

Banking On God's Faithfulness

1 Peter 4:12-19

Tonight, we come to the heart of Peter's first letter. In fact, I would argue that we'll encounter the singular verse that best captures the meaning of the entire book, but I don't give spoilers, so let's dive in and talk our way to it. Picking up in verse twelve, Peter wrote...

1 Peter 4:12-19

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. 17 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? 18 And

**If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?**

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

I love the TENDERNESS that Peter demonstrates throughout his letter. I don't know about you, but when I think about the gruff, often rash fisherman, I'm almost caught off-guard by this "grandfatherly" figure we meet in these two epistles. My heart's warmed just as much by the work the Lord has done in Peter's heart as by the words Peter uses. Just like the time Peter gave the hard bit of instruction to conduct oneself in godliness and to be subject to human authority (1 Peter 2:11), he tenderly calls his readers "BELOVED." He tells them...

1 Peter 4:12

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Now, we know that there is suffering that's just part and parcel to living in a sin-broken world. All of our lives have been touched by sickness, pain, heartache, and loss. Such suffering is common to lost and saved alike. There's the trials and suffering we bring upon ourselves through selfishness and ultimately SIN. Peter has warned against suffering for this reason several times in his first letter already, and he'll touch on that again tonight. However, Peter's focus is on the "fiery trial" which is an allusion to

PERSECUTION brought on by following and proclaiming the Name of Jesus Christ, and specifically the REFINING nature of the trial. Peter said to **“not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you.”** The Greek for that phrase can be literally translated, **“do not be ASTONISHED or TAKEN ABACK at the BURNING among you, occurring to you for TESTING.”** The NET Bible simply translates it as **“a trial by fire,”** and Peter began his letter with this VERY theme, writing...

1 Peter 1:6-7

6 In this [our hope, inheritance, salvation] you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Trials were already present in the lives of these believers, and more were coming. As counterintuitive as it seemed, they were for their good and God’s glory. Therefore, it was God’s will to use persecution as a tool for refinement, and Peter warned these beloved believers not to be SURPRISED. Tonight, if you’re taking notes, we’re going to see THREE "DON'Ts" and THREE "DOs" as we meditate upon Peter's inspired instruction for responding to the “fiery trial,” and this is the first "don't."

1. DON'T BE SURPRISED.

Don't be ASTONISHED. Don't be TAKEN ABACK. Don't be NAÏVE, or careless, or self-deceived. Persecution was (and is) on the way, and leaving yourself in a position to be surprised is to set yourself up for CRISIS and to CAVE UNDER PRESSURE. As it comes to teaching our kids important life lessons or anticipating difficult conversations or situations, Pastor Kevin, and others, no doubt, promote the practice of ROLE-PLAYING, essentially PRACTICING going through a tough scenario before ever arriving at it. Another example is that of running suicides on the basketball court before jumping on the free-throw line to shoot free throws, simulating the shaky hands and pounding heart that comes with the pressure of a real game. In both cases, the role-player is less likely to CRUMBLE under the pressure of the moment, BECAUSE THE MOMENT IS NOT UNFAMILIAR! He or she has BEEN THERE BEFORE! THIS is what it looks like to not be SURPRISED by the "fiery trials" that are headed our way. You may not make role-playing a habit in your life going forward (though it's practicality speaks for itself), but what Peter's encouraging is, once again, an approach to persecution that has to do with MENTAL PREPAREDNESS. Don't be surprised. EXPECT it. That brings us to the SECOND "DON'T" of the evening...

2. DON'T THINK IT STRANGE.

Now that the imminent reality of persecution is squarely at the front of your mind, don't react **“as though something strange were happening to you.”** If you remember the last time I taught, Peter spoke of how the lost are SURPRISED when we don't join them in debauchery, meaning that they think it strange. The word for surprised in tonight's passage means the same thing, and Peter ELABORATES on it. The word for STRANGE, in this context, carries the meaning of being NEW or UNHEARD OF. Peter was saying that the world hating and persecuting the righteous is NOTHING NEW. This has been the

case ever since the Beginning, and Warren Wiersbe pointed this out. CAIN WAS RELIGIOUS. He was! He was dutifully going through the motions of religion right next to his brother, yet he HATED and KILLED him! WHY?! **"Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12b)**, and the world has persecuted the righteous ever since.

