

Suffering by Design

July 12, 2015 ~ 1 Peter 4.12-19

(Read v12) ~ Fiery Trial not Strange

- ❖ **Peter** is writing to Christians all across modern day Turkey ~ mid-60's of 1st century
 - ✧ **1.1** “pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia”
 - ✧ Trials had already begun / **1.6** “.. you have been grieved by various trials”
 - ✧ An intense persecution has begun / Many are in distress because of it
 - ✧ Some may be surprised by the ferocity of it – and are unprepared for it
 - ✧ Peter warns it will continue – it will get worse / **4.12** “trial which is to try you”
 - ✧ He is not denying or minimizing their present situation or their future reality
- ❖ **Christians** today in China, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, etc... would not be surprised by receipt of this letter / These people face harsh persecution
 - ✧ But we Christians of America have had it so easy for such a very long time
 - ✧ We are unaccustomed to persecution and we are unprepared for it
 - ◇ We must prepare ourselves and our children for what may come
 - ◇ We can and should pray that it not come
 - But just as with the many peoples to whom Peter is writing . . .
 - We must not deny that it is already here / and it will likely worsen

(Read v13) ~ Rejoice that you Partake in Christ's Sufferings

- ❖ Can Peter be serious, that you are to “.. rejoice .. that you partake of.. sufferings?”
 - ✧ “Is this hyperbole, exaggeration, masochism, insanity ?” / No . . .
 - ✧ There's a truth here that we can't fully comprehend
- ❖ Peter had rejoiced himself in response to suffering, many years earlier . . .
 - ✧ **Acts 4.18** ~ Peter & John commanded “not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.”
 - ◇ **v19-20** They replied that they would be obedient to God
 - ◇ **v29-30** Then they prayed for boldness to speak in the name of Jesus
 - ✧ **Acts 5.18** ~ The apostles are again imprisoned
 - ◇ **v20** But an angel releases them & commands them to preach in the Temple
 - ✧ **Acts 5.26** ~ They are again brought before the Sanhedrin
 - ◇ **v29** They reply “We ought to obey God rather than men.”
 - ◇ **v34-39** The council wants to kill them / But Gamaliel rescues them
 - ◇ **v40** They are beaten and commanded to not speak in Jesus' name
 - ✧ **Acts 5.41** ~ “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name”

Xition: Peter knew that of which he spoke . . .

Peter Knew Suffering / But We Do Not

- ❖ This is something we need to study to understand . . .
- ❖ “Why did the Apostles rejoice that day they were beaten?”
 - ✧ Because “. . . they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name”
 - ✧ “Are you worthy to suffer shame for Jesus?”
 - ✧ “Do we even want to be worthy to suffer shame for His name?”
 - ◆ Especially if it means we’ll be arrested, threatened, imprisoned and beaten
 - ✧ “What does it mean to be worthy to suffer shame?”

Worthy Suffering

- ❖ Jesus never sinned ~ He died a sinless man ~ **the** sinless man
- ❖ In a sense, His death was the only truly unrighteous death on this earth
 - ✧ Since the sin of Adam and Eve all others have had a death sentence resting upon them
 - ◆ A temporal earthly death sentence / And an eternal spiritual death sentence
- ❖ So all but Jesus bears some real responsibility for the sin of this earth
 - ✧ But, when people embrace the forgiveness of sin available through Christ
 - ✧ When they turn from their former sinful ways and fully embrace God
 - ✧ They embrace true righteousness, they identify with Christ and His sufferings
- ❖ When such people are reviled or persecuted, when they suffer yet endure . . .
 - ✧ Then they reflect the glory of God
- ❖ Christ’s obedience unto death earned our salvation
 - ✧ But our “worthy suffering” purifies us of sin and glorifies God

(Read v13-14) ~ Two Outcomes of Worthy Suffering in vss 13-14

1. **v13** ~ “that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy”
2. **v14** ~ “blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you”
 - ✧ These two blessings indicate that we are God’s special treasure
 - ✧ Enduring the abuse of an enemy of God well, pleases and glorifies God (**v14**)

(Read v15) ~ Our Suffering Must Not be Due to Our Own Sin

- ❖ I am concerned for myself and all Christians in our society
- ❖ We live in an age of relative peace and ease
 - ✧ We do not endure abuse, reproach, suffering or even criticism well
 - ✧ Yes, we should defend our Constitutional rights . . . But hear in **1798** what . . .
 - ✧ **John Adams** said, “Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

Xition: The Constitution will not protect us from the abuse that is coming . . .

