

1 Peter 4:12-14

Introduction

This morning, we start the closing section of Peter's letter where he revisits many of the same themes that he's already explored in the rest of his letter. What we see is that Peter really wants to make sure that these things are cemented in our thinking. He wants to make sure that the things we've learned are imbedded firmly in our hearts.

But even as he repeats himself and reminds us of so much that's already been said, he'll also add some things that he hasn't said before – always encouraging us, and strengthening us, and seeking to establish us more firmly in the faith.

So, he begins in verse 12 of chapter four:

I. 1 Peter 4:12 — Beloved, do not be surprised at the **burning [fire; *pyrosis*]** when it comes upon you to **test** you, as though something strange were happening to you.

All the way back in the introduction, in chapter one verse 7, Peter spoke of “the **tested** genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is **tested by fire [*pyr*].” And now, here, in the first verse of Peter's conclusion, he returns to this same theme – the theme of the “burning fire” which comes upon us to “test” us. Peter compares the persecution and sufferings and mistreatment that Christians endure as sojourners and foreigners in this world to the burning heat of a fiery furnace.**

The “fire” metaphor isn't emphasizing how bad or how severe the sufferings are. It's not like Peter's only talking about the suffering of being martyred or burned at the stake. The point of the “fire” metaphor is actually to emphasize the true nature of all our sufferings and of any kind of persecution or mistreatment that we may ever experience as Christians – whether small or big. The suffering Peter has in mind is any kind of pain or discomfort that's the result of living as sojourners and foreigners in the midst of an unbelieving world. The word for “burning fire” is used only two other times in the New Testament (Rev. 18:9, 18) and only once in Peter's Greek translation of the Old Testament. It's probably this passage in the Old Testament that Peter has in mind.

➤ Proverbs 27:21 [LXX] — Fire is the trial for silver and gold...

Just as the fire in the furnace tests metals, so also persecution and suffering—any trial associated with living as sojourners and foreigners in this unbelieving world—is a burning fire that tests us. We know that some things are burned up and consumed by fire—things like wood, and hay, and straw, while other materials are melted in the fire but not destroyed. So, the piece of wood that's been shaped and painted to look just like the real gold nugget that sits beside it will be very quickly exposed for what it really is in the flames of the fire. It's whatever passes through the fire and survives the fire that's proved to be the genuine article (gold, silver, precious stones), while everything that's consumed and burned up in the fire is proved to be nothing more than wood, or hay, or straw. (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-14) So, the first thing that the testing fire does is to

separate between what is genuine and real, and that which pretends to be genuine and real, but is not. The first thing the fire does is it authenticates—it reveals and displays for all to see—the tested genuineness of my faith in Christ.

Now, for some, this burning fire comes earlier, and for some, later – maybe not even until the return of Christ. But in the end, there is no profession of faith that can ever escape this testing. In the end, every human being and every profession of faith must pass through the burning fire so that it might be tried and proven and found to be what it really is – whether the genuine article that is far more precious than gold that still ultimately perishes (cf. 1:7) or a superficial and false profession. Certainly, this should cause every single one of us to be diligent to examine ourselves to see if we truly are in the faith. (2 Cor. 13:5) It's a simple question that should never cause us paranoia or terror, and yet it's also a most serious question of eternal significance. Have I truly confessed and repented of my sin? Am I truly trusting in Jesus and his finished work upon the cross? And do I truly see in my life the fruit of the Holy Spirit who dwells within me? By God's saving grace, when the burning heat of the fire comes (and it does always come), will I pass safely through that fire and not be burned up?

But the fire does more than this. It not only separates between the genuine article and what is not genuine, but in the very process of doing this the fire is also refining and purifying all that proves to be a genuine faith. The fire doesn't just test and prove what we already are because of God's grace, it also works to remove the sin and impurities (the dross) that still remain within us. Peter said at the beginning of this chapter:

➤ 1 Peter 4:1b–2 — Whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

The fires of persecution and suffering—any trial associated with living as sojourners and foreigners in this unbelieving world, even just being rejected and labeled as a social misfit by the world—these fires force us to be constantly choosing between our human passions on the one hand and the will of God on the other. And so even as the burning fire reveals what we already are, it also transforms us into what we will one day be.

When we can see persecution, and mistreatment, and suffering in this light—as this fire that tests us, revealing what we really are and transforming us into what we will one day be—we will see clearly why we should never be surprised at trials and sufferings in this world as though something strange were happening to us. We should not be taken off guard, or confused and bewildered, or in any way question God's faithfulness to us or His love for us. Instead, we should do the opposite. As one commentator says, “our sufferings are not a sign of God's absence, but [rather] of His [redeeming,] purifying presence.” (Johnson; quoted in Schreiner) So Peter says: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the burning fire when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you...” And then he goes on to say something crazy and amazing and wonderful:

II. 1 Peter 4:13 — But rejoice [*chairō*] insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice [*chairō*] and be glad/exult [*agalliao*] when his glory is revealed.

