

5/30/18

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What makes you happy? Seeing a beloved family member again after a long separation? Being able to spend some time on the golf course or in the wood shop or at the pool? How about suffering? Does suffering make you happy?

Do you rejoice when people make fun of you because you actually believe that Jesus bodily rose from the dead? Do you consider it a privilege when people consider you an uneducated simpleton because you believe that God created the world in six twenty-four-hour days? Would you consider it pure joy to actually suffer physical violence because you told other people about Jesus?

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 1 Peter 4:12-16

Jesus' apostles really did consider it pure joy to suffer in that way. One time, after the Jewish ruling council had them flogged for preaching about Jesus, they "went out...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name" of Jesus (Luke 5:41). In fact, they went right back to the temple and kept telling people about Jesus, in spite of the punishment they had just endured for doing just that.

And now, the apostle Peter tells us in today's Bible passage that we, too, can "rejoice as [we] share in the sufferings of Christ." When people ridicule us for being Christians, we can consider ourselves blessed because God's Spirit rests on us. Such suffering doesn't come to us because we're doing something wrong. Rather it comes because we're doing something right. We're suffering for following Jesus. And that is nothing to be ashamed of.

But rejoicing in our sufferings is not something that comes naturally to us sinners. When someone ridicules us, our first reaction is to strike back at them, not to rejoice. Yet, all that changes when we remember the one for whom we are suffering. We're suffering because we belong to Jesus, who lived, died, and rose again for us. We're suffering because we belong to Jesus, who soon will return in glory to take us to the eternal joys of heaven. We're suffering because we belong to Jesus, who has promised to be with us always, even to the very end of the world. Because we belong to Jesus, we, like the apostles, have been counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of his Name. What a tremendous privilege God has given us! What a reason to rejoice!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for the privilege of being able to suffer for your Name. Keep me focused on you, so that I may always rejoice, even in my sufferings. Amen.*

(WELS E-Devotion, Adapted)

...See you in worship.

Keep looking up because the Lord is always looking down – Psalm 121

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