Suffering Must be for Just Behavior

- ❖ We live in a time of immature Christians
 - ✧ Perhaps many aren't even Christians / But perhaps some are . . .
 - ◇ “Will they remain faithful through reproach, abuse and persecution?”
- ❖ Well, that's in part at least the point of persecution . . .
 - ✧ God purifies His children / He purifies His church
 - ✧ Peter used the term “fiery trials” (i.e., “trial by fire”)
 - ✧ The fire renders some precious metal useless – too many impurities
 - ✧ But for the rest it removes the impurities / the heat drives the impurities out

(Read v16) ~ Embrace the name Christian with Pride

- ❖ Modern western society spits upon Christianity
 - ✧ When Michael Chang (age 17) won the French Open in 1989 he gave the glory to Jesus
 - ◇ He said, “I thank the Lord Jesus Christ, because without Him, I am nothing.”
 - Some in the audience loudly booed him
 - ✧ The French Open was occurring during the Tiananmen Square crackdown
 - ◇ He later said, “The crackdown that happened was on the middle Sunday at the French Open, so if I was not practicing or playing a match, I was glued to the television, watching the events unfold... I often tell people I think it was God's purpose for me to be able to win the French Open the way it was won because I was able to put a smile on Chinese people's faces around the world at a time when there wasn't much to smile about.”
- ❖ It has become politically correct to mock or insult Christians and Christianity
 - ✧ But for this very reason we ought to set ourselves up as targets for the mockers
 - ✧ Let the mockers mock . . . Let the haters hate . . . What we are called to do is endure
 - ✧ Their insults, their taunts, their cruelty, will be heard again in courts of heaven
 - ◇ And our patient endurance, our calm demeanor will also be seen

Martyrdom of Polycarp

- ❖ Polycarp was an elder of Smyrna / He was 86 years old by this time
 - ✧ The letter from the church of Smyrna records his martyrdom
- ❖ Many in the church tried to convince him to flee – to escape – but he chose to stay
- ❖ In the arena even the government official (proconsul) wanted to spare his life
 - ✧ He urged him to just take a small pinch of incense and offer it in homage to Caesar
 - ◇ But he would not do it . . .
 - ✧ He urged him to cry out “Away with the atheists” for that's what they called Christians
 - ◇ He cast a feeble arm towards the jeering crowd and said, “Away with the atheists”
 - ✧ He urged him to take the oath – to curse Christ – to which Polycarp replied

- ❖ “Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?’ Tied to the stake, Polycarp prayed to be received by the Lord ‘as a rich and acceptable sacrifice.”

Cuban Christian Martyrs

- ❖ Christians were arrested and imprisoned in Cuba under brutal conditions
 - ✧ Armando Valladares documented this in his book, “**Against All Hope**” (2001)
 - ✧ They were ordered to deny Christ and embrace Communism as a condition of release
 - ◇ Some that continually refused to do so were executed
 - ◇ When brought outside for execution they would cry out
 - “**Long live Christ the King! Down with Communism!**”
 - This cry became so disturbing to the jailers that they would first gag the men

(Read v17) ~ Judgment Begins at the House of God

- ❖ The argument Peter states is one from lesser to greater
 - ✧ “**God loves His children, yet allows them to be mistreated in this way**”
 - ✧ “**Imagine then how severe the judgment of God will be upon the mockers**”
 - ✧ The same fire that purifies the child of God ~ destroys the mocker of God

- Suffering for Christ is a pledge to us of the reality that we truly belong to Christ**
- If we truly are partaking of Christ’s suffering – it’s because Christ is in us**
- It is the Christ in us – too visible to others – that makes them hate us so**
- Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. . .”**

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,

And to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,

To God our Savior, who alone is wise,

Be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.

Amen *pause* Go in peace . . .