

The Christian in a Hostile World Excelling In Our Attitude Toward God in Suffering (1 Pet. 4:12-19)

Intro: Peter in his epistle makes it clear that suffering is the inevitable lot of those who serve the Lord. Not only will they suffer the many problems common to humanity, they will also suffer unique problems because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

In this book Peter tells disciples everything they need to know to live in a hostile world.

In 1 Pet. 3:13-4:6 Peter tells the Christian what his attitude and response should be to his persecutors.

In 1 Peter 4:7-11 he tells us what our attitude and response should be toward each other in suffering.

And now in our text tonight, Peter expands the discussion by telling us what our attitude and response should be toward God when we suffer (4:12-19.)

Suffering often makes us have questions that relate to God. Is He supposed to let this happen? Why would He? What use could He make of such things? It's questions like these that Peter intends to answer.

When you suffer...

Don't be surprised by the fact that you suffer...

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; (1 Peter 4:12)

Do not be surprised!

Maybe some Christians might have thought that God would somehow protect His children from such evil doers, and would be surprised by the experience of being maligned or worse.

Or some might have been unable to conceive how a life so noble and loving could solicit persecution from others.

But Peter say, it should be expected.

God does not choose to protect us from the conflict of good and evil.

Instead He uses suffering to purify us.

Peter calls suffering for Christ's sake a fiery ordeal. The Greek word *purosus* refers to a process used in the refining of metals by applying fire to purify them.

Likewise suffering is allowed by God to determine the genuineness and quality of our faith. Just like fire purifies gold, so suffering purifies faith and indicates that it is real.

Cf. 1 Pet. 1:7 "the "proof of your faith being more precious than gold that is tried by fire..."

No Christian should make the decision to follow Jesus without hearing the words of the Master himself:

Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. (John 15:20)

but rather rejoice!

but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. (1 Peter 4:13)

To the degree you share the sufferings of Christ

This expression is a reminder first that our sufferings are those that Jesus suffered. They are sufferings for the doing what is right, not merely suffering because of life's harshness or our own evil deeds. The measure of our joy should be comparable to the measure of our sufferings for Christ's sake.

It astounds us to hear Peter say, "The more you suffer the more you should rejoice!"

Peter uses the present imperative--Keep on rejoicing.

But the reason is clear. It is because when Jesus is revealed in His heavenly glory at His final coming, those who have faithfully endured suffering for His name's sake will rejoice with exultation at His approval and reward.

Recognize what suffering says about you now!

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (1 Peter 4:14)

When we suffer, we need to think about not only what suffering means for our future, but also what it means for the present. Persecution is the indication of the presence of God's Spirit working in our lives.

Peter says rejoice "because the Spirit of glory and grace rests upon us!"

If the Spirit "rests" upon us, it means that there is in us permanent commitment to follow the leading of the Spirit.

However, it also means that those upon whom the Spirit rests will be reviled for the name of Christ.

Those so reviled will know that they are blessed.

The idea is not that we are "happy" at the suffering, but that we have an inner joy, "blesseness" in knowing that we are in the favor of God. Peter alludes, no doubt, to the beatitude of Jesus which he had heard on the Galilean hillside:

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12)

If there is enough of our Savior in us to cause us to share in His suffering, then that should cause us to rejoice as well. cf. the apostles in Ac. 5.

Don't be ashamed.....but rather glorify God in it!

By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God. (1 Peter 4:15-16)

There are some things for which people may suffer that ought to cause them to be ashamed, that is, if their suffering is for the sake of wrong-doing.

Peter may also be thinking of how the Christian might respond to mistreatment by doing those very things that unbelievers have done.

However to suffer as a Christian is to suffer because of our faith in Jesus and in the teachings he has given us.

If anyone suffers as a Christian, don't be ashamed.

To be ashamed is to be reluctant to acknowledge our faith in Jesus before others. It is to be embarrassed by his teaching and remain silent rather than let others know that we agree with it.

Remember Jesus' words:

"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38)

How could we be ashamed of the Lord knowing this? And Peter promises that if we are not ashamed now, we will reason to boast in a godly way in the end (with exultation).

Rather than allow hostility to back us down and shut us up, it can become the occasion to cause us to speak out for God and speak up for what is right. And in doing that we are "glorifying God".

By our faithful and loving lives, we are helping others to see His character, the brilliance of His thoughts and the perfections of His nature.

And all of it is because we suffer "in that name."

Put your trust in God in doing what is right!

For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. (1 Peter 4:17-19)

Peter reveals that a time of great persecution was on the horizon. Such persecutions could be considered a time of judgment on God's people to purify and discipline them. They should be seen in that light as the attempts of a loving God to perfect and prepare them for their eternal life with Him

In the face of these persecutions, Peter could say it is with difficulty that the righteous are saved. In other words, it is hard. Doing what is right is not easy, but difficult.

The KJV "scarcely" might leave the wrong impression, viz. the idea that a Christian just barely makes it into heaven. The context is the pain and difficulty of discipline.

However, if that is true with the Christian, then what would be the outcome for those who do not believe at all and do not obey God? These persecutions and difficulties would declare the greater severity with which God would punish those who were not in His house and who did not obey the gospel. So Peter urges all who suffer to entrust their souls to a faithful God.

“Commit” or “trust” conveys the idea of making a deposit. It means that we put our souls in His hands believing that He knows what is best.

“Faithful” reminds us that God, even when we are suffering, is a trustworthy God. He will always do what is right and what is best for His people.

“in doing what is right” remind us that it is only when we stay committed to truth that we can receive the blessings God offers us.

Conclusion: Sometimes when we read those horrifying stories of persecution we may not see in them the love or care of God. But even they were the manifestation of a loving God who allows all things to work for the good and the salvation of His people. At the same time they become the evidence of God’s justice in punishing eternally those who do not know and obey Him.

What is your attitude when you have to suffer for Christ's sake? If you were to be ridiculed for being a Christian, or left out of someone's plans, or lost an association, or perhaps even were discriminated against on the job, how would you view this? What if we had to face governmental persecution for our faith? How would we handle it?