

## Introduction

In 1969 “Look” magazine had an article about seemingly unchecked growth out west. Developers were transforming the desert into new cities at an alarming rate. Wilderness was being tamed by concrete and asphalt. Edward Abbey remarked about this unchecked growth:

Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell.  
Edward Abbey, Look Magazine, November 1969

The reality is we see this pursuit of growth in nearly every sphere of our world. When your company has a record-breaking quarter in sales, how does your sales manager “celebrate”? By pushing you to break the record again. The modern corporate “product” is actually the share price, regardless of what product or service a company produces. Stock prices must always grow so business decisions are made with the goal of ever-increasing stock prices in mind. You look at your 401(k) and you don’t think, “Gee, that’s enough to retire”. Instead you want to see it continue to *grow*.

This pursuit of endless growth invades the church as well. The idea is a local church is healthy only if it is growing in size. There are countless books about church growth, offering some new strategy or “ministry opportunity”, some technique guaranteed to put more butts in the seats next week than you had last week. So long as that average attendance figure keeps growing, you assume things are happening as they should.

We see this in what is usually the first question you ask another believer about his or her church—“How big is your church”—as if that tells you anything at all about that church. I know you ask that question because I at least *think it* even if consciously refusing to ask it. We tend to associate numerical growth with health.

I just came across a new term the other day. We’re all familiar with “megachurch”—a church that’s really large. The most common definition of megachurch is a local church with an average attendance of more than 2,000 people. By this definition the very first church in history was a megachurch, for the church in Jerusalem added 3,000 people on the day of Pentecost. There are more than a thousand megachurches in the United States so there’s the newer term *gigachurch*, which is a church of more than 10,000 in average attendance. There are about 50 such churches in America.

If numerical growth is the purpose of a local church, then the mission of the church is to grow in size. In this way pursuing “mission” can actually detract a church from its, well, *mission*. We tend to think of the mission of God as this never-ending growth in numbers, as if the number of nickles and noses a local church has is an effective method of evaluating true growth.

Mission, when motivated by anything other than love for God, becomes idolatry. There are countless books about church growth, about outreach strategy, about ways to attract a crowd, and many of them simply do not explain the proper motivation for mission. There is

the assumed goal of numerical growth for the local church. The thinking is that if a church is not growing consistently even if slowly then a church is simply not “on mission” or is otherwise failing to do something right. What is remarkable to me is that none of these books ever sound like the “church growth strategy” outlined in Scripture. None of these books point to faithfulness in suffering as a significant means for accomplishing the mission of God. We’re in 1 Peter 4 this morning.

<sup>1</sup> Pet 4:12 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. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. <sup>15</sup> But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. <sup>16</sup> Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. <sup>17</sup> 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? <sup>18</sup> And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

<sup>19</sup> Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

1 Peter 4:12–19

## Do Not Be Surprised

Peter starts out with a direct instruction: do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you. In fact, he adds that you shouldn’t be surprised, as if something strange were happening to you. Why would it be strange, when this world is full of suffering, whether you’re a Christian or not?

In the ancient world as today, there were earthquakes and wildfires and tsunamis and plagues. These caused untold suffering. There were wars and government corruption that caused all sorts of suffering. There was profound inequality in wealth and human rights. This, too, caused all sorts of suffering. If you were a man with resources, your life might look pretty good with what appeared to be little suffering—until you had a toothache. Being rich and powerful didn’t cause dentists to suddenly pop into existence. You could still break a leg and have to bite down on a stick while some “doctor” who had very little actual medical knowledge tried to set the broken bone.

In a world full of suffering, why does Peter tell his readers to not be surprised at the fiery trial—suffering—when it comes? Of course it comes! Why should that be a surprise? That’s like saying, “Don’t be surprised when leaves begin appearing on trees”. *That’s what they do in April.* Why does he say this?

