

Suffering As A Christian

1 Peter 4:12-19

Pastor John Miller

We'll read the whole text, 1 Peter 4:12-19. I want you to follow with me in your Bibles. Peter says, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." They were going through a fiery trial. What they were to do, verse 13, was to rejoice. So, don't think it strange or foreign or odd, verse 13, "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed,"—notice that's future tense. When He comes the second time, we see Him in glory. " . . . when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye"—or blessed are you—"for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part"—that is, the part of those who are persecuting you, causing your suffering—"on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified."

Verse 15, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. 16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. 17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? 18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved,"—and we'll come back to this and explain what he's saying here, but the idea of 'scarcely be saved' means to be saved through great difficulty, be saved through great trials and testings—"where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Notice the conclusion, verse 19, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."

Someone said that God has only one Son without sin, but none without sorrow. Jesus was known as a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was without sin, but He's not without sorrow. He took on sorrow and experienced it just like we do. Peter is writing to strengthen the suffering saints that were facing, verse 12, a "fiery trial," a very specific persecution that was coming upon them. In 1 Peter 5:12, Peter, in talking about the whole purpose of his letter, said that what I'm writing is that you are standing in the grace of God. " . . . this is the true grace of God," 1 Peter 5:12, "wherein ye stand." They're going through suffering, but he wanted them to stand in the grace of God.

In this passage Peter gives us four inner attitudes to help us in times of suffering. Again, I know I've had a lot of four, five, and multipoint sermons lately, but again, I want you to write them down right from the text how we should respond to the suffering that we encounter in this world. First—write it down—expect suffering, or suffering should be expected. Look at verse 12. He said, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." Notice he starts with the word "Beloved, think it not strange," do not be surprised, literally, or have an attitude of bewilderment.

The word "strange," and I'm getting a bit ahead of myself but I can't help it, means foreign. It

means foreign. It's tied into someone who is a stranger in your land because he's from a foreign country. When you are suffering, you're not to respond by thinking, This is strange. This is so weird. Why is this happening to me? Does God really love me? Does God know what's going on? We get this idea that we think it's strange. "I go to church. I read my Bible. I pray. I serve the Lord. I'm living for the Lord. This is so strange. This is so foreign to my understanding. Why should I be going through suffering and difficulty and hardship?" Many times when we go through trials we think it's strange or foreign or alien. So often we think that as Christians we should be kept from suffering.

Lest I forget, let me mention this very clearly. We are in an unredeemed body in a world that has not been reconciled back to God yet, so until that happens, we will suffer in this world. Christians get colds. Christian cars break. Christian refrigerators break. Christian toilets overflow or get stopped. Christian dogs dig out under the fence and run away. We have our problems and our trials. Because we live in a fallen world, and we're still in unredeemed bodies, we shouldn't think it strange when we go through these times of testings and trials.

One of the number one things that we think about when we go through suffering is, God must not love me, right? God must be mad at me. I thought God loved me, why am I going through this? Isn't it amazing that Peter starts with the word "beloved." This is a reminder to these suffering saints, "God loves you."

We should never doubt in the dark what God has spoken in the light. Whenever you're going through a difficult time, a trying time, a hard time, never doubt the love of God. That's one of the things the old devil's going to try to do is whisper in your ear, "God doesn't really love you. God loves other people, but He doesn't love you," and because of the suffering you're going through, you're going to question or doubt the love of God. Peter says right off the bat, "You're beloved." It's a reminder that God loves you. Never ever, ever doubt the love of God. You need to stand on that love. We thank God that He is also in control. So, we have a God who loves us, a God who is sovereign, and a God who reigns in the affairs of man.

When Peter says, verse 12, ". . . some strange thing happened unto you," that word "happened" is interesting. It literally means to throw together. It means to happen by chance. Another point that's made here is not only does God love you, not only is this not strange, it's common to the Christian life, but it didn't just happen.

Did you ever have stuff happen and you say, "Wow, the strangest, weirdest thing just happened to me." Well, if you're a Christian, things don't just happen. We call it happenstance. It didn't just happen, it was designed and planned; and God is in control, God allowed it, God knows what He is doing, God has a purpose, God has a design. The minute I go through a trial or a testing or I'm suffering, remember God loves me, this is part and parcel of the Christian life; and it didn't just happen, God's on the throne. He's in control. It's all laid out in His perfect plan and in His perfect will. Even when things, we think, are bad, God can use them for good.

