

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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Between Two Worlds

PART

16

TITLE

Still Rejoicing

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 4:12-19



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Good morning, Providence family. And if you are a guest with us here, we are thrilled that you have joined us whether you're in this room or at home. We're glad that you are here. Hope this time will be encouraging to you.

If you have a Bible with you, if you want to turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 4. We're in a series working verse by verse and so if you're wondering why we chose this passage this Sunday, it's because last Sunday we finished verse 11 and so we have to be up to chapter 4 verse 12. It's a serious passage. It's a hopeful passage and it's for you and for me, so let me pray for us.

Father in Heaven, we come before You believing that You are God. We come believing that You're good and when we open up Your Word and we see the expression of Your kindness and goodness to us in Your Son, Christ, we are amazed. We are overwhelmed. We are grateful. We're glad. We're hopeful. Christ, we know You're coming back for us and we want to be found faithful when You arrive. I ask, God, that You would help us as we open Your Word to be able to see amazing things within Your Word as we devote this time to studying what we believe is the plumb line of all truth claims. We ask that the Bible, by Your Spirit, would search every part of our life, that You see us through and through, You know us in every way, every nook, every shadow, every closet, every hole of our heart, every motive, every intention of the heart. You see everything and we ask that You would heal everything and that You would give us courage to take our stand on the only foundation in life that will endure forever, Your Son Jesus Christ. Would you speak through weakness? Would you fill this room with the power of Your Spirit, that we would know that You are with us and that You would address everything that You desire? We love You and we thank You for Christ and it's in His Name that we pray. Amen.

First Peter was written by a man named Peter. Peter was writing to persecuted Christians. Now, I've said that for about 14 weeks in a row and so you probably don't hear it anymore. So let me emphasize one word there and it's the word persecuted. We let that roll off because we don't necessarily feel the weight of that intensity visiting us and so that's a sentence that we normally, over the last 14 weeks, have internalized as a historical statement, sort of like Rome burned. Real Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ, not only were persecuted but are and Peter is writing to them as believers who are living in between two different worlds and you are as well. So am I.

This whole series has been titled "Between Two Worlds" and the reason is because we're all citizens here on the Earth but when we come to faith in Christ, we become citizens of Heaven and so we have a King in Heaven and yet we have rulers, leaders, here on the Earth. We have an eternal Word in Heaven, a constitution that will endure forever and ever and ever and yet we have laws here on the Earth that we have to abide by. We have this tension and the reason is these worlds, they don't always align with one another. In fact, sometimes they collide with one another. One feels sometimes more real than the other because of its tangible presence right now in our life.

Peter is writing these believers who are Christians living in this world and yet they are citizens of this world and because of the King of this world, they're persecuted in this world. There is a special pain in this world that comes to people who stand with Jesus. Not so much if you walk around and you tell people, "I believe in God." But when you say, "Jesus is God, and I believe in Him," suddenly the temperature rises. Not so much in saying, "God is good," but in saying that Jesus, Who is God, is the source of everything that is good, everything from beauty to truth to wisdom to light to life to joy to hope, to everything. He's the Source of it all. There's really not too much intensity that'll come your way if you say something like, "Jesus was a teacher," but if you begin to say that Jesus' words are the plumb line for every truth claim and that His words are the final authority on all matters of human experience, everything from purpose to origin to destiny to sexuality to family to work and relationships and responsibilities. Suddenly the temperature will rise. Very rarely will you find much intensity by saying, "Jesus is a way," but if you quote Jesus Himself and say that He is the only way to heaven, you will find adversity.

For those who see Christ, we love Christ. But for those who cannot see Christ, His name is divisive, His claims, His very claims, they're so abrasive. His words tend to be so invasive, they attack everything about who we are. His exclusivity is oppressive to people. To stand with Christ ... Listen, Providence. To stand with Christ is to stand with the rejected King. We follow a crucified Man, a misunderstood Man, which is why Jesus told us clearly, "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

One in nine Christians today around the world live in a place where they're experiencing severe persecution. Loss of life. Loss of possessions. Loss of freedom, liberty. One in nine. Actual brothers and sisters in Christ. People who will be with you in Heaven, worshiping Christ forever. We sit in this room and they are imprisoned because they sat in a room. It's real. And you ask the question, "Why not us? Why don't we? Why is there certain peoples in the world who tend to live in places where they are persecuted and other people that are not? Why is that?" There's really two things the Bible describes to keep us alert, right? One of them is time. The other is light. So let me describe both. Time.

