

1st Peter 4:12-19

Committing Our Souls to a Faithful Creator

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator – v. 19

Our text this morning reminds me of a well known hymn: *Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidst me come to thee, O Lamb of God I come.* – You know the hymn. And as much as the hymn may be overused and perhaps even abused in some cases, it's nevertheless a great hymn. The 3rd stanza from our hymnbook would be very relevant to the setting of 1st Peter. *Just as I am, though tossed about With many a conflict, many a doubt, Fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come.*

This is what the Christians were experiencing that are addressed by Peter in this epistle – Conflicts and doubts and fightings and fears. They were in heaviness because of manifold temptations or literally various trials (1:6). Peter describes them as undergoing a *fiery trial* in 4:12. That phrase *fiery trial* is defined as *the burning by which metals are roasted and reduced.*

And Peter's exhortation is the same as that expressed by that familiar hymn. That exhortation is found in the words of our text in v. 19. At least one commentator has suggested that this verse could be regarded as the key verse to the entire epistle. It's as if the entire epistle aims at these words: *Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.* Committing your soul to God or to Christ – just as you are coming to Christ. It's an act of consecration for the Christian and it's something that needs to be done again and again.

It's interesting to note how familiar some very prominent characters in the Bible are with the practice of committing their souls to God as unto a faithful Creator:

David, in Psalm 31:5 expresses this commitment: *Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.* We know that Christ Himself quotes the first half of this first when He engages in the same act of consecration: *And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost* (Lk. 23:46).

Stephen while being stoned to death for his faithfulness to Christ says words very similar. So we read in Acts 7:59 *And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.* And Paul, from the Roman dungeon in which he penned his last words to Timothy, writes in 2Tim. 1:12 *For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

It only seems fitting, then, doesn't it? – that Peter would call upon the readers of his first epistle to *commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.* You could certainly argue, I think, that this commitment is one of the reasons we gather

together on Sundays. It's an act of worship. It's a presenting of ourselves to God which is our reasonable service – literally *which is our reasonable worship*, Paul writes in Rom. 12:1. Now I know that some of you come from backgrounds in which such a practice is engaged in so often that it practically becomes meaningless. You've either heard or told stories yourselves of invitations at the end of worship services in which multiple stanzas of *Just as I Am* are sung and people are pressured to come forward and consecrate themselves anew to God.

Someone sent me a text about a week ago that made reference to that passenger on the United Airlines flight that was dragged off the plane because of his refusal to leave peaceably. This text I received was a copy of a tweet from a character who called himself a Loyal Legalist and basically he said he would continue flying United Airlines because in his Christian experience he was use to being dragged down the aisle – that's unfortunately how abused the practice has become.

But we've got to be careful here as Christians, and especially as Christians that have perhaps seen or experienced the unbalanced emphasis that can be given to the matter of committing our souls to our God and our Savior. The danger we face is that of throwing out the baby with the bathwater so to speak. There is a place, you see, for Christians to be engaged in this practice of committing their souls to God. If the Psalmist as well as Stephen and Paul and Christ Himself found such acts of consecration to be fitting, then there certainly is a proper place in our Christian lives for such acts of devotion.

But it's got to be done intelligently and we'll see in the course of this study that such an act if done right encompasses many things. It's got to be done intelligently and it's got to be done whole heartedly and when it's done intelligently and spiritually we'll see that there is a great benefit to be gained from a proper commitment of our souls to God. So that's what I want to call your attention to this morning – this act of committing our souls to God.

We Must Commit the Keeping of Our Souls to Our Faithful Creator

And in analyzing this theme, I'd like to call your attention first to:

I. The Condition for Such a Commitment

By now I'm sure you know that the setting for Peter's first epistle is the setting of suffering and affliction and persecution. Peter makes reference to their *fiery trial* in v. 12. *Ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings* – v. 13. *If ye be reproached (insulted, reviled) for the name of Christ*, v. 14, *happy are ye. If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed* – v. 16.

