

Triumphant Suffering!

- 1 Peter 4:12-19
- Peter will give a final encouragement about our suffering in chapter 5, but this text today could be seen as the culmination of what he began in chapter 1 where he spoke about various trials that are meant to refine our faith for God's glory. Let's look at this passage under three main points: Don't be surprised, but rejoice, Don't be ashamed, but give glory, Don't stop trusting, but do good.
- **Don't be surprised, but rejoice! (verses 12-14)**
- The same man who once rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering on the cross is now encouraging followers of Jesus to stay in the fires of persecution. Peter told us in chapter one that our faith, which is more precious than gold, is tested by fire. Here he repeats that theme, that not only should we not run from our faith when the heats is turned up, we shouldn't even be surprised by the opposition we face. Here's the thing about being surprised by suffering. It's often the first step toward being angry about suffering. Which can lead to being resentful towards God about our suffering. Which can lead to unbelief. What should we do then, Lord, when fiery trials come upon us? Peter tells us: rejoice! What? Why should we rejoice? Two reasons. One, we rejoice in trials because in them we share Christ's suffering. Paul talked about that in Philippians 3 where he said all that he had attained as a proud Pharisee *before* he met Christ he counted as rubbish, as dung, *after* he met Christ and traded in his righteousness which was useless for faith in Christ and the righteousness of God in Christ "...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and *may share his sufferings*, becoming like him in his death." As we share in Christ's suffering because we belong to Christ, we are reminded of another reason to rejoice: Peter says "that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." We suffer with Christ because we will also be raised with Christ! Paul finished Philippians 3:10 this way: "that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." This was a statement of trust in the final glory that we will see and live in forever when our Savior returns.
- Don't be surprised at suffering because you are a Christian. Irish missionary Amy Carmichael understood when she opened an orphanage in southern India to rescue children in the lower caste who had been rejected by their parents, and many were young girls who had been forced into prostitution in the local Hindu temples. Amy Carmichael suffered greatly in her health because of the work, 55 years without a furlough. But what could have been most surprising and hurt her the most was the disrespect some missionaries in India showed her because they believed what she was doing, taking in little girls who had been prostitutes, was not something their supporters wanted to hear about. Amy Carmichael wrote a poem entitled. "No Scars?" Here's an excerpt:
Hast thou no wound? No wound, no scar? Yet, as the Master shall the servant be, And, pierced are the feet that follow Me; But thine are whole: can he have followed far, Who has no wounds nor scar?
- Don't be surprised at the fiery trials. Vance Havner wrote, "At the Nicene Council, an important church meeting in the 4th century A.D., of the 318 delegates attending, fewer than 12 had **not** lost an eye or lost a hand or did not limp on a leg lamed by torture for their Christian faith."
- Peter says if we are insulted for the name of Christ, we are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. Fox's Book of Martyrs is one story after another of men and women who suffered persecution to the death because of their faith. One story is about a pastor in London in 1555 who was burned at the stake for his faith. Fox wrote, "When he was come to nigh the place, the officer, appointed to see the execution done, said to Mr. Saunders that he was one of them who marred the queen's realm, but if he would recant, there was pardon for him. 'Not I,' replied the holy martyr, 'but such as you have injured the realm. The blessed Gospel of Christ is what I hold; that do I believe, that have I taught, and that will I never revoke!' Mr. Saunders then slowly moved towards the fire, sank to the earth and prayed; he then rose up, embraced the stake, and frequently said, 'Welcome, thou cross of Christ! Welcome everlasting life,' as the flames consumed him."

