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Order Of Worship (Liturgy)

Congregation: **First United Reformed Church**
Oak Lawn, Illinois
www.oaklawnurc.org/

From the Trinity Psalter Hymnal:

224 - Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise

351 - How Deep the Father's Love for Us

Title: **Unsurprised by Painful Trial**

513 - Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken

Text: [1 Peter 4:12-19 \(View\)](#)

Occasion: [Regular Sunday](#)

243: 1-4, 6 - How Firm a Foundation

Topic: [Living in a sinful world](#)

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Note: For reading convenience, this sermon is in the NIV and the ESV. The ESV sermon, "Unsurprised by Fiery Trials", follows the NIV manuscript.

* As a matter of courtesy please advise [Rev. Ted Gray](#), if you plan to use this sermon in a worship service. Thank-you.

07/18/2021 (NIV)

"Unsurprised by Painful Trial"

1 Peter 4:12-19

One of the most popular preachers in America has a message that almost everybody wants to hear. His message is that God's plan for your life is for you to have good health, wealth and lots of friends – basically, to have heaven here on earth. His message is part of what we know as the prosperity gospel. It is a message that people find very attractive. But if Peter were alive on earth today, it is a message that he would denounce.

Have you noticed how often Peter addresses the reality of suffering as a Christian? He began writing about it in the beginning of his letter. It is written between the lines in the first verse where he addresses his readers as "*God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia...*" It is a description of people who are strangers in a world where they are scattered and outnumbered.

By the sixth verse of chapter one he is already speaking about "*suffering and grief in all kinds of trials.*" And that theme of suffering continues throughout his letter. In fact, as we begin a new section in his letter here in chapter 4, verse 12 we read: "*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.*"

Why is Peter's message so different from the message of many of the popular preachers today? Some commentators point out that Peter addresses suffering as a Christian because he was writing to both Jews and Gentiles. They point out that the people of Israel knew what it was like to suffer. Their whole history was marked by suffering. As God's special people they had been held in bondage in Egypt; they had faced captivity by the Assyrians and were held captive by the

Babylonians. The Israelites, including the Jews of the first century who were under Roman rule, understood that suffering came along with their identity as people of God.

But as Christianity spread and as Gentiles became saved, the concept of suffering for their faith was new to them. They had not suffered for their beliefs before. Those who worshiped the gods of the Greeks and Romans were accepted socially for that worship. If you went to the Temple of Artemis and engaged in the immoral activities that went on there, it was an acceptable part of “worship” and no persecution was involved.

But now these Gentiles had come out of religions that were accepted by their cultures and they came to faith in Jesus Christ. As they did so they faced great suffering. Rather than presenting them with a prosperity gospel the Apostle Peter, as well as other writers of the New Testament, spoke to them honestly, not only about the joy of salvation but also about the trials that Christians inevitably face.

Why do Christians face trial, severe persecution, and even martyrdom? The main reason is that we are identified with Jesus Christ. As verse 13 puts it, *“But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”* And verse 16 adds, *“However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”*

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ were first called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26). But the name “Christian” was given to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, not out of respect, but out of disdain. The name Christian was coined by unbelievers in Antioch. Up until the name Christian was applied to them, those who believed in the Lord were called *“disciples,” “believers,”* and those *“who belong to the Way”* (Acts 4:32, 6:1 9:2).

Why, then, did the people of Antioch call the believers Christians? It was because most of them wanted to identify Christians with someone who they refused to believe in – Jesus Christ. They rejected the message of the gospel. They rejected the truth of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Most of them wanted no part of the message of His shed blood; they did not want to hear that only through the shed blood of Jesus Christ can anyone be reconciled to God the Father. And they certainly didn’t want any part of the message that believing in Christ meant living a transformed life of purity and holiness rather than debauchery and revelry. It was out of that type of ridicule and disdain of Christ Himself that the name “Christian” came into common use.