Remember Joseph, when he forgave his brothers in Egypt? He said, "You meant it for evil,"

right?, “but God intended it for good.” God takes the evil that comes against us and He turns it for good. It didn’t just happen that Joseph was sold as a slave to Egypt, God was in control. Every facet of our lives are under the sovereign hand of God. Even in the book of Job, Job said, “The Lord gives, the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” The fiery trial was by God’s design.

Notice also the word in verse 12 “trial.” “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange—or foreign—“thing happened”—or fallen out —“unto you.” That word “trial” indicates that God has a design, God has a purpose. He’s testing us. He’s trying us. A faith that cannot be tested, cannot be trusted. He’s testing your faith to prove its value and its worth. He puts us through the fire. God’s testing us to prove our worth. I love what J. Oswald Sanders said. He said, “Every adverse experience when rightly received can carry its quota of good.” So, expect suffering. Christians are not exempt.

Here’s the second, write it down. When we’re suffering, we should rejoice in our suffering. You say, “Wait a minute, Pastor John, I can accept that fact that suffering is going to be a part of my life, but now you want me to actually rejoice in suffering?” No, the Lord wants you to rejoice in your suffering. Look at verses 13-14. He says, “But rejoice,” so there’s a contrast intended here between verses 12 and 13, “Beloved, think it not strange,”—“This is so weird, I can’t believe this is happening. This is so foreign. I’m a Christian, why is this happening?” No, what you’re supposed to do is rejoice, verse 13, “inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings”—I love that—“that, when his glory shall be revealed,”—when Jesus comes back in His Second Coming, His glory will be revealed—“ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy;”—or blessed—“are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.”

As I said, the intended response is not bewilderment but that we should be worshiping God, thanking God, and rejoicing in God. Our response to suffering should prompt us to rejoice. “Rejoice,” there in verse 13, is an imperative. That means it’s a command. It’s not an option. God is actually commanding us to rejoice in our suffering. It’s in the present tense which means constantly, continually, ongoingly, habitually be rejoicing. Don’t freak out, sing out with the joy of the Lord.

We all know the story in Acts 16 of Paul and Silas when they were on the second missionary journey and went to Philippi. They were arrested, beaten, and thrown in a prison cell. Their feet and hands were in stocks, and it was midnight. What did they do? Did they sulk and complain and get mad at God? No, quite the opposite. They began to sing praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them. We’re going to come back to this illustration in just a few minutes because I believe that they were a witness to the unbelieving world by the joy and by their singing. Here they are, in stocks, falsely accused, beaten, whipped, thrown into an inner dungeon. They’re laying in the filth of that dungeon, and no doubt Paul turned to Silas and said, “Let’s sing to the Lord.” He might’ve thought, No, I don’t want to do that right now. It’s not the time to sing. It’s the time to sulk. But they began to sing praises unto God, and you know how God sent the earthquake and opened the prison doors and set the captives free and the

Philippian jailer was converted.

In James 1:2 it says, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into [different trials]”—or testings. Again, the word “count” is a banking term, and it means to bank on this, count it a joy when you fall into different trials and testings.

How can we rejoice during these trials? Let me give you some ways to rejoice. First, you need to remember that your suffering means fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. This will bring joy. Look at verse 13. In verse 13 it says, “. . . inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings,” so count it all a joy, “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings.” We're not like Christ suffering for our sins or atoning for others' sins, but we are identified with Jesus who is a crucified, Savior; and we're following Him, so we get to be identified with Christ in His sufferings. That should bring us joy.

In Philippians 3:10, Paul said, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” When Paul said, “That I may know him . . . and the fellowship”—the koin Ōtō yōō` his sufferings,” that's that same concept that I want to be so close to Jesus that I suffer with Him and for His sake and for His cause. It's a badge of honor to be persecuted for following Christ, to be persecuted for being like Christ, for being persecuted being holy and committed to Christ. That means that fellowship should bring great joy as we rejoice in the Lord.