And while this setting of suffering and trials and afflictions is not the only setting in which committing our souls to God is appropriate, it becomes all the more necessary and all the more challenging in such a setting. Skeptics have called the phenomenon of suffering the Achilles' heel of Christianity. R.C. Sproul tells the story of a young man, the

son of a Methodist minister and scholar who became an atheist because of a statement by a well known philosopher, John Stuart Mill. It seems that John Stuart Mill reasoned that God could not be both omnipotent and all-loving. For God to be all powerful and yet not intervene to stop suffering especially in its worst manifestations would mean that either God was incapable or unwilling to stop such great suffering. If He was unwilling, how could He be considered all-loving? Perhaps He could be viewed as all-loving but unable to do anything about suffering. In either case, this atheist philosopher concluded that the God of the Bible couldn't possibly exist and evidently this young teenager found that argument compelling.

Now when life is going along smoothly and you're not facing any contrary winds, it becomes easy just to look at such philosophical puzzles and see them as nothing more than intellectual challenges that have no more serious an impact on your life than a crossword puzzle. But when life actually becomes stormy and things take place that you can't explain and the time of testing seems to last way too long and run way too deep and become way too painful then the kind of skepticism set forth by an atheist philosopher becomes a very real temptation.

And in a setting of fiery trials it becomes very natural to raise the questions – Does God really care? Can God really do anything to help me? If He can then why doesn't He? Does He really exist or am I just following a cunningly devised fable? Was Karl Marx right after all and religion is really nothing more than opium for the masses? And if you haven't been tested in your faith to the point that you find yourself tempted by such skeptical notions then you should know that the time will come when you will be tested. Young people especially need to be aware the time of your testing will come. And you will face the temptation to question and doubt your very faith.

And one of the best ways to prepare for tests is to be aware that they will come so when they do you'll be able to heed Peter's admonition to *think it not strange*. Can you think of a single character in the Bible that wasn't tested? Abraham was tested; Moses was tested; David was tested; John the Baptist was tested; the Apostle Paul was tested. And then we have an entire book in the Old Testament that gives a very lengthy account of a man being tested, that man's name was Job.

And it's worth noting here that not everyone in the Bible passed these tests with flying colors. Moses would not be allowed to enter the promised land. David would, for a time, be driven from his throne. John the Baptist would harbor doubts about whether or not the man he identified as the Messiah really was the Messiah. And though Job would start out well, before his time of testing was over he would be justifying himself rather than God. And that's what we end up doing when we say God isn't fair or God isn't treating me right.

While browsing through a book I have that's made up largely of Puritan quotes I noticed under the heading of trials a number of quotes that were unknown as to their origin. Listen to a few of these quotes:

- Adversity introduces a man to himself. (Job certainly illustrates that)
- Affliction, like the iron-smith, shapes as it smites.
- Afflictions are often God's best blessings sent in disguise.
- The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials.
- The hammer shatters glass, but forges steel.
- Where there are no trials in life, there are no triumphs.

So the best way to commit your soul to the keeping of God is to recognize that the setting for such a commitment is the setting of fiery trials. To use Peter's word again: *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.* Rather than thinking it strange, be prepared instead to commit the keeping of your soul to the One who loved you and gave Himself for you. And when you find yourself in circumstances that you can't explain and that don't seem right and that tempt you to doubt, then especially *commit the keeping of your soul to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

But let's think next on what it means to commit our souls to God. I said in my introduction that it's something that must be done intelligently and whole-heartedly. So we come to consider next:

II. The Manner of Such a Commitment of Our Souls

And what I want to think about under this heading is how all encompassing such a commitment is. Consider then how such a commitment:

Encompasses the way you think. Peter is addressing the mind when he writes in v. 12 *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.* I think it would be fair to say that when it comes to fiery trials thinking right is a very important key. You need to think right about God and you need to think right about yourself and you need to think right about the kind of world you live in and you need to think right in the matter of your spiritual warfare.

Dr. Cairns use to make a constant point of emphasis that the battle ground for the Christian was and is in the mind of the Christian. The devil's design is to lure you into wrong thinking. Wasn't this the challenge the devil put to God regarding Job? The devil was sure that under the right circumstances he could lure Job into thinking wrong thoughts toward God which would in the end lead Job to curse God rather than bless God.