And the same disdain impacts Christians today. Christians around the world suffer the most inhumane persecution imaginable. Why? Because they bear the name of Christ. At the root of the suffering brought on by persecution is hatred for the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus hatred for those who are identified with Him by name and by conduct. As Jesus said John 15:18-21, *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed My teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of My name, for they do not know the One who sent Me.”*

Rejoicing in Suffering

Because of that, you might expect that the suffering we face – along with the persecution that our brothers and sisters in Christ face around the world – would make Christianity a great burden to bear. It might make it seem as though in this life Christians would have nothing but sorrow, and that

every Christian would be like “Eeyore”, the depressed donkey from *Winnie the Pooh*, or “Sad Sack”, the cartoon character who had a dark cloud of trouble that followed him throughout his life.

But this passage reminds us that through suffering we are blessed with great spiritual blessings. Did you pick that up in verse 13 and 14? Peter writes: *“But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”*

It is because of our identity with Christ that we face the disdain, ridicule and persecution of those in the world. But it is also because of our identity with Jesus Christ that we share in His glory. That is what verse 13 is telling us. And verse 14 is teaching that when we are insulted because of our identity with Christ we receive a blessing from God, for His Spirit will be upon us, giving us comfort and peace even as we face the insults and hostility of those who detest Jesus Christ.

Perhaps Peter was reflecting on the Beatitudes which Jesus had spoken, when He said in Matthew 5:10-12, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

Perhaps it is hard for us to imagine, living in a land where we have not faced physical persecution, that there could possibly be any type of blessing or joy in facing imprisonment for our faith. Yet the apostles took great joy in knowing that their identity with Christ caused them to suffer, just as Jesus had also faced ridicule and suffering.

For example, in Acts chapter 5 we read how the authorities *“called the apostles in and had them flogged”* because they were proclaiming the gospel. *“Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.”* Acts 5:41 then says, *“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”*

And not only did they rejoice that they had been flogged, disgraced for bearing the name of Christ, but also verse 42 of that chapter describes how *“they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.”*

The reaction of the apostles in the first century as they rejoiced in their persecution was not an isolated event. It has been repeated over and over throughout the history of the New Testament church. Just one example of many is that of Guido de Bres, the author of the Belgic Confession.

You may recall that when he was imprisoned, awaiting execution on the gallows, he wrote to his wife: *“Remember that I did not fall into the hands of my adversaries by mere chance, but through the providence of God who controls and governs all things...”*

Writing to a former congregation, he added: *“As for my chains and my bonds, rather than frightening me and filling me with horror, on the contrary they are my delight and my glory, I count them more precious than gold...”*

His last words, before being hung, at the age of 47, were: *“My brothers, I am condemned to death today for the doctrine of the Son of God, praise be to Him. I would have never thought that God would have given me such an honor.”*

Because we live in a land where throughout our history it has been socially acceptable to be a Christian, it is good for us to take Peter’s warnings about suffering for the name of Christ to heart. The winds of change have come across our culture forcefully and rapidly. In that way we are similar

to the Gentile converts in the first century. They had not suffered persecution before, but now that they worshipped the one true God they would suffer.

In our culture we are seeing a growing hostility against those who bear the name of Christ, against those of us who are Christian. But in years to come we may face more than just insult and ridicule; we may face more than economic sanctions, such as many Christian bakers, florists and other Christian business people have already faced.

In years to come we may face the type of persecution that the faithful people of God in other areas of the world now face, and have faced throughout history. And should such persecution, even martyrdom, come into our land we must stand firm remembering these promises that there is blessing when we are persecuted because we bear the name of Jesus Christ.

Suffering According to God's Will

However, this passage also teaches that we suffer according to God's will and that it is hard to be saved. In other words, our suffering isn't just based on the hostility of those around us, nor is it just a happenstance when we suffer with circumstances beyond our control. Instead, verse 19 tells us that we suffer according to God's will.

Why would God's will include the suffering of His dearly loved people? Does that make God a cruel God who delights in the painful trials of His children? Quite the contrary. The purpose for suffering according to God's will, described in verse 19, can be seen more clearly in verse 12.

In a certain sense verse 12 and verse 19 serve as the "book ends" to this passage. The painful trials that come as we suffer according to God's will are a result of God refining us and purifying us, much as the goldsmith uses fire to test, refine and purify gold.

Peter had previously written about that in chapter 1:6-7. He had described the great blessing of having *"a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"* the blessing of having *"an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you."*

And then, after describing some of these great blessings that come to those of us who believe in Jesus Christ, Peter writes, *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."*

In those verses the Holy Spirit is teaching us that our trials are for our good; they sanctify us, and, as God strengthens us through them, He is glorified.

