

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The Fiery Trial 1 Peter 4:12-19 Part 2

Those of us here this morning who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ are a part of a redeemed community. We have been set free from the slave market of sin and call God “Father.” Hopefully the world will have the opportunity to view the powerful and positive impact that such a transformation has had on our lives. And there is no better opportunity for the world to witness the reality of that transformation than when we as individual Christians or the church as a whole are suffering **“for the name of Christ.”** I believe that this morning/evening we will have the opportunity to see how this actually can be accomplished.

We have begun to examine **1 Pet. 4:12-19**. This particular passage of scripture contains four different features involved in a proper response to suffering. In order to refresh our minds let us read **VV. 12-14** which contains two of those four features. **“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; (13) 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. (14) If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”**

The first feature involved in a proper response to suffering was to “expect it.” Look at **V. 12**. How does the verse start? **“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you.”** We as believers should understand that if the world hated Christ it will hate us. If the world persecuted Christ it will persecute us.

Theologically we should not expect to suffer less when we come to Christ, but actually more because we will suffer not only as a man but also as a follower of Christ and History has demonstrated this to be true. The church throughout the centuries has suffered as it has sought to live obediently to Christ. And we need to appreciate the fact that it may also happen to us either individually or corporately. There is a lot of truth in the phrase, “What goes around comes around.”

Though suffering persecution certainly is not pleasant nor something that any of us would want to seek out Peter tells us that it comes upon us for our testing. Let us continue to read the verse, **“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing.”** Testing will accomplish two very positive things in our lives.

1) Proving us - **1 Pet. 1:6-7**

2) Purifying us - **James 1:2-4**

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If we as believers understand that suffering as the followers of Christ is not only necessary, but profitable it allows us to accept the fire of persecution. This ability on the part of the individual believer as well as the corporate body to calmly accept the fiery ordeal of persecution without a bitter and hateful spirit toward those who are inflicting the pain or the Lord who has permitted it can be a powerful testimony to the transformation that has taken place in our lives when we decided to embrace Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

But there is more. What was the first feature of a proper response to persecution? ACCEPT IT. Now we will consider the second feature involved in giving a proper response to suffering. And that is to a REJOICE IN IT.

REJOICE IN IT

It is one thing to be able to be at peace in suffering, but it is quite another thing to rejoice in suffering. The former is impressive, but the latter is mind boggling. The world certainly would be impressed to view a Christian or the church at peace in the midst of their persecution but certainly the world would be even more astounded to view a Christian not only at peace but rejoicing in the midst of their suffering for the name of Christ.

Certainly we see the power of this demonstrated in the story of the Philippian jailer in **Acts 16**. Paul and Silas had just crossed over from the continent of Asia into Europe. They were in Philippi and Lydia had become their first convert. But things turned bad very quickly. How did this happen? Paul and Silas cast out a demon from a young slave girl who had made a lot of money for her masters by telling fortunes. When they cast out the spirit they in effect destroyed their business and they were not happy campers. So in **Acts 16:19** we read, **“But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, (20) and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, “These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, (21) and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans.” (22) And the crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them, and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. (23) And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; (24) and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks. (25) But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them (26) and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s chains were unfastened. (27) and when the jailer had been roused out of sleep and had seen the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. (28) but Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here!” Clearly this passage is written in such a way that we would have to conclude that the prisoners had been so moved by what they had seen and heard in Paul and Silas that they chose to remain with them than to take advantage of the earthquake to seek their freedom. Our ability to rejoice in the midst of suffering, in the midst of persecution can be a powerful positive testimony to the reality of the transformation that takes place when we come to Christ. Our ability to rejoice in the midst of suffering and persecution will set us apart from the world and it will challenge their thinking and their beliefs.**

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Certainly it is obvious that such a response to difficulty can be very impressive but where does such a response come from? What was in the minds of Paul and Silas as they were singing in that prison? **VV. 13-14 of 1 Pet. 4** may give us some clue. Let us read **VV. 13-14, “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. (14) If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”**

As we read these two verses we see that there is a “present” as well as a “future” aspect of Christians rejoicing and the two are inseparably linked.

Let us look first of all at the present aspect. When we share in Christ’s suffering we are commanded to rejoice. Let us look at **V. 13, “But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing.”** What does Peter mean when he speaks about sharing in the suffering of Christ? Let me ask you a question? Was Jesus hated by the world? And the answer is yes. Was Jesus persecuted by the world? And the answer is yes. Now let me ask you this question, “What should we as a faithful follower of Christ expect as we become more conformed to Jesus both in terms of personal righteousness and in terms of our work?” We should expect that we will experience what? **“The sufferings of Christ.”** We should expect that same kind of treatment that the world poured out on Christ will be poured out upon us. The sufferings of Christ are those sufferings that come to us as a result of living as Jesus lived.

