

Don't Think It Strange

by Anton Bosch

This sermon focuses on the concept of enduring trials and persecution as a Christian, emphasizing the need to not be surprised by challenges but to see them as opportunities for purification and testing of faith. It highlights the importance of being prepared for increasing difficulties in the world and the significance of having a strong anchor in Jesus amidst trials and uncertainties.

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:12, 1 Peter 4:17, Matthew 5:11, James 1:2, 1 Corinthians 3:13, Hebrews 6:19, 2 Timothy 3:12, Romans 8:18, 1 Peter 1:7, Revelation 2:10

Topics: "Endurance in Trials", "Strength in Faith"

Description

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Transcript

1 Peter chapter 4 verse 12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you. But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory is revealed you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

On their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

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? Now if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to him in doing good as to a faithful creator. So we are in verse 12 and we now come to the core of this epistle.

Remember we've said all along that the epistle deals with suffering, and it particularly deals with suffering in the context of the fact that we are strangers and pilgrims and we don't fit into our society. The letter is written, the letter begins, to the strangers or the the pilgrims or the sojourners that are scattered. And so

these are not necessarily Jews, but they are Christians that are scattered in the world.

We are pilgrims, we are scattered in this world, and we do not belong in this world, we do not fit into this world, we are members of a different kingdom, and because of that we live different kinds of lives. And of course the problem is that many Christians are compromised and they look like the world, they smell like the world, they act like the world, they speak like the world, and so the world accepts them as part of their own. But if we are true children of the kingdom, then we will be different in every area of our lives, and that attracts persecution, that attracts rejection.

When the world loves us there is a question as to our testimony. All who live godly will suffer persecution. We've covered all of this, I'm just trying to remind you of where we've been as we to this passage.

And so because we are strangers, because we are foreigners, there is a very real term, and I think that we're seeing a lot of this today in the world and in the political environment, and it's a term that's not used in America much, but it's used in Africa a lot, and the term is xenophobia. Xenophobia. Xeno is stranger, phobia, fear.

Fear of strangers, and people have a fear of strangers, fear of people of ethnicity or of culture that they don't know and they don't understand. And if we are living truly godly lives, Christlike lives, the world does not understand that. They don't understand when we don't take bribes.

They don't understand when we have integrity in all of our business. They don't understand when we don't talk with them, when they talk, unseemly talk. They don't understand when we don't party with them.

And so they have a fear of us, in a sense, and this translates into a hatred, and this translates into persecution. And so in this context, then, Peter says, Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial. Now remember a little bit earlier in the chapter, he said that you need to brace yourselves, arm yourselves with this mind of being willing to suffer.

And here he's now coming to the other side of the same thing, and he says don't think it strange. Now I've talked about this in many different contexts over these, particularly these last few years, as we race towards the end of time, towards the soon coming of the Lord Jesus, that we have a problem, particularly in America, because we think it is strange that a Christian should be persecuted, because we have been accepted in American society for a long time, and particularly in the rise of evangelicalism and Pentecostalism in the last century, it has become acceptable to be a Christian. And so we assume that we shouldn't be suffering.

We don't understand Christians who live in China, and parts of Mexico, and other parts of the world, North Korea, and in Arabic countries, who, Islamic countries, who are persecuted for their faith. We feel for them, but we can't relate to them, because we say, well, we don't know what this is. And so when, and this is our problem, this is the problem that we are facing today, particularly the next generation, those who are maybe 20 years younger than I am.

We think it's strange, but persecution is coming, and it's much faster than we think it is. And so when it comes, those who have been taught that we will be, that life's going to be easy, that we'll be prosperous, that everyone's going to love us, that everything's going to go well, that we're not going to have problems, will not be able to endure, and we're going to talk about testing tonight, because this is part of the passage, the part of what Peter deals with here. And so we need to be ready.

We need to recognize that part of being a Christian is suffering for the faith. And it may not be real today, but it is soon going to become real. And I'm not going to talk about the situations that I have had to deal with, but right now there are those who are persecuting me for the stand that I take.

