

## Hope PCA Sermon: April 21, 2024 *"The Name That Glorifies God" (1 Peter 4:12-16)*

Rev. Martin Hedman

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Well, this morning we continue in 1 Peter chapter 4. We'll be looking at verses 12 through 16. Just about 24 years ago, the very first sermon that I preached in seminary in a class on preaching was this very same text. I will not be preaching that sermon this morning. I look back at it, it's not bad. It's not good either. Hopefully this is a better word. But this is a wonderful text. I chose it back then because it spoke quite personally to me. But I think it's certainly applicable to each and every one of us as we live and try to live for God and for Christ.

So if you would, please stand as we honor God's word and its reading. Let us be attentive to it as we hear it, for this is the very living Word of our living God. 1 Peter 4 verses 12 through 16:

<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. <sup>15</sup> But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. <sup>16</sup> Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

May that be true indeed for us this morning and may God bless to our understanding and to our application in our lives his Word before us this morning. Please be seated, let me pray for us.

Lord God, this is your very own Word. Send it out this morning and fulfill your own promise that it will not return to you empty, but accomplish everything for which you have sent it out, every purpose that may be successful and every endeavor for which you have sent it out. We pray this, we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Thus, William Shakespeare. He's got a point. Call it what you want, but that flower is going to still smell the same, still look the same, have the same beauty. That might be true for a flower, for a plant, But human names are not so easily dismissed. In the Bible itself, names are often a key element in understanding a person, his or her character, their story.

Think about Eve, a sinner, who is now under God's just condemnation and is going to die. And yet her husband gives her the name Eve because she is the mother, not of the dead, but of the living. Isaac, given that name because his mother laughed when she heard the prophecy of his birth. Or Elimelech in the book of Ruth, whose name means "My God is king", who in famine ravages the land there in Bethlehem, runs to a country that God has condemned and

judged, because there's food there. He abandons his king to go serve somewhere else. Tragically, he dies there. Elijah, whose name means "My God is Yahweh", who stands in opposition to those who want to serve Baal, the false god. "Choose who you will serve", he says, kind of in echo of Joshua. Quit hopping back and forth from one foot to the other. If Baal is God, serve him. If God is God, serve him. His name describes his calling, his ministry. Similarly with his successor, Elisha, "My God saves". Time and time again in the story of Elisha's life, God intervenes and saves his people, even when the situation seems incredibly dire. Or Yeshua, short for Yehoshua. "He saves". We know it as Jesus. And of course many more.

Sometimes in the Bible names are changed and that has significance. Abram becomes Abraham. Simon becomes Peter. Saul becomes Paul. Even outside the Bible, maybe your name fits your personality or character or even the story of your life. Mine doesn't. Martin means, it's after the god Mars, the war god. Those who know me know I'm not a very war-like person. It doesn't fit very well. And some people change their names for a variety of reasons. Lew Alcindor and Cassius Clay converted to Islam and adopted Arabic names, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Muhammad Ali. An American from Hawaii named Chad Rowan recently died. He was better known by a fighting name that he had, a ring name as a sumo wrestler, Akebono, the first American to earn the rank of Grand Champion, or Yokozuna. On becoming a Japanese citizen, he formally changed his name and took as his legal name, Akebono Taro.

And sometimes that happens as people move to a new country with a different language, and they'll adopt a name in that language, maybe to fit in, or maybe they just happen to like that name. We know that Hollywood actors and various kinds of celebrities have long changed their names for various marketing and other purposes. Some of us don't like our names. I know when I was in school, maybe it was true for you as well, boy, if we found out the middle name of someone, boy, we could embarrass them. I don't know why it is we don't like our middle names. They might avoid using their name. They may come up with a nickname that they prefer, or even change it altogether again. I do remember one of our nieces, as a young girl, decided she wanted to be called Princess Marie. That didn't work. Another thing about names is it's kind of fun to meet someone with the same name, first or last. Especially fun if your name is maybe less common. One of my old bosses, his name was Harold. And when he would learn that someone was expecting a baby, he would kind of jokingly, but also kind of seriously say, "Well, if it's a boy, name him Harold. Our numbers are declining. We need more Harold's in the world."

