

The Fiery Trial

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[0 : 00] I want you to open up your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 4. We have been walking through the book of 1 Peter for several months now. We're nearing the end. We'll begin chapter 5 next week and spend a couple of weeks in chapter 5 before we finish this great, great letter.

But this week we're finishing chapter 4, so we're going to be looking at verses 12 through 19. I want to ask you guys, as you turn there in your Bibles, I want to ask you to stand with me as we read the Word of God together.

The Apostle Peter writes in verse 12, or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.

Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. 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?

And if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

[1 : 34] Take this Word now, Father. Apply it to our hearts, we ask in Christ's name. Amen. Peter has not been shy throughout this letter as he discusses the subject of our suffering and our pain that we endure in this life.

Neither has Peter been shy, as he's turned his attention multiple times throughout this letter, to the suffering of our Lord Jesus. So that suffering from Peter's perspective is a common thing.

It's a thing modeled for us by Christ our Lord, which is in stark contrast to what we often hear from many of the preachers that we hear on the radio or on television and that we see online.

Oftentimes we are told by the voices that we hear around us that suffering ought to be an odd and a strange thing in the life of a Christian. That if you're really living in faith and trust in Christ, that suffering should be rare for you.

But in fact, what we find here is exactly the opposite. And we're going to walk through this passage this morning, but before we do, I want to kind of just outline it for you so you don't get lost because there are a lot of statements that we're going to cover here.

[2 : 50] And so I just want to give you a brief outline here of the passage and then we're going to walk through it slowly. Take a look. He gives us two basic commands in verses 12 and 13 to not be surprised, but instead a contrasting command in verse 13 to rejoice.

And then verses 14 and 15 and 16 just provide some foundation underneath that. What kind of suffering is he talking about? What's the motive for this rejoicing that he commands? All those sorts of things. We're going to see some motive.

We're going to see some reason, some explanation in those verses. And then verses 17 and 18 give a strong warning before we come to the end of this passage. In verse 19 where we get a word of encouragement from Peter.

So two commands, a little elaboration on the commands, a warning, and a word of encouragement. And we're going to begin this morning where Peter begins. We're going to begin with these two commands. So look at the first command with me.

He says in verse 12, In other words, Peter is saying, Do not listen to the voices of those who say suffering should be rare to non-existent in the life of a Christian.

[4 : 02] Do not listen to them. And do not be shocked. Do not be surprised when difficult circumstances come into your life. Do not be surprised even at very, very difficult trials that can be described by such a word as fiery.

In other words, painful and difficult for us to endure. And he says, Don't be shocked at that. Don't be surprised when those things come into your life.

In other words, what he's saying is expect suffering and hardship to come into your life. But he's very specific as he moves on through this passage about exactly what kind of suffering and hardship we should expect to experience.

Take a look down at verse 14. He says, If you are insulted for the name of Christ. And then verse 16. If anyone suffers as a Christian.

So what Peter is saying here is that the suffering that I'm calling you to be expectant of is a suffering that's going to come to you precisely because of your faithful following of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 09] Because if you're a faithful follower of Him you will suffer. It's going to happen. Jesus said, They persecuted me. They will persecute you. This is going to happen.

In fact, he discusses the other possible cause of our suffering. He discusses it. We skipped over it. But he says in verse 15, Let none of you suffer as a murderer. That's pretty bad.

Or as a thief. That's pretty bad. And as an evildoer. That's more of a broad term for sin in general. Okay. So a murderer, a thief, really bad levels of sin. Sin in general.

And at the end he used a strange word that's translated in my translation here as a meddler. It's a word that we don't really know fully how to translate because it doesn't occur anywhere else in the Greek language that we're aware of that we've been able to discover so far.

And it's just composed of two basic words. One means to be an overseer and the other means of another. So it's someone who's overseeing or getting into the business most likely of somebody else.

[6 : 10] So a meddler, or some translations say a busybody, somebody who's just kind of involved in things that they ought not be involved in and just kind of bothering in other people's lives. Which we would kind of look at and say, that doesn't seem like a very big deal.

I mean that doesn't compare with murder and thievery and that's exactly the point. Peter says that because of a whole range of sins from the worst to those that we would dismiss is really not all that big of a deal sometimes.

Suffering can come into our lives because of those things. If you're a murderer or a thief, you'll suffer at the hands of the civil authorities if you're caught. Right? If you're an evildoer, then there'll be all sorts of things reaped in your life.

