

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **The Fiery Trial 1 Peter 4:12-19 Part 3**

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.”**

The reason why Christians are able to respond so much differently than the world to suffering is because of our much greater understanding of suffering in terms of God’s overall plan for our lives. Being equipped in this way separates us out from the world who only see their pain in the midst of suffering and nothing else.

**1 Pet. 4:12-19** is one of many passages that the Lord has given us to equip us to respond properly to suffering. Let us turn in our Bibles to **1 Pet. 4:12-19** and read this wonderful passage. **“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. (15) By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; (16) but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God. (17) 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? (18) And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? (19) Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”** Within this passage four different features involved in a proper response to suffering are given.

First of all as Christians we need to understand that we should expect suffering. What did **verse 12** tell us, **“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.”** We do not believe that just because we are a part of God’s family that we will be protected from suffering. We understand suffering, and suffering in the name of Christ is inevitable. This understanding helps us to give a proper and righteous response to suffering when in fact it does come.

But not only as Christians do we need to understand that we should expect suffering, but when in fact suffering comes we are to rejoice in it. Let us read **VV. 13-14** **“but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that 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.”**

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There is no confusion as to what God expects from us when in fact the suffering that we are anticipating does come. We are commanded to rejoice. How could we not rejoice when we as the followers of Christ recognize that we are sharing in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings? When this occurs it assures us of our future joyful celebration at the revelation of Christ's.

What other features need to be present in our lives if we are going to have a proper response to suffering? When suffering comes we need to evaluate it.

### EVALUATE IT

When we are suffering we need to try and figure out why we are suffering? If we are suffering for righteousness sake we have just learned that we are to rejoice in it, but if we are not it might be that rather than rejoicing we may need to do a whole lot of confessing.

We all suffer, but unfortunately much of the suffering we might experience during the course of our lives may have more to do with our own wickedness rather than with the pursuit of righteousness. We must commit ourselves to living our lives in such a way that we are not bringing suffering upon ourselves unnecessarily. This is Peter's point in **V. 15**. Let us read this verse, "**By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler.**" How much more clear could Peter be.

As you look at the list of unacceptable behaviors, that Christians should avoid, it must be noted that there are four different terms used. And I believe that these four terms can be divided into two major groups.

The first group includes behaviors that society has deemed unacceptable legally. Certainly murder is clearly a crime punishable under the law by all civilized nations of the world, certainly stealing is also. But what about the word "**evildoer?**" What kind of behavior does Peter have in mind when he uses this term? I believe that Peter again is referring to criminal behavior not in a specific sense, but in a very broad sense. I believe that this is made clear by Peter's earlier use of the word in **1 Pet. 2:13-14** where he said, "**Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.**"

It is very important for us as believers that we are very concerned about living our lives within the confines of the law. We should consider it unacceptable to suffer as a law breaker no matter how minor the offense might be. This would include even a parking violation.

We have these signs posted by the city on 35th West which say, "No parking anytime." The reason for this sign is because it is now a dedicated bike lane. We have asked the city to replace those signs with signs that read except Sundays in order to use the street for badly needed parking. Up to this point they have refused to do this. Should we ignore the signs and park there anyway risking the possibility that they might in fact ticket our cars. If we would do this, we would in fact be suffering as an evildoer. This is simply should not be an option for us.

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After listing various criminal behaviors in descending order of their severity it appears that Peter shifts his attention away from criminal behavior to a totally different kind of behavior.

The second group would include behaviors that the Lord has deemed unacceptable socially. Notice the one behavior that is isolated by Peter as an example of the kind of behavior that we should avoid. Peter calls it “troublesome meddling” (ALLOTRIEPIKOPOS). What does Peter mean by this? It comes from the word “ALLOTRIOS” which means “belonging to another” and the noun “EPISKOPOS” which means “overseer or bishop.” Therefore this refers to a person who acts as an overseer in matters that belong to another.

Wives should not attempt to function in the role of the husband, the children should not attempt to function in the role of the parents, students should not attempt to function in the role of the teacher, employees should not attempt to function in the role of the employer and so on and so on. We need to mind our own business. We need to stay in the area of our own responsibility. Isn't this the way that you would like to be treated? If this is so then let us behave accordingly.

When we can identify the person or persons that are in charge, our role should not be an antagonist or an obstructionist but rather an encourager. We will have a pretty good idea of whether or not we are being successful in this pursuit by the way the person or persons who are ultimately responsible for a particular area are responding to us. If we find those in a particular area of responsibility are getting agitated with our “great wisdom” or “supernatural discernment” or worse yet becoming weary of our “well motivated and righteous actions” then we would be well served by changing our attitude as well as our actions.

This is not a new theme in the scriptures. In **1 Thess. 4:9-11** it says, **“Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; (10) for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, (11) and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you.”** This same theme is repeated in **2 Thess. 3:11** and **1 Tim. 5:13**. Obviously the reason why this theme is so often repeated is because it is a common problem. **WE NEED TO EXAMINE OURSELVES AND SEE IF YOU ARE IN FACT GUILTY OF BEING THIS KIND OF PERSON.**

If we are suffering as a Christian, hopefully as we examine the reason for that suffering we will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are suffering for the right reasons. If this is so rather than feeling shame we will be filled with joyful praise. Let us read **V. 16 “but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.”**

Suffering is more or less inevitable, but this does not mean that suffering needs to produce negative feelings such as shame, in fact it should not. What does Peter say, **“but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed ....”** Suffering can actually be a springboard into something very positive. Again let us look at **V. 16 “but in that name let him glorify God.”** Glorifying God is a very positive thing.

