

On the other hand, many Christians are working together, through organizations like Crisis Pregnancy Centers, to help women and teenage girls through a crisis situation. They are showing Christ's love to those in need, and often giving these women in crisis situations access to options they didn't hear about from abortion clinics or Planned Parenthood centers. The Crisis Pregnancy Centers have also been attacked in the press, and by pro-choice groups. But their compassion for both the mother and the unborn child, and their consistent witness within the laws of our society, give a powerful refutation to their opponents.

So in summary, followers of Jesus should live lives of love and compassion and upright behavior, as God directs them—even though people in the world around them may not agree with that. Notice how often in this epistle on suffering, that Peter tells us to walk in love (1:22; 3:8-9; 4:7-8). That's the right response for trying times.

Sometimes trials can't be avoided, even when we're living upright, moral, love-filled lives. People will often accuse Christians of various immoral or unpopular behaviors; sometimes our accusers are malicious, but often they are misinformed or misled, and their

questions show a real desire for understanding. That's why we need to be prepared with a wise answer for those who come asking for one.

Let's never fall back on an old gospel cliché, like "I don't need a reason, I just know it's true", or "It works for me, and it'll work for you." If we're bluntly honest, we'll have to admit that other religions seem to "work" for their adherents; such pragmatic evidence does not prove that any religion has the complete truth about God, man and salvation.

What we need is to use our minds, to be aware of the arguments given against faith in Christ, think through the Bible's teachings for a response, and prepare to share our answer (1 Pet 3:15). Throughout church history, people have challenged the Christians to defend their hope in Christ. And throughout history, God has raised up "apologists" to respond with thoughtful, logical arguments to the attacks of intellectuals. And God's people have used these brothers and sisters' writings to arm themselves with an answer for whatever attacks come against them.

I would encourage you to read the works of men who stand up for the faith in a well-reasoned response—men like C.S. Lewis, Tony Evans, Tom Skinner, or Anthony Campolo. They will strengthen your own faith, and prepare you to deal with the often painful attacks on your beliefs.

The most encouraging aspect of our suffering for the faith, is the One

who suffered for us first. Jesus Christ's sufferings are the basis of our salvation (1:11, 18-19; 3:18); in his own suffering, he also left us "an example, that ye should follow his steps" (2:21). Peter tells us that we need to recognize and follow Jesus' example of suffering.

How did Jesus handle false accusations, and rejection, and physical torture, and death? Peter sums up the whole gospel record when he writes, "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him [God the Father] who judges justly" (2:22-23, NIV). It's hard not to return insult for insult, to use love to cover other's sins (3:9; 4:8). But Jesus showed us how powerfully love could conquer evil, as he gave his life on the cross. Dr. King showed us how to channel God's love in non-violent action, which crossed all racial and social barriers of our society. Such love doesn't prevent us from suffering, but it does make our suffering worthwhile, and indeed powerful.

The frustration of youth in our cities, raised to the boiling point by the court decision in the Rodney King case, may make Jesus' example seem irrelevant or out of date. Unfortunately, the suffering of so many in these riots will only create more hurt, broken people, unless they turn to Christ and follow his steps. That is our sorrow today, but it is also our hope.

Dorsey & Spears Honored



over 40 countries sharing the Gospel of our Lord and Savior through song. She sings in seven different languages. Rev. Mondaine presented her with the 88-Keys Gospel Globetrotter Award for 1992.

In 1991, last year, Terry Davis, song writer, keyboardist and vocalist, became the first award recipient of the 88-Keys Gospel Award.

This year's award recipient was Mattie Ann Callier-Spears. She shared that she has been singing since the tender age of six. "I can remember mimicking the singers on the radio. I wanted my voice to soar like the angels," she said with tears in her eyes. "It is not easy being out here carry God's Word in song," Callier-Spears remembers. "Many, many times you will not receive any pay or gratitude but go anyway," were her words to the young audience of musicians. She has travelled the United States presenting concerts, revivals, retreats, and prison ministries. She carries the Word and song to the downs and outs. She said, "Many times I did not know how I was going to get there or how I was going to get the money to go but God would open doors, that I could not see, and He provided a way to get me there and back and even put money in my pocket that I was not expecting."

Ms. Callier-Spears was chosen from a group of three nominees, who in-

cluded: Tammie Drayton, Expressions of Praise Dance Ministry and spiritually impressive Signer and Carey Simms, and extraordinary Gospel instrumentalist on woodwind (saxophone). Everyone sat in wonderment as Rev. Mondaine opened the sealed envelope. He announced, "And the winner of this year's award is ... Ms. Mattie Ann Callier-Spears." The audience stood to its feet as the recipient made her way to the front.

Special congratulations to Ms. Dorsey and Ms. Callier-Spears for their work in the field of Gospel music. Continue the good work!

Ms. Callier-Spears is presently engaged in the recording of a long awaited album of gospel songs.

Announcement

Fashion/Talent Show

"Woodlawn's Children in Motion"

Albina Ministerial Alliance Head Start

May 16, 1992

Portland Community College - Cascade Campus

705 N. Killingsworth

Cascade Hall Auditorium

5:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Suggested donations: \$1.50 in advance; \$2.00 at door; children under 12 free.

BY TEAL N. THOMPSON

The Celebration Tabernacle held its second annual "Eighty-eight Keys Evening of Gospel."

The church was filled to capacity. People came to praise and lift up the name of the most wonderful Lord Jesus Christ.

The pastor Rev. Elbert Mondaine, served as the M.C. over the evening's festivities. The Celebration Singers, a young and up-coming group of eight voices and six instrumentalists sang their hearts happy. They started the evening off with the comforting words "His Eye is on the Sparrow and I know that He Watches Me."

The program featured the sounds of -- Grace & Truth, In His Name, sounds of victory, New Song and community A.M.E. Zion, from Vancouver, Washington.

"Evening of Eighty-Eight Keys Musical" is presented each year with the hopes of raising enough money to assist in the musical education of some up and coming gospel artist in the Portland/Vancouver area who has demon-

strated the desire to lift up the name of Jesus through Gospel Music. Rev. Mondaine shared his vision with the audience. He stated that as a child he always knew that he would play the piano. He can remember pretending to play the keyboard on the window sill. It wasn't until he was twenty-one was he able to pursue his dream. He now plays the keyboards -- but, he says that there is so much more to be learned. It is his hopes to provide an avenue that will assist others as they reach for their dreams in gospel music and to recognize those who have been laboring in the field for a long time.

Ms. Willa Dorsey, who is a world renowned Gospel singer, for the past thirty years, was recognized for her many contributions to Gospel music. She said, "This is the first time that a local pastor has taken the time to recognize my ministry in such a manner. I am so full." After receiving her award she sang her arrangement of "Yes! Jesus Loves Me" and she was acknowledged overwhelmingly. Ms. Dorsey shared that she has been to six continents and

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Minister Gregory Fobbs

SUNDAY SCHEDULE

Bible Study

9:30 am.

Morning Worship

10:45 am.

Men's Training Leadership

Women's Bible Class

5:00 pm.

Evening Worship

6:00 pm.

Attended nursery for all services

Wednesday prayer meeting and bible study

7:30 pm.

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 11:00am Morning Worship
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Sunday Service 10:45
Sunday School 9:30
Bible Study 6:00
Evening Service 7:00 P.M.
 Pastor, Rev. James C.E. Faulkner
Theme: Whatever you're going to do for the Lord, do it now
 1 Peter iv. 11

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