In the Roman empire the Caesars were each called the savior of the world. To save the world was to rescue it from chaos. Caesar delivered the empire from civil collapse, from economic ruin, from the instability of wars. The so-called Pax Romana—the Roman peace—was enforced with the sword but ensured a basic level of social stability. Most people did not live in constant fear of invasion from foreign enemies.

When Caesar Augustus was born his birth was gospel—good news. In 9BC the Roman province of Asia changed its calendar to begin on September 23. This was the birthday of Caesar Augustus and the province was trying to honor him. In the Priene Calendar Inscription we read some interesting claims about this particular Caesar.

...“Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a savior, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance...surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the gospel [εὐαγγέλιον] for the world that came by reason of him,” ...

Priene Calendar Inscription, 9BC

The province changed its calendar so that the first day of the year was the birthday of Caesar Augustus. The reasons are given in this inscription. His birth was proclaimed as the beginning of salvation for the whole world, for the emperor would rescue people from suffering and pain caused by instability of nations. He would cause wars to cease and would rightly order the world. Luke had all this in mind when he wrote his Gospel. In Luke 2:1 he declared that a decree went out from not just any Caesar, but Caesar *Augustus*—the same one widely acclaimed as being the savior of the world, the lord of all, the one whose birth was gospel—good news of victory. What did the angel say to the shepherds when announcing the birth of Jesus?

Lk 2:10 And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:10–11

Luke’s language—indeed, the language of the Gospels concerning Jesus—was very political. Caesar is not lord; Jesus is Lord. Caesar is not the savior of the world; Jesus is the Savior of the world. Caesar’s birth was not truly good news for the world; Jesus’s coming is the very gospel of God. Caesar did not bring everlasting peace; Jesus brings everlasting peace.

Peter says to not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you because this was the last thing they were expecting! They weren’t expecting suffering and persecution! Where’s the peace? Where’s the order and stability? Where’s the prosperity? How is this fiery trial compatible with *good news*?

For first century believers who were well acquainted with Caesar Augustus, along with all the other Caesars up to that point, the counter claims of Jesus, the Savior of the world, would have stood out. The empire claimed to be all-powerful, for who could fight against the beast that was the Roman empire? The apostles and the early Christians declared Jesus is Lord and so Caesar cannot be. This was necessarily a political claim, for denying Caesar could get them killed.

Only Jesus can bring true peace. Only Jesus can offer true salvation. Only Jesus has a kingdom that will last forever. This means the Roman peace was not true peace. The Roman salvation was no salvation at all. The Roman kingdom was temporary *at best*. The birth of Caesar was not good news; the birth of Jesus is good news for all people, for his offer of salvation is a real and true offer.

And yet. Those who responded to his offer, who through faith declare Jesus is Lord, who gladly reject all other gods and refuse to bow down to them, are suffering. Their world does not feel like one of peace. The kingdom of which they are now citizens does not feel all that stable. The salvation they have been promised does not seem to have brought proper order to the world.

## Rejoice

Peter says do not be surprised by this, as though something strange were happening to you. It's not strange, for ultimately this is what the Lord himself predicted. Peter was there when Jesus said this to his disciples:

Jn 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.  
John 16:33

In him you will have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. Do not be surprised, then, at the fiery trial when it comes! The Lord is not surprised by this, so neither should you. He knew it would come—he *said* it would come. When it comes, then, you shouldn't be surprised. That's not all, though. He goes further. Not only should you not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes, you should rejoice when it comes.

He does not mean to rejoice in the suffering and pain itself. He says to rejoice *insofar* as you share Christ's sufferings. We saw last week the apostle Paul said in Colossians he is filling up *what is lacking* in Christ's afflictions through his own physical suffering. This is what Peter means. We share in Christ's suffering. The ongoing hatred and persecution of Christians is Christ's suffering. He isn't here physically for the world to harm him directly, so the world goes after his body on earth.