As a culture continues to drift away from the Lord, becomes post-Christian, becomes anti-Christ, it's only a matter of time before those who stake their faith and their heart and their life upon Christ, when it becomes more visible to the world around them because of the opposition of the culture to God Himself and so many of us who have spent most of our life here in America, we've not necessarily come to church and feared the police were going to storm the building when we come and the reason is because our culture, by and large for such a long part of its history, adopted a virtue even if you didn't ever read a Bible, you believed things simply because it was part of culture that was found within the Bible, but that's not true today which is why 1 Peter is going to become a more precious treasure to you the longer you live in America.

There are people around the whole world today and one of their favorite books of the whole Bible is 1 Peter and it's because 1 Peter is the one that's written by God Himself to people saying, "I know you are suffering because of Me, and this is My Word of encouragement to you." 1 Peter is a nice part of the menu in America, but in thirty years from now, 1 Peter will be one of our greatest treasures.

The other reason that we should consider why not us and why now and how do we prepare, it's not just time. It's also light. In other words, Jesus even said ... He goes, "You know, the reason that they persecute you is because you're not like them." In other words, our light is so dark that the world cannot see any difference between us and what they do, what they live, what they say, what they believe. If our light is under a basket, they simply cannot see it, you won't feel any persecution. So long as culture continues to drift away from the Lord and so long as we continue to herald the gospel that Jesus Christ died for our sins, He was buried in a grave and He rose from the dead and He has final authority and stake over our very life, the temperature is going to increase. Hoping to encourage believers in this, listen to what Peter wrote.

"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. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If you're insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler. Yet, if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in that name. 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? If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good."

I know that many of us in the room are facing a particular trial today, and it's real and it matters to God. What Peter says in these verses applies to how you interpret and walk through those trials in your life but it's important for us to note the particular kind of trial that Peter is addressing. This is not a marital trial. This is not a financial difficulty. No, this is the kind of trial he's talking about. He refers to three different sentences that tells exactly. Those who share Christ's sufferings, who are insulted for the name of Christ, and those who suffer as a Christian. It's people who will die for their faith. Be imprisoned for their faith. Be insulted for their faith. Who will lose their job because they stand up for their faith. This is the kind of trial that he's addressing specifically.

It's really important for us, then, to take that and to say, "Isn't it interesting, though, the temperature, the level of optimism that fills the words of what he says and how we're supposed to respond to this kind of intensity?" There's no shrinking back. There's no, "Be terrified." Everything is optimism. In fact, if you just look at this, there's at least four. He says, "Look, don't be surprised. Rejoice. Be glad. You're blessed. Don't be ashamed. Glorify that Name."

There's a remarkable level of optimism. It's laced all through these verses, that Peter is not looking out into all of these people and thinking, "What do I tell them?" He's saying, "How do I continue to give them hope and let me show them the goodness, the goodness of even suffering for Christ," and so the question that he answers within these verses is this one, and that is, "How can we still rejoice when we go through such suffering?" He tells us a few things. Let me show you.

The first one is this, is that suffering for Jesus is evidence ... It's evidence that we will rejoice forever. Our instinct, any time we go through a trial, is to be shocked, is to be surprised, isn't it? Like, I mean, if I walked up and slapped you, you'd be surprised that that happened, right? If the police came in right now and arrested you, we would all be surprised initially, so it's interesting that he would be in verse 12 and he says, "Look, 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."

He's not saying deny your instinct as a human being. What he's saying is this, is that once you're there, once you get to that place, like this individual in prison who's holding his Bible, he goes, "You get to that place, once you can breathe again, once you can imagine, once you catch your breath and you see what's happening, remember a few things. Remember a few things to give you hope when it's happening." 260 million of our brothers and sisters in Christ today live in places where this is reality. 95 hundred churches will be attacked this year. It's real. He says, "So when you pick yourself up off the ground and you start thinking, "What do we do? What do we do?", he says, "Calm down. Don't be surprised. Remember a few things.