Once again, Peter's reminding us of things that we've already reflected on in chapter one.

- 1 Peter 1:5–9 — [You are those] who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice [*chairo*], though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice [*agalliao*] with joy [*chara*] that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

As Christians, we are called to a deep and abiding, and a full and overflowing joy. Jesus said:

- John 15:11 (cf. 16:24; 17:13) — These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

This isn't an artificial joy that we work up and stir up and try hard to feel. This joy is simply the natural, inevitable result of our salvation and the hope that we have. And so when we learn to see even in our sufferings our salvation and our hope—the burning fire that reveals what we really are and transforms us into what we will one day be—then won't we also be learning to rejoice even in our sufferings? (Mat. 5:12; Rom. 5:1-5; James 1:2-4) Do we understand this? Are we truly discerning this?

Already, in chapter one (1:11), chapter two (2:21-24), chapter three (3:18), and chapter four (4:1) Peter has reflected a great deal on *Christ's* sufferings. Any persecution and mistreatment and suffering we endure as sojourners and foreigners in this world can only be rightly seen against the backdrop of these sufferings of Christ for us – both as our substitute and also as our pattern and example. And now, Peter sums all this up by describing our suffering as a sharing in, or a partnering and fellowship in [*koinoneo*] the sufferings of Christ. (cf. Phil. 3:10-11; *koinonia*) The point obviously isn't that our sufferings have any of their own saving power. Our sufferings can't atone for sin for many reasons, and praise God they need not atone for any sins because the sufferings of Christ have already atoned for all. On the other hand, if all Peter means to say is that our sufferings are “like” Christ's sufferings, then why does he use this peculiar language of actually *sharing in* (or, fellowshipping in) Christ's sufferings? It's because he really wants us to see what he's been trying to help us see all throughout this letter: Our suffering as sojourners and foreigners in the world is the sign of our salvation because we see in our suffering the sign of our union with Christ – we truly have followed in His footsteps and therefore we truly do share in all the saving benefits of His suffering in our place. Our sharing in—or fellowshipping in—the sufferings of Christ proves and demonstrates to us our union with Christ, and so it's also a wonderful proof and assurance to us that we will also one day share in His **glory**.

Why do we rejoice in our sufferings now? Peter answers: *So that* we may also rejoice and exult when Christ's glory is revealed. What Peter's saying is that the only way to truly endure and persevere through sufferings as sojourners and foreigners in the world is to learn the “secret” of rejoicing in those very sufferings as the sign of our salvation. Do you see how black and white this is? So on the one hand, there are those who rejoice in sufferings; on the other hand, there are

those who compromise and ultimately deny the faith, and Peter knows of nothing in between. On the one hand, there's the Peter who denies three times that he knows who Jesus is. (Mat. 26:69-75) On the other hand, there's the Peter who rejoiced along with the other disciples that he was counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. (Acts 5:41) Once again, Peter knows of nothing in between. To rejoice *in* suffering *is* to persevere through suffering. To rejoice in suffering *today* is to **know** that we will also *one day* rejoice and exult when Christ's glory is revealed.

Do we know in our hearts today the eschatological joy of that future day when Christ's glory will be revealed? And do you see clearly, now, that there is a sense in which this eschatological joy of the future can only be most fully tasted today in suffering – or at the very least in the conscious determination and resolve to always choose suffering rather than sin? (cf. 4:1) Peter goes on, now, to reinforce this truth in a really powerful and wonderful way.

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

Here, again, we have a reminder of something Peter said earlier, in chapter three verse 14:

➤ 1 Peter 3:14 — Even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed.

It sounds completely wrong, but Peter explains again why it's actually right— because when we suffer for righteousness' sake, and when we're reviled for the name of Christ (ostracized, mocked, labeled as judgmental and intolerant, or “weird,” or a social misfit), this is nothing less than the sign that the Spirit of glory and of God is resting upon us.

Remember that in the last verse, this “glory” (the glory of Christ's appearing) was something still future; and yet the joy we will have when that glory is revealed is a joy that we can taste of even today. Well, now in this verse we see that even the *glory* of that future day—even the glory of Christ's future appearing—is something that we can somehow taste of even today. But how can this be possible?

That expression, “because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you,” is a really strange expression in English, but it's even more so in Greek. So, would you want to take any guesses as to why Peter writes in this strange and awkward way? Once again, Peter's quoting from the Old Testament Scriptures. And why does he do this? He never does this just for the sake of a “proof text,” but always because he would anchor our joy—and our faith and our hope—more firmly and root it more deeply.