What we see in Peter in this passage this morning is that there is a name that all believers share: Christian. It's a name that means something. It tells us something about who we are attached to, who we're affiliated with: Christ Jesus himself. It's a name that identifies a follower of Christ, one united to Christ. No matter the name we've been given, no matter the name we might have chosen, whether our name fits us or doesn't describe us at all, the name Christian does describe us. It does identify us. It does fit who we are. And it's a name that when we learn someone else shares it with us, we have a common bond. "Oh, you're a Christian too? Great." Immediately, there's an affinity. Immediately, there's a connection. We can relate to that person. And it's a connection that goes beyond and far deeper than just a label or a title. "Christian" isn't just a title. It's a name. And thinking of that name, reflecting

upon it, it's no surprise that Bunyan gave that name to his hero in *Pilgrim's Progress*, right? What other name would be better for this allegorical stand-in for believers? It's a good name, but it's a name that also tells us who he is: Christian.

Peter's letter (we call it a general epistle) to all Christians everywhere, as he described it, "elect exiles of the dispersion". And after his greeting, Peter first recalls and rejoices in the great salvation that's been given to us by the Father, procured for us by the Son, made ours through the work of the Holy Spirit. But starting in verse 13 of chapter 1, he talks at length about what it means to be a Christian. And by this passage before us in verse 16, he exhorts us not to be ashamed of that name, but to glorify God in that name, or because of that name, or on account of that name. These verses before us, 12 to 16, are kind of a summary of what Peter has been teaching us. There's a final summary that Lord willing we'll get to next week in verses 17 to 19, and then that leads us into chapter five and some closing exhortations for us. But basically from chapter one verse 13, through chapter four verse 19, the end of chapter four, he's telling us what it is to be a Christian. What does a Christian look like? 12 to 16. This morning I want to work through basically in order and looking at how Peter repeats certain themes that he's been using in this letter to summarize or recap his teaching on being a Christian and maybe some concluding thoughts as we come to the end. There are six themes that we'll look at. A man named Daryl Charles, commentator in a volume of the *Expositors Bible Commentary*, identifies seven themes. The seventh is in verses 17 to 19, which again, Lord willing, we'll look at next week. But I do want to look at those six themes.

Again, Peter's summarizing things that he's been showing us. But the passage begins in a very interesting manner. You know, there are many ways in which Christians are different than non-believers. And Peter gives us one in verses 12 and 13 that may be as unusual as any difference that we have. He speaks to us in fatherly terms. "*Beloved,*" he calls us. "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial 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.*" It runs completely contrary to human nature to rejoice in the midst of suffering. It runs contrary to human nature to take suffering in stride, to not be surprised when we experience it. Thinking about this passage this week, I couldn't help but think of C.S. Lewis' book, *Surprised by Joy*, his short little quasi-autobiography where he talks about coming to Christ, being surprised by the joy that he found in Christ. That's quite natural, to be surprised by that joy. It's interesting that five years later, just five years later, he would write *The Grief Observed*, after the sudden death of his wife after only a few months of marriage. His reflections in that book are quite normal. His heart is broken. but they lead him into a deeper understanding of God. But where there's joy in one book, there's grief in another.

It's just not natural for us to rejoice in suffering or not to be surprised when it comes upon us. Peter wants us to embrace the idea that suffering is not strange for Christians. The idea is actually there in that first verse, verse 12, twice. It could be translated, and I think that King James actually does do it this way: "*Do not think it's strange as if something strange were happening to you. Do not think it's strange when the fiery trial comes upon you to test you.*" This isn't strange, says Peter. And if we pay attention to Scripture, Peter's right. The fiery trial is going to come. If you get a chance to look back at Malachi chapter 3, Christ is prophesied as coming with a refiner's fire to purify his people. Even Jesus says in John 16 at the end of that

chapter, 'In this world you will have trials. They will come. but do not fear, I have overcome the world.' So Peter says "*rejoice*". Maybe in trial your faith is made stronger. Maybe in trial it's an opportunity to share in Christ's sufferings. He suffered for you, he suffered for me, for our salvation. Is the servant greater than the master that we should not suffer as well? Given what He has done for us, can we do any less for Him? So rejoice. Maybe it's an opportunity to show gratitude for the saving work that Jesus has done for you and for me. It reveals his glory, what he's done for sinners, and how he upholds them even in the midst of great trial.