If you're a meddler, then you'll lose friends and people won't trust you anymore. But suffering, trials will come into your life as a direct result of your sin. Peter acknowledges that.

That is indeed the source of a number of the difficulties that we face. In fact, all the time as you sit and visit with people and they will complain about things happening in their lives and if you begin to dig into the causes and things that are going on in their lives, many times you can trace the root cause of a particular difficult time or a fractured relationship.

[7 : 20] Many times you can trace it back to a sin that they've committed. If you'll search your own heart, many times you can trace back your own difficulties and trials that you feel like you're going through. You can trace them back to some bad decision that you made, some harsh word that you said when you should not have said it.

So it's true. Sometimes bad things happen to us because we do things that reap bad things. And Peter's letting us know that the kind of suffering that he's talking about in verse 12 is not that kind of suffering.

That's not what he's talking about. He says, let none of you suffer in that way, but nevertheless, do not be surprised when suffering comes upon you because you are living the opposite of that way, because of your faithfulness to Christ, because of the name of Christ that you name, because you are named as a Christian among those in your society.

The sufferings that will come upon you as a direct result of that kind of obedient, faithful lifestyle really counters the voices that we hear.

Does it not? So often we are told that, well, all of the bad things that happen to us are happening to us because we don't have enough faith or because we haven't been faithful enough or because we haven't been obedient enough.

[8 : 41] And Peter is saying here, no, that's not the case. In fact, much of the suffering that you will experience as a follower of Christ will come to you because you are a follower of Christ.

And he says, don't be surprised by that. He spent this entire letter trying to prepare us for that kind of suffering.

It's not an accident that he begins this letter by calling us exiles. It's not an accident that he tells us that we are strangers and aliens in this world. It's not by accident that he tells us that we will be slandered because of our different lifestyle.

That people will look at the conduct of our lives and wonder why we no longer participate in the things in which we used to participate. He's been telling us these things throughout this letter and so now he's drawing near the end of the letter and he wants to sort of summarize all that by saying, listen, I've warned you over and over so don't be shocked at it.

Don't act as if you don't know where these things are coming from and you ought not to be experiencing these things. Expect this as a faithful follower of Christ. Expect to be insulted for the name of Jesus.

[9 : 55] Expect to be rejected for the name of Jesus. Which leads us to ask a very simple question. Why do we often go through long seasons of life without experiencing any suffering for the name of Christ?

Now it may very well be that the Lord has simply protected us and guided us through a particular period of our lives for reasons known only to Him.

but it may also very well be that we haven't suffered for the name of Christ because we haven't bothered to publicly proclaim His name. We haven't suffered as a Christian because nobody knows that we are a Christian.

We have to when we come across these sorts of commands and we look at ourselves and we say, I don't identify with that. I can't connect to that because I don't experience that.

Sometimes we need to take a step back and ask ourselves, why are we not experiencing that? Because we've talked over and over about the situation of the people to whom Peter originally wrote this letter.

[11 : 00] These were not people who were being fed to the lions. These were not people who were being beheaded for the name of Christ just yet. That persecution lies only a few years ahead but these are not people who are now experiencing that.

These people are experiencing social ostracism. These people are experiencing slander among people who used to be their peers and friends. These people are experiencing the threatening of their livelihood because they won't participate in all the things necessary for them to do their jobs because there are immoral aspects to that.

These are people who are facing the exact same kinds of things that Christians today in America face on a regular basis. And so when Peter says not to be surprised, he's not saying to us that all Christians ought to be expected to be rounded up and gassed in a chamber or rounded up and thrown to the lions or any, he's not saying that at all.

That may happen but what he's saying is all of you who name the name of Christ and are known as a Christian and a follower of Christ, you ought to expect real suffering to come into your life as a consequence of that.

Now it may be simply on the level of losing friends or being estranged from family members because you just won't stop talking about Jesus. It may be something like that but nevertheless there will be trials, there will be sufferings that come upon you and if they do not come upon you we have to take a step back and ask am I naming the name of Christ in such a way, am I living my life in such a way that it's clear and obvious that I'm a follower of Jesus?

[12 : 37] We have to ask ourselves that question. That's the first command. Don't be surprised. But there's a second command that's equally important in verse 13. In contrast to that it's going to happen, trials are going to come into your life as a believer but, verse 13, but rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.

