



1 Peter 4:12-14

Suffering Brings Encouragement

12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

One of the most popular ways of presenting the Christian message today, is to tell people that if they become Christians their lives will dramatically improve. Their problems will disappear and they will live their *"best lives now."* Some are told that Christianity will be their key to health, and wealth, and happiness. And many people hear that message and immediately embrace it – who doesn't want a better life after all? *If I'm sick, I want health, if I'm poor I want wealth, if I'm sad, I want happiness – so if you tell me I can have all three here and now, I'll probably respond positively.*

People have followed Jesus expecting those material blessings since his earthly ministry, for instance Jesus Himself said *"Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."* But the problem with following Christ for those blessings is that it's not the gospel message, and while people may follow Jesus expecting those things, those things are not what He came to give them. If people do follow Him for those reasons they almost always prove to be the stony ground hearers, who believe in the morning, but when their faith is put to the test by the scorching heat of midday fall away. That scorching heat that makes causes them to fall away is almost always suffering or persecution:

Jesus himself said as much in Matt. 13:20 *"But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;*

21 "yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

Unfortunately, I've seen that lived out, I've seen people start following Christ because they want their marriage to be fixed or just to be happy – and often they saw that Christians were happy and had good marriages and figured I start following him and that's what I'll get – and then when following him gets tough they are surprised, and angry or discouraged, and you don't see them in church anymore. *They expected a bed of roses, and instead they got a cross.* But that's what Christ said following him involved – *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."*

The saddest thing is for me in watching that is that they don't persevere long enough in cross bearing to find out, what many of you have already found out – namely *no Cross, no Crown* – that the blessings of the Christian life, and there are many, both here and more importantly hereafter, come through the grace of God experienced in the midst of that suffering, that Cross bearing.

Now remember, Peter is writing this letter, largely to new Christians and he wants them to understand that, and not to be surprised by suffering and persecution as Christians. In fact, he wants them to view it as a normal part of the Christian life, and instead of being surprised by persecution and running away from Christ because of it, to be encouraged by it and even to rejoice in the midst of it.

I want the same thing for you that Peter wanted for them, I don't want you to be stony ground hearers, I want you to persevere in following Christ and experience the real and eternal blessings of being a Christian. So I want you to take to heart x things:

1) **Understand that being persecuted for Christ is a normal part of a true Christian's life:** As Paul put it 2 Tim. 3:12 ***Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.***

That is because if you are a follower of Christ you immediately have three great enemies, **the world, the flesh, and the devil**, and they hate you because they hate the God you follow. Keep in mind that that hasn't been the case since the 1960s, its been the case since the FALL OF MAN way back in the garden. The first instance of that persecution for the sake of righteousness came when Cain killed his own brother Abel, so American Christians shouldn't be acting like the persecution that they are beginning to feel is something new. The truth is that when you look at the history of redemption, it was the brief period where Christians weren't persecuted in this country that was abnormal.

Christians, Jesus said to you – ***John 15:19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."***

But I want you to note that, ***he chose you*** and don't take it lightly. If you understand how important that is you will be able to say in the midst of persecution, ***the world hates me because He loves me*** – and how encouraging that is. In fact, as Sinclair Ferguson pointed out, ***the closer you are to the king, the more likely you are to draw the enemy's fire.*** Therefore see that persecution as a visible sign of the love of Christ to you, and of your union to Him and REJOICE because of it. If you were not His, the world would not hate you.

2) **Know that the persecution you are endure is directed by Christ and is meant for your good.**

Know that the fiery trials that you endure are not wildfires. Christ tells us again and again that the flames you feel are the refiner's fire. He is the smelter who takes you like unrefined silver, full of dross and impurities and puts you in crucible and melts you, and as you are melted all of dross of your life comes up to top and He the refiner skims it away, so that you emerge from the process far more sanctified than when you began. And while that process is painful, it teaches us to persevere and to endure, it teaches us humility, and it teaches us dependence upon Christ.

Brothers and Sisters, I truly believe that those of you who have gone through long periods of suffering and weakness have truly learned how necessary it is to depend upon Christ, and know what God meant when he said to Paul ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."***

Also, know this the suffering that like Daniel's brethren, when you do go through the flames Christ goes with you, he is in the fire and your faith will not fail because he has prayed for you – which is what he told Peter before he went through his trial in the Courtyard.

Isa. NKJ Isaiah 43:1 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.

