

LIVING FOR CHRIST IN A HOSTILE WORLD

1 Peter 4:12-19 (No. 1)

Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson

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INTRODUCTION

We are living in an extraordinary time in American history, where the morality of the culture is changing rapidly. A cultural revolution is happening before our eyes on the issues of marriage and homosexuality. At the end of June, the Supreme Court is expected to rule on cases involving so-called same-sex marriage. And regardless of how the Supreme Court rules, this much is certain: it will be a day that marks American history.

I feel a burden to prepare you for that as well as equip you to live for Christ in an increasingly hostile world. So we're taking a short break from Ephesians over the next couple of weeks to help you think and live biblically in a culture that no longer feels like home for American Christians. My desire for you is that your faith would be able to endure the increasing hostility that you'll face as you live out your faith before a world that opposes you—that opposes Christ.

I think it's important for you to understand that all suffering in the path of obedience to God is Christian suffering. If you shake people's hands to welcome them to church and get sick—that's a kind of suffering that is Christian suffering. If you take the gospel to a group of people who seize you and kill you—that's another kind of suffering that is Christian suffering. If you are shamed or ridiculed or slandered because of believing the Bible—that's also a kind of suffering that is Christian suffering.

So whether it's...

- a Christian florist fined by the government for refusing to celebrate what God condemns.
- or it's a student who is shamed because he believes what the Bible says about homosexuality.
- or it's an employee who is laughed at behind her back at work because she prays before meals. . .

These are all kinds of suffering that occur in the path of obedience to God. And the Bible has a lot to say about that. And those passages that help Christians in times of suffering at the hands of a hostile world are increasingly helpful to us. And that's where I want to go today. Turn to 1 Peter 4.

Bridge to text. 1 Peter was written to a group of churches in Asia Minor who experienced suffering because of their allegiance to Jesus. They found themselves—because of their newfound faith—living in a foreign culture—cultural outsiders—despised and rejected like their

Savior—and receiving intense persecution. And in the section we are going to look at, Peter gives instruction on how these believers should respond.

1 Pet 4:12-19 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. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

When we face hostility from our culture, how should we respond? In this passage, Peter gives four ways we must respond to suffering in order to persevere in our faith.

First, we must respond to suffering by expecting it.

I. WE MUST EXPECT SUFFERING (v. 12)

v.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."

"Don't be surprised . . . as though something strange were happening." Suffering as a Christian should not catch you off-guard, but should be expected. It's normal. It isn't "strange." The Gk word is related to the word for "foreigner"—to treat as a guest. Suffering is not foreign to Christians. There is a kind of suffering that is uniquely Christian. Everyone—Christian or not—experiences suffering—because we live in a sin fallen world. But Christians receive suffering precisely because they are Christians. So it isn't strange.

Do you know what is strange? What is surprising? No suffering. America has been strange. You've lived in a strange, surprising land. We should thank God for the blessing this country has experienced for 239 years. But will we murmur now that the cultural tide has shifted and we find America to be a hostile land? Now that we find ourselves increasingly in a normal situation, will we be like those murmuring Israelites who had crossed the Red Sea and then said to Moses—"Oh that we would return to Egypt" and live under Pharaoh? No, things are returning to normal.

We should expect suffering, knowing (2 things):

A. EXPECT: KNOWING ANIMOSITY IS INEVITABLE

Jesus said in John 15:20: "*Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.*"

If we open our mouths with the gospel, we will experience suffering. If you affirm the biblical view of marriage and the biblical view of homosexuality—the homosexual jihad will seek your silence and destruction. The reason so many Christians haven't experience suffering is that they keep their mouths shut. There has been a long season in America where you could stay silent on sin and the world would accept you. That won't work anymore.

There is coming a time when every professing Christian must either publicly bow their knee to Jesus or bow their knee to the new morality. Will your people-pleasing, praise-pursuing soul be able to make the right choice? Beware: there is a kind of people-pleasing that demonstrates a lack of true, saving faith. Jesus said—and this should frighten every American because our souls are sick with the love of the praise of man—he said in Jn 5:44: “How *can* you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

B. EXPECT: KNOWING GOD USES IT TO PURIFY OUR FAITH

There is a point to Christian suffering. Peter describes the suffering as a “fiery trial [that] comes upon you to test you.” That language “fiery trial” and “test” comes from 1:6-7.