- Peter includes one qualifier in verse 15 that is worth noting. Make sure, he says, that you are not suffering because of your sin. There's no glory in that, no testimony, unless that suffering leads to repentance. Interesting that he includes the sin of being a "meddler" along with murderer, thief, and evildoer. Maybe he wanted to include one everyone could relate to! 2 Thessalonians 3:11 comes to mind where Paul wrote, "For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies." Sometimes those with too much time on their hands take to managing other peoples' affairs, or at least trying to. Peter calls them out and reminds them that the suffering they experience when they meddle is deserved and will not bear good fruit. Then Peter says...
- **Don't be ashamed, but give glory (verses 16-17)**
- Edmund Clowney tells the story of Armando Valladares, a political prisoner for 22 years in Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba because he refused to put an "I'm with Fidel" sign on his desk. He was brutally tortured, starved, beaten, threatened with death, and subjected to solitary confinement. What kept him alive was his faith and he says his weapon was his poetry, which he wrote on the walls of his cell with his own blood. He wrote that the cries of people before they were executed in the prison, "Long live Christ the King! Down with Communism!" wakened his faith and gave him courage. "The cries became such a potent and stirring symbol that by 1963 the men who were condemned to death were gagged before being carried down to be shot. The jailers feared those shouts."
- I would say those brothers were not ashamed but instead used their dying breaths to proclaim the glory of Christ. Peter instructs us that we are to use our living breaths to do that as well. "Let him glorify God in that name." Which name? The name of Christ, for which we are insulted, he said in verse 14. What a powerful name it is, the name of Jesus.
- Peter gives us further motivation to have hope in the midst of trials as he says, "For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" Peter may be thinking about Malachi 3 when the prophet says, "But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord." The judgment of God on the church is not punishment but purging. It comes from God to refine his people, as fire purifies gold. It separates the wheat from the chaff. It prunes the dead or wasteful branches and leaves the living to grow more fruitful. But the judgment on those who do not obey the gospel of God will be swift and sure and none will be able to hide from his wrath against sin in that day. We tell others the truth about Christ's amazing grace and God's terrible judgment on those who insist on saving themselves because we want them to come to the knowledge of the truth. And we tell *them* to remind *ourselves*! We don't ever want to take that amazing grace for granted. Then Peter says...
- **Don't stop trusting, and do good. (verse 19)**
- Verse 19 starts with that important word, "therefore." Because of this truth about our suffering, God's purging, and the imminent return of Jesus Christ our Lord, Peter says let's remember and let's do these three things. You could see this verse as a "summary statement of suffering well." We all suffer as beloved in Christ. Let's do it well.
- First, we suffer according to God's will. It is his divine plan to send the heat of persecution to his beloved children for our good and for his glory. On a wall in his bedroom Charles Spurgeon had a plaque with Isaiah 48:10 on it: "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." "It is no mean thing to be chosen of God," he wrote. "God's choice makes chosen men choice men...We are chosen, not in the palace, but in the furnace. In the furnace, beauty is marred, fashion is destroyed, strength is melted, glory is consumed; yet here eternal love reveals its secrets, and declares its choice."
- Second, we are called to entrust our souls to a faithful Creator. This is one of only two verses in the New Testament where God is called Creator. Paul did it in Romans 1 to accuse those who reject the

Creator and instead worship and serve the creature or the creation. Peter uses Creator in this verse, "to remind us that the Lord whom we trust in the Architect of all things, accomplishing his great design. He feeds the birds and numbers the hairs of our heads; he will watch over us who commit ourselves to his care." (Edmund Clowney)

- Third, we are commanded to continue doing good. While we suffer, we do good for God's glory. While we suffer, we continue doing good for the sake of the gospel. William Sangster was a pastor in England who lived 60 years and died after two years of suffering from progressive muscular atrophy. He ended one of his sermons on Jacob wrestling with God and ending up with a lifelong limp, with this story. "I was asked to go to the Eye Hospital in Liverpool and tell a girl that within three months she would go blind. I went at once and talked with her on trivial matters, not knowing how to broach the subject. She suspected it and said, 'I think God's going to take my sight.' I replied: 'I wouldn't let Him. Will you see if you can offer this prayer, not now but in three months' time? 'Father, if for any reason known to you I must lose my sight, I will not have it taken from me. I will give it to you.' It was a stormy three months. I visited her often and she kept saying, 'I can't pray that prayer. I can't live without a little light.' But at last she did say it to God. And now ask anyone who knows the sisters in Merseyside if they know Jessie Johnson. She comes with her dog and speaks to the women out of her rich experience. God has told her things He has only whispered to me. Out of the darkness she speaks."
- Don't be surprised, don't be ashamed, don't stop trusting. God will use the suffering he has chosen for us for our good and his glory!
- Prayer
- Greet One Another