It says in verse 13, "Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's suffering that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed." Let me tell you what this means. He says, "Look, if you're willingness to stand for Jesus right now on this earth in adversity and it causes you pain because of your willingness, then for you that is evidence that you will rejoice when you see Him face to face." The Bible says that when Christ comes, that those who do not love Christ, who are not ready for Christ, that they will fear and even hate, resent, His return. The fear will be so intense, in the Book of Revelation we're told that they're going to cry, "God, would You just allow the mountains to rise up and crush us, to remove us from the presence of Someone that is now so real that I rejected for so long?"

What he's saying is this, is that for those people who are so willing to say, "You know what? I absolutely know for certain that this is real and so I'm going to stake my life to Jesus Christ now and forever," is that that is evidence to that individual that on the day that you see Christ that that will be a day that you love and not hate. It will be a day that you have gladness on that day and not gloom. The willingness to endure it, it tells us, "That's real to me."

Religion rules is not sweet enough to endure suffering for. Feeling a good vibe, "I get a good vibe when I come to this place, but I'm going to be persecuted. All right. I don't need that good vibe so much." I am with Christ. With Christ. His presence is better than the absence of pain. The only presence that's better than the

absence of pain.

What Peter's really teaching here is a really important principle that every parent needs to teach and every believer needs to own and it's the godly way for the greater reward. It's the fuel of self control, where we control our urge and desires for important desires. "I want to lose weight. I want to eat all the Oreos." Urgent. Important. I say no to the Oreos for the important. This is exactly what he's saying. Right now you can have somebody's affirmation. Here on this Earth, for many people, they have a choice to make. "Do I want to be comfortable now or when I see Christ? Is the world's affirmation of me what I need today or is it Christ affirmation then?" You see, this is exactly what was missing from Peter the night that he denied Jesus. He chose peace now instead of peace then.

What he says to us is that's not the path to joy. Let me encourage each one of us to live for the day when Jesus returns. He's literally going to come back. One day, Jesus Christ will either find you and me ... He's going to find us either following Him in spite of pain or denying Him to avert that pain. On that day everyone including yourself will see just how worthwhile it was to live for Jesus Christ and so I encourage you to do something I try to do every morning and that is to imagine that today is the day. He's coming today. Imagine it. It'll change the way that you live. It'll motivate you to say, "He's worth it today. He's worth it."

The second thing he teaches is that suffering for Jesus will deepen our experience of His peace. In other words, he's saying, "Look, when trials come and they strike and you pick yourself back up off the floor and you have time to remind yourself of something that is important, rejoice in that moment and the reason is because if you're persecuted for Christ, it proves that God is taking you, intentionally taking you to a deeper level of peace." He's looked at you and He says, "You have peace, but I want you to have and know more of an experience of peace and so I'm going to allow a particular trial to come upon you."

This is precisely what he teaches. You notice what he says in verse 14. "If you were insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed." Isn't that interesting? I don't like to be insulted. I just don't. It's never enjoyable. He says, "But if you're insulted for the name of Christ, you're blessed." Now why? Why am I blessed? Because the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God ... That's the same. It's the Holy Spirit of God. When this happens, the Spirit rests upon you. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, it's the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit dwells in every single Christian and the Holy Spirit does specific things in order to keep our relationship with Christ current. The Holy Spirit is never about a show. He never stands apart from Christ and says, "Hey, look at Me. Look at how amazing I am. Look at all My giftedness." Never. He always stands behind Christ and He says, "Do you see this One? This is the amazing One. Worship this One. Worship Christ. Be absolutely overwhelmed in Christ." Then what He does is He reminds us of the truth. This is what Christ said. "When He comes, He's going to remind you of the truth." In other words ... Have you ever been at a time or a place to where you're either all by yourself and you need a verse, like you need the encouragement, or you're talking to somebody and suddenly you don't have a Bible and you're like, "Man, what was that

verse,” and suddenly you remember? Don’t pat yourself on the back, right? That’s the Holy Spirit in you going, “Oh, this is what you need. You need E8. Here, let me give it to you. Here’s the verse.”