In Daniel 3, when the three Hebrew boys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were thrown into a fiery furnace—you talk about a fiery trial, that was literally a fiery trial—and the ropes burst off their hands, and they were in the fiery furnace walking around. The king came and was bewildered because he said, “How many did we throw into the furnace?” and they said, “Three.” “But I see four, and the fourth looks like the Son of God,” or the form of a god. The three Hebrews were in a fiery furnace, and they were experiencing fellowship and communion with Christ, so much so the king had to ask them, “Come out. I want to talk to you.” If you were thrown into a fiery furnace, and the ropes popped off your hands, would you hang out any longer in there than you needed to? I'm like, “Whoa, I'm out of here!” But they were in the presence of the Lord. They were having fellowship with the Lord.

It's not easy for me to say, but I believe that many times some of the sweetest fellowship that we could ever have with the Lord is the fruit of sorrow. Now it doesn't mean that you go out and say, “Okay God, send suffering so I can have sweet fellowship.” If we respond properly to the suffering that comes into our lives, it will deepen our intimacy with Christ and our fellowship with Him. It will drive us to fellowship with Him.

I learned a poem years ago that went like this:

I thank God for bitter things;

They've been a 'friend to grace';

They've driven me from paths of ease

To storm the secret place.

I thank Him for the friends who failed

To fill my heart's deep need;

They've driven me to the Savior's feet,

Upon His love to feed.

I'm grateful too, through all life's way

No one could satisfy,

And so I've found in God alone

My rich, my full supply!

The sweetest joys of life are the fruit of sorrow and knowing that I'm identified with Christ, drawn into that fellowship. How marvelous and how wonderful.

Secondly, our suffering for Him now means glory in the future. How do I have joy in trials? Remember that my suffering means fellowship in His sufferings now and also that our suffering for Him now means glory in the future. Look at verse 13 of our text, “. . . that, when his glory shall be revealed,”—again, this is future tense—“ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” You know that your joy, when you see Jesus in His glory, is going to be intensified because of the suffering and the sorrow and the hardships you went through in this world. Those who suffer most in this world, will rejoice most in the world to come. What a blessing that is! So, “. . . that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” We Christians have hope beyond the grave and beyond this life. Our hope is not in this world, our hope is in the coming Kingdom. Write down Romans 8:18 where Paul said, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.”

Thirdly, here's how we rejoice when we go through suffering. Our suffering, we need to remember, brings us the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is why I talked about the sweetness of our fellowship when we suffer for Christ. Our suffering brings to us the ministry of the *parákletos*, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 14. Peter says, “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye;”—this is the idea of blessed are you; why?, here's the reason—“for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.” What is the “spirit of glory and of God”? It's the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, sometimes called the Spirit of Christ, the glory of God.

Remember when Stephen was being martyred for his faith, Acts 7? Isn't it interesting that the first Christian martyr in the Church Age was named Stephen, *Stéphanos*, that means crown,

victor's crown. He was the first to wear the martyr's crown. As the stones were hitting Stephen's body, ". . . he . . . looked up . . . into heaven, and saw . . . Jesus standing on the right hand of God," the Father, and the Bible says those that looked at Stephen, saw his face, that it shone like an angel. What an amazing thought! He had an angel face, glowing with the glory of God because ". . . the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon [him]."

Sometimes we go through the dark, but we're never at a distance. God is always with us. I love Psalm 23 when David said, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," and in the Hebrew that phrase is the deep, dark valley. Even though I'm walking through a deep, dark valley, ". . . thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Here's the fourth way we rejoice when we're going through suffering, that is, verse 14, remembering that our suffering gives us opportunity to glorify God. Look at verse 14. He says, ". . . on their part"—referring to the persecutors—"he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified." One of the greatest ways for you and I to glorify God is through our sufferings. Some of the Christians that have blown my mind the most have been those that have suffered the most.

Lately, some of the brothers and sisters that the Lord has taken home from our church in death through sickness have been such a testimony to me. Their joy, their peace, their love, their faith, their hope in Christ, it just so encourages me. It blesses me. It's almost like you can just sense a special presence of God in their heart and life that when the need is there, God gives them grace, God gives them mercy, God gives them strength. They just sense that strengthening power of the Holy Spirit. You might look at a situation and say, "You know, I don't know how I could ever go through that. I don't know how I could ever suffer that way," and what you don't realize is if God calls you to do that, God will give you the strength and the power and the ability to do that.

