



1 Peter 4:15-19
What Will Become of the Unsaved?

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

18 Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

Comparing the church to a fishing vessel is by no means new, Jesus himself calling Peter and Andrew from their trade as fishermen said to them ***"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."*** The world is the sea, the church is the boat, the Christians are the crew, the lost are the fish, and the gospel is the means by which they are caught and drawn up into the boat. That analogy is intensely useful, it teaches us for instance that the main calling of the church is to be about the business of "Man-Fishing" and spreading the gospel rather than simply taking the crew on pleasure cruises.

As a fisherman, Peter knew well how difficult and punishing fishing was. He'd had the terrifying experience of going through the sudden violent storms on the Sea of Galilee in an open boat. He'd had many a night of backbreaking toil without catching anything. As an aside I've often wondered if that wasn't why Jesus picked fishermen to be his disciples, they after all knew what it was to persevere and suffer hardship to land a catch. Because manfishing is very hard and requires perseverance as well. Peter knew from firsthand experience how manfishing involved self-denial, and hardship, and unrelenting persecution from both the world and the authorities. He wanted the Christians he was writing to who were by and large new converts to expect that kind of thing, he was in one sense the experienced Captain letting the greenhorns know what to expect, so that it wouldn't surprise them, and to view it as normal, to get used to it, and even to be encouraged by it as we discussed at length in last week's sermon.

Because there is a tendency to expect that the Christian's life of fishing will consist of sunny afternoons on the lake with Grandpa and a few fishing rods. We'll toddle out there drop a line or two, shoot the breeze for a while and see if they're biting. And then we'll come back home and tell stories about the one that got away. Now if that's your idea of Manfishing, get it out of your head, that's not it at all. We may have had an extended era of sunny afternoons and lazy fishing here in the USA but the era is rapidly drawing to a close. *How many of you have seen the Discovery Channel series "The Deadliest Catch?"* it's about the King Crab Fisherman of Alaska on the Barents Sea, it's the deadliest fishing ground in the world, 20 foot seas, white-out blizzards, rogue waves, pack ice, and so on are all a normal part of their trade. That should be what you are thinking of, that's the kind of seas most of the church has had to endure throughout history, and indeed endures daily in many places in the world.

Now because you are working in a situation where suffering and persecution is the norm, there is a danger that you will react to or think about that persecution in some distinctly unbiblical ways. Let me list 2:

1) The first way is to begin to think that every kind of punishment from the world or the civil magistrate is in fact *persecution for the sake of Christ and therefore a sign of blessing*: But brothers if I commit crime such as murder or theft, and am prosecuted for it, I am not being persecuted for my faith. The fact that I am a Christian in that situation is something that brings dishonor to Christ. So in Peter's time, Nero may have been a hater of Christians, but if you stole your neighbor's money and the government prosecuted you for a crime it wasn't because you Nero hated Christians that you were put to death, it was because you were a thief. Peter wants all Christians to know that these activities are contrary to Christ's commandments and should never be named amongst the Christian community.

Similarly as Christians we need to be able to discriminate between persecution for the sake of Christ, or our own sins. If my neighbor dislikes me is it really because I'm a Christian or is it because I borrowed his lawn mower and never gave it back? Am I being pulled over by the cop because he hates my Christian bumper sticker or could the fact that I was doing 85 in a 55 zone have something to do with it? I've seen Christians act in the most obnoxious and hurtful ways towards worldlings, becoming meddlers in their affairs gossiping about them or telling them how they should be living their lives in a way that is frankly abusive, and then when they receive evil, they assume that it is because they are Christians. No it was because you were mean! Remember that in our witnessing to the world Peter instructs us: "*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect*" and Paul tells us in Col. 3:2 "*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*"

2) We may be tempted to respond to evil or real persecution for the sake of Christ in a unbiblical way: For instance when we respond to the sin of abortion by going out and murdering an abortionist as Paul Hill did or planting bombs at clinics. The sword has been put into the hands of the magistrate, not the individual Christian. Also persecution does not make it ok for me to sin. I may be unfairly denied a job because I am Christian in certain countries, but that does not make it ok for me to steal. The government may persecute Christians, but that doesn't mean that I have the right to organize Christians into a mob (and here the word ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος translated Busybody in the NKJV can also refer to sedition) and attack government personnel and property. Now remember Peter knows what he is talking about here, his instinct in the garden when they came for Jesus was to strike with the Sword. So he cut off Malchus's ear. Jesus instructed him to put his sword and reminded Him this was happening according to the Father's will. Remember that is true of your persecution as well. Brethren it is *never right or necessary* to render evil for evil.