Isaiah chapters 11 and 12 are wonderful chapters all about the coming of the Messiah and the beauty and the power and the glory of His kingdom – of His rule and His reign. To feel the full impact of Peter's words, we really need to be familiar with all of Isaiah 11 and 12 so I would encourage you to go home this afternoon and read these chapters for yourself. The first two verses of chapter 11 are familiar to many:

➤ Isaiah 11:1–2 — There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. **And the Spirit of God [LXX] shall rest upon him**, the Spirit of

wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

And now what does Peter do? He takes this Scripture and changes the future tense to a present tense and the third person (“him”) to a second person (“you”). “The Spirit of God **shall [in that future day]** rest upon **him**” in Isaiah becomes in Peter, “The Spirit... of God **rests [now in the present]** upon **you**.”¹ What an awesome miracle this is! Remember what happened when Jesus was baptized:

- Matthew 3:16 — And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming [to rest] on him.

And now Peter says that the same Spirit of God that rests upon Christ the King (in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy) also rests upon you and me.

Now think about it: In Isaiah who is this Spirit of God? Is He not truly the Spirit of **glory**? In Isaiah chapters 11-12 we see the Messiah, anointed by the Spirit of God, ushering in an everlasting kingdom of righteousness (Isa. 11:1-5), and peace, (Isa. 11:6-16), and joy. (Isa. 12:1-6; cf. Rom. 14:17) The wicked are destroyed, the righteous are rewarded, the wolf dwells with the lamb, the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, God’s people draw water from the wells of salvation with joy, and they all say in that day:

- Isaiah 12:3-6 — “Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

Do you see how in Isaiah the “Spirit of God” who rests upon the Messiah is truly also the “Spirit of glory”? And so it’s in light of this, and also because Peter has just spoken in the previous verse (v. 13) about the day when Christ’s “**glory**” will be revealed that he now “inserts”² that word “**glory**” into his quotation of Isaiah. “If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit **of glory** and of God rests upon you.”

Brothers and sisters, the Spirit that Isaiah said would one day rest upon the Messiah and that even now rests upon Christ and will empower and enable the coming of His glorious kingdom—that Spirit rests even now upon us, and so even as we taste today of the eschatological joy of the future, so we also already share today in the eschatological glory of the future. Whether we always “feel” this to be true or not, this is a fact, Peter says, because the Spirit of that future,

¹ Isaiah 11:2 — **καὶ ἀναπαύσεται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ**, πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ συνέσεως, πνεῦμα βουλήs καὶ ἰσχύος, πνεῦμα γνώσεως καὶ εὐσεβείας.

¹ Peter 4:14 — εἰ ὀνειδίξεσθε ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ, μακάριοι, ὅτι **τὸ τῆs δόξης καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἀναπαύεται**.

² It is evident from the Greek text in the above footnote that Peter does not actually insert the word “glory” but rather adds it to the beginning of the clause.

eschatological glory—the Spirit of God—is, even now, resting upon us. So listen, now, to what Paul says in Corinthians and Romans and Ephesians.

- 2 Corinthians 1:21–22 — It is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us **and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.**
- 2 Corinthians 5:4–5 — For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. **He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.**
- Romans 8:23 — Not only the creation, but we ourselves, **who have the firstfruits of the Spirit**, groan inwardly as we **wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**
- Ephesians 1:13–14 (cf. Rom. 8:23-24) — In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were **sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it**, to the praise of his glory.

Do we know in our hearts today the eschatological joy and glory of the future? And do you see clearly, now, that there is a sense in which this eschatological joy and glory of the future can only be most fully tasted today in suffering – or at least in the conscious determination and resolve to always choose suffering as sojourners and foreigners in this world rather than sin? (cf. 4:1) This is when we know that the Spirit of glory and of God is resting upon us.

Throughout the New Testament, but especially in 1 Peter, suffering and glory always go together – only the glory always so far outweighs the suffering as to make even the worst and most prolonged sufferings only “light and momentary” in the end. (1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Cor. 4:17; Rom. 8:18) A biblical theology of suffering is ultimately a theology of glory. For all the numerous references in 1 Peter to suffering and persecution (1:6, 11; 2:4, 12, 15, 18-24; 3:1, 6, 9, 14-18; 4:1, 4, 12-16, 19; 5:1, 8-10), do you know how many references there are in Peter to “glory”? Besides the two that we have here in our passage this morning, there are seven others (cf. 1:3-5, 13; 4:7; 5:6):

- 1 Peter 1:7 — ...so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and **glory** and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
- 1 Peter 1:11 — ... [the prophets were] inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent **glories.**
- 1 Peter 1:21 — ...through him [you] are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him **glory**, so that your faith and hope are in God.
- 1 Peter 4:11 — ...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong **glory** and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
- 1 Peter 5:1 — I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the **glory** that is going to be revealed...
- 1 Peter 5:4 — When the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of **glory...**

- 1 Peter 5:10 — After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal **glory** in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Conclusion

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the burning [fire] when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his **glory** is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of **glory** and of God rests upon you.”