

The Fellowship of Fiery Trials – I Peter 4:112-19

I. Introduction:

- A. It appears to me that Peter was concerned about the saints in Asia Minor – Galatia, Pontus and Cappadocia.
1. Perhaps he had heard that they were suffering under severe persecution.
 2. Perhaps he was afraid they would stumble and turn from Christ, even renouncing their professions of faith.
- B. In the midst of other subjects, Peter speaks of trials and suffering in each chapter of this book.
1. **Chapter 1** – You *“are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise & honour & glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”*
 2. **Chapter 2** – *“For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:”*
 3. **Chapter 3** – *“But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:”*
 4. **Chapter 5** – *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”*
- C. You may be thinking, *“Well, that is interesting, but it has nothing to do with me.”* Are you sure?
1. Perhaps your trials aren’t as fiery as those of your brethren two millennia ago – or even two centuries ago.
 2. But how will you respond when the heat under you is turned up, and you are considered to be a criminal for following the principles of the Word of God?
 3. It could happen with the next change in government or with no change at all, or with no government at all.
 4. And next week when your closest loved one is diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, will you feel a little more sympathy with the people in these scriptures?
 5. Don’t the words of **verse 12** seem to suggest that fiery trials are coming and are even inevitable?
*“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial **which IS to try you.**”*
- D. Something to remember is that we are going to spend eternity with the people to whom Peter was writing.
1. We are connected to them by our mutual faith in Christ. We are a part of the same divine family.
 2. We may be separated by thousands of years and thousands of miles, but under Christ there may be more similarities than we currently realize.
 3. And speaking about connections, that is the theme I’d like to use in considering these eight verses.
 4. Multilayered fellowship is one of the blessings of fiery trials.

II. As I say, Peter hints at our connections to other believers.

- A. He begins this paragraph by addressing his readers as: *“beloved.”*
1. Sometimes this Greek word is translated *“well beloved,”* and sometimes as *“dearly beloved.”*
 2. It might be interpreted as a reference to God’s love for His people. We are **all** the loved of God
 3. But isn’t it obvious that Peter is referring to **his** affection for those people? They are connected by love.
 4. Their hearts are linked, tied together, and circumstances, like fiery trials, draw the cords of love tighter.
- B. The trials surrounding each of them are not unique to the individual.
1. *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some **STRANGE** thing happened unto you.”*
 2. You are not alone.

3. **I Corinthians 10:13** has a little different context and yet, *“There hath no temptation (or trial) taken you but such as is **common** to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”*
 4. You are not the first Christian to have been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Comforters are available.
 5. Other Christians have grieved as you now grieve under the suicide of a loved one.
 6. You are not the first Christian to be hunted down as if you were a rabid dog.
- C. In that confusing 17th verse, which I will address in another message, Peter speaks of the *“house of God.”*
1. *“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God.”*
 2. At this point, I’ll simply point to the house of God.
 3. Can that be anything else but to the church of Christ?
- D. It is expected that each member of God’s family join their Father and Elder Brother for dinner at the table in the family dining room.
1. This should be done on a regular basis – daily or at the very least, weekly.
 2. And at that glorious meal, prepared by the Father’s servants, not only are we fed, but we fellowship around the events of the week, opening up our hearts to one another and expressing our mutual love.
 3. *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is...”*
 4. That weekly meal might include exhorting one another, but also sharing encouragement in the midst of each other’s problems.
 5. There is fellowship between family members as individuals feel the heat of fiery trials.

III. But the most precious connection to consider when enduring trials is that with the Lord Jesus.

- A. *“Beloved... 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. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye.”*
1. This such a profound thought that I should spend a few hours on it, but tonight I’ll just share the highlights.
 2. Our souls are so entwined with the Saviour, that God sees one in the Other.
 3. Just as to separate the soul from the body is to kill that body, to separate the saved soul from the Saviour is even more deadly.
 4. Christ is the Vine and we are the branches. When one flourishes so does the other.
 5. The Lord said to the man attempting to arrest & prosecute His saints, *“Saul, why persecutest thou **ME?**”*
 6. Other unbelievers will say to Christ the Judge, *“Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?”*
 7. *Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these (my brethren) ye did it not to me.”*
 8. There is a glorious and mysterious bond between the Saviour and those He has saved.
- B. One of these days, Christ’s glory shall be revealed, and when that takes place we will rejoice with Him with *“joy unspeakable and full of glory.”*
1. The words *“happy are ye”* (**verse 14**) are a classic understatement.
 2. Peter’s idea was that we will be over-joyed when our Saviour is glorified. We will be jumping for joy.
- C. The Bible teaches that we partake of Christ’s sufferings when we suffer for the name of Christ.
1. I suppose there may be more than one way to interpret the phrase, *“for the name of Christ.”*
 2. But one of them has to be *“as someone who wears the name of Christ.”*
 3. In **verse 16** Peter says, *“If any man suffer as a **CHRISTIAN**, let him not be ashamed.”*
 4. The Christian is someone who carries the name of Christ on his soul **and** in his outward life.
 5. When that Iranian who trusts Christ, putting on His name, he gives his earthly life to the Saviour, and it may be extinguished within days, but, oh, how closely connected he is to the Saviour.