Don't be surprised they're coming but when they come rejoice in them. Why would we do that? What person in their right mind would be glad to suffer?

What person in their right mind would rejoice when difficulties and trials come upon them? The person whose mind is shaped and formed by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

That's the kind of person that would rejoice in sufferings because, Peter tells us, we share, that is, we participate, we enjoy a kind of fellowship in Christ's sufferings when we suffer for the name of Christ.

Christ. He does not mean by that that our suffering accomplishes all the things that Christ's suffering does. That's impossible. We've already seen Peter describe Jesus' suffering as the righteous for the unrighteous.

[13 : 54] He's died for our sins so that Christ's suffering is a suffering in the place of His people. He bears the wrath of God for His people.

We're not capable of doing that. If we bear the wrath of God, we bear it because we deserve it. Alright? So he's not saying that we share or participate in Christ's sufferings and that our sufferings accomplish all the things that Christ's sufferings accomplish.

But what he's saying is that we identify with Christ in our sufferings and our sufferings are connected to His sufferings because through our sufferings the gospel message is taken into the world.

This is what the Apostle Paul means when he says that by our sufferings we fill up the afflictions of Christ. It is not as though it's not that Christ's afflictions are lacking in any way but by our sufferings the message, the gospel message about what Christ has accomplished in His suffering is carried out into the world.

And so that as we suffer we ought to rejoice because in that suffering we are participating in God's work of saving a people for Himself and establishing His kingdom in the world.

[15 : 06] We are participating in that. Why do soldiers gladly go to war and run out into the battlefield where bullets are flying?

Why would they do such a thing and why do they do it joyfully at times? Yes there's fear yes there's trepidation but why are they willingly going out into the battlefield where they know they might die?

Because they understand there's a cause greater than themselves for which they are risking their lives. we have a cause we have a name we have a master infinitely greater than any other cause greater than any nation that has ever existed more important and more vital to the freedom of people real genuine freedom of people than anything else we could ever imagine laying down our lives for.

and he says when you are suffering understand you participate in the worldwide cosmic work of God to save a people for himself and establish his kingdom you are a part of that and being a part of that ought to motivate you to rejoice in the midst of your sufferings.

But that's not the only reason he gives us other reasons notice it's not just connected to the death of Christ and our participation in the death of Christ he also connects it to the resurrection and return of Christ because he says that we will rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed when his glory is revealed what glory?

[16 : 49] the resurrected glory of Christ as he comes back to earth to judge the world and finally set up his kingdom we have that promise awaiting us and no matter what suffering might come our way that promise stands before us it stands in front of us as something that we cling to we rejoice when we suffer because in our suffering we get a glimpse of future glory turn back a page I want you to see and remind you once again we keep coming back to some of these key verses in 1 Peter but I want you to go back to chapter 1 verse 3 again because this informs all that we're saying here where he says that according to God's great mercy he caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled unfading and kept in heaven for you we who have been born again into a living hope through Christ's resurrection have an inheritance that awaits us and Peter says here that when you suffer you ought to rejoice and be glad because you know the day is coming when your suffering will be ended and the inheritance will be fully yours we have a faith that is always looking toward the future always understanding that there is something infinitely better ahead for us in the future so that no matter what may come now all these things are what Peter calls trials coming upon you to test you all these trials prove the validity prove the reality of our faith in Christ and because that faith is tested and shown to be true through our trials we have all the more reason to hope in our future resurrection and participation in Christ's glory when he returns so that your suffering in the name of Christ and for the cause of Christ your suffering is not simply something that you just put up with and you can kind of work your way through and try to be tough as you make it through it your suffering ought to be a direct cause to move your eyes back to Christ back to your future inheritance and to remind you to remind you of what God is doing in and through those very trials and to show you and give you assurance that your faith is authentic your trust in Jesus has endured through this trial and you have laid up for you because you have truly been born again an inheritance undefiled unfading being kept and reserved for you through faith by God himself rejoice in your trials rejoice you have all the reason in the world to rejoice and then he comes to give us a warning yes trials will come upon believers yes we ought to rejoice in those but how ought we to think more broadly when confronted with the reality that suffering is not only happenstance it doesn't just happen to believers but suffering is destined for our lives it is coming to us in fact he tells us in verse 19 that we suffer according to God's will so how are we to think more broadly when we realize that God is bringing suffering into our lives to accomplish how do we think about that verse 17 addresses that it says for it is time for judgment to begin at the household