He reminds us of the truth. He delivers that truth at just the right time for us so that we have something to hold on to. The Holy Spirit also bears fruit in our life, meaning that when we’re walking with the Holy Spirit, we become like a branch that fruit just begins to just sprout upon. The fruit of the Spirit. You remember what they are? Love, joy, what? Peace. You want peace? You need the Holy Spirit. That’s the ... There’s no other equation. You need the Holy Spirit to rest upon you.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment in order to keep our relationship current. He convicts us of sin. That means when we do something that’s sinful, He lets us know through conviction. We feel bad about it so that we’ll confess our sin, repent, and turn back to the Lord. He convicts us of righteousness. What does that mean? It means when you do the right thing, the courageous thing, He speaks and He says, “I’m proud of you.” He confirms His pleasure within us so that we feel like, “That’s the right thing. What I just did was right.” Then He convicts us of judgment. You know what that means? It means He reminds us that you can put anything you want on your tray but there’s a cash register at the end of this line. There’s an accounting, a judgement, and He says, “You better remember that as you live your life.” The Holy Spirit ... If you ever have the thought, “You know what? I don’t want to answer for that one day,” it’s because the Holy Spirit’s at work in your heart right then.

You can grieve the Holy Spirit, you can quench the Holy Spirit, but what he says here is this, is that if you endure insult for Christ and instead of grieving Him by insulting in return but instead walking faithfully and in love with one another, the Holy Spirit will rest upon you. Some of you, you know exactly what this feels like, but this is the description of what he’s saying. There’s a fearful place. There’s anxiety. There’s apprehension. There’s risk. There’s all kinds of danger around and yet when we are insulted and we don’t revile in return but instead we respond like Christ did, it says that the Spirit of Christ takes His arm and He just wraps it around us and rests upon us. When you feel that arm of His presence, you’ll never forget it. Ever.

When I was in a hospital room with my son, He was there. Countless graveside services, He is there. I grew up with a speech impediment, I still have it. Most Sundays, I’m like, “God, just please do it one more time. Let me just ... Let the words come out one more time.” Every Sunday, I’m like, “God, I just need that peace one more time. I just need You to just cover. I need You to rest Your arm over me.” Once you feel it, you never unfeel it. It’s amazing. This is exactly what we find within the Scriptures. A guy named Paul. You remember Paul? Walking around, telling people about Christ. He gets in trouble, he goes to trial. Acts chapter 23, verse 11, he says, “You know, I look around. I’m at my trial. I look around for all my friends. They’re not there. No one showed up,” but then he says, “You know what? The Lord.” The Lord stood by his side and said, “Take courage.” Now, this wasn’t Jesus in bodily form. Jesus has already ascended into Heaven, so what he’s talking about is the Holy Spirit. It’s the Spirit of Christ came. “Paul, it’s going to be okay. It’s going to be okay.”

You say, “Now, what’s the significance of that event in his life?” In particular later on when he gets to the end and eventually what happens to Paul is he’s going to have his head cut off. He’s going to become a martyr for his faith in Jesus Christ. He’s condemned as a criminal. He knows he only has literally a matter of days or hours before he hears the steps of the executioner coming for him. It’s for real. He says, “I have to write one more letter.” He doesn’t write a church. He writes one of his buddies. His name is Timothy, and his last letter that he writes, his last chapter, the last paragraph of the last chapter, he begins talking about the fact that he knows that he knows that he knows that, “Every time I’ve been in the mouth of the lion, I’ve been delivered because of God. It’s going to happen again. He’s going to deliver me. He’s going to bring me to Heaven,” and do you know what was the foundation of that hope? It was the memory of that first trial when the Lord stood by his side.

You say, “Well, how do you know that?” 2 Timothy chapter 4, notice what says. “At my first defense, first trial, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.” He sat there and he thought, “I thought my buddies were going to be here to support me and nobody’s here with me.” He goes, “God, don’t hold that against them. But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me.” In other words, what he’s saying is this, is, “The memory of peace at my first trial is the reason I have hope at my very last.”

If you go through trials, it’s because Christ wants you to know deeper peace. So let’s respond to pain with a hunger for the Spirit’s peace. Instead of resenting God, ignoring God, attempting to punish God because He’s allowing you to go through something so difficult, stand for Christ and wait for that still, small voice of the Spirit that says, “I love your courage. Now keep standing and loving.”