The hymn writer also wrote about God's sanctifying work through our trials in the fourth stanza of the hymn, *How Firm a Foundation*. He wrote:

When through fiery trials your pathways shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be your supply;
The flame shall not hurt you; I only design
Your dross to consume, and your gold to refine.

In this passage, then, we see that our identity with Christ necessitates suffering and yet also brings great joy. The passage enables us to relate to the truth of Scripture in other places such as Acts 14:22 which tells us, *"Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."* But as we suffer according to God's will, even undergoing fiery trial, we do so with the knowledge of Romans

8:18, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”*

And that is why, when you suffer because of your faith in Jesus, you can rejoice that you participate in His sufferings. As verse 16 reminds us, *“If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”* Praise God that He shapes and molds us through the trials that we face so that our dross is removed, and so that we are purified and sanctified as God uses fiery trials to cause us to lean ever more fully upon Him as we realize that His grace is indeed sufficient for even the most painful thorns that may come into our lives.

Verse 19 gives us another application as we suffer according to God's will. It says that we are to commit ourselves to our faithful Creator. We recognize that the Lord sustains all that He has created. When He created this world, He didn't just wind it up like an old-fashioned pocket watch and let the gears, springs and other mechanisms move the hands on the clock. There are those who believe that God created the world but is not active in it; they are known as Deists.

But we know from Scripture that the Lord, having created the world, upholds and sustains what He has created by His work of providence. And what is true for the world is also true for each individual: The Lord knit us together in our mother's womb (Psa. 139:13). The Lord knew us long before we were born (Jer. 1:4), and the Lord has determined the number of days that each one of us will live. As Psalm 139:16 says, *“...All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*

Consequently, the Lord has a thorough and loving knowledge about each one who, by His grace, has placed their faith in Him. He has also promised to meet our needs and to uphold us through whatever trials and suffering we may face, never leaving us nor forsaking us. Our closing hymn also addresses that biblical truth, as it quotes from Isaiah 41:10, where the Lord promises:

Fear not, for I am with you;
 be not dismayed, for I am your God;
 I will strengthen you, I will help you,
 I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Commit yourself to your Creator and He will indeed uphold you through whatever suffering and trial you face in life. He will do so even as He brings judgment on those who reject the gospel. Peter writes about that in verse 17 and 18. Those verses have caused some confusion because they speak of judgment on the family of God. The word for “judgment” in verse 17 – *“For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God...”* – is used in that context in a disciplinary fashion, as God disciplines those whom He loves, and shapes and molds them through trial (Heb. 12:5-11).

But the judgment that each one of us deserves for our sin was borne by Jesus Christ on the cross. Those who have rejected Him, and in turn reject, ridicule and persecute those who bear His name, will face judgment.

Peter quotes from Proverbs 11:31, in verse 18, when he asks, *“If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”* When Peter says it is hard for the righteous to be saved, he undoubtedly has in mind both the humiliation and suffering of Jesus Christ – a hardship we cannot not even begin to imagine the depth of – as well as the hardships – the trials and temptations – that come into the lives of those who believe in Him.

The question of verse 18 – *“What will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”* – is rhetorical, reminding us of the certainty of judgment for those who reject Jesus Christ. Their judgment will be severe, and their judgment will be eternal.

If you are among those who have never come to the Lord in humble repentance and saving faith, take to heart the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:1-2. He writes: *“We urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For He says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”* (2 Cor. 6:1-2).

No matter what is in your past, no matter what temptations and sins you struggle with in the present, you can come to Christ with full assurance that He will forgive and accept you, for He has promised, *“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out”* (John 6:37).

Another application is in the last phrase of verse 19 telling us to continue to do good. No matter what trial you face, no matter what persecution may come your way, continue to do the good deeds that God has before ordained for you to do. Often it is those who suffer the most whose lives make the largest impact, because despite their suffering, they continue to do good, living out their faith in Jesus Christ.

Also, this passage reminds us that when we are insulted, ridiculed and suffer, we must make sure that it is for righteousness sake, that it is because we bear the name of Christ. We have perhaps known professing Christians who are ridiculed and insulted, not for righteousness sake, but because of their own obnoxious nature!