In the midst of the suffering he says to rejoice. Be in a state of well-being and happiness. The timing of this rejoicing is interesting. He says to rejoice as you are in the process of sharing Christ's sufferings. While sharing them, rejoice. Be in a state of well-being and happiness. Further, rejoice "that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed". That's a future joy, a future well-being and happiness. Rejoice now and rejoice in the future.

That joy, that sense of well-being that comes from knowing the Lord is in control even in the midst of suffering and pain, cannot be taken from you. Again, Peter was there when Jesus taught the disciples this joy in the midst of sorrow.

Jn 16:20 Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. <sup>21</sup> When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a

human being has been born into the world. <sup>22</sup> So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

John 16:20–22

Jesus says there will be sorrow and lamentation. We will lament. Pain *hurts*. Yet the promise is our sorrow will turn into joy. As we gain perspective we will recognize what the sorrow produces, just like a woman giving birth understands what her labor pains will produce. No one will take this joy from us.

Peter doesn't simply make this assertion. He tells them to rejoice, recognizing they will also rejoice in the future when the glory of God in the face of Christ is revealed, that is, when Christ returns. They rejoice now and they will rejoice when his glory is revealed. He doesn't simply tell them to rejoice but explains the profound reason for their joy, their sense of well-being.

He says in verse 14 if you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed. The insult is not the blessing, anymore than pain is the blessing. The insult reveals the blessing for the insult reveals a profound truth: the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. What is the sign of the new covenant, the thing that indicates one is really and truly in the new covenant? The sign of the new covenant is the presence and activity of the Spirit of God.

Some want to point to baptism as the sign of the new covenant. Baptism is the entrance rite into the new covenant, but it is not the sign of the new covenant, for an unbeliever can be baptized and remain outside the covenant. The promise of the new covenant is they will all know him, from the least of them to the greatest. That is, every member of the new covenant is a believer in the Lord Jesus. Baptism can be falsely administered. You know what cannot be? The presence and activity of the Spirit! You can't manufacture that!

As we see the Spirit work in a person's life, the Spirit bears fruit. That fruit indicates the Spirit's presence and activity. If you know someone who claims to be a follower of Jesus but does not bear the marks of the Spirit's presence and activity, that person is not a follower of Jesus. It doesn't matter how "spiritual" their lives may seem to be, with all sorts of religious activity. Jesus said in Matthew 7 you will recognize them *by their fruits*. Look carefully at how he follows this up.

Mt 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Matthew 7:21–23

He does not say, "No, you didn't do those things". Immediately after declaring you will recognize his people by their fruits, he says prophesying in his name and even doing "many might works" in his name is not the sort of fruits he's talking about. It is the presence and activity of the Spirit bringing about increasing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, not "religious activities"—even those that appear miraculous.

One of the profound evidences of the Spirit's presence and activity is joy. Peter says rejoice when the suffering comes, for you will also rejoice when the Lord himself comes.

## Right Suffering

Because the Spirit is present and active in the believer's life, that believer can be filled with joy—he or she can *rejoice*. You can experience that sense of well-being. Even when insulted for the name of Christ, he says you are blessed.

All of this assumes you are suffering for the name of Christ, that you are sharing in *Christ's* sufferings. He says in verse 16 if anyone suffers *as a Christian*, or on account of being a follower of Jesus, you should not be ashamed that life is not going as you think it should go, that the peace and prosperity inherent in Jesus being the Savior of the world suggests is not a present reality for you. Don't let that be a cause of embarrassment.

However! Let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. We'll take a closer look at meddling next week. For now, it means what you think it means: meddling in someone else's affairs. Peter says when you suffer, you should suffer *as a Christian*. He doesn't mean suffer while also being a Christian. He means suffer precisely because you are a Christian.

His point is you should not suffer because of the foolish things you do, whether murder, or theft, or evil, or meddling. Those first three seem really extreme, particularly when compared to meddling. Again, we'll take a closer look at that next week. For now, he's saying don't suffer for being an idiot; suffer for being a faithful follower of Jesus.