of God now don't be thrown off by the word judgment here he means he means the temporal bringing in of trials in this life that's what he means by judgment here he doesn't mean condemnation okay we don't want to confuse those terms here he simply means God bringing into our lives difficulties that's what he means he says it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God that's exactly what he's been talking about suffering's going to come God's going to bring hardships into our lives because we name the name of Christ it will happen in a fallen world now in consequence of that now he's going to be what do we think if it begins with us he says here's how we ought to be thinking this is where our minds ought to take us if that's the case for God's people and for the church then what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God if trials are brought into the lives of God's very own people and if we suffer hardships in this life what ought we to think about those who reject the gospel and who reject

Christ what ought we to think and then he quotes from Proverbs chapter 10 to solidify that point he says and if the righteous is scarcely saved that means if the righteous is saved through or with difficulty that's those trials then what will become of the ungodly and the sinner what will become of them what do we think of those who do not obey the gospel of our God answer while we may experience quote unquote judgments in this world and difficulty and trials those things will come to an end and a glorious end with return of Christ but for those who reject the gospel for those who do not name the name of Christ in this life when he returns there will be only condemnation judgment wrath forever it's not a message that plays well in our culture

I understand that it's not a message that our ears are attuned to easily hear and easily agree with because we prefer to think of God as a different kind of God than that we prefer to think of ourselves as better people than that than to deserve an eternity of condemnation in hell but God is a holy and just God and we are not on our own a good people deserving of good things we are sinners we are fallen people we have rejected the gospel of God we have rejected the glorious beautiful son of God and his sacrifice if we have done that if that is true of us what shall we say glory awaits those who trust in Jesus misery everlasting torment awaits those who do not it's a warning because there are always those mixed into the church much as we might like to think that they aren't there are always those mixed in among the congregation those who have not really trusted those who have not really put their faith in

Christ and obeyed the gospel command to repent and believe when this warning comes strongly suffering comes to God's faithful ones what will happen to those who do not believe hear that listen to that warning it's given here for a reason Peter writes this letter to persecuted scattered Christians for a reason because he knows that among them and close to them will be those who desperately need to hear this warning before it is too late and there are some of you who need to hear this desperately trust in him believe in him the one who would lay down his life the righteous holy one who would lay down his life in the place of sinners trust in him trust in him and you are not promised that you will have all the things in this life that you want you are not promised to have your best life now but you are promised a glorious infinitely good happy life in eternity trust in him and a word of encouragement finally for us before we close verse 19 therefore let those who suffer according to

[25 : 42] God's will those are the followers of Christ God is bringing suffering into their lives let those who suffer according to God's will two things entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good now take that to mean this don't stop doing the good that you're doing continue doing that while you're doing good don't give up on simple regular obedience to God so don't allow yourself to slip into the category where bad things begin to happen to you because you do bad things don't become a meddler don't become an evil doer certainly don't become a murderer a thief but don't don't become those things continue to do good continue to pursue obedience to Christ don't let suffering begin to come into your life because quite frankly you deserve it alright don't be that continue to do good but more than that more importantly than that even as you suffer even as trials come upon you even as you get a phone call where the doctor says cancer or even as you find out about the death of a loved one even as these things continue to happen to you even as you lose your job even as you lose a family member who's tired of hearing about church and Jesus even as you lose a relationship with them even as these things continue to happen he says entrust your soul to a faithful creator both of those descriptions are key he is the creator he is sovereign over all things he is king over all of his creation and none of these things that come into your life happen apart from his will he is the creator he is the one who upholds and sustains all things by the power of his word never forget that he is the creator he's sovereign nothing's happening to you outside of his control and never forget that he's faithful and good to his people let's pray thank you for your word that calls us not simply to endure but to endure joy and it's so hard for us to do sometimes father we confess that we are tempted to grow discouraged and to give up I pray that this morning we would we would be encouraged and built up by your word and that the exact opposite would happen that we would redouble our commitment to rejoice in you in all things good or bad and let us not forget as we walk through our week you are good and faithful and sovereign and powerful and you have a plan and you're testing and proving and refining our faith as we go so let us now come as we begin to sing again let us now come as those whose hearts have been quickened and awakened by your word to sing with joy and let us come also to give with that same joy pray in Jesus name amen