“In this [salvation] you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

In other words, one of the purposes of God allowing trials to come into our lives is to purify our faith. Peter uses an illustration of metal being heated by fire in order to burn away impurities and resulting in purified precious metals. God counts your faith more precious than gold. So how much *more* will God bring trials *into* your life in order to purify your faith.

Don't begrudge your suffering—these light and momentary afflictions are preparing for you an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Cor. 4:17). So the first way we must respond to suffering is to expect it.

II. WE MUST REJOICE IN SUFFERING (v. 13-14)

v. 13-14: “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

The command is to “rejoice” to the degree that you share in Christ's sufferings. “rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings.” “Rejoice” is in the present tense: rejoice and keep on rejoicing. In other words, as the hostility increases, your joy should increase. So. . . more hostility results in more joy. From the world's perspective: that's not normal. This is supernaturally empowered joy.

And one of the means by which God causes supernatural things to happen in you is by you trusting promises he has made to you. So, when you experience suffering, he doesn't expect you to simply wait for a feeling that makes you happy. God's design is for you to grab hold of his promises to you and the Holy Spirit uses the instrument of his divinely revealed promises in the Word of God to do a work of God in your heart called—joy despite circumstances. So it is not joy rising apart from the Word—it is joy rising because of the Word.

Here, God motivates joy—despite suffering—by highlighting two blessings suffering Christians receive:

A. BLESSING: YOU WILL RECEIVE FUTURE REWARD

v. 13b: “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”

The reason you should rejoice now in suffering is that you'll “rejoice and be glad” when Jesus comes back (“when his glory is revealed”). “Rejoice and be glad”: the double-use of joy language emphasizes the superabundance of happiness you'll receive then. The idea here is that if you rejoice in suffering now—it confirms you are truly Christ's. And you will receive a future reward in heaven. Your suffering now gains for you an “eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). Those who share his sufferings will also share his glory. Peter echoes Jesus' words in Matt. 5:10-12:

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

B. BLESSING: YOU WILL RECEIVE SUPERNATURAL HELP

v. 14: “If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

The Holy Spirit will come to your aid. He will give you supernatural relief in the midst of suffering. “Spirit of glory”: recalls the blazing glory of the Lord that came to rest upon the tabernacle and led Israel in the wilderness.

The Holy Spirit now rests in you and as our Comforter, he gives: 1. Endurance 2. Understanding 3. Fruit.

You'll recall from Acts 6 that it was the Holy Spirit who came and aided Stephen when he was stoned by the angry Jews. You may feel you could never endure under such persecution. But the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. He comes to our aid. And he gives the help when you need it (not in advance).

When we suffer, how should we respond? First, by expecting it. Second, by rejoicing in it. Third, we should respond by evaluating the cause of suffering.

III. WE MUST EVALUATE THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING (v.15-16)

When we suffer at the hands of others, we ought to consider the reason why we are suffering. Not all suffering brings relief from the Holy Spirit.

Peter says there are two reasons why we may be suffering:

A. SUFFERING FOR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS (v. 15)

v. 15: “But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.”

Why “murderer” and “thief”? Was this really a struggle for these Christians? Two possible explanations:

1) Falsely accused of these. Rumors circulated about Christians in those days. Some thought Christians were murderers or cannibals because they “ate the body and blood of Jesus”—the Lord’s Supper.

*2) Rhetorical device: starts with extremes to illustrate his point. Then Peter “evildoer” and “meddler” hit closer to home. “Evildoer”: general term for wrongdoing. If you get a speeding ticket on the way to church. “Meddler”: rare word in Gk. Lit. “watching over the affairs of others”. Busybody. Busybodies cause all kinds of trouble. They stir it up.

In a sense, Peter is saying, don’t suffer like an unbeliever. We can easily rationalize punishments that we deserve and explain them as “persecution” or “Christian suffering.” So Peter warns: don’t suffer due to unrighteous. If you are going to suffer, suffer for doing good. That’s the second reason why you might suffer.

B. SUFFERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (v. 16)

v. 16: “Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.”

This is a beautiful kind of suffering. Suffer as a Christian without shame.

The term “Christian” was **not** a term Christians came up for themselves. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch by outsiders (Acts 11:26). It means “Christ follower” and was probably a term of reproach. So if you suffer as a Christ follower, don’t be ashamed. When you’re insulted and abused because of your faith, it could have the effect of silencing you. That’s what shame does: it makes you want to hide your face and stop talking. Which is one of the assaults against Christians today in relation to homosexuality and so-called same-sex marriage. They want to shame you into silence.