Something else that is NOT NEW or UNHEARD OF is how God uses trials and suffering and makes good out of them. Since the days of Joseph in Egypt, we've known that God allows what our enemies intend for evil and makes it work together for good, just as Paul said in Romans 8, the greatest example of this being the crucifixion of the sinless Son of God. God did not even spare His own Son from suffering. Therefore, we should EXPECT it, and because we SEE IT for what it is, we are able to go beyond merely expecting it or enduring it. Peter wrote...

1 Peter 4:13

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

I know that's a difficult thought to wrap your mind around, but Peter wasn't just blowing smoke when he said it. He spoke from EXPERIENCE! After being arrested, imprisoned, and beaten for performing miracles and preaching in the Name of Jesus and STILL REFUSING to stop, Peter and the other apostles were released by the Pharisees. Luke tells us...

Acts 5:41

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

Can you imagine these guys smiling, putting their arms around each other, and praising God as they walked away from a beating? The lost world had to have thought they were crazy, but they could rejoice because they'd been **"counted worthy to suffer."** They weren't merely okay with what had happened. They didn't just have a good attitude about it all. THEY WERE GLAD IT HAD HAPPENED! How?! Why?! Paul put it this way to the Corinthians. He said that they we're...

2 Corinthians 4:10-11

10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

They were glad because, through their suffering, THE WORLD WAS STILL SEEING JESUS! They were accomplishing the mission their Master had left them with before His ascension. When we find ourselves **"carrying in the body the death of Jesus,"** we can REJOICE because we're also displaying **"the life of Jesus!"** I can suffer for all sorts of reasons in this sin-broken world, but I'll only suffer like Christ suffered when I live like He lived. I WILL suffer if I follow Jesus, but I CAN REJOICE because I know it means that I LOOK LIKE JESUS, and GOD IS REFINING ME. Peter said...

1 Peter 4:14

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

Once more we hear ECHOES of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where He said...

Matthew 5:10-12

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus said to rejoice in our persecutions, and Peter later came to understand why and encouraged others to rejoice in theirs, but I want you to notice something else. Look at all the times that suffering and glory are mentioned in connection with each other.

Matthew 5:10

Blessed are those who are PERSECUTED for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of HEAVEN.

Matthew 5:11-12

Blessed are you when others revile you and PERSECUTE you...for your reward is great in HEAVEN...

And then back in Peter's writings...

1 Peter 4:13-14, 16

13 But rejoice insofar as YOU SHARE CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS, that you may also rejoice and be GLAD WHEN HIS GLORY IS REVEALED. 14 If you are INSULTED for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of GLORY and of God rests upon you.

16 Yet if anyone SUFFERS as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him GLORIFY God in that name.

If you've been following along with us throughout this study in 1 Peter, you may be wondering, "Are we ever going to talk about anything besides suffering?!" And I get it. Suffering is a dismal subject, but something that saints throughout the ages learned at some point in their walk with the Lord is that SUFFERING IS THE PATHWAY TO GLORY. There is an undeniable connection between the two, and again, there's no greater example of this than Jesus. As Jesus spoke with His disciples on the night of His arrest, He told them...

John 16:33

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

And RIGHT AFTER THAT!!!

John 17:1

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour has come [The hour for what? SUFFERING!]; **GLORIFY your Son that the Son may GLORIFY you,**

Suffering for RIGHTEOUSNESS is the pathway to glory, and THAT is something to REJOICE in, just as Jesus did when He looked beyond the suffering and **“for the JOY that was set before him endured the CROSS, despising the SHAME, and is seated at the right hand of the THRONE of God” (Hebrews 12:2b).**

Having established that, Peter reminds these persecuted believers that there is an INGlorious suffering to avoid. Peter isn't extolling the virtues of enduring "persecution" for being a "jerk for Jesus," and I know that sounds ridiculous, but we all know people like this. They're Pharisees. Instead of sharing the Word with others, they legalistically beat others with the Word, and when the world despises them for it, they call it "persecution." For offenses like this and more, Peter follows up by saying...