This is the right sort of suffering to embrace, and is the sort of suffering that results in rejoicing. It is the presence and activity of the Spirit that results in this suffering. Because Christians have the aroma of Christ, they suffer. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2,

2 Cor 2:15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, <sup>16</sup> to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. ~~Who is sufficient for these things?~~  
2 Corinthians 2:15–16

Paul says this of *believers*. Christians are the aroma of Christ. Why do shepherds smell like sheep? Because they are constantly around sheep. Why do Christians smell like Jesus? And why do some "Christians" *not* smell like Jesus? The presence and activity of the Spirit of God, who ever works to glorify the Lord Jesus, causes Christians to have the aroma of Christ. It is this aroma that unbelievers find repugnant.

They also find bad behavior repugnant. Peter says there is a right kind of suffering, and that is as a Christian. To say this another way, if you suffer, make sure you suffer because you are the aroma of Christ and not because you're an idiot.

Rather than being ashamed at suffering for the name of Christ, Peter says to glorify God in that name. To glorify is to influence one's opinion about another. It is to praise the Lord in such a way that others recognize his goodness. To glorify God is not cause him to have glory. God is simply glorious. His glory is the fullness of his beauty, and his beauty is the fullness of all his divine attributes, the very things that make him God. You cannot increase

his glory, nor can you decrease it. You can, however, influence others to recognize it or to reject it.

When Peter says to *glorify God in that name* he means to live in such a way as to influence others' opinion about God. When that fiery trial comes, if it comes because you are rude or mean or even criminal, you are not glorifying God in that name for you are not suffering *as a Christian*. You're suffering as a jerk or as an evildoer or a liar or whatever. You cause others to glorify God in the name of Christ by living for Christ in such a way that accurately reflects who he is and what he has done. In other words, you glorify God by living a life transformed by his gospel, a life that demonstrates his peace, a life that has been rightly ordered by the Lord of all.

Peter adds a strange statement in verse 17. You must live in a way that glorifies God in the name of Christ for it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God. That is clearly the local church. Peter told them in chapter 2 they are being built up as God's spiritual house. They are the household of God. Where does judgment begin? With the people of God! But judgment? Aren't we saved from judgment?

We tend to restrict our understanding of judgment to punitive action. On judgment day those who are rebellion against God are judged. They are punished. That's not a full understanding of judgment. Judgment means the proper evaluation of a person. On judgment day those who persist in their unbelief will receive a proper evaluation from God. So will those in Christ! For those in Christ the proper evaluation will be their salvation.

Since judgment, or the right evaluation of people begins in the church, Peter asks what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel. That's an interesting expression, isn't it? We don't often think of the gospel as something to be obeyed. We tend to think of the gospel as something to be believed. This is what James was getting at when he says he will show his faith by his works. His obedient acts of faith demonstrate his faith. You can do good works without faith, but you cannot believe without engaging in good works. Good works cannot cause faith; faith will cause good works.

Those who suffer in faith are those who are faithful in obedience to Jesus. The right evaluation of God comes in the fiery trial. Notice what Peter says in verse 12. Don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you *to test you*. By sharing Christ's sufferings you are demonstrating what the test is showing: the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. This blessing enables you to glorify God in the name of Christ, for this judgment, this evaluation, shows that you truly in Christ.

If this judgment begins with us, those who are outside of Christ, who do not obey his gospel, face a terrible future. He describes those who do not obey the gospel as the ungodly and the sinner—the very things these elect exiles once were. Now, through faith in the Lord Jesus, they obey the gospel and thus are no longer judged as ungodly and sinners. They are now in Christ and are blessed.

## **While Doing Good**

Faith in the Lord Jesus results in transformation by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God produces ever increasing fruit in the life of the believer. That is, each believer in Jesus is becoming more and more like Jesus. Jesus is God and is therefore infinite, so we will always be in the process of becoming more like him.

