

EXPOSITION OF I PETER

Message #18

I Peter 4:12-19

I do not like hassles. I don't know too many who do. I like things to sail along nicely in life with no bumps in the road. Unfortunately that is not how life works. It is certainly not how life works for the Christian. Life for a Christian can get very difficult. We do suffer, we do hurt, we do cry. We all have different thresholds of pain. Some flinch at the slightest hint, others seem to be able to cope with much. But every believer experiences pain for that is real life.

When you read the first word of **verse 12** "beloved," it becomes quite clear that this is addressed to Christians, those who are in the family of God. The theme is not too difficult to spot just by reading the text - "fiery ordeal" (4:12), "sufferings" (4:13); "reviled" (4:14); "suffer" (4:15); "suffer" (4:16); "suffer" (4:19). Obviously, Christian suffering is the theme.

Now there are two reasons for suffering spelled out in this context: **(Reason #1)** - Suffering because you did wrong and deserve to suffer (4:15). **(Reason #2)** - Suffering because of the will of God and your connection to Jesus Christ (4:19).

If you are one who suffers for doing evil - murder, steal, or troublesome meddler, then you deserve it and it does not glorify God in any way. If you suffer for actually doing right, standing for the Word and will of God and you don't deserve it, then this kind of suffering has far-reaching positive eternal ramifications.

Now the key to victory in all of this is your attitude when suffering. What you think and how you feel when undergoing suffering for God. Peter believed it was actually possible to have such a good grasp of it that you could find joy in it.

Now in this passage the primary thesis is not hard to see:

BELIEVERS SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF THEY SUFFER FOR THE WORD AND WILL OF GOD BUT SHOULD ACTUALLY REJOICE IN IT.

Now the idea behind the word "surprise", in **verse 12**, is the idea of not continually being in a state of bewilderment or astonishment about what is happening. You should not walk around in total amazement or in total shock that you don't get treated by the world as a royal child of God. You should not be totally surprised by the fact that unbelievers sometimes do and say some very negative things against you. It actually can be part of a God-glorifying life and experience.

Now in **verse 12**, the phrase "fiery ordeal among you" seems to suggest that the trouble is in your world, but not necessarily in the world of another. The pronoun "you" (υμιν) shows up in the dative case three times - "among you", "upon you", "to you." The emphasis is things are happening to you which are not happening to everyone else. You are personally experiencing things very negative, but others aren't. The word "fiery" indicates suffering can be very severe. When that happens, you can begin to get mad at those who aren't going through the same kinds of things. You can begin to lash out at your brothers and sisters in Christ. Peter says you can actually have joy in the midst of all of this. You can rejoice.

Suffering for the believer is something that does make some sense.

Now there are several observations we want to make about the theme of suffering from this text:

KEY COPING POINT #1 – God tests us by allowing us to suffer . 4:12

The word “testing” (πειράζω) is a Greek verb that means to prove something or to make proof of something by trying it or testing it (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 351). The specific emphasis of this word is that God will permit various trials and afflictions to hit us from time to time in order to prove that you are His valuable property.

God, Himself, will put us to the test to see what we are made of. God will use a trial or test to prove you to be His pure property. When you endure a trial or test of God, you prove your character and your worth. Now the unsaved world is at a loss to explain trouble. They don’t get it and they don’t understand it. But for the believer suffering is a test.

KEY COPING POINT #2 – God tests us with various degrees of suffering. 4:13a

The words “to the degree” actually are words designed to connect us to Jesus Christ and His suffering. The adverb “degree” indicates that not all Christians are called upon to suffer to the same extent. Whatever the level, it is determined by God and is for the purpose of connecting us deeper and deeper to Jesus Christ. Since the suffering of Jesus Christ was fully authorized by God, then when He authorizes our suffering, it is also fully authorized by God. These sufferings can actually bring us into close fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Now there is a sense in which we will never be able to suffer at the level Christ suffered. He suffered for our sin as One who never sinned.

**KEY COPING POINT #3 – When you suffer rejoice because of your future exultation .
4:13b**

The verb rejoice is present tense; this is to be our continual attitude when suffering.

Now I want you to notice that suffering ends at the “revelation of His glory.” Christ’s glory will first be revealed to us either at our death or at the Rapture. In either case, we may always rejoice as a believer because we will miss the terrible events of the Great Tribulation described in Revelation 6-19. Whatever we suffer, nothing compares to what is described there.