43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

3) *If we are persecuted because we are following Christ, that persecution is a sign of our Union to Him, and that persecution will ultimately be directed by Christ for our good, then you can rejoice and be encouraged in it.*

Peter doesn't say to you be stoic when you are suffering. "Keep a stiff upper lip." He says rejoice, and this isn't advice he gave but didn't follow Himself. When he and the Apostles were beaten by the Sanhedrin for preaching Christ we read Acts 5:41 *So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.* And instead of giving up they were actually encouraged to continue fulfilling the great Commission: 42 *And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

Why do you think that was? Well because they remembered what Jesus had told them:

Matt. 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You are going to have to keep those words in mind as well, because sometimes those trials are terrible and without them not only will they not seem to make any sense, but if you don't take Christ's words to heart your own trials and those of your brethren, will not produce the right fruit. Let me give you an example of what I mean:

From 1964 to 1999 an Australian missionary by the name of Dr. Graham Staines, and his family did wonderful work for the Lord in India. He was the director of the Leprosy Mission in Baripada, Orissa, India, and translator of the New Testament into the Ho tribe language, his life was literally devoted to nothing but helping the poorest peoples of the tribal areas of India.

On the night of January 23, 1999 Staines, who was attending the 14th annual jungle Bible camp in the village of Monoharpu, was sleeping in his jeep with his two sons, Phillip who was 10, and Timothy who was 6. Sometime after midnight, their Jeep was surrounded by a mob of Hindu militants 50-100 strong. Repeatedly the missionary and his children tried to break out of the car, but repeatedly they were forced back in. The windows were broken out of the jeep, kerosene was poured on and ignited, and the jeep was enveloped in flames. Villagers who heard the shouts and attempted to rescue the Staines, were savagely beaten. The charred bodies of Staines and his sons were found embracing each other.

Now let me ask you, is your reaction to that anger? ***"We have to get the people who did that and make them suffer!"***

Well then you haven't really taken Christ's words to heart, and suffering will not produce good fruit in your life. It will become only a root of bitterness and hate. What does the right fruit look like, well a few days later, Staine's wife, Gladys, 49, offered a clear and public statement ***forgiving the killers. Jesus being Crucified- "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."*** Stephen being stoned - "Lord, do not charge them with this sin."

Well a final point, Let me start to ask simply ***Are you familiar with being persecuted for Christ?*** If not why not? I'm not going to mince words with you – Paul said *"all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."* Not *some*. Everyone who is united to Him will suffer some degree of persecution, and I

have to tell you *everyone* who goes out and serves Christ by witnessing, or taking a stand for Jesus out there will suffer and people like Graham Staines, who were very close to their king, will tend to suffer the most.

If you haven't been persecuted at all, the only reason is because the World, the Flesh, and the Devil *don't see you as their enemy*, and you have to ask yourself why that is.

That is a very important question, because you see those sufferings that Christians rejoice in are but light and momentary, 2 Cor. 4:17 *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, the fire that they pass through is to refine them – Zec. 13:9 *“I will bring the one-third through the fire, Will refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; And each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.' ”*

But the sufferings of the unbeliever are entirely different, they choose not to suffer in this world, they choose passing pleasures, personal peace and affluence in this world.

Luke 16:23 "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'

25 "But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.

Matt. 25:46 "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Mark 9:48 "where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'

Are you content to have your good things here? To avoid suffering in this life? To exchange a thimbleful of pleasure in this world for an endless sea of pain in the next?

Can you rejoice in the midst of suffering?

“I cannot but acquaint your Ladyship with the kind dealing of Christ to my soul, in this house of my pilgrimage, that your Ladyship may know that He is as good as He is called. For at my first entry into this trial (being cast down and troubled with challenges and jealousies of His love, whose name and testimony I now bear in my bonds), I feared nothing more than that I was casten over the dyke of the vineyard, as a dry tree. But, blessed be His dear name, the dry tree was in the fire, and was not burnt; His dew came down and quickened the root of a withered plant. And now He is come again with joy, and has been pleased to feast His exiled and afflicted prisoner with the joy of His consolations. Now I weep, but am not sad; I am chastened, but I die not; I have loss, but I want nothing; this water cannot drown me, this fire cannot burn me, because of the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the Bush. The worst things of Christ, His reproaches, His cross, are better than Egypt's treasures. I would not give, nor exchange, my bonds for the prelates' velvets; nor my prison for their coaches; nor my sighs for all the world's laughter. This clay idol, the world, has no great court in my soul. Christ has come and run away to heaven with my heart and my love, so that neither heart nor love is mine: I pray God, that Christ may keep both without reversion.” – Samuel Rutherford