Sunday night this week, we're going to be showing the movie on John Hus. John Hus was actually burned at the stake for his commitment to Christ. Before he was taken and put on the stake and burned for his faith, he was in his prison cell and there was a candle lit there. He was running his finger near the flame of the candle recoiling from the pain. He felt that he would renounce the Lord, and he felt so fearful. He said, "Lord, I don't know how I can bear the flames. I don't know how I can bear the pain. God, please give me strength. God, please help me." The Lord did indeed do that. When he was put to the stake, he started praising God, singing praises to the Lord, rejoicing in the Lord, and what a testimony he was as he was executed there in the flames. When he put his finger in the fire the night before his execution, he recoiled in fear, but the moment he needed that strength, the moment he needed that grace, God came through, ". . . for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon [him]."

In a book by J.R. Miller, he said this: "A photographer carries his picture into a darkened room that he may bring out its features. He says the light of the sun would mar the impression on the sensitized plate. There are features of spiritual beauty which cannot be produced in a life in the glare of human joy. God brings out in many a soul its loveliest qualities when the curtain is

drawn and the light of human joy has been shut out.” God takes us into the darkroom in order to develop us into the image of Jesus Christ.

So, we are to expect suffering, we are to rejoice in suffering, and here’s the third, if you’re taking notes, examine your life when you suffer, verses 15-18. He says, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. 16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian,”—I highlighted that statement, ‘suffer as a Christian,’ it goes right along with verse 19, “. . . suffer according to the will of God,”—“let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. 17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? 18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved,”—or be saved with great difficulty and through great trials—“where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” The fires of affliction often bring more light by which we can see our lives in light of God’s holiness. It’s God’s refining process to remove the dross and to purify us.

Here’s some things we need to ask ourselves when we suffer from these verses. First of all, verse 15, ask yourself, “Am I suffering because of my sin?” If so, confess your sin, repent of your sin, but you need to ask yourself, “Lord, am I suffering because...” and look at the list he gives us here. You don’t want to suffer because you’re a murderer. You don’t want to suffer because you’re a thief. You don’t want to suffer because you’re an evildoer. Then, how crazy is this, in a list which has murder and thievery and evil-doing, he has “. . . busybody in other men’s matters.” He’s basically saying, “Mind your own business. Don’t be a busybody.” It comes from the idea of going around talking to people, getting involved in their own business, which you ought not to be. You get persecuted for not righteousness sake but because of your own sin. That’s not commendable. That’s not praiseworthy.

Secondly, in verse 16, you ask yourself, “Am I ashamed or am I bringing glory to God?” “Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” Don’t be ashamed for suffering as a Christian, but actually glorify God on your behalf.

Thirdly, verses 17-18, ask yourself, “Am I concerned for the lost world when I suffer?” Am I concerned for the lost and those that are in the lost state when I suffer? Verse 17, “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God.” In other words, God chastens His people. God disciplines His people. In Hebrews it tells us that that’s a sign of sonship. You don’t spank kids that don’t belong to you, it’s not a good idea. Sometimes you want to, but you can get into big trouble doing that, right? So, if you’re getting “disciplined” or a spiritual spanking, you belong to God. You belong to God. I know this sounds bizarre, but there’s been situations in my own life where I felt like God has allowed infirmities or weaknesses or sickness in my life, and I felt like it was the hand of God disciplining me to get my attention. He wouldn’t do that if I wasn’t His child. So, if you’re being disciplined, the Bible says, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth,” He disciplines. If you’re being chastened by the Lord, at least it’s a sign that He loves me. I’m His child! He wants the best for me. It’s a marvelous thought.

He starts with the house of God. What he’s trying to say to these discouraged, persecuted

believers, is if that happens, “. . . what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” If God disciplines His own children, don’t you think that Judgment Day He’s going to judge those who persecuted His children, those who opposed His children, those who weren’t believers? So, it starts with the house of God, but it’s basically saying, retribution for these persecutors is going to come. And then he mentions, “. . . the righteous”—or the believers —“scarcely be saved.” That means that they go through trials and difficulties and hardships, make great sacrifices. Following the Lord is a challenge, but “where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” They’re going to be judged, and they’re going to be judged on Judgment Day; but Christians are going to be saved through trials and great hardships and great difficulties.