Peter points out in verse 15, *“If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.”* That verse covers a lot of ground. There is a big difference between a meddler and a murderer, but both are going to face suffering. But it is a completely different type of suffering than suffering for righteousness sake.

Whose message do you think most people would rather hear? Would they rather hear the message of Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, telling us that we will face suffering in this life and that it is even according to God’s will as He sanctifies us and purifies us, and allows us to face the ridicule that comes because we bear His name?

Or do you think people would rather hear the message of one of America’s most popular preachers, a handsome man with a winsome smile who will tell you that God wants you to have health, wealth, lots of friends and a great life here on earth?

Life is great here on earth for those who have true saving faith in Jesus Christ alone. There is an inner joy which is so great that it is indescribable, a peace which surpasses all understanding – even for a martyr like Guido de Bres. As he faced the gallows, he had a peace which surpasses all understanding because he knew that his only hope in life and in death is that he belonged to his faithful Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

There is also the sweet, wonderful fellowship with God the Father through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, to where we can call out to the Father, the Giver of every good and every perfect gift, the overflowing Fountain of all good, *“Abba, Father!”* as the Holy Spirit intercedes in our prayers with groanings too deep for words. And there is the tie that binds – the communion of saints with other believers who are brothers and sisters within the family of God. And, the best is yet to come!

I trust and pray that your hope is not in the prosperity gospel, and not in self-righteousness or works of the law, but that your trust and hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to this earth as the Man of Sorrows in order to suffer and die – and rise again – for the salvation of all who in humble repentance and true saving faith look to Him, and identify with Him, through their sufferings as they bear His name regardless of the consequences.

May that description be a description of your life and mine, this day and always! Amen.

bulletin outline:

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.” – 1 Peter 4:12

“Unsurprised by Painful Trial”

1 Peter 4:12-19

I. This passage reminds us that we should not be surprised when we suffer for being a Christian (12).

We suffer because:

1) We are identified with Christ (13, 16; Acts 11:26; Matt 15:18-21)

2) Through suffering we are blessed spiritually (13-14; Matthew 5:10-12)

3) It is hard to be saved (17-18) and our sanctification includes suffering *“according to God’s will”* (19a) as we are tested (12; 1 Peter 1:6-7)

II. When you suffer because of your faith in Jesus:

1) Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ (13, 16; Acts 5:41)

2) Commit yourself to your Creator (19b); He will uphold you even as He brings judgment on those who reject the gospel (17)

3) Continue to do good (19c), making sure that you are suffering for your identity with Christ, not because of evil conduct (15)

07/18/2021 (ESV)

“Unsurprised by Fiery Trial”

1 Peter 4:12-19

One of the most popular preachers in America has a message that almost everybody wants to hear. His message is that God’s plan for your life is for you to have good health, wealth and lots of friends – basically, to have heaven here on earth. His message is part of what we know as the

prosperity gospel. It is a message that people find very attractive. But if Peter were alive on earth today, it is a message that he would denounce.

Have you noticed how often Peter addresses the reality of suffering as a Christian? He began writing about it in the beginning of his letter. It is written between the lines in the first verse where he addresses his readers as *“God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia...”* It is a description of people who are strangers in a world where they are scattered and outnumbered.

By the sixth verse of chapter one he is already speaking about *“suffering and grief in all kinds of trials.”* And that theme of suffering continues throughout his letter. In fact, as we begin a new section in his letter here in chapter 4, verse 12 we read: *“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.”*

Why is Peter’s message so different from the message of many of the popular preachers today? Some commentators point out that Peter addresses suffering as a Christian because he was writing to both Jews and Gentiles. They point out that the people of Israel knew what it was like to suffer. Their whole history was marked by suffering. As God’s special people they had been held in bondage in Egypt; they had faced captivity by the Assyrians and were held captive by the Babylonians. The Israelites, including the Jews of the first century who were under Roman rule, understood that suffering came along with their identity as people of God.