Well, this leads to the **first** of the six themes Peter is repeating here in these verses. It's there in verse 13. We are people. Christians are people who share in Christ's sufferings. He's told this already to us in chapter 2 verses 20 and 21. Enduring suffering for doing good, he tells us, "is a gracious thing in God's sight." Christ suffered for us, leaving an example for us to follow. And to this same thing we are called. We share in Christ's sufferings. Chapter 3 verses 17 and 18: "it's better to suffer for doing good ... than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, that he might bring us to God." Christ suffered, we also suffer in and with him. Here in verse 13, Peter is saying: don't just copy or imitate Christ's sufferings. That's not what he's talking about, but he's saying we are so united to Christ, so much in him and him in us that we share in his sufferings. And there's a purpose. There's a benefit to sharing in Christ's suffering.

This leads to the **second** theme that Mr. Charles points out to us in Peter's summary of his teaching on the Christian life. That second theme is that those who share in Christ's sufferings get to "*rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed*." Again, this is not new. This is a recap, if you will. Back in chapter 1 verses 6 and 7, Peter says, we rejoice in our salvation. What he's called an "imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance kept in heaven for us." We rejoice in our salvation, even "though now for a little while, if necessary, we've been grieved by various trials." He says these trials test our faith, "the genuineness of that faith", so that when Jesus Christ comes again, we'll be able to give him "praise and glory and honor." Only those who have that genuine faith in Christ Jesus are gonna be happy when He comes again. He's saying, Christian, that's you. That's you, Christian.

And as such, the **third** way Peter summarizes his teaching here for us is in verse 14. As such, Christians are blessed to suffer for the name of Christ. Recaps two related ideas, both from chapter 3. In verse 9, instead of repaying evil for evil, instead of reviling for reviling, bless those who do evil to you, or revile you. This is what God calls us to do, and Peter says, in doing so we receive a blessing. And in verse 14 he says it very clearly, if we are to suffer for righteousness sake, we are blessed. Again, that may not seem natural to us. According to human thinking, how and why are we blessed in suffering? Well, first, this kind of suffering shows we are united to Christ Jesus. We're His. He is ours. But also, as he says, this kind of suffering shows that our faith is genuine. We can think of this as the fruit of sanctification in our lives, the fruit of the Spirit at work in us. We're blessed to see these things, and we're blessed because we can have true joy and praise and honor and thanksgiving that will come when Jesus comes again. And so our suffering glorifies God.

The **fourth** theme that Peter is recapping here in these verses, also there in verse 14: God is glorified in us. Peter puts it this way: "*the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us*." This is so

much true that when Christ comes again and those who speak against us as evildoers, lying about us, accusing us, will recognize our good deeds and give glory to God when Christ comes again. Peter's already told us that. That's in the future. That's something we long for and hope for. But I think there's also a present reality to this as well, because we glorify God and our obedience to him, to his call upon us that Peter has repeated to us, to conduct ourselves properly according to his commands, according to his instructions. There's a sense in which God's glory is revealed not just at Christ's second coming, but in us. His glory is revealed in us and our Christian behavior.

This language that Peter uses about the Spirit of glory and of God resting on us is an echo of descriptions of God's presence with his people. Mount Sinai, Exodus 24:16, the glory of God resting on the mountain. Or the glory of God resting upon the ark in Leviticus 16 verse 2. The glory of God in the tabernacle in Exodus 29 verse 43. The glory of God in the temple when it's dedicated in 2 Chronicles 7 verse 3. Peter's using that kind of language to describe us. That glory rests on you, Christian. Paul, I think, agrees with this. 2 Corinthians 3 verses 7 to 13 are kind of an extended comparison that Paul makes between the greater glory of Christ in us and in the ministry of the church versus the lesser glory of God in the days of Moses and his ministry. This glory is so much greater, says Paul. Peter is reminding us that as Christians, those who bear that name, those who are identified by that name, that we also bear the glory of God and are to demonstrate that glory to those around us.