The more you suffer for Christ the greater you can rejoice because of what it is eternally doing for you. It is connecting you deeper to Jesus Christ and it is actually laying up treasures for you in heaven.

If you suffer for Jesus Christ, you have a very bright future in store and that future will be realized when Christ returns.

**KEY COPING POINT #4 – When you are reviled for the name of Christ you are blessed.
4:14**

In the next verses, there are some ways stated in which a believer may suffer. You may suffer verbal assault. If you are linked to Jesus Christ, you can pretty much bank on this one.

The word “revile” speaks of unjustified verbal reproaches and insults that are hurled against you which are neither true nor deserved. These kinds of verbal attacks include abuse, slander, and defamation of character. When you are under verbal assault because of your faithfulness to Jesus Christ, you can rejoice because you are blessed by God (Matthew 5:11).

This verse rang home to me personally at the first part of the week, when I got an irate letter from some one listening to an Exposition of Romans who said, “I was leading people astray” by preaching exactly what is in that text. At first, I was mad and thought about sending this person a stinging rebuke and lecture on Biblical exegesis and then I stopped and thought, wait a minute, what are you preaching this Sunday. Rejoice when you stand for truth and are verbally abused. The text says when that happens, we are blessed.

The word “bless” means we are actually in a fortunate position because the Spirit of God specifically rests upon you in a very unique way. The Spirit of God bestows on you a special glory that connects you to Jesus Christ and He sees you through all the trouble.

When people are hurling negative things against you and you know you are walking consistent with the Word of God and the Spirit of God, you are a blessed person and your reward in heaven is great.

KEY COPING POINT #5 – When you suffer you may rejoice if you know you are not suffering for doing wrong. 4:15

There are four categories of offenses for which we should never suffer:

- 1) A murderer - one who takes the life of another who is innocent;
- 2) A thief - one who steals. We get our English word “kleptomania” from this word;
- 3) An evildoer - the particular flare of this word seems to involve moral behavior;
- 4) A troublesome meddler - a word that refers to a busy body, one who is always meddling in the lives of others. The Greek means one who wants to literally oversee the activity of another.

One of the keys to coping when suffering is to know you are not suffering because you have done wrong.

KEY COPING POINT #6 – When you suffer because you are a Christian you should not feel ashamed. 4:16a

The name Christian originated from non-Christians in the city of Antioch (Acts 11:26). That word is used only twice in Acts and here in Peter. The word Christian has lost some of its real force in our day because almost all people call themselves Christians. In fact, we call ourselves a Christian nation. But the noun, in Peter’s day, generated a powerful response because it immediately connected the person to Jesus Christ in a very personal way.

Peter says if you suffer because you are a Christian you should not harbor one bit of shame. The word “shame” is one that means to feel dishonored or shamed. When you are in a right relationship with God, you do not ever need to feel ashamed or dishonored, for you are one of the most honored saints in this earth.

KEY COPING POINT #7 – When you suffer because you are a Christian you should glorify God. **4:16b**

When you suffer as a Christian you can glory in God because you do glorify God. By the name Christian you may glorify God when you are suffering for Christ’s sake. You belong to Christ and you can suffer like Christ and it matters to God.

KEY COPING POINT #8 – When you suffer remember it is part of God’s work and judgment. **4:17-18**

God uses suffering to prove and test His people. He shows they are connected to Jesus Christ. He uses judgmental things for purging and purifying reasons and if He does that to His own people, to Christians, think what He intends to do to those who reject His Son. You talk about fiery ordeal, the unbeliever will experience the wrath of God.

There is no limitation of difficulty or insufficiency to the work of Jesus Christ, but the difficulty lies in the few who believe on Jesus Christ. One of the most difficult things is to convince sinners that they cannot save themselves by their works and they need to totally rely on Jesus Christ to save them. Once one comes to faith in Jesus Christ, there are some things that need to be endured.

KEY COPING POINT #9 – When you suffer it is the will of God so commit yourself to Him and to doing right. **4:19**

Peter says when you suffer place your soul in the hands of God

There are three realities here:

- 1) You do have a soul and you need to place your soul in the hands of God.
- 2) God is the faithful Creator, which means He will be faithful to preserve the souls of those who place them in His hands.
- 3) The manner in which we should live while we are suffering is to continue to do right.

Remember this, only valuable metal is smelted in the furnace.