

✠ James 1:2-18 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

Much is made in this world over the alleviation of suffering. No one wants to suffer. No one wants to endure pain and loss. Medicines and hospitals strive to alleviate pain and sickness. Soup kitchens and halfway houses try to alleviate the pain of loss and betrayal and rejection. And of course the commercial industry boasts in products and wares that promise relief from pain and suffering – from couches to pills to vacations. Much is made in this world over the alleviation of suffering.

This should not surprise us. Man was not created to suffer. We were not created to die and to suffer disease and sickness. We were created to live. We were created to walk with God and commune with God. We were created to fellowship with God and with one another.

But in this broken and fallen world there is pain and suffering, there is death. But God has not forgotten us. He has not turned His back on those whom He created, leaving us to wallow in pain and suffering. He has given to us a remedy, the medicine that cures us and makes us as we were meant to be. And with this medicine, our Lord Jesus Christ, He brings us back into communion with Himself. He undoes the effects of sin. He re-creates creation. He re-orders all things.

That is why we call on the name of the Lord, because He is the medicine that cures our diseases and cleanses our bodies and souls. But all too often we are sick with fever and do not think straight. For the sickness of sin and death is not truly remedied until our Lord returns. That is, we still suffer now, even while we drink the medicine of salvation from the chalice of our Lord's sacrifice. We become sick, we suffer disease, we undergo painful, life-altering events that shatter our worlds.

And our Lord uses this pain and suffering to teach us. Not like a mean father who takes out his petty frustrations on his helpless and innocent children. But like a benevolent father who uses his child's mistakes and stubbornness to teach his child a better way. Thus, our Lord teaches us to call upon Him in the day of trouble. He teaches us to live as Christians.

To live as those who do not live here but are only pilgrims and nomads in the desert. To live as those for whom this world holds no appeal. To live as those who long for a heavenly dwelling. Through suffering, our Lord teaches us to call on His name that we may be saved.

And not just saved from sin and death, though that is the chief reason, but also that we may be saved from heartache and loss. Our heavenly Father does not just care for our eternal salvation with no care or thought to what we experience and go through now. No, He cares for us and provides for us now, even as we suffer in this life, so that we will learn to speak to one another with compassion and mercy and love. So that we will build one another up.

We do not embrace suffering; it is the enemy as much as its big brother, death, is the enemy. But even the enemy, even Judas is used by our Lord for the good of those who call upon His name. We do not weep for ourselves, for we know in whom we have put our trust: the Lord Jesus. He is our Rock and our Redeemer, an ever-present help in the day of trouble.

For our Lord is not a High Priest who cannot identify with your suffering. He is not One who does not know your temptation and trials.

He knows them and He overcomes them. He does not leave you to do it yourself, cheering you on like a life-coach or a good teacher. He is your substitute. He does it for you. And He brings you with Him so that you share in His glory, in His life, in His communion with the Father.

In Jesus all suffering is swallowed up in life, in His life. And His life is made yours by His own testament, by His own promise. You share in His life just as He shares in your suffering. And in the end He is risen. He no longer suffers. He no longer dies. He lives. And you too shall live with Him for you call upon His name.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