And unfortunately many of them are Christians. So it's not a strange thing. It's not something that is over the sea in Korea or North Korea.

It is something that is right here in America. And so don't think it's strange when this happens. Be ready.

Be braced for it. I remember many years ago, and this is a slightly different subject, but it's the same principle that I want to share with you. But many years ago in South Africa, a lady came to our assembly, and I can't even remember how she came to meet us, but she came and started fellowshiping with us.

She had come from a prosperity-type church, and we were not a prosperity. We obviously are very against the prosperity gospel. And then forgive me if I've shared this testimony with you before, but she then, after a few months, her husband went bankrupt, and they lost everything.

And her testimony was that it was God's grace that brought her to this church, to our church. Because in the six months before, she had been taught to be able to not expect things to go easy, to be ready for trials, and for difficulties, and for opposition, and for things to go wrong. Because God is working all things to the good of them that love him and are called according to his purpose.

And that is 20 years ago. To this day, every once in a while, every once in a year or so, I get an email from her. She now lives in Cape Town with her husband.

Her husband never accepted the Lord Jesus. But she still writes every year. And one of the things that she writes every year is she thanks God that she was brought out of that prosperity thing.

Because if she was in there when everything went wrong, her faith may have fallen apart. Because where is God? God's promised, I'm going to be healthy, and wealthy, and fine, and everything's going to be great, everything's going to be easy. And now I've lost everything.

And so the same thing applies to this, to the issue of suffering. Folks, when suffering comes, those who are younger—and I don't know if it will happen in my lifetime, but it certainly will happen in the next generation's lifetime—when America will lose its freedom of religion. And certainly you will not be allowed to preach the gospel anymore.

We will not be allowed to open those doors. And that's if Jesus tarries. I think he's going to come before that.

But if he does, persecution will come to America. And when that happens, remember what we have said and what I've been saying in this last year, as the Lord has laid this upon my heart. And remember that part of the struggle that we have right now, while what we are experiencing with the virus, and what we're experiencing with the political uncertainty and unrest that's going on on the streets, and that's going on in the White House, and all of these things, that while that is not the persecution and the trial that Peter is speaking about here, it's a similar thing.

And so I believe that God has been preparing us, as I've said to you before, the Lord has been preparing us over this last year for this time. And I thank God that we have been prepared, and that the folk have

been able to endure this time and to come through this time stronger in their faith. Many churches are losing people.

And I thank God that we've not lost one so far. And it's not nothing that I've done, but it's God's grace that has prepared us for the time in which we are. Yes, we are scattered, and many are watching on television tonight, and are not able to join with us.

But as far as I know, we have not lost one who has turned away from the Lord, or gone into some kind of heresy because they've been watching TBN or some other kind of nonsense, as I've seen in other churches. And so we thank God for Him preparing us. And I believe that the reason we've come to Peter right at the end of our studies, having gone through all of the New Testament just about now, we've come to Peter.

And I believe that the timing is God's timing. Don't think it's strange. When the world does not accept you, don't think it's strange.

It is common to Christians. And I've reminded you many, many times that more, even today, that more Christians in the world are persecuted than are free. We find it hard to understand because America is so big, and we're free in America, and people are free in Europe, or many parts of Europe.

But more Christians, statistically, are being persecuted for their faith than live in free countries. So it's not a strange thing. We need to look at church history.

And right from the very beginning, the church was always persecuted. It was always persecuted. And at the very beginning, you remember that it was the Jews at the hand of Paul, and others like him who persecuted the church.

And then the Roman government took over, and they began to persecute the church. And then in 8300, Constantine came and married church and state, and everything was great. Everybody said, this is wonderful.

The government has accepted us, and we're part of what's going on. But in fact, that was not the true church. They turned on the true church, the small groups that remained faithful to the Lord Jesus, and would not bow the knee to Constantine, who had set himself up as the head of the church, and headed the Nicene Council, and the list goes on and on.