Insult you. Belittle you. Tell you, you're on the wrong side of history. Your grandchildren will think of you as bigots. You're unintelligent. Unsophisticated. Behind the times. You're even immoral. They want you silent or angry—but not holy.

Silent or angry: Satan will take either one. He wants you to shut up about the gospel and God's truth. Or he wants you to be so mad you lose your witness. Look at 1 Peter 3:13-17

1 Pet 3:13-17 ¹³Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Now, back to 4:16. . . Peter writes, “let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.” To glorify God is to go public with how much you value him. Your suffering is your greatest opportunity as a witness, if you suffer as a Christian and glorify God in that name. To be as Paul was: “suffering, yet always rejoicing” confounds the critics.

I remember touring the catacombs outside of Rome years ago. The catacombs are these underground burial chambers, where many Christians are buried—many of which died at the hands of Roman persecution. On the walls in these passageways are quotations of Scripture, hymns, and other Christian sayings. When the tour was wrapping up—our tour guide referenced the persecution and the writings and she said ~ it all makes you think they really died for something. In other words, their resolve to cling to Christ and not forsake him during persecution was a compelling witness that they died for something real and true. So don't be silenced. Go public with the One you treasure in holiness. So we are not suffer for unrighteousness, but only for righteousness. Lastly, we should must respond to suffering by entrusting it to God.

IV. WE MUST ENTRUST SUFFERING TO GOD (v. 17-19)

v. 19: “Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

With the word “therefore,” Peter summarizes not only this passage, but his main point of the whole book. The theme of the book is “in your suffering, trust God and keep bearing fruit/doing good.” “Entrust” is a banker's term referring to a deposit for safe keeping. And the *character* of the one you entrust your soul to must be exemplary. Who else would you entrust your soul to, but a “faithful Creator?” Deposit your trust of your soul in God. You wouldn't entrust your soul to the ones who oppose you—so why live to please them? The body they may kill, but your soul will be safe.

He gives two reasons why you should entrust your soul to God:

A. ENTRUST: BECAUSE OUR SUFFERING IS PLANNED

v. 19: “Therefore, let those who suffer according to God’s will”

No suffering comes your way without the sovereign permission of God. God is the guide of all your pain. Your suffering isn’t meaningless. It isn’t accidental. It isn’t haphazard. It has a point. So what’s the purpose?

v. 17: “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God”

The word “judgment” is neutral. It means to render a decision. It could mean to judge in condemnation (like a judge sentencing a criminal). Or, it could mean to judge with approval (like a judge awarding a prize at the dog show). Context determines.

Here, judgment begins with the “household of God.” So judgment begins with Christians—who Peter calls “a people for [God’s] own possession” (2:9). So judgment for Christians is the trials that come about by the will of God to purify our faith. Your suffering is a type of judgment—not for condemnation or wrongdoing, but for purification so that you would grow more holy. Your suffering is God’s approval of you. But the plan for your suffering is bigger than that. Read v. 17b-18.

v.17b: “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?”

Your suffering is a parable to sinners: if the Lord does not spare his own from suffering, how much greater will be the suffering of those who do not obey the gospel and are punished for their sin? When Jesus comes back in Rev. 19, he comes either as your savior or as your slaughterer. Only those who trust Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins will be saved.

B. ENTRUST: BECAUSE OUR SAVIOR IS POWERFUL

v. 19: “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Our rescuer is the one who, in his might, created the universe and in his might he can keep your soul safe. God, who intelligently designed nature for his purpose, designs your sufferings for his purpose. He has the strength to keep you. So entrust yourself to him.

CONCLUSION

Summary: So when suffering comes our way. How should we respond?

- We must expect suffering

- Rejoice in suffering,
- Evaluate the cause of suffering,
- Entrust our suffering to God.

The purpose that God has for you in this passage is that---whether your suffering occurs because of a changing culture or any other reason—your faith would remain. That your faith wouldn't be shaken. You would persevere.

Isn't it interesting that Peter, of all people, would be the one to write, of all things, this passage? Here is a man who when he first faced persecution, he denied Jesus three times, even while Jesus was looking. Be encouraged not only by Peter's instructions, but also by Peter's life. The Lord Jesus prayed that Peter's faith wouldn't ultimately fail, and it didn't.

The Bible says that Jesus is interceding for you (Heb. 7:25). Know that Jesus always prays in the Father's will and what he asks will be done and he is praying for your faith to be strong.