

5-24-20 NOTE: BE SURE TO MENTION GETTING READY FOR COMMUNION NEXT WEEK IN THE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sermon- Fiery Trials

Scripture- 1 Peter 4:12-16, CTW Psalm 68:1-10

Hymns- 689, 641

Theme- I have recently seen "chatter" that says since we are all in the midst of a Pandemic, there is no God and people are foolish to follow the myth that there is. Peter says that we should not be surprised by this...Dealing with trials and adversity are a part of everyone's life - some more than others. We don't enjoy suffering, and yet the Word of God teaches us that Followers of Christ are to rejoice in them and even be happy as they suffer ridicule. **Peter says it is all about checking your attitude! (Did your parents ever say that to you?...what result did that have? CHANGE?)**

I. Introduction: Rejoicing in Suffering?

Peter had spent considerable time in the preceding verses dealing with Christian character and conduct in the midst of a fallen world. He was well aware of the struggles and persecution many within the church faced.

Although they were forced to deal with adversity, they were also expected to maintain their integrity before men, presenting a positive witness for Christ.

Our text today continues that thought, but Peter takes their responsibilities in a different direction. Most believers in that day dealt with opposition from the world, knowing all too well the difficulties of being a committed Christian in the midst of a pagan culture.

Peter does not shy away from the truth, nor does he try to minimize the reality of their lives. He is very straightforward with the church. In fact, instead of trying to alter their focus, Peter dealt candidly with the sufferings they faced.

Peter breaks it down into two areas: Attitude and Fortitude.

II. Our Attitude in Suffering (12-14) – As Peter began to deal with the suffering believers faced, he addressed their **attitude** in the midst of suffering. Developing and maintaining a proper attitude in suffering would enable them to better navigate the difficulties they encountered. Consider:

A. The Reality (V12) –¹²Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Peter challenged the church in regard to their perception of trials and adversity. He urged them not to consider such difficulties as strange or unusual. No doubt, some would have felt as if they were being forced to deal with struggles that others had been able to avoid.

Sometimes in the middle of suffering we compare our trials to those of others...that is human nature

Peter assures us that these trials are not unusual, and we are not the first to encounter such difficulty. This was simply the reality of striving to live for the Lord in the midst of a wicked, perverted, and problem riddled culture.

Peter revealed another reality regarding these trials. Not only were they not the first to face such adversity, there was actually purpose in these trials.

God had allowed them to come into their lives in order to try their faith and strengthen their resolve. While our nature resists and despises trials, the Lord knows they are beneficial in our lives.

Through them we realize our weakness and learn dependence upon the Lord. As we endure faithful, our faith in Him grows.

While trials are never enjoyable at the moment, once they are over, they almost always produce stronger Christians who are more mature in the faith.

B. The Rejoicing (V13) –¹³But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

The challenge for believers continues as Peter calls on them to not only embrace the reality of suffering, but also rejoice in the midst of their suffering.

I know that trials are beneficial, but I find it difficult to rejoice in the midst of them. **However, that is expected of us.** This is easier when we realize that God has not only allowed the trial, but is planning to use it in order to make us stronger in the faith.

Peter also revealed an important aspect of our sufferings. As we suffer for our faith in Christ, we are partaking in His sufferings.

As we embrace the suffering we encounter for the Christ, we are following His example, submitting to the will of God for our lives in an effort to serve and honor Him.

While suffering is not enjoyable, it is supposed to be a great honor and privilege to identify with the sufferings of Jesus.

Remember His statement about picking up our cross daily.

Our rejoicing in trials provides great benefit as we walk with the Lord in this life, and it will produce great joy as we meet the Lord when He returns. **The result for us will be joy!**

The suffering we endure in this life will not compare to the glory that will be revealed when the Lord comes again. **2 Cor.4:17 – For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!**

C. The Reproach (V14a) –¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, then you are blessed; Again, contrary to human nature, Peter declared that our suffering in the Lord will result in great joy and even happiness.

Those to whom Peter had written would certainly be able to relate to suffering reproach for Christ. These had been forced to flee their homes because of their faith in Christ.

They lived a life of uncertainty and great difficulty, being rejected by the majority of society. They were pushed to the fringes of society, often impoverished and ridiculed simply because they had believed in Christ as Lord and Savior.