But as Christianity spread and as Gentiles became saved, the concept of suffering for their faith was new to them. They had not suffered for their beliefs before. Those who worshiped the gods of the Greeks and Romans were accepted socially for that worship. If you went to the Temple of Artemis and engaged in the immoral activities that went on there, it was an acceptable part of “worship” and no persecution was involved.

But now these Gentiles had come out of religions that were accepted by their cultures and they came to faith in Jesus Christ. As they did so they faced great suffering. Rather than presenting them with a prosperity gospel the Apostle Peter, as well as other writers of the New Testament, spoke to them honestly, not only about the joy of salvation but also about the trials that Christians inevitably face.

Why do Christians face trial, severe persecution, and even martyrdom? The main reason is that we are identified with Jesus Christ. As verse 13 puts it *“But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”* And verse 16 adds, *“Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.”*

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ were first called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26). But the name “Christian” was given to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, not out of respect, but out of disdain. The name Christian was coined by unbelievers in Antioch. Up until the name Christian was applied to them, those who believed in the Lord were called *“disciples,” “believers,”* and those *“who belong to the Way”* (Acts 4:32, 6:1 9:2).

Why, then, did the people of Antioch call the believers Christians? It was because most of them wanted to identify Christians with someone who they refused to believe in – Jesus Christ. They rejected the message of the gospel. They rejected the truth of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Most of them wanted no part of the message of His shed blood; they did not want to hear that only through the shed blood of Jesus Christ can anyone be reconciled to God the Father. And they certainly didn’t want any part of the message that believing in Christ meant living a transformed life

of purity and holiness rather than debauchery and revelry. It was out of that type of ridicule and disdain of Christ Himself that the name “Christian” came into common use.

And the same disdain impacts Christians today. Christians around the world suffer the most inhumane persecution imaginable. Why? Because they bear the name of Christ. At the root of the suffering brought on by persecution is hatred for the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus hatred for those who are identified with Him by name and by conduct.

As Jesus said John 15:18-21, *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed My teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of My name, for they do not know the One who sent Me.”*

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Your dross to consume, and your gold to refine.

In this passage, then, we see that our identity with Christ necessitates suffering and yet also brings great joy. The passage enables us to relate to the truth of Scripture in other places such as Acts 14:22 which tells us, *“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”* But as we suffer according to God’s will, even undergoing fiery trial, we do so with the knowledge of Romans 8:18, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”*

And that is why, when you suffer because of your faith in Jesus, you can rejoice that you participate in His sufferings. As verse 16 reminds us, *“If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.”* Praise God that He shapes and molds us through the trials that we face so that our dross is removed, and so that we are purified and sanctified as God uses fiery trials to cause us to lean ever more fully upon Him as we realize that His grace is indeed sufficient for even the most painful thorns that may come into our lives.

Verse 19 gives us another application as we suffer according to God's will. It says that we are to commit ourselves to our faithful Creator. We recognize that the Lord sustains all that He has created. When He created this world, He didn't just wind it up like an old-fashioned pocket watch and let the gears, springs and other mechanisms move the hands on the clock. There are those who believe that God created the world but is not active in it; they are known as Deists.

But we know from Scripture that the Lord, having created the world, upholds and sustains what He has created by His work of providence. And what is true for the world is also true for each individual: The Lord knit us together in our mother’s womb (Psa. 139:13). The Lord knew us long before we were born (Jer. 1:4), and the Lord has determined the number of days that each one of us will live. As Psalm 139:16 says, *“...All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*

Consequently, the Lord has a thorough and loving knowledge about each one who, by His grace, has placed their faith in Him. He has also promised to meet our needs and to uphold us through whatever trials and suffering we may face, never leaving us nor forsaking us. Our closing hymn also addresses that biblical truth, as it quotes from Isaiah 41:10, where the Lord promises:

Fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Commit yourself to your Creator and He will indeed uphold you through whatever suffering and trial you face in life. He will do so even as He brings judgment on those who reject the gospel. Peter

writes about that in verse 17 and 18. Those verses have caused some confusion because they speak of judgment on the family of God.

The word for “judgment” in verse 17 – *“For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God...”* – is used in that context in a disciplinary fashion, as God disciplines those whom He loves, and shapes and molds them through trial (Heb. 12:5-11).

But the judgment that each one of us deserves for our sin was borne by Jesus Christ on the cross. Those who have rejected Him, and in turn reject, ridicule and persecute those who bear His name, will face judgment.