That takes us to the **fifth** summary of Peter's themes in this letter, recapped for us in verse 15. He says once again: don't suffer for doing wrong. And he lists "*murderer, thief, evildoer, meddler.*" Some people think "meddler" is out of place there, but probably in that culture there was that long section of household code instruction in Peter's letter. Being a meddler in Greco-Roman society was a terrible thing because it breaks the fabric of society. But we get a sense, evildoer, meddler, of all kinds of wrongs and sins we might commit. If we're going to suffer, don't suffer for doing wrong. Let it be for doing what is right. Again, it echoes what he said before. Chapter 2 verse 12: "Keep your conduct honorable among the Gentiles", he says, non-believers. And later in verse 20: "what credit is it if when you sin you're beaten for it and endure?" It's like Peter said, "So what?" You deserved it. You endured it, big deal. But if you're doing good and suffer for it and endure, he says "this is a gracious thing before God in his sight." Again, he keeps it simple in chapter 3 verse 17: "It's better to suffer for doing good, if that's God's will, than for doing evil." Peter's reminding us here: you have a precious name. Live up to it. Show by your actions and by your words that you are who you claim to be.

You know, sometimes as children, you may have heard this, parents disciplining or instructing their children: "You know, that's not how we Smiths behave. That's not how we do things in our family. That's not the Jones way of doing things." Now if that can impress upon a child his duty to his family and to his family name, how much more should the name Christian impress upon us our duties before God? Peter is saying to us: "Christian, act like a Christian." I think this is Peter's version of what we see so often in Paul: the indicative, the imperative. Paul tells us, "You're a Christian. Here's what being a Christian is. Here's what it entails. Based on this, live like this." Indicative, indicating who we are, if you will. Imperative, this is how we live because of who we are. Peter's basically doing the same thing: "Be who you are", he's saying.

The **sixth** summarizing theme is in verse 16: Don't be ashamed of suffering for Christ. *"If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed"*, says Peter. This picks up on chapter 2 verse 6, where he makes the statement: "whoever believes in Jesus will not be put to shame." There is honor for those who believe because the stone the builders rejected is now the cornerstone. In other words, this is part of sharing in Christ's sufferings again. The cornerstone was rejected. If the cornerstone was rejected, don't be surprised when you are either. Don't be ashamed of suffering for Christ. If Jesus was rejected, the one who is now the chosen Savior, sent is the beloved Son, the one in whom all who turn from sin and look to him as Savior have life and hope and joy and peace and blessing and glory. If he was rejected, don't be ashamed when you are rejected, when you suffer for his name. Don't be ashamed of your name, Christian. Glorify God in that name. Glorify God that he saved you in that name. Wear that name as a badge of honor. I hate going to conferences where you have to have those little my name is tags on them. It just feels kind of silly. Wear Christian as a name with honor.

And indeed, maybe your name or part of your name makes you proud. Oftentimes we have good reasons for this. My middle name is Wallace. It's an unusual name, but I got it being named after my uncle, who was a man I greatly admired and greatly looked up to. I was proud to share that name with him. He, in turn, got his name from his grandfather, William Wallace. That's a name I see notes of recognition out there. That's a name to be proud of. But that name pales in comparison to the name of Jesus Christ, to the name Christian. Do you bear that name? Do not be ashamed. Be proud that you might glorify God in that name. Basic idea here from Peter: Fiery trials are coming. Do not be surprised. Instead, rejoice. You can only rejoice in your suffering if you are a Christian.

So, some things that might mean for us. It occurs to me that there are a couple ways that trials can come upon us. The first is through circumstances, what we might say is the providence of God. The other way is through a direct attack. And I think both Peter has in view in this passage, because both can be very fiery trials, and both can be used by God to glorify himself in us. The circumstantial trials, the providences of God, sometimes the hard providence of God. Things in life happen. Maybe it's a sickness, or even death of a loved one, the loss of job in a poor economy. A disaster comes unexpected, an earthquake, fire, tornado, hurricane, tsunami, whatever it might be. Maybe a relationship is broken unexpectedly. Big or small, these can be deeply painful. These are fiery trials. Peter's saying: don't be surprised; rejoice in these things. The Christian life is not all happiness and good things. We don't call people to come to Christ because if you do, your life's going to be so much better. That's a false promise. We can't paper over the things that happen to us in this life with false smiles or a stiff upper lip.