And to whatever degree we share in the sufferings of Christ we should rejoice. Or in other words the greater our suffering as a follower of Christ the greater our joy should be. Why? It would appear to me that Peter is once again emphasizing the point he made in **1 Pet. 1:6-7** where he made it clear to us that when we suffer as a disciple of Christ it proves the genuineness of our faith. Therefore sharing in the sufferings of Christ testify to us of the reality of our union with Christ. What more precious treasure could we possess than the unshakable confidence that all is well with our soul and that following our earthly pilgrimage will be a glorious homecoming?

In light of this knowledge that sharing in the sufferings of Christ testify to us of the reality of our union with Christ what should our prayer be? All we have to do is to look at the testimony of Paul in **Phil. 3:7-11** **“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (8) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, (9) and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, (10) that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.....”** What should our prayer be? We need to be praying for the privilege of sharing in the sufferings of Christ. We need to be praying for the opportunity to share in the fellowship of his sufferings. And as God answers this prayer what does the Lord through Peter command us to do? REJOICE!

So many professed believers are unwilling to place themselves at risk in living out a life of obedience. They are unwilling to look foolish, they are unwilling to experience embarrassment, they are unwilling to risk failure, they are unwilling to risk incurring the disapproval or wrath of friends or family members.

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There are unwilling to risk the loss of a life of ease and comfort. This is a tragedy. Why would I say this? It is because they will never know the joy that comes from sharing in the sufferings of Christ. They will never have the joy of being reassured that they truly are a faithful follower of Christ. And this present rejoicing or lack of such will impact our anticipation of the future coming of Christ.

Let us look again at **V. 13**, “**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.**” The context makes it clear that in the Christian life, there is a close connection between present resolve (to rejoice when we share the sufferings of Christ) and future result (which is rejoicing with exultation at the revelation of His glory).

The implication is clear, for those of us who count it a privilege to share in the sufferings of Christ and appreciate the positive benefits of those sufferings and are therefore able to be obedient to this command to rejoice in the midst of them will be well prepared on that day when we will meet Jesus face to face. And having been well prepared what will be our experience on that day? We will “**rejoice with exultation.**”

To rejoice with exultation simply communicates the idea being jubilant, skipping about, boiling over with shouts of delight.

Doesn't this make sense? When you are well prepared for an event it frees you to enjoy the majesty of it without distraction. We are going into the Christmas holidays, if we are well prepared for it we will be able to enjoy the fullness of all that this holiday can offer us. And so it is with the coming of Christ. Someone may ask are there those who call themselves Christians who may not enjoy this event nearly so much. And I believe that the answer is yes. What does **1 John 2:28** tell us, “**And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.**”

Christmas is a wonderful holiday and certainly we want to be well prepared to enjoy the fullness of all that this holiday can offer us, But this event pales in comparison to that coming day when we shall see Jesus face to face. And I want to be one of those that will rejoice with exultation.

I must therefore apply myself to being obedient to this command. I want to be obedient to this command, but this is so difficult and we are so weak. There is no hope for any of us to be those who will skip about and boil over with shouts of delight at the coming of Christ.

Let us look at **V. 14**, “**If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.**” There is hope. Peter makes it clear to these readers that even as they are being reviled for the name of Christ, they are blessed, and certainly can rejoice because the “**Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.**” There is little debate that Peter is referring in this phrase to the Holy Spirit. What we see therefore is this that God, who sent His Son, also sends the Holy Spirit or in other words the Spirit of glory and of God on those who suffer as loyal followers of His Son.

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This special grace ministered by God's spirit I believe is clearly evident in the biblical record of the death of Stephen. Stephen was the first martyr of the church. He had committed himself to the bold proclamation of the gospel. He had been brought before the same council that had been instrumental in orchestrating the death of Jesus in order to answer to various accusations against Him. And yet all the while as he was sharing in the sufferings of Jesus the Spirit of glory and of God was upon Him. He was not afraid he was filled with boldness. He was not confused but was speaking with power. Whatever he needed he was supplied.

I would like to read **VV. 54-60**, **“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. (55) But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; (56) and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (57) But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse. (58) And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. (59) And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” (He was not afraid. He was not about to shrink away in shame. He was well prepared to enter into the presence of the Lord with confidence) (60) And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” And having said this, he fell asleep.**

CONCLUSION

One day we will see Him face to face, and I do not want to shrink away. Let us commit ourselves once again to zealously seek to live righteous lives. Let us not be afraid of sharing in the sufferings of Jesus but rather if it comes be prepared to rejoice in it for our sake, the world's sake and for the Lord's sake.

Patiently enduring until Jesus takes us home.