The third thing he teaches as to why we can still rejoice is because suffering for Jesus will point others to Him. Clearly, not every kind of trial will point people to Jesus, which is why in verse 15 he says, “Look, let none of you suffer as a murderer or as a thief or as an evildoer or as a meddler.” In other words if you break laws or if you’re just a punk, right, you’re mean to people and you face backlash for it, he goes, “Don’t take any pride in that, thinking that Christ is ... Look, I’m a persecuted Christian.” No. He says, “No, no, no. Don’t meddle in people’s lives. Don’t be abrasive to people. Don’t be cruel to people. Be kind to people, even as you share the Gospel. Don’t be breaking laws. Don’t be hurting people, because those kinds of trials, they don’t honor Christ.”

Then he says this. “Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in that name.” Providence, do you realize that there is no greater honor given to man than to bear the name of Jesus? Some of you, if I ask, “Hey, what’s ... Tell me about your identity. Who are you as a person?” We get so confused. Some of us wouldn’t even think of mentioning Christ. It’s the most important mark of distinction in your whole life. You’re born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He is your identity, but let me tell you something. If you become ashamed of Him, what that means is that as Christians is that we have absolutely lost our way in knowing why we’re on the Earth and what we’re supposed to be doing.

To be called a Christian, even in a world that reviles the name, is an honorable name. We talk about shame sometimes. Every time I use these ... There's only three ways that we really feel this shame. Shame is that awful feeling that we feel when we want somebody to think highly of us and we do something or something happens and it causes us to feel like they're not going to think highly of us.

It happens in one of three ways. We sin against somebody or in front of somebody. So if I sinned right now in front of all of you, I'd go home totally ashamed. "I can't believe I just said that or did that in front of everybody." Sometimes it's not sin, sometimes it's simply failure. It's amazing. We just started the Olympics. There's going to be some athlete, they're going to come in last place and they're going to actually feel shame, right? All these people watching. We're on our couch, they're in the pool and yet they're the ones who feel ashamed. They've not sinned against anybody. They've just not done as well and hope to receive the glory and honor that at one time they thought that they might. That's another way we find shame.

There's another way, though, and it's by association. If you've ever had like a girlfriend you were going to bring her home for a family gathering, but you got that crazy uncle, and you're like, "Oh, man. I got to warn her. All right." And so you go and you say, "Look, so great family. There is this one. It'll be interesting." Why do we even have that category of behavior that we would want to warn someone before they get there and here's why. It's because one of the ways that we find shame is through association. When we want to people admire us and they look at somebody else and they go, "Oh, my gosh. Look at that person. I can't believe," and all of a sudden, "Wait a minute. You're associated with that person that I'm reviling?" We can feel shame and what the Bible says is sometimes even we as Christian, because we live in a world that reviled Christ, that we feel a sense of shame because we're associated with Him. We want people to like us so much.

Peter is saying there is nothing to be ashamed about in being associated with Christ. On the day that you see Him, you're going to wish that you had taken every trial that you had and used it as a window through which somebody could look at your suffering and see His on their behalf. Colossians chapter 1 verse 24 says it this way. He says, "I rejoice in my sufferings for Your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking Christ's afflictions." What's lacking? What could be lacking in the death of Christ? Did He not die for enough people so He needs to come and do it again? No. Hebrews says once for all. So what's lacking?

What's lacking is there are people He died for that don't know it yet and one of the ways that they're going to see His suffering on their behalf is they're going to see us go through suffering like He went through His suffering. Being reviled. We don't revile in turn, but instead we entrust Him Who judges justly. So let me encourage you and me, all of us, to see our suffering as an opportunity to point to Christ.

The last thing, I need to move quickly. I want to show you a video in just a moment that's going to encourage your heart, is suffering for Jesus will refine our lives. Some of us, we don't like refinement, which is why we don't have a gym membership because pain refines. I don't know if you've ever noticed, but you have never been refined sitting on a couch eating Cheetos. Did you know that? Ever. You never refine that way. It's always

through discomfort, which is why you talk to anybody here who's over 40 years old and ask them this question, "When have you known the greatest growth, the greatest lessons and the greatest joys in your life?" They will not speak about seasons of extended ease. They'll speak of seasons of affliction that the Lord led them out.