And when it comes to seasons of affliction and fiery trials the temptation becomes very strong to think that your circumstances are beyond God or God must not care. We find the Psalmist expressing these very kinds of thoughts in Psalm 77:7-9 Oh that you might hear these words from the reality of what the Psalmist was feeling and thinking. The Psalms are sometimes referred to as the book of Christian experience. Listen to these words and hear them as the reality of the Psalmist's experience when he asks in v. 7 *Will the Lord cast off*

for ever? and will he be favorable no more? 8 Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? 9 Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?

You find the same kind of thinking expressed in Psalm 73 where the Psalmist honestly acknowledges in v. 2 *But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.* And in a spirit of transparent honesty this same Psalmist expresses the thought that it was vain to serve God. The wicked seemed to live easy lives while the followers of Christ were afflicted all the day. *When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me* he writes in v. 16.

But then he catches himself and the way he catches himself is the same you and I are to catch ourselves. We enter into the sanctuary of God and we present ourselves to God. We commit the well being of our souls to God and in the process we gain an attitude adjustment and a paradigm shift to our thinking. And once this happens then we affirm the same thing the Psalmist affirms in v. 22ff:

So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. 23 Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. 24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. 26 My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. 27 For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. 28 But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.

So committing our souls to our Creator encompasses the way we think. It's a battle for the mind. But it's also a battle for our emotions. Christianity is not, you see, simply a book religion that leads to a form of rational logic. It encompasses the whole man, body, soul and spirit. And so after Peter addresses the matter of the mind when he tells his readers how to think, he goes on in v. 13 to address how the emotions they need to feel.

And here is where on the surface of it your religion can seem to be impossible. Listen to what Peter writes in v. 13 and keep the setting in mind, the setting of suffering and fiery trials. *But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*

Rejoice, he says. Even though your trial is long and painful and doesn't make sense, and is lasting so long, rejoice. Is such a thing even possible? Or is Peter proving himself to be about the worst advice giver known to man? I dare say that Peter knew whereof he spoke. He does not address his readers from the realm of the hypothetical. He himself knew what fiery trials were about. Remember that Peter is the one who despite his boasts failed the Lord by his denials. And now it's a humbled Peter that calls on his readers to rejoice.

And the way this is done is not by training our emotions to be counter intuitive so that we learn to rejoice when we're feeling deep ceded pain. If you look carefully at v. 13 you see that Peter is directing his readers to look back, then look at the present, and then look

ahead. He directs them to consider Christ's sufferings. *But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings.* Remember what Christ suffered for you. If you find yourself tempted into thinking that your sufferings are not fair then remember Christ's sufferings. His sufferings are the only sufferings, you see, that were not fair. You and I are sinners but Christ was completely innocent. And yet He voluntarily subjected Himself to being beaten and whipped and humiliated and mocked and crucified.

Remember Him and in your remembrance of Him see an identification with Him in your current sufferings. You are in a spiritual sense, you see, a partaker of Christ in His sufferings. There is an identification with Him especially when you're suffering for being a Christian. So that's the look back which provides the lens for seeing the present and then look ahead. *His glory shall be revealed* Peter says in v. 13. There is coming a better day and a lasting day. It is the things of this current world that are fleeting and temporal. Look ahead to a better day to come.

And never fail to see that there's a purpose to it all. Sometimes you're able to discern that purpose. Sometimes you're able to say with the Psalmist *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes* (119:71). But at other times you may not be able to discern that specific purpose. I don't think Job could figure out the specific purpose for his trial. In such cases you need to know that there is purpose to your fiery trial whether you're able to discern it or not. *On their part he is evil spoken of,* Peter writes in v. 14 *but on your part he is glorified.*

And when you look back and contemplate Christ's sufferings, and then you make His sufferings the lens for viewing your own sufferings and then you look ahead to the glory that shall be revealed, you'll be enabled to rejoice and the commitment of your soul to a faithful Creator will not be a morbid act of sad and depressing resignation it will instead be a joyful act of consecration as you're gripped by the truth and reality that I am His and He is mine.

