

THE EXPECTED FIERY TRIAL

1 Peter 4:12-13

INTRODUCTION

- People often say, “Expect the unexpected” – that is, there are many unanticipated things may happen to us in life, and we should not be surprised when they do
- Then there are other things in life that we *should* expect, and we are unwise if we “unexpected the expected”
- “To be forewarned is to be forearmed” – we are much better equipped to deal with something if we know that it is coming
- The expected thing dealt with in our text is the Christian's trial
- Trials can come in many forms, such as health or financial
- But the particular trial Peter is dealing with here is persecution for faith in Christ, and he tells us that such persecution is altogether normal
- 4:12 begins the final major section of the epistle (4:12—5:11) which deals with the responsibilities of believers collectively in the church
- In vv.12-19 he returns to a prevailing theme in the epistle of the Christian's proper response to trials (cf. 1:6-7; 2:19-24; 3:14,17; 4:12-19; 5:8-10)
- Through Peter's words, suffering believers will find strength and comfort, understanding God's purpose in afflicting us, and assuring us of our final triumph over these momentary trials and the eternal glory that will follow

I. THE EXPECTATION OF TRIALS (12)

A. Beloved

1. Beloved (*agapetos*) is a term of endearment indicating a close relationship
2. Peter employs it when impressing upon his readers a particularly vital imperative, showing his deep concern for their spiritual welfare (cf. 2:11)
3. The brethren are not only beloved of the apostle, but of God – this same term is used by God the Father towards the Son (Matthew 3:17)
4. The use of this word sets the trials we face as being from the loving hand of God

B. Trials should not be thought of as strange

1. Note how Peter again stresses the vital importance of *sanctified thinking* as essential to a godly walk in the world (cf. 4:1,7)
2. We should not be surprised by trials, but too often we are
3. There are some who go so far as to think that if your Christianity invokes the ridicule, ostracism, hostility, abuse of the world, then there must be something wrong with your Christianity
4. This modern idea of a “comfortable and respectable Christianity” is a counterfeit Christianity that has no cross, no self-denial

C. Reasons why we might mistakenly think trials as strange

1. We fail to properly understand the great difference between believers and unbelievers
 - a. On the one side you have someone who is lost and dead in sin, who walks in darkness, who is blinded by Satan, who is the enemy of God and Christ, whose heart is deceived and desperately wicked, who loves sin
 - b. And on the other side you have someone who is saved, who has life, who walks in the light, is reconciled to God and desires to be holy
 - c. The unbeliever is by nature hostile to the gospel (Romans 8:7; 1 Corinthians 1:23-24)
2. Mistaken view of what we deserve
 - a. In our self-love and pride we think we deserve a good life, free from hardship and persecution
 - b. We deserve nothing but the miseries of hell forever
3. Mistaken view of what we need
 - a. We think we know what is best for us – a smooth, quiet course through life.
 - b. But God knows best what we need, and that is the trying of our faith (James 1:2-4)
4. Forgetting the persecution of the saints over the last 6000 years, and of Jesus Christ himself – and that we are called to suffer the same persecution (John 15:20)
 - a. The Lord Jesus made clear to his hearers that to follow him was to bear the cross, and therefore they must “count the cost” of being his disciples (Luke 14:26-28)
5. Assuming that a government/society/culture that has tolerated Biblical Christianity historically will necessarily continue to do so
 - a. Modern-day tolerance of Biblical Christianity in the West is a historical anomaly
 - b. The normal situation for Baptists over the last 2000 years has been brutal, state-sanctioned persecution
6. Misunderstanding trials and their purpose
 - a. The natural response to trials is to see them as an enemy that will harm us
 - b. The truth is that trials are for our spiritual and eternal good
 - c. Some, like Job’s wife and friends, see trials as evidence of God’s disfavour, when the opposite is true (Job 2:10)