So what Peter says here is, "Look, when the trial strikes and you fall to the ground and you get back up," and you're like, "Wait a minute. I'm not supposed to be surprised. I'm supposed to be thinking about something," rejoice and then think about this thing. God has a purpose for what you're going through. In verse 12, if you remember, it begins with the word beloved. That's not a throwaway word, which is why we come back to it. You're a beloved. It literally means a dearly loved child. When you become a Christian, you join the family of God. Isn't that good news? He loves you.

Then you get to verse 19 and all of a sudden, you're like, "Wait a minute. I don't like that so much." In verse 19, it says, "Let those who suffer according to God's will." Wait a minute. Could it actually be God's intended purpose to allow me to go through this persecution? Peter says yes. This is a hard thing for a lot of people who were told that, "If I come to faith in Christ, life is all about comfort and candy. That Jesus is only worthy of me following Him so long as He gives me that perpetual comfort and candy." What Peter says is, "Sometimes He decides, just like a loving father, you need discipline."

You notice he calls them fiery trials. Fiery. Fire. You throw fire into a bin and if that bin has gold, silver, wood, and hay, the wood and hay burn up. The gold and silver are refined. This is what he keeps telling us. We saw it in chapter one when he says, "Look, your faith is of greater worth than gold and it's not going to perish even though it's refined by fire."

He loves us and He has purposes for His fiery permissions and what Peter does is he unpacks this truth with this sobering comparison. Notice what he says in verse 17. He says, "For it is time for judgment to be at the household of God." That means that God's fire drops first upon His own kids. Because of Jesus Christ, there's no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ. We do not receive the fire of His wrath. We receive the fire of refinement. So when the fire comes, and sometimes it even comes through the hands of evil, persecutors, that God in all of His intentionality, like a blacksmith, what's He doing? He's using that heat in order to test us and refine us and purify us and shape us into a new you.

You compare this to the fire that the unbeliever receives, which is what he talks about next. He says, "If it begins with us, what will be the outcome of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Is the righteous scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" We don't have to guess. We don't have to guess because the Bible says when the Lord Jesus is revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

While this picture should alert every single unbeliever to the need to look to the Savior, Peter is using it not to speak to the unbeliever, but to speak to the believer these words. “Oh, Christian. Your trial is not random and it’s not punitive. God is using this to refine your character, to refine your life, to refine your faith, your hope in Him.”

So let’s submit to God’s purposes of pain in our life. If you know Christ and you’re going through a trial, He loves you. He’s a dad who loves you. He’s exposing what’s in you. He’s testing what you worship and why you worship. He’s forging a new you. So entrust your soul to your faithful Creator and continue to do what is good.

If you do not know Christ as your Savior and Lord and you feel the pain at the mention of Hell, I beg you to trust Christ. He came to this earth to die for your sin and mine. He did so. It’s paid for. But His pain is only applied to those that believe in Him, who surrender their life to Him. Submit to Him. Confess Him as your Lord. You can do that right now. Would you do that right now?

I know that there’s many believers in the room, myself included, that we need a tangible expression, we need somebody to say, “I’ve walked through this. I know what it’s like,” and what Peter said is true and so I invite you to watch this video.

I became a believer when I was living in Cyprus. After nine months of fighting, arguing, and asking questions against Christianity in a church which was started by IMB, God touched my heart. So I gave my heart to the Lord and I came over to my wife and I said, “Sepideh, I gave my heart to the Lord,” and my wife told me, “I am so happy. This happened for me last week and I was praying for you.”

I became a believer in 1998. I was reading Bible because I was interested to know what is in the Bible but I believed that Bible is corrupted and the book, Bible, helped me to see what is God’s plan. So finally, I bowed down and said, “I surrender myself to You,” and really after that I had deep relationship with God.

In 2000, we forced to leave Cyprus and we move to Turkey. God connected us to IMB missionaries in Turkey. They said, “Long time we were praying for somebody come here and start house church among Iranians.” God blessed that house church in Turkey and some of the new believers, they moved back to Iran. After few months, they called me and they said, “We shared our faith and 15 people became believer. What should we do?”

So I feel I need to go and help their ministry. On one of those trip, I feel God calling me to move to Iran, so after just few weeks, a month, and we moved to Iran in 2003. First week, we started first church. Two members, my wife and I, but God blessed that church and became three house churches and 70 believers and God protected us for seven years.