As we saw last week God has decreed that his purposes in this world will come through suffering. Ultimately, salvation comes through the suffering of the Lord Jesus. Peter said in chapter 2 Jesus bore our sins in his body on the tree and by his wounds we have been healed. His suffering is salvific; Jesus purchased our salvation when he offered himself up as our Passover Lamb. God has decreed even more suffering, however.

When we suffer for the name of Christ, we are, in Paul's words, filling up what is *lacking* in Christ's suffering. Jesus' suffering is sufficient for salvation. Our suffering, then, is not *salvific* but *missional*. We suffer for the mission of God, which is the salvation of men and women from every tribe and language and people and nation.

This is why Peter says if anyone suffers as a Christian, *let him glorify God in that name*. Let him cause others to have a greater opinion of God. By suffering well, a Christian shows others that God is worth giving up everything for. Do you see how that glorifies God, how it influences the opinions of others concerning God? A believer who is willing to suffer for Jesus and to rejoice in the midst of that suffering is a powerful declaration of God's goodness.

Remember Peter's point for this letter:

<sup>1 Pet 2:12</sup> Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

1 Peter 2:12

Peter says in verse 19 that those who suffer according to God's will must entrust their souls to a faithful Creator *while doing good*. That is, we must continue to live faithfully for the Lord, loving our neighbors, loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, serving according to our giftedness as Peter says in verses 10–11. Suffering is no excuse for unfaithfulness.

It is possible that suffering prevents one from serving. If a believer is imprisoned for her faith, she cannot continue serving the church or her neighbors *in the same way*. She can, however, continue to suffer well. She can entrust her soul to a faithful Creator while doing good. What does Peter say? If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him or her glorify God in that name. Let the one who suffers as a Christian influence others' opinion of God by demonstrating God is a faithful Creator even in the midst of profound suffering.

Do you see the good Peter means here? When a person suffers as a Christian and remains faithful to the Lord and rejoices for sharing Christ's sufferings and rejoices for the blessing of the Spirit's presence and activity in his or her life, that Christian is showing others the goodness of God. God is worthy of our faith.

Remember, faith as the Bible describes it is not wishful thinking. Faith is seeing the pattern of God's incredible and profound faithfulness and trusting that in the present circumstances he will remain faithful even though you do not see how *in the present circumstances*. Faith is not blind. Faith looks at God's long history of faithfulness and when confronted with circumstances that do not readily show God's goodness nevertheless continues to trust him. Faith may be blind in the moment but it is based on God's history of faithfulness.

Imagine the suffering of these elect exiles. As we've seen, they've not experienced formal persecution yet. They've been losing friends and social networks. Trade guilds had begun excluding them because they would not participate in the guild festivals, which involved worshiping patron deities and lavish banquets featuring drunkenness and gross immorality.

Family members who did not also convert would have begun turning against them for their new refusal to be good citizens, which is to say, they would not worship the gods that promised social stability and blessing.

In these circumstances the pressure to go along with the trade guild would have been enormous. A man who had been a successful craftsman may have found it difficult to provide for his family as suppliers would have stopped doing business with him and the guild would have cut him off from his business partners. Customers would have moved on. Suddenly this successful craftsman finds himself working in the fields just to buy bread.

It's so very interesting that Peter says if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be *ashamed*. What an interesting instruction! Why would such a person feel shame? Shame is a negative self-evaluation, one centered on a profound sense of guilt. It comes with a sense of powerlessness, of worthlessness. It is painful and while being an emotion it affects all other emotions a person has. Shame is a deep sense of being unworthy.

The man who is taking on any job he can find just to feed his family because his faith in Jesus caused him to stop worshiping the gods the trade guild required he worship would feel all of this. He would feel ashamed. Broken. Worthless. Powerless. Inferior. Self-loathing would dominate his thinking. At the core of it all would be this nagging question: is this my fault? Have I sinned? Is God angry with me? Have I done something I should not have done? Have I failed to do something I should have done? Did I bring this on myself? Even more, isn't Jesus, you know, *the Savior*, the one who tames the chaos of this world and brings peace?

