THE PROBLEM AND POWER OF PAIN
WEEK 1 • DAILY BRIEFING 2 • SUFFERING FOR DOING RIGHT

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

Revelation 21:4

This week follows Sunday's sermon, "The Threat of Pain," from Jesus' parable of the soils in Luke 8. You can watch or listen to the sermon at 1mso.church or on the One Missoula app.

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help me persevere through every kind of trial, whether it comes from living in a broken world, from other people's sin or my own, or from the legitimate persecution that comes with following Jesus. Help me not to play the victim card and claim persecution when it is not persecution. I ask You for this wisdom and strength in Jesus' name, amen.

TODAY'S TEACHING

On Sunday we walked through Jesus' parable of the soils in Luke 8, and yesterday's Briefing started with the hardened walking path. Today is the rocky ground. Jesus says the seed that fell on the rock sprang up and then withered, and when He explains it, He says these people "believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away" (Luke 8:13). Matthew's account of the same parable is more specific about what kind of testing scorches that plant, and we will read it below. Here is today's idea in one sentence: following Jesus does not exempt you from pain, and sometimes following Jesus is the very reason you are in pain.

That runs against how a lot of people assume life with God is supposed to work. The assumption is that if you do the right thing, things will go right for you. For most people reading this, suffering for doing right will not look like the angry mobs that hunted the first Christians. It looks more like losing a sale because you would not fudge the numbers, or getting passed over because you will not work Sunday mornings. It looks like the friend group that goes cold when you stop drinking with them, or the relative who rolls his eyes every time you pray before Thanksgiving dinner. None of that is a stoning, but it is real pain, and it comes because you chose to obey Jesus.

Notice that the rocky ground receives the word "with joy." Emotion is not the problem. Plenty of people come to Jesus genuinely glad to find forgiveness and a reason to get up in the morning. The problem is what the joy was resting on. Underneath it there is often an unspoken deal that says, "I will follow Jesus, and in return my life will work." As long as life works, the joy holds. Then the first time obedience costs something real, the thought goes something like, "I signed up for forgiveness and purpose, not this. I'm out."

Two of today's passages come from men who knew this kind of pain firsthand. First, Paul wrote 2 Timothy from prison near the end of his life, and he wrote it to Timothy, a younger leader he had trained. Just before today's verse, Paul reminds Timothy of the persecutions he endured in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, the same Lystra where he was stoned and left for dead in Sunday's passage from Acts 14. Second, Peter wrote his first letter to Christians scattered across what is now Turkey who were being slandered and mistreated for their faith. In the section we will read, he is speaking to household servants, many of them enslaved, who answered to unjust masters (1 Peter 2:18). Neither man promised these people an easier life.

READ & MEDITATE

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, [21]yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

Matthew 13:20–21

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

2 Timothy 3:12

For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. [21]For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. [22]He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. [23]When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

1 Peter 2:20–23

Read all three passages twice. The second time through, watch for who these passages say will suffer and why.

REFLECT

Reminder: honest introspection and Scripture-informed self-assessment are far more beneficial than self-delusion and wishful thinking.

In Matthew's account, Jesus names exactly what scorches the plant on the rocky ground.

1. Fill in the blanks from Matthew 13:21: "and when _____ or _____ arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away."*

What does the phrase "on account of the word" tell you about where this pain comes from?

The rocky soil started out well, and the joy was real. Still, the depth underneath the joy was missing.

2. When you first started following Jesus, or first started taking Him seriously, what did you expect Him to do for your life?

Which of those expectations has been tested by friction, and how did you respond?

Some people respond to friction by abandoning their faith. Others stay, but they quietly assume that friction means they must be doing something wrong.

3. Fill in the blank from 2 Timothy 3:12: “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be _____.”*

What does this verse say to the person who assumes friction always means they did something wrong?

One person decides God broke the deal to always treat them well, and another person decides they broke it by not having enough faith or not obeying His commands perfectly. Paul’s point is that there was never a deal to begin with. Friction does not automatically mean you are out of step with God, and sometimes it means you are exactly in step with Him.

Peter does not hand suffering Christians a formula. He points them to a person.

4. According to 1 Peter 2:22–23, what did Jesus refuse to do when He suffered?

What does verse 23 say about God that made it possible for Jesus to respond that way?

Jesus was perfect, and He was still betrayed, mocked, beaten, and crucified. You are not going to get your life dialed in better than Jesus did, so you need to expect pain.

Now something needs to be said plainly. Not everything Christians call “persecution” is actually persecution. Plenty of Christians call the results of their own rudeness “persecution.” Some argue politics online with insults and sarcasm and then call the backlash “suffering for Jesus.” Others tell people the truth in a way that creates unnecessary friction and retaliation, and then they are surprised when people push back. That is not suffering for doing right. Peter put it bluntly: “But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler” (1 Peter 4:15).

Paul set the standard for how a Christian handles opposition. He told Timothy that “the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness” (2 Timothy 2:24–25). The goal is not to soften what Jesus said. The goal is to make sure that when people are offended, they are offended by Jesus’ message and not by your delivery. If they are offended by Jesus and lash out at you, that is persecution. If they are offended by your delivery, that is feedback.

Peter draws this same line in verse 20 of today’s passage, and it may be worth reading again with your own life in view.

5. Think about the last time you felt opposed or mistreated because of your faith. Would the people who opposed you say you were wrong (message), or would they say you were a jerk (delivery)?

Where do you need to stop calling friction “persecution,” and where do you need to stop being surprised by real persecution?

Do some honest introspective self-assessment before moving on.

**These fill-in-the-blank questions use the ESV text. Your Bible may use different words for the same idea.*

PRAYER

Write your prayer or pray out loud.

MEMORY VERSE

Write or recite Revelation 21:4 from memory.