I think in Christmas in 2009, we celebrating Christmas and door open. One camera came in and more than twenty police came to our Christmas party and they arrested me and at midnight they put me in cell in Rajaei-Shahr prison. When they opened the door and they put me in and they close the door, I scared. I am flesh and blood. I am human.

For 21 days, my family didn't know here I am. Am I alive or no? After 34 days, they were able to come to prison to visit me. While I was in prison, I really understood this is not mean to keep in that faith. This is God who even in that persecution time is with us and He is keeping our faith.

After three months in prison, I was able to put up bail and released to return to the court as needed. They charged me with two crimes, against the government and against Islam. When he filled, he look at me eye to eye and he told me, "I will find something against you to keep you for. Come back in two weeks."

Two weeks later when I return to the court, I find that judge was out sick. Day after, I went to the court. Prosecutor came, took me and my lawyer to the different court, new judge. I didn't know what's going on. Prosecutor who wrote against me, he asked new judge, "Judge, sentence him one year probation and close the case and let him go." I had no idea why. God always protect His children.

But there is one very important things. God didn't promise we don't ... You are not going to face prosecution, but God promised, "Always I am with you," and He was. Also, God didn't invite us to the very successful life and He didn't promise, "If you become believer, you have everything good." Even He reminded us, "Take your cross and follow Me." This is the life and this is the path of the Christianity.

I can say persecution was good not because it was pressure because more than the pressure, the presence of God was with us and the taste of sweetness of presence of God was more than the bitterness of the persecution.

So I would say if you are in the middle of the suffering because of your faith, His presence give you strength. He promise He is with you all the time and you can feel His arm, His warmness of His arm and He give us peace.

Providence family, here's Kambiz and Sepideh. Yeah. Amen. Amen.

I'm glad you're standing. Go ahead and stay up. We're going to sing in just a moment. Before we do, we're going to pray. I hope that you know, in fact if you don't now you do, they actually live here. They're actually members of Providence. They're a part of our church family. Most of us, though, don't know their story and so we wanted to share it but we also want to pray for them and a lot of people. There's a lot of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world that are suffering right so we certainly want to pray for them, but we also want to pray for what the Lord is doing in their lives.

You see, there was a point in time when they were going through a hard time when they began praying, “God, would You raise up somebody in this world who would be able to train leaders in Farsi, that would revolutionize and bring the Gospel to the Middle East?” Little did he know, after many years of persecution and even having to come, having to come here, there’s places in the world where they’re not allowed to be right now, the Lord would raise them up and today they actually do leader training, pastor training, for over three thousand leaders and pastors throughout the Middle East where the Lord is using them in the ways and the reason is because they sought to continue to entrust themselves to God and do what is good. So their testimony, to us, is a great affirmation that whatever it is that you happen to be going through, continue to look to the Lord. He has a purpose for it. He has a plan. So let’s pray for them and for our family.

Father in Heaven, we come before You thanking You most of all for Jesus Who came to rescue us. We thank You for the people in each one of our lives who came to us with the Gospel to tell us the greatest news we’ve ever heard. We thank You for Your Spirit Who’s confirmed that and that gospel and how You caused us to be born again. We thank You so much for the privilege to be a family.

Today we pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who are imprisoned, who are experiencing loss of liberty, loss of their things, their own possessions, loss of their parents, and even loss of their life. We thank You that when we open up the Bible, we see in the book of Acts that when Stephen was bearing witness, his faith in the gospel and he was being stoned for it by a world that was reviling Christ, that Jesus, You stood in Heaven with him.

We pray, God, by Your grace, that You would stand with Your children, our brothers and sisters around the world, as they’re enduring difficulty today. We pray, Spirit, that You would cover them, that You rest Your arm over people today who are frightened, who are imprisoned. We ask, God, for Your blessing in their life, that You would keep them, protect them, and give them strength to endure.

For Kambiz, we pray as he loves Sepideh and as they continue to walk on this earth as normal believers in Jesus Christ, a man and a woman seeking to honor You, we pray that You would continue to expand their influence, that You would continue to use the training that they’re giving to literally thousands of young believers, young pastors who will lead churches, house churches, underground churches, in places of the world where currently it is so dark. So we ask that You would strengthen their hands. We believe it’s only because of Christ and so we sing about that fact, in Christ alone it’s our whole hope is in You, so we sing to You now with joy. We pray this in Jesus’ name, amen.



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