There are times to be sad. There are times to mourn, and God has given to us brothers and sisters to come alongside and mourn with us, to comfort us, to pray with us, to help us, to provide for our needs. If these kinds of fiery trials come upon you, don't pretend that they're not there or that they don't hurt. That doesn't glorify God. In fact, I think it's actually quite selfish, prideful even. I can handle this on my own. God has provided a people, a family, who share your name, help you through whatever trial you're going through. Christianity is not a lone ranger religion. We're a family. We are one body. We share one name. When one suffers,

we all suffer. It's an opportunity for us to love one another. It's an opportunity for you to be loved.

Sometimes the fiery trial comes in a direct attack. I had a friend, a deep, close friend, a Christian brother at work, who we were discussing some sort of theological thing in some email, and he was complaining about Calvinists, and he said, "Well, you know, I'm a five-point Calvinist." You know, I basically did not hear from him after that. Walked away because of what I believed. I know someone who lost a job because they had an anti-abortion pro-life bumper sticker on the back of the car. Maybe a marriage or a friendship or some other relationship is broken because the person just can't take that you are a Christian. We see increasing rules in the workplace or in society in general that try to silence our teaching about the truths of Scripture. It might be ridiculed by friends at work, at school, family. People think we're weird. Don't think that's strange. We are weird. We're Christians. We're different. "You guys really believe that the Bible is God's Word? That it's all true? Every word of it? No errors? You guys really believe that God personally created the world? Come on. Follow the science. You really believe that sex outside of marriage is bad? Come on, it's just normal human activity, enjoying one another." And when it comes to marriage, "You really think only two people, a male and female, can get married? Why do you care as long as two people are in love and they want to be together? Or three people? Or four people? You guys are weird."

And you know, other Christians disagree with you. Folks, the world is changing. And we'll probably touch on this a little bit next week. Maybe, maybe God is winnowing his church. Maybe he's separating the wheat from the chaff. Maybe he's discovering where the genuine faith lies. Maybe this is a time of persecution so that the church can be purified. Again, that idea from Malachi chapter three. And that purification will lead to greater growth and fruit at a later time. In a changing world that's increasingly hostile to us, how are we going to respond? How will we respond together? The call (and Peter echoes this call throughout the letter), our call is to suffer for being a Christian, for walking in a manner worthy of the calling to which we've been called. To suffer in humility and in gentleness, in love, being patient and kind, blessing those who curse us, doing good to those who hate us, speaking the truth in love, not rejoicing in wrongdoing, abhorring what is evil, not suffering for doing evil. That's out of character. Don't suffer for being arrogant or prideful or judgmental or hypocritical or being a meddler who stirs up trouble. But when suffering comes, don't be surprised. It is coming. Rejoice. It's an opportunity for us to share in the sufferings of our Savior and to testify to the glory of God.

There's an old song that was popular when I was in high school called "Evidence", and it would ask the question in the song: if you were put on trial for being a Christian, does your life show enough evidence for you to be convicted of that accusation? Will your life show enough evidence? It's a pretty compelling song, pretty compelling questions it asks. As we walk through the valley of the shadow of trial and persecution, will we walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we've been called? When trial and tribulation come, will you and I continue to act like who we are? Christian, your name glorifies God. Wear it properly. Wear it proudly.

Let me pray.

Well, Lord God, without your help, we are lost and we are weak. You have given us a name above all names. May we wear it proudly and with honor. May we be faithful witnesses of all that that name points to and means. For us and for our salvation, for the hope of those who are lost, to bring light to those in darkness, life to those who are dead in their trespasses and sins like we once were as well. Oh, Lord, help us. Help us to be who you have made us to be in Christ Jesus, our Savior. It's in his name that we ask all of these things. Amen.

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