IV. Also, in midst of our fiery trials we are connected to the Holy Spirit.

- A. *“If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.”*
1. Yes, I know that in your Bibles the word *“spirit”* is not capitalized, but remember, that omission was made by the printer of your Bible and cannot be proved by the Greek which had no capital letters.
 2. I can't read it any other way but as the Holy Spirit, and I couldn't find a Bible scholar who said otherwise.
- B. Picture Stephen as Saul and his friends illegally executed him for his testimony of faith in Christ Jesus.
1. It is said that they gnashed on him with their teeth. Was literal or figurative? Why not literal?
 2. *“But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfast into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.”*
 3. I believe that is an example of what Peter is describing for us – *“happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.”*
 4. We might think of Stephen's last day on earth as being his worst.
 5. I think that he might tell us that to be enveloped with the Holy Spirit at that moment was the greatest highlight of his earthly life, even though he was at the point of death.
- C. You may not sense it or realize it, but we all have the opportunity to enjoy that same sort of blessing.
1. You will probably never look with your physical eyes into God's throne room before leaving this world.
 2. But we can look by faith, and we certainly can be filled and engulfed with the same Spirit as Stephen.
 3. It may come while you are in some service for the Lord, or it may come in the midst of a fiery trial.

V. And of course, every Christian should reach out to our Heavenly Father during our darkest hours.

- A. **Verse 19** – *“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.**”*
1. **And verse 16** – *“If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on his behalf.”*
 2. There are two things here.
 - a. As painful as it may sound, Jehovah is still sovereign over this world.
 - b. If we suffer it is according to the will of God.
 3. The basketball coach may require the new player to endure a variety of drills & difficult training situations, but that coach knows what it should produce in the young person if properly carried out.
 - a. And it may be that he is thinking of the team more than the individual.
 - b. He may be testing, trying & training that athlete to make the team better & the school more renowned.
 4. And God may have ordained your fiery trial for His own special glory. What a privilege there is in that.
 5. We are connected to God the Father with His hand reaching down toward us.
- B. And in the midst of our fiery trial, we need to reach back up to Him.
1. We need to be like Stephen, *“committing the keeping of our souls to the Lord,”* while in that flame.
 2. And as Peter says, *“But let him glorify God on his behalf.”*
 3. I will not pretend that this is easy, but that could be because this isn't a muscle we exercise sufficiently.
 4. *“And they stoned Stephen, (while he was) calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”*
 5. I won't attempt to put words in Stephen's mouth, but I think that this saint of God, was happy to be able to glorify God in this way.
- C. Very likely, we're all going to leave this world through the portal of death, and we are probably not going to be given the opportunity to choose which door.
1. But I think Stephen was thinking that this was an excellent way to die.
 2. *“Thank you Father... I praise you Lord for giving me this special privilege.”*

- D. The word “*Creator*” in **verse 19** is a Greek word which is found in only one other verse:
1. Paul in condemning our sins, said in **Romans 1**: we *“Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.”*
 2. If I was writing Peter’s epistle for him, I might have said that the Lord was a faithful Saviour, or God, but he said *“Creator.”*
 3. *“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.”*
 4. Why did he use that word? Could he be thinking that this was the reason God created us?

VI. There is one more connection which trials provide – a connection with the lost.

- A. **Verse 18** – *“If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”*
1. I plan to clarify this verse on Sunday, but for this evening just hang in there with me.
 2. Let’s say that a certain woman, an unbeliever, has a daughter whom the Lord has saved.
 3. Mother sees an immediate positive change in her child, as she begins to love and serve the Lord.
 4. But then she sees the world turns on her Christian baby.
 5. The young lady gets sick, like Job in the Old Testament, or her friends forsake and betray her.
 6. And yet that Christian remains faithful to her Saviour, enduring her affliction for God’s glory.
 7. She carries a smile even when her mother knows she is in pain.
 8. Her baby, through her suffering, has been given a special avenue by which she can speak to her mother.
- B. Those who are saved have been made righteous in a very difficult way – through the sacrifice of Christ.
1. In addition to the pain endured by the Saviour, that child of God may go through a great many fiery trials during her life.
 2. Mother may not initially see or understand it, but if the righteous are saved through extreme difficulty what will the unbeliever and rebel have to endure?
 3. That mother may come to see that she is going to have to endure a lot more than her child.
- C. When we suffer as Christians, it may be before the eyes of a whole flock of lost sheep.
1. When we suffer for Christ, the relationship we have with the Saviour may be seen by unbelievers.
 2. Perhaps it provides us with an unprecedented opportunity to reach another Saul of Tarsus with the gospel.
 3. I’ll close with a statement from the Sermon on the Mount: *“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven...”*