And so we can go right through. Now, the persecution, that's the beginning of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church persecutes the true Christians right through to the Reformation.

And at the end of the Reformation, we say, oh, this is great. We have the Reformation. We're now accepted.

No, the Reformers persecuted the true Christians. Calvin and Luther murdered true believers. And so it's never stopped.

It's always been part of being a Christian. Don't think it's strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you. Now, he uses this word, fiery trial, and he uses it on purpose, because you remember that earlier on in Peter, he speaks about our faith being tested as by fire produces pure gold.

And so he's trusting us to remember what he'd written. Now, it's taken us two years, almost, I think, from where we were there at the beginning of Peter. What is the purpose of the fiery trial? It is to do two things.

It is to purge, to cleanse, and it is to test. Those two things. Those two things go together when it comes to metal, when it comes to steel.

And when we forge knives in the furnace, the process of putting the steel into the heat and bringing it out, and it's orange or yellow or sometimes white-hot, and then beating it on the anvil and putting it back in again, that has two purposes. The one is that we're cleansing, purifying the steel. We're reducing the molecules, and don't worry about that.

But we're also testing it as we're going along to make sure that it is strong and it will be able to do the job that it's to do. And so the fiery trial is there to purify us. And so here's exactly the problem we have in the free world today, is it's too easy to be a Christian.

So everybody's a Christian. Everybody thinks they're a Christian. It's too easy to join the church.

It's too easy to get baptized. It's too easy to even serve on the church board or whatever else it may be. And so the church is infiltrated by tares, by those who are not truly born again.

But when there is persecution, when there are trials, you find out who are real and who are fake. You take a plastic knife, and you say, oh, it's a knife. It can cut.

I'll put it in the fire, and let's see what happens. No, it's just going to melt. It's going to burn up.

But you take a piece of steel, a proper knife steel knife, and you put it in the fire. It's just going to come out stronger. It's not going to break.

It's not going to melt. It's not going to burn up. And true Christians are just purified, and the church is purified during a time of trial.

Now, we're not going to get there tonight, but in verse 17, you'll see that he speaks about that judgment must begin at the house of God. This is what he's talking about. The judgment there, just by the way, is not judgment in the sense of condemnation, but it's judgment in the sense of cleansing and purifying.

And so God, and this is where we are now, and we need to not lose sight of this. We are at a time at the end when God is purifying, or the Lord Jesus is purifying for himself a bride, that he will present to himself spotless without blemish. And so we're in that time of sifting.

We're in that time of cleansing and purifying, and in the time of the great falling away, and thousands and thousands are falling away from the faith. I don't want to get into the argument about once saved, always saved, but the vast majority of those who are falling away were never saved. They were never saved.

Oh, but they're preachers. I can rattle off a list of names of preachers who have denied the faith, if not verbally denied the faith, but have denied the faith by their actions, and who I do not regard as saved anymore, and they're still preaching in the pulpits. They're still preaching on television, but they're not saved anymore.

They've fallen away, because God is testing the work. Don't think it's strange concerning the fiery trial, and of course the fiery trial speaks of intense heat. So this is not just a little bit of trouble.

I think that what we're going through with the virus is very, very real, and I understand that people are going through tremendously difficult times in terms of their finances, in terms of jobs, in terms of their emotional well-being, in terms of relationships. All of these things are taking tremendous strain, but this is not a fiery trial. This is a trial, but not a fiery trial.

A fiery trial is what they're experiencing in North Korea. When they find a Christian, they wipe out four generations. Two generations after, your kids and your grandkids.

Two generations before, they're all taken and put down on the road in steam rollers. What do you call them? Steam rollers, right over. Terrible, terrible.

That's a fiery trial. Now he says, don't think it's strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you. Now this word comes from the King James, and so I'm going to go to the English Standard Version, and most translations use the word test.