1 Peter 4:15-16

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

We don't get to behave wickedly and then call the consequences "persecution." We don't get to be hateful in conversation with someone who believes differently than us and call their ire "persecution." If we give in to hatefulness, Jesus says we're as good as murderers (Matthew 5:21-22), and there are plenty of believers who struggle to separate the sin from the sinner. We don't get to steal time from our employer even for "talking about Jesus" and call our boss' fury "persecution." Let none of you suffer as a "jerk for Jesus." "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable" (1 Peter 2:12a). Serve and speak the truth in love, and if you're persecuted for that, don't be ashamed; glorify God.

Yes, we live in a sin-broken world, which means that even after we've sought to keep our conduct among the Gentiles honorable as Peter has previously instructed, there will still be times when we're persecuted for it because we did it as "Christians." Peter names actual CRIMES for which we should never be found guilty of, crimes like murder and theft. The Greek term translated "evildoer" can also be translated "criminal," but then, in the same context as these criminal allegations, he names one who is identified as, or CHARGED WITH being a Christian. I believe the connection is intentional. Under Rome in the first century, being a CHRISTIAN was tantamount to being a CRIMINAL, but in this case, Peter said, "DON'T BE ASHAMED," our final "DON'T" of the night.

The world may demonize you for your faith. The charge of "Christian" may eventually be treated as serious a CRIME as murder, but you know the truth. The world may treat you horribly when you know

you've DONE NOTHING WRONG. Hmmmm...who does that sound like? Oh, yeah! THAT'S WHAT THEY DID TO JESUS, who said...

John 15:20a

Remember the word that I said to you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

Nevertheless, we mustn't be surprised or think it strange, and we aren't to be ashamed. Don't hang your head. Don't live defeated. Don't live in fear of being identified with Jesus. **GLORIFY GOD IN THAT NAME!**

This is the second AFFIRMATION or "DO" of the passage tonight. Wear the insults and bear the marks of persecution as a BADGE OF HONOR. You didn't get those for the wrong reasons. You suffered for the best possible reason, and having remained obedient to God, blessing your persecutors rather than returning evil for evil, you BEAR WITNESS TO THE POWER OF GOD. He is GLORIFIED! When they're stunned and ask us for the reason of our hope, we get to share the GOSPEL, which is the WHOLE POINT! "Jesus is WORTHY of my suffering! He bled and died to PAY FOR MY SIN! He went through the cross, the grave, and Hell FOR ME! I'll gladly go through this trial for Him and SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW HIM, and after this, I'll go to HEAVEN." Our suffering is TEMPORARY. Peter wrote...

1 Peter 4:17-18

17 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? 18 And

**If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?**

Wait. Hold on. Pete's talking to a bunch of people who are coming under fierce persecution BECAUSE OF THEIR FAITH IN JESUS, and now he's telling them that the persecution they're facing is actually JUDGMENT or PUNISHMENT from God for some sort of disobedience??? Really?! It's a HARD WORD, for sure, but God will not tolerate disobedience, especially from His own people, so like any GOOD PARENT, when His children get out of line in some way, God DISCIPLINES us. In the same context that the writer of Hebrews exhorts us to "**Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself,**" and encourages us regarding our "**struggle against sin,**" we're also told...

Hebrews 12:7, 11

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

God can use anything to bring about our growth and His glory, even persecution. We've already talked about how such "fiery trials" come upon us to TEST or REFINE us. Sometimes we're disciplined for CORRECTION, and other times we're disciplined for MATURITY. As Paul wrote about rejoicing in the hope of the GLORY of God, he also wrote...

Romans 5:3-5

3 More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

This suffering was instilling godly character! And as, I believe, Paul also wrote later when he described how Jesus was "**CROWNED with GLORY and HONOR because of the SUFFERING of DEATH**" (Hebrews 2:9b), he wrote...

Hebrews 2:10

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Did Jesus ever need correcting or discipline because of sin? ABSOLUTELY NOT! Yet the Holy Spirit revealed to the author of Hebrews that EVEN JESUS was perfected or COMPLETED through suffering. So, you see, there is a perfecting, consecrating element to the suffering we experience as well. Again, it's a hard word, but that said, the judgment (punishment) we face in this world IS IT! When Peter wrote about how "**the righteous is scarcely saved,**" he was quoting Proverbs 11:31 from the Septuagint (Greek OT). The Hebrew clarifies things a bit, I believe...