The nonbelieving world is watching! The spotlight is on us. We are called to a higher duty here! If you don't believe me, check out the chatter on social media!

This begs the question – **how is one happy when suffering?**

This all depends on one's perspective and attitude. Peter wants us to view our struggles through the lens of faith, not through what our eyes can see.

While they suffered greatly in this life for their faith, their suffering and commitment to Christ were not in vain. They endured difficulty here, but their eternal destiny was secure in Christ.

They had to come to the realization that temporary suffering was actually a small price to pay in light of eternal life in Christ. When they viewed their reproach through the perspective of faith, it was easier to endure, and they were even able to rejoice.

The same is true for us.

D. The Reward (V14b) – for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Here Peter described the gracious provision of the Lord for those who suffer for Him.

Many scholars agree this is the heart of the passage. Those who suffer for Christ never suffer alone.

Peter assured them, as they faced trials and suffering for Christ, they would receive the Spirit of God and His glory resting upon them.

Peter did not promise the Lord would prevent suffering, but he did reveal the Lord had promised to meet them in their suffering, and provide the provision of His Spirit to guide, guard, comfort, and enable them to endure.

I certainly don't pray for trials and suffering in my life, but there is a presence and provision from the Lord that is only experienced in the midst of those difficulties.

In fact, I am convinced we experience the Lord more intimately in those moments than at any other time in our lives. Trials are not enjoyable, but if we can experience His presence in the midst of

them, growing in our faith, being conformed to His image, then **we must agree they are beneficial!**

This is tough to consider, but I wonder how many trials we have wasted?

That's an odd question, but think about the principle – how often do we merely endure trials, never really seeking the Lord or drawing strength from Him, struggling through until the trial has ended. God may have desired to teach us a great lesson that would have a significant impact on our lives and faith, and yet we squandered such a gracious opportunity. **THINK ABOUT IT AND YOU MIGHT VIEW THIS PANDEMIC AS OPPORTUNITY!**

III. Our Fortitude in Suffering (V15-16) – After discussing the attitude believers are to possess in the midst of suffering, Peter then addressed how we are to endure in the midst of suffering. He referred to:

A. Our Purity (V15) –¹⁵If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

Peter revealed our suffering should never be caused by ungodly actions. Those who engaged in willful sin could expect to reap the consequences of their behavior, but that should never be the case for believers.

If the believer is to suffer, it should be in relation to their commitment to the faith, seeking to honor Christ rather than indulging the desires of the flesh.

When suffering comes, we should be able to take solace knowing it is for our faith in the Lord instead of rebellion against His plan and will for our lives.

B. Our Integrity (V16a) –¹⁶However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed. Unlike those whose behavior brought about suffering, Peter declared the Christian has no reason to be ashamed for their suffering for the faith.

This is one of only three times the word Christian is found within the New Testament. In that day, it was a name that often brought reproach and disdain.

Those among the world used it as a **slang term** to identify those who believed Jesus was the Christ. **Peter wanted the believers to embrace their faith**, while standing boldly for the Lord, being willing to identify with His suffering.

Many today are ridiculed for their faith. Has this Pandemic caused that for you?

There is no shame in identifying with Christ our Lord. We all have been in situations when we were uncomfortable, feeling as if we were the only believer within the group.

People expect us to have all the answers, but we don't...but we have something way better, we have Christ himself.

C. Our Testimony (16b) – but praise God that you bear that name.

When faced with opposition or ridicule for our faith, Peter encourages us to use that as an opportunity to bear witness of the grace of our Lord rather than allowing fear to silence our voice.

Our faithfulness to the Lord, especially in difficult situations, should provide a tremendous witness for our faith and Christ. These difficult moments should be viewed as opportunities rather than inconveniences.

Think about it this way: Light shines brightest in the darkest places.

These situations are never easy, but we must continually seek opportunities to let our light shine for the Lord. Being a faithful witness when we are forced to stand alone often bears great influence.

The people we interact with may never admit it publicly, but I think they will notice our commitment and it will make an impact in their lives.

We must commit to being a consistent witness, regardless of the situation or company we are among.

In conclusion, This is a difficult passage to consider. It is easy enough to understand, but difficult to put in practice. As believers

we must view our trials in light of God's plan and purpose for our lives, while striving to present a positive witness among unbelievers.

If you are struggling, come to the Lord for guidance and strength to endure! Amen? Let us pray...