Just as a brief aside there is one other unbiblical response that some churches take to persecution that Peter doesn't even consider because it is so hopeless, that is to get off the sea entirely. To make the church into an inland fortress instead of a fishing boat. We will have nothing to do with the world, we and our children will be safeguarded, but then the church isn't doing what it is supposed to, fishermen who don't fish. That approach never really safeguards from the world, an army that sees its calling as avoiding contact with the enemy will lose when it does come into contact with them.

Now another thing that Christian suffering often causes is shame. You are persecuted and you feel like the kid who doesn't fit in on the schoolyard, after a while the being made fun of an hearing "Ha, Ha!" all the time can be wearing. You become ashamed of the faith that makes you stick out, you don't speak of it, you hope people don't find out so they won't persecute you. Many are tempted to leave the church blend in with the world. It's not surprising that on the TV show I mentioned the *Deadliest Catch*, so many of the new guys on the boats end up giving up, sometimes before they've even returned to port, 20 foot seas, ice,

constant danger? Who needs that? And sometimes after seeing how hard it is to be a Christian and walk the walk, and endure tribulation, people just give up. Peter encourages you not to do this, and he lists some sobering reasons.

1) **Peter has already told us this, but the suffering that occurs in the church is according to the will of God as he says again in verse 19, it is not a sign of the Father's wrath and judgment, and it is not a curse:** Rather it has a sifting effect in the church, and a refining effect in the Christian. You remember that before he went through his own trial by fire in the high priest's courtyard, Jesus told him that Satan desired to sift him like wheat. That was the process of course of beating the kernels of wheat and then putting them into a sieve and bouncing them up and down in the wind so that the lighter chaff flew away leaving only the wheat kernel behind. Persecution does that, when it comes, the false believers who can't endure are blown away, the church is in effect purified by persecution. That is the Father's desire in allowing it to begin with us.

In our own lives, persecution is the refiners fire and verses like Malachi 3:3 said that Jesus the Messiah would be the Refiner of His people: *"He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness."* Christians passing through times of persecution have often taken heart in this, and I would recommend you read the Sabbath meditation from Bunyan who was himself persecuted for the Lord's sake enduring mockings and beatings and prison and loss of livelihood and yet who saw it all as working for his good.

2) *Peter points out, that if the people of God whom he loves are called upon to suffer like this, what about the enemies of his people? What will become of them?* Peter wants you before you are tempted to run away from suffering and join the enemies of the Lord to consider the end of those people and so not be envious of them. We might be tempted to envy the unbeliever, because they aren't mocked or persecuted by the world.

Psalms 73 for instance is an extended meditation on that fact, the Psalmist starts out looking at the wicked and saying its not fair, they don't suffer like we suffer, they have riches, and do whatever they want. But just when he was tempted to stumble in his faith, he goes into the temple and he sees there represented the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man and the sacrifices that spoke of the necessity of salvation through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ and of faith in Him and he has this blinding insight as I realizes, I never thought of their end, of what will happen to them in the next world:

Psalm 73: 17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.

18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction.

19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.

20 As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.

Jesus said that way of salvation was not easy, in fact for man in his natural unredeemed state it is impossible, and consequently not many are saved in the end:

Luke 13:23 Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them,

24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

Matt. 7:13 " Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

14 "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

When the disciples first heard how difficult it was to be saved they immediately asked the right question: Luke 19:25 *When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"*

26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Friends salvation is hard, but not impossible. God can and does save through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore if we will put our faith and trust in Him he will carry us through to the end of that difficult journey through tribulations we take in this life.

We must we do first, we must commit our souls to him, entrust them to his Loving care - The word there *commit* is the same word for making a deposit of money with a friend before a journey . With a faithful friend you don't have to worry that he will lose your deposit or steal it, but that it will be kept to the very end. And there has never been a friend so faithful as Christ:

As Paul wrote to Timothy near of his own long and difficult voyage: *2 Tim. 1:12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.*

You see as Peter reminds you, you have to keep the end of that Journey in mind, the final reckoning where it all makes sense. Where those who have believed on Christ and persevered in suffering for him enter into the joy of their master, and where those who have denied the gospel and caused them to suffer are sent away to eternal punishment. I know of nowhere in the Bible that that great contrast is drawn up better than in

2 Thess. 1:3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,

4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,

5 which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;

6 since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you,

7 and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

So then, which suffering will you choose? Will you endure the difficult voyage of the Christian fisher-of-men and go through hardship and persecution, but at the end arrive safe in the harbor of heaven with a catch that glorifies God, there to know you will never have to sail a raging sea or endure suffering again. For in heaven he only sea is that great sea of glass before the throne of God.

Or will choose the easy way, the broad way here on earth, will you shrink back choosing an easy journey to a terrible destination? Will you stand with mockers instead of the mocked, only to hear on the last day those terrible words from Christ: *"I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"*