Proverbs 11:31

**If the righteous is repaid on earth,
how much more the wicked and the sinner!**

Our suffering is TEMPORARY. As believers, we experience our judgment for a moment of time in this world; unbelievers experience theirs forever in the next. THIS is why Peter is so passionate about faithfully obeying and glorifying God through our persecution. As we've already talked about, when those who would persecute us see our godly response, our willingness to obey God in this world in spite of persecution, they're confronted with the power of God and the reality of eternity. This world isn't all there is! WE'RE LIVING FOR THE NEXT!

So, how do we endure the fiery trials of discipleship? This is the focus of Peter's entire letter, and it's almost completely summarized in the final verse of our passage tonight. Having assured us of the rich promises of God toward us, warning us of the persecution that will come to those who follow Jesus, yet still urging us to remain steadfast in godly conduct and subjection to human authorities for Christ's sake and for our persecutors' salvation, Peter encourages us...

1 Peter 4:19

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

You could preach an entire message on that one beautiful verse, perhaps an entire series. In one verse, Peter ties together all of the major themes of his letter thus far. We are going to SUFFER, and this suffering hasn't slipped past God; He's allowed it, which means it's part of His WILL for our lives right now. Finally, Peter indicates that an understanding of WHO GOD IS enables us to ENTRUST our souls to Him, which is what we're doing as we continue to OBEY Him in the face of suffering.

That Greek word translated "entrust" is important. It's a BANKING term, hence the title for the message. It carries the meaning of "depositing" SOMETHING PRECIOUS as a trust or for PROTECTION, like when we put our money in the bank; we deem it SAFER than keeping it all in our own possession. They're better equipped to protect those funds. Who cares more for our soul than God? Who can protect it better than Him? Paul understood this and sought to pass on the wisdom and encouragement to his son in the faith when we wrote...

2 Timothy 1:12

Because of this [Paul was appointed as a preacher, apostle, and teacher of the gospel], **in fact, I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed because I know the one in whom my faith is set and I am convinced that he is able to PROTECT what has been entrusted to me until that day.**

Peter and Paul are saying the same thing in unison. We are going to suffer for the sake of the Gospel, but don't be ashamed. IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY! How do I know? "**Because I know the one in whom my faith is set,**" and if you've set your faith in Him, then you know Him too, and you have but to look back on your walk with Him to see all the many, amazing ways He has cared for you.

"Who do you know God to be?" We certainly know Him better because of suffering, do we not? We're far more inclined to depend on Him in the midst of trials than we are at other times. If you've been walking beside Him in the power of the Spirit and in obedience to His Word, especially in the face of suffering and trial, then you are WITNESS to His faithfulness.

Peter describes God as FAITHFUL, and He certainly is that, but the description of God as Creator within this context of suffering and persecution REALLY STANDS OUT. There are any number of designations for God that Peter could have used in this encouraging passage. He could have said, "Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful FATHER," or "a faithful LORD," or "a faithful KING," or "a faithful SAVIOR," or "a faithful SHEPHERD while doing good." All of these and more have been used to great illustrative effect throughout the Scriptures, but Peter was inspired to write "**CREATOR.**" In Acts 4, after being released by the Sanhedrin from their first arrest, they prayed and asked for boldness from the "**Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,**" and when they finished praying, the Bible says that they place where they were

gathered was SHAKEN. The title of Creator speaks to His "**eternal power and divine nature**" (**Romans 1:20**).

There's no one more intimately acquainted with you than the One who knit you together in your mother's womb, the one who sits outside of time and watched your entire life before it even started, the One who has numbered the hairs of your head, who bottles your tears, keeps your heart beating, and gave you the breath you just took. THIS IS YOUR CREATOR WE'RE TALKING ABOUT, the One who made you to know Him, imbuing your life with ETERNALLY SIGNIFICANT PURPOSE! There is no one to whom you are more PRECIOUS! There's no one who loves you more! There's no one able to sustain us better than Him. So, when we face the "fiery trial," we can entrust our soul to Him because the One who's allowed it cares for us more than anyone else can. There's no one who cares for our soul more, nor can keep it better than Him, and if we entrust it to Him, we'll continue obeying, continue sharing His Gospel, and continue doing good.