We all feel this when we suffer, whether that suffering is truly suffering as a Christian or suffering while being a Christian. Financial pressures cause shame. Relational struggles cause shame. Spiritual struggles cause shame. Health struggles cause shame. What did I do wrong that all this is happening to me?

Peter says, "If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name". In the midst of the suffering, rather than being ashamed, the Christian should recognize that he is profoundly blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon him. The presence and activity of the Spirit of God in a believer's life is the sign that the believer belongs to God and therefore there is no cause for shame.

Think of what Peter did earlier in this letter when he addressed directly both slaves and wives. Slaves were those with no power in the world. Legally they were just property owned by someone else. By writing directly to the slaves Peter elevates them as God's image bearers and shows them they have agency. That is, they are not mere property but represent God himself. He then gives them instructions for how they can participate in the mission of God while in the most dire circumstances.

Then he addresses wives directly. While a wife had more power and influence than a slave, her life was largely controlled by either her husband or her father. In the ancient world slave owners and husbands were given instructions for their slaves and wives, for they were believed to be the responsible party. Peter elevates wives as responsible agents, as those who represent God. Specifically, he addresses wives who had husbands who were not believers. His instructions make it clear that even in such difficult circumstances wives can participate in the mission of God.

Here he addresses all of the believers in Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia. They were a mix of men and women, slave and free, rich and poor. All

of them were beginning to suffer for being faithful to Jesus. Though they were remaining faithfully present in a world hostile to Jesus, the world was turning against them. Peter tells them they can participate in the mission of God by rejoicing at the opportunity to share in Christ's sufferings. They can participate in the mission of God by rejoicing in the blessing of having the Spirit of God. They can live free of guilt and shame for their suffering by choosing to glorify God in the name of Christ.

They needed to embrace God's perspective on their suffering. The world saw their suffering and believed their suffering is what defined them. Whether slaves or wives or those part of this new and strange religion called Christianity, their suffering was simply who they were. They couldn't rise above their suffering. Peter says no! Their suffering is not what defines them. Their suffering demonstrates they are in Christ for they are sharing Christ's sufferings, and this gives them reason for hope in the midst of the suffering.

What is underpinning Peter's optimism in this text? Peter understands that God's mission will be accomplished through suffering! Do you see why church growth books tend to avoid suffering as a strategy? Those books won't sell many copies! When believers suffer well, which is to say, when believers strive to glorify God in the midst of suffering by entrusting their souls to him as a faithful Creator, they cause others to recognize God's goodness. God is glorified by his people reflecting his glory to others. This is what it means to keep our conduct among the nations honorable.

We are called to suffer as Jesus suffered. As Peter says in chapter 2, Jesus did not respond to insults with insults. When he suffered he did not threaten retaliation. Instead, he continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. That is, he entrusted himself to the very one whose evaluation is just. How did God evaluate Jesus? He raised him from the dead. Paul's words in Romans 4 capture this very well. He said Jesus "was delivered up for our trespasses and *raised for our justification*". Justification is God's declaration that we are in the right. It is God's evaluation of all those who are in Christ.

When God raised Jesus from the dead, he vindicated Jesus and showed that Jesus was right all along. He is who he says he is and he has done what he said he would do. His resurrection is *our* justification. This means that when you suffer, there is no reason for shame, for God in Christ through his Spirit is bringing us through that suffering so that one day his judgment of us—his evaluation of us—will be made known to all. That day is coming. Until then, continue entrusting your souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. Remember the words of Jesus.

Jn 16:22 So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

John 16:22

Church, it won't be long. Hang in there. Keep rejoicing. Enjoy the Lord and his goodness in the midst of whatever your circumstances happen to be. He will see us again, and our hearts will rejoice fully, forever.