Peter quotes from Proverbs 11:31, in verse 18, when he asks, *“If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”* The word “scarcely”, in the Greek, can refer to difficulty, as it does in this verse. The righteous are saved with difficulty, both in the humiliation and suffering of Jesus Christ – a hardship we cannot not even begin to imagine the depth of, as well as the hardships – the trials and temptations – that come into the lives of those who believe in Him.

The question of verse 18 – *“If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”* – is rhetorical, reminding us of the certainty of judgment for those who reject Jesus Christ. Their judgment will be severe, and their judgment will be eternal.

If you are among those who have never come to the Lord in humble repentance and saving faith, take to heart the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:1-2. He writes: *“We urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For He says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”* (2 Cor. 6:1-2).

No matter what is in your past, no matter what temptations and sins you struggle with in the present, you can come to Christ with full assurance that He will forgive and accept you, for He has promised, *“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out”* (John 6:37).

Another application is in the last phrase of verse 19 telling us to continue to do good. No matter what trial you face, no matter what persecution may come your way, continue to do the good deeds that God has before ordained for you to do. Often it is those who suffer the most whose lives make the largest impact, because despite their suffering, they continue to do good, living out their faith in Jesus Christ.

Also, this passage reminds us that when we are insulted, ridiculed and suffer, we must make sure that it is for righteousness sake, that it is because we bear the name of Christ. We have perhaps known professing Christians who are ridiculed and insulted, not for righteousness sake, but because of their own obnoxious nature!

Peter points out in verse 15, *““But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.”* That verse covers a lot of ground. There is a big difference between a meddler and a murderer, but both are going to face suffering. But it is a completely different type of suffering than suffering for righteousness sake.

Whose message do you think most people would rather hear? Would they rather hear the message of Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, telling us that we will face suffering in this life and that it is even according to God’s will as He sanctifies us and purifies us, and allows us to face the ridicule that comes because we bear His name?

Or do you think people would rather hear the message of one of America's most popular preachers, a handsome man with a winsome smile who will tell you that God wants you to have health, wealth, lots of friends and a great life here on earth?

Life is great here on earth for those who have true saving faith in Jesus Christ alone. There is an inner joy which is so great that it is indescribable, a peace which surpasses all understanding – even for a martyr like Guido de Bres. As he faced the gallows, he had a peace which surpasses all understanding because he knew that his only hope in life and in death is that he belonged to his faithful Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

There is also the sweet, wonderful fellowship with God the Father through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, to where we can call out to the Father, the Giver of every good and every perfect gift, the overflowing Fountain of all good, *“Abba, Father!”* as the Holy Spirit intercedes in our prayers with groanings too deep for words. And there is the tie that binds – the communion of saints with other believers who are brothers and sisters within the family of God. And, the best is yet to come!

I trust and pray that your hope is not in the prosperity gospel, and not in self-righteousness or works of the law, but that your trust and hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to this earth as the Man of Sorrows in order to suffer and die – and rise again – for the salvation of all who in humble repentance and true saving faith look to Him, and identify with Him, through their sufferings as they bear His name regardless of the consequences.

May that description be a description of your life and mine, this day and always! Amen.

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. - 1 Peter 4:12

“Unsurprised by Fiery Trial”

1 Peter 4:12-19

I. This passage reminds us that we should not be surprised when we suffer for being a Christian (12).

We suffer because:

1) We are identified with Christ (13, 16; Acts 11:26; Phil. 1:29)

2) Through suffering we are blessed spiritually (13-14; Matthew 5:10-12)

3) It is hard to be saved (17-18) and our sanctification includes suffering *“according to God’s will”* (19a) as we are tested (12; 1 Peter 1:6-7)

II. When you suffer because of your faith in Jesus:

1) Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ (13, 16; Acts 5:41)

2) Commit yourself to your Creator (19b); He will uphold you even as He brings judgment on those who reject the gospel (17)

3) Continue to do good (19c), making sure that you are suffering for your identity with Christ, not because of evil conduct (15)

* As a matter of courtesy please advise [Rev. Ted Gray](#), if you plan to use this sermon in a worship service. Thank-you.

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