The men are going up to their retreat next week or in a week or two, and they’re going to be studying Hebrews 11, men of faith in that chapter. At the end of that chapter, Hebrews 11, it says that some of them who lived by faith were persecuted and suffered, “. . . they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins: being destitute, afflicted.” They lived “. . . in dens and caves of the earth.” They were sawn in two. They were persecuted, and they were just as much men of faith as those who were delivered out of the mouth of the lions. They didn’t have less faith, so just being a man or woman of faith doesn’t mean that you’re not going to have suffering or have trials or have hardships. What a blessing it is to know that we belong to Him and that one day we will appear with Him in glory.

There’s one last verse, verse 19, and, again, in many ways it’s one of my favorites. Fourthly, and lastly, whenever we suffer, whenever we go through hardships, commit yourself to God when you suffer. You could say, “Have yourself committed,” in a good way. Verse 19, “Wherefore”—this is the conclusion—“let them that suffer according to the will of God....”

I’ll just say this right now before I forget, this is why I love this section so much, is I grew up in a church that commonly taught that if you suffer, you’re a second-class Christian, you don’t have enough faith, you’re not spiritual enough, you’re not claiming what’s yours in Christ. When I saw this in the Bible, it was so liberating to me, “. . . suffer according to the will of God.” I heard all these sermons about health and wealth and prosperity and healing and money and all that stuff. I watched my own parents suffer many times financially, physically, and they were godly, wonderful Christians. It just didn’t compute. For me, when I saw this, “. . . suffer according to the will of God,” because these Word Faith, Health and Wealth, Prosperity preachers actually say that if you’re sick, you’re out of the will of God. If you’re struggling financially, you’re out of the will of God.

I had a friend that lived in Hawaii for years, and there’s a Calvary Chapel over there on the North Shore of Oahu, all surfers. It’s just a surf church. They show up for church in their surf trunks, their hair’s all wet, they go surfing before church. They’re just a bunch of hippie surfers but a neat fellowship. I was over there back in the 70s, and one guy, I don’t know how, got invited to speak at their church, and he was a Prosperity, Health and Wealth preacher. He got thrown into the pulpit, and he stepped up into the pulpit, and there’s this whole tent full of hippie surfer dudes in their trunks and flip flops and their t-shirts. The guy reaches in and pulls out his wallet, opens it up, and takes out a hundred dollar bill. I kid you not, he actually said, “If you are

a Christian, and you don't have at least a hundred dollars in your wallet, you're out of the will of God." You hear all the groans in the congregation, and they pulled him off the stage immediately. Praise God! The thought of, "If you don't have a hundred dollars in your wallet?" I mean, I thought, I've never been in God's will. I don't even have a wallet. I got a bar of surf wax in my trunks. I mean, a hundred dollars in my wallet, I'm out of the will of God? What kind of craziness is that? They obviously haven't read this passage or read Hebrews 11.

So, " . . . let them that suffer according to the will of God." Remind yourself, God's in control, God's got a purpose, God's got a design, God knows what He's doing. What do you do? Here it is, " . . . commit the keeping of their souls to him"—that is, God, and keep—"in well doing,"—that's what it means, keep doing well, keep doing what is right—"as unto a faithful Creator." I love that. Peter's summary directive for suffering readers are suffering is part of God's loving purpose and plan and will for our lives, " . . . suffer according to the will of God."

The word "commit" again is a banking term. It means continually entrusting oneself to God's protective care—continually entrusting yourself to God's protective care. You say, "Lord, I trust You." This is what it means to live by faith. It's 1 Peter 5:7, we'll get there in a couple weeks. It's, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." So, Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey. Then, keep doing well, verse 19, " . . . in well doing." We must leave to God all that depends on Him, trusting Him by faith, and think only of being faithful in all that depends on ourselves. Remember that He is, look at verse 19, " . . . a faithful Creator." I love that, " . . . a faithful Creator."

Someone said, "All that we see in creation teaches us to trust Him for all we cannot see and to remember what is hidden from us is not hidden from Him." Amen? Let's pray.