So the committing of your soul to God and to Christ encompasses your mind and your emotions. We should also note that it encompasses your ethics. Peter gives us a very important qualifier to the commitment of our souls to God in v. 15. It's the qualifier of integrity. Look at what it says. *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.* Don't set aside your integrity, in other words, even during a time when your integrity may not seem terribly important.

Make sure that your sufferings spring from being a Christian and don't ever cave in to the temptation of treating the world the same way the world treats you. *Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee* the Psalmist prays in Psalm 25:21. *Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles* (v. 22).

So what does a true commitment to God encompass? It encompasses our minds, our emotions, our ethics, our outlook, our actions (well doing). I'll only add briefly before leaving this point that it encompasses as well our theology. We see God as our faithful Creator. You may not understand His ways. That's not really all that unusual since His

ways and His thoughts are far above and beyond our ways and our thoughts. You know that He's faithful and you know that He cares. The cross of Christ proves that to you. It is by keeping your gaze focused on Calvary that you'll be able to submit to His providences even when they're harsh. And it's when you keep your focus on Calvary that you'll be convinced that all things really do work together for good.

So we've seen the condition under which the committing of our souls is necessary even if it's challenging. It's the condition of fiery trials and suffering and affliction. And we've seen that the actual committing of our souls to our faithful Creator is not some shallow thoughtless act of devotion, it's an act that is all encompassing and includes our minds and our hearts and our wills. Let's think for a moment finally and briefly on:

III. The Benefit to Such a Commitment

Look at the words of v. 14 *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye*. That word *happy* is the same word that Christ uses in the beatitudes – *blessed*. You're blessed. When we studied the beatitudes a number of years ago we noted how the blessings of the beatitudes go against the grain of the world's thinking.

Blessed are the poor in spirit – What? Are you kidding? – the world wants to know. To be poor in spirit is to be dependent and world's cry is for independence. *Blessed are they that mourn*. And again the emotions seem to conflict with each other. How can I be blessed or happy if I'm mourning over sin? The answer is provided by the beatitude itself – *Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted*. It's a good thing to come under conviction of sin but it's still better to be comforted by understanding the basis for sins being forgiven through Christ.

It's the very last beatitude that Peter perhaps had in mind when he wrote the words of v. 14 *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye*. Perhaps Christ's very words came to Peter's mind *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake*.

Peter follows his Master when he writes *happy are ye*. And it's Christ Himself who says right after this beatitude that pertains to persecution and being reviled *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you* (v. 12). When we studied this beatitude a number of years ago I made it a strong point of emphasis that one of the best ways to prepare for the inevitable fiery trials of persecution and being reviled was to know and be convinced that you really are blessed. Isn't that the whole point to the beatitudes? Isn't that what Christ drives home again and again and again?

Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the meek; blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness; blessed are the merciful; blessed are the pure in heart; blessed are the peacemakers; blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness sake. And then in a way that makes for a final explanation point of

emphasis, it's as if Christ looks his audience directly in the eye and says to them *Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*

If you know that you're blessed on account of all that Christ has done in providing salvation for you, then you'll be enabled to say to the world – throw at me your worst. I know that God is for me. Who can be against me? And especially who can be against me in such a way that I'm robbed of the assurance I have that God is for me?

So Peter's beatitude is taken directly from Christ's beatitude. And the point to Christ's beatitudes is that subjects of Christ's Kingdom are blessed. So I hope you're able to focus today on how much you're blessed. Your purpose in coming to church is to commit the well being of your soul to God as a faithful Creator and the effect of such an act of devotion is the assurance that you're blessed.

I hope you know that this morning. I hope you have assurance that you're blessed. Being blessed doesn't mean that you're exempted from fiery trials. Quite the contrary we're to think it not strange when those fiery trials come. But in that setting especially you and I must commit the well being of our souls to God as unto a faithful Creator. And that commitment must encompass your mind and emotions and your ethics and your outlook and your actions.

Will you commit the well being of your soul to your God and Savior this morning now that you know what all is involved in such a commitment? I trust you will and that in so doing you'll gain strong assurance that you are blessed, indeed that you are bountifully blessed.