II. THE PURIFICATION OF TRIALS (12)

A. It is a *fiery* trial

1. Peter wrote this letter around 64 AD, when the Great Fire of Rome destroyed much of the city

2. It was thought that Nero himself was responsible for the destruction in order to implement his rebuilding program
3. He blamed the Christians who quickly became the objects of the most severe persecution
4. Among the various forms of cruelty the Romans inflicted on the Christians, burning was one of them, Nero using their burning bodies as human torches, or "Roman Candles"
5. But the fire in this verse refers to the effect of the trial on the believer's faith, using the analogy of gold being tried in a fire (1:7)
6. Afflictions and trials both *prove* our faith and *purify* our faith

B. Trials prove our faith

1. Abraham believed God, and God proved his faith by trying him concerning the offering of Isaac (Hebrews 11:17-19)
2. There are many who profess faith in Christ, yet it is not clear whether they possess true faith
3. The stony ground hearer has all the appearance of a genuine believer, yet it is not until "tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word" that he is shown to be a mere professor (Matthew 13:20-21)
4. But the true believer's faith increases and is strengthened through his trials (2 Thessalonians 1:4)
5. "A faith that is not tested is a faith that cannot be trusted"

C. Trials purify our faith

1. In the refining process, the intense heat of the fire separates and removes the impurities from the gold, leaving only the pure and precious metal
2. It is said that it is only when the goldsmith can see his reflection in the surface of the molten gold that he knows it has been purified
3. God is the refiner of his saints, removing their sin and making them pure in his likeness
4. Job understood this, even in the midst of his trial: "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:10)
5. Though the trial may seem severe and even unbearable, we must realise that it is being overseen by the loving hand of God, to give us an expected end (Jeremiah 29:11) and that he supplies his all-sufficient grace to sustain us through it (2 Corinthians 12:9)
6. In perfecting our faith, trials not only benefit us, but others to whom our faith in suffering serves as a most powerful witness to the lost and the saved alike (2 Timothy 2:10)
 - a. The gospel is never so compelling to the world than when it is proclaimed from the lips and life of a suffering Christian
 - b. The Spirit-filled testimony of Stephen as he was martyred was surely one of the "pricks" used of God to convict the heart of Paul (Acts 9:5)

III. THE JUBILATION OF TRIALS (13)

- A. We partake of Christ's sufferings
 - 1. Not in atoning for sin – Christ alone suffered for our sins
 - 2. We suffer for the same cause – righteousness, truth, the glory of God
 - 3. We suffer to the same end – our sanctification and final glorification
 - 4. The persecution the world desires to inflict directly upon Christ but cannot, they instead inflict upon his people on earth
 - 5. In this way we know “fellowship of his sufferings” (Philippians 3:10) and “suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29)
- B. The exceeding joy will be realised at Christ's coming
 - 1. Christ is now glorified, but his glory is not revealed
 - 2. Though Christ has and will have essential glory in himself, his great glory on that day will be in his union with his redeemed, who render glory unto him, and are partakers of his glory (2 Thessalonians 1:10)
 - 3. His glory will be revealed in us at his coming (Romans 8:17-18)
 - 4. In the light of that eternal glory, our present sufferings will be seen as insignificant, a light affliction, which is but for a moment (2 Corinthians 4:17)
 - 5. So presently we rejoice to be “counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5:41)
 - 6. But the day will soon come when the “rejoice” (*chairo*) becomes “exceeding joy” (*agalliao*) – far higher exultation, a joy unspeakable

CONCLUSION

- 1. We are called to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14) and hope that our good words and works will bring others to faith in Christ
- 2. Yet in the world, “men loved darkness rather than light” and “hateth the light” (John 3:19-20), so we must expect to receive that hatred of the world in the form of persecution
- 3. The more light we shine, the more hate we will generate
- 4. The less light we shine, the more the world will love and praise us (cf. Luke 6:26)
- 5. The apostle Paul suffered much for the name of Christ, yet he confessed his suffering fell well short of Christ's, and desired to suffer that he might be more like his Saviour (Colossians 1:24)
- 6. We must rid ourselves of viewing the Christian life as one of ease and comfort and realise that we are called to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:3)
- 7. View this life as God's preparation for the world to come, realising that “the bitter must come before the sweet, and that also will make the sweet the sweeter”
- 8. Look beyond this present sufferings in this “vale of tears” to the eternal joys of heaven in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:18)
- 9. Pray: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts” (Psalm 139:23)