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The NAS may be somewhat confusing as to the precise meaning of what Peter has in mind but the NIV is very clear. The NIV reads **“but praise God that you bear that name.”** What name? The name “Christian.” When we as Christians suffer we should not be filled with shame because of our misdeeds, but rather with a spirit of thanksgiving.

Why? What very specifically does Peter have in mind? The reason, according to our author is quite simple. Let us read **V. 17**, **“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? God’s judgment has already been cited several times in 1 Peter (1:17; 2:23; 4:5-6).** And “the judgment” it would appear refers to the final judgment (**Acts 24:25; Rom. 2:2-3; Heb. 6:2; 2 Pet. 2:3; Jude 4; Rev. 17:1; 18-20**), a judgment that the OT indicated would begin with God’s people and in God’s own temple for the purpose of purification but which would ultimately spread to all the people of the world in a final climatic judgment (**Jer. 25:29; Mal. 3:1-6**). Though these OT passages refer specifically to the Jewish nation and their literal physical temple it appears that Peter extracting a principle from these OT Scriptures applies it to the church which is also God’s people and who make up spiritual temple in the world today (**2:5**).

Peter sees that not only is God’s judgment upon the nation of Israel and the destruction of their temple a foreshadowing of a future greater judgment, but Peter also sees that the sufferings being endured by the church, who are also God’s people, are also a part of that same foreshadowing of final judgment. This realization should not cause us fear, but a sense of gratitude for God because we recognize that though it is bad for us now as the Lord seeks to purify us it will only get better. And yet we also recognize that for others who are not a part of the church whatever sufferings that they may now be enduring will only get worse.

What separates the church, who may be presently suffering as Christians but have the hope of future bliss, from those who may be suffering now but have no such hope? What separates them is their response to the gospel. Christians have heard and responded to the demand of the gospel to turn from self centered living to embrace Christ as their Lord and Savior. While those who have chosen not to become Christians have heard the gospel but have not responded to the demand of the gospel which is to turn from self centered living to embrace Christ as their Lord and Savior. THE POINT IS “IF GOD IS HARD ON CHRISTIANS, HOW SEVERE INDEED WILL HE BE WITH THOSE WHO REJECT HIM? CHRISTIANS THOUGH SUFFERING ARE BETTER OFF THAN THEY APPEAR.”

But just in case you may have missed Peter’s point Peter backs up what he just said in **V. 18** with his own rendition of **Prov. 11:31**. And what was that rendition? **“And if it is with difficulty that the righteous are saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?”**

As we suffer let us not feel shame but rather let us glorify God praising Him. Knowing that for those who have been obedient to the gospel this suffering is necessary for our purification in preparation for our glorious and joyful entrance into the presence of God and though this period of suffering is difficult, let us remind ourselves, it in no way compares to the suffering that will be experienced by those who choose to be disobedient to the gospel of God who will meet God not as their father but rather as their judge.

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Let us thank the Lord for the better days that are ahead for us. But if you happen to be here and know that you have yet responded to the demands of the gospel which would be to turn from your centered way of living and embrace Jesus as your Lord and Savior there would be no better time than now to do so.

If we are going to respond to suffering in a positive and righteous way our response must be characterized by these three different features: (1) We must expect suffering (2) We must rejoice in suffering (3) We must evaluate the source of our suffering. And now finally,

### WE MUST ENTRUST OURSELVES TO GOD IN THE MIDST OF IT

If we are going to successfully respond to suffering this last point I believe is the most important of all. Let us read **V. 19, “Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”**

The word entrust is the same word used of Jesus when he entrusted His spirit into the hands of His Father.

But someone may ask but how do we in fact do this? How do we entrust ourselves to the Lord? The verse is very clear look at the verse once again. **“Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”** When we commit ourselves in doing what is right we entrust ourselves to God.

Jeffrey Bull at the age of 30 had been in prison 3 years and 2 months by Chinese communists. Part of the time he had been held in solitary confinement and was half starved, threatened, badgered, and subjected to various brain washing techniques. And yet though he was in truth suffering as a Christian entrusted Himself to his faithful creator. Even in a prison cell by writing the following five stanzas.

Let not thy face grow dim dear God nor sense of Thee depart  
Let not the memory of Thy Word burn low within my heart  
Let not my spirit Lord grow numb through loneliness or fears  
Let not my heart to doubt succumb and keep my eyes from tears  
Let not the distance come between as months and years increase  
Let not the darkness close me in and let me not lose Thy peace  
Let not the pressure of the foe crush out my love for Thee  
Let not the tiredness and the woe eclipse Thy victory  
For Thy joy is my joy and my hope Thy day  
And Thy kingdom gracious God shall not pass away.

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### CONCLUSION

What did Jeffrey Bull do in the midst of his suffering, He entrusted himself to the Creator by once again committing himself in doing what is right. Let us do that this morning all of us. Truly desiring that if we do in fact suffer that we will not suffer for doing that which is wrong but rather what is right.