The word try means to test. It's an old English word, and we don't use it that way anymore. When we talk about try today, we mean you're trying to do something.

Now the sense of that English word means, in the old language, to test something. And so a better word here is to test you. So the trial comes to test us.

So I said it's there to purify. When your faith has been tried as so is through fire, it will come forth as pure gold. But it's also testing, and it's testing in the sense that that which is not real will be consumed, will be burnt up.

You can take some gold nuggets with all sorts of inclusions in it, all sorts of dirt and other bits and pieces, and you take that whole lot and you put it in the fire, and the gold and the dross, the rubbish, is going to separate out. And you skim the rubbish off the top, and you're left with pure gold. And that's the process that Peter is talking about here.

Now here's one of the things that we just have to get our minds right as we deal with these next verses, and I'm just going to get through verse 12. Well, I'm hoping to get through verse 12 tonight, and then we'll move on. But as we go through all these verses going up to the end of the chapter, one of the things that we need to try and understand is that the trial in this case, the persecution, is coming from the world.

It's coming from the world, but God is using that for His purpose. He is not causing the persecution, but He is allowing the persecution, and He is using the persecution for our good. I don't know where the virus came from.

I don't know whether it was man-made or natural. And as I've warned before, let's not get into those debates. It doesn't matter.

Did God bring it about? I don't think so. But what I do know is that God is using it for our good. And we say, well, you know, we've spoken about that earlier tonight.

How can that be for our good when there's only a few of us here tonight, because the rest are either sick or they can't come out? How can that be for our good? No, God is using it to strengthen our faith. And on one of the Zoom meetings, we spoke about this, and I'm going to remind you of that. Last year, at the end of last year, I warned about the need for you as a congregation to not be dependent on me.

I can't carry you all the way. You have to have your own relationship with the Lord Jesus. But as long as I'm here, it's easy to rely on me.

It's just natural, but it's not a good thing. And one of the things that each one of you have experienced and learned in this last three, four, five months is to stand on your own feet. The three months that we were not able to meet together, we were not able to see one another, you had to dig a little deeper in your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

You had to get down to business with him and his word and allow him to minister to you and not to have the benefit of the body of the church and of the elders being able to minister to you. Can you see that God has used that? And maybe you can't see it, but I can see it. I can see the growth.

I can see the difference between when I went to Australia in February and when we were able to meet again together a month ago. I can see the difference. God is using it.

So let's not get hung up about, is it the devil? Is it the politicians? Is it this or is it that? Let's forget it. God is working all things for our good. And God is using the virus and God is using persecution for our good.

And that's the point. And you'll see that Peter deals with that and speaks about the Lord's role in this whole process. So I just wanted to jump ahead on that simply because it's easy for us to say, well, I don't understand.

We're talking about testing, but you know, it's the world that's causing the problem. No, it is the world, but it's God who's using the trials to test us. Now, when he's testing, he's testing two things.

First of all, he's testing the stuff in our own lives, because there's stuff there that shouldn't be there. Our faith is built, just an example that I just quoted, many times our faith is built on the pastor. That shouldn't be there.

So he's going to test that, and that needs to be burnt up, as we've used this illustration. But there's also the testing of us all together. And when I say all together, I mean the church across the world.

Is this congregation a real congregation? Now, folk, I'm expecting that when the virus has come and gone, and we have a vaccine, whenever that happens, and things return to some kind of normality again, the end of the year, maybe sometime next year, that many churches will not reopen. Many churches will not reopen. That many megachurches will not reopen, because God is testing.

He's testing us, the stuff in our lives. He's testing the churches, and he's testing whether we are real, whether we will stand. Now, the question then is, doesn't God know everything? Doesn't he know who is born again, and who's not born again? Of course he does.

He doesn't need a test to figure out who's who and what's what. He knows these things. So why is the purpose, what is the purpose of the test? The purpose of the test is so that we can see the results, so that we can understand what's in our own hearts, so that we can understand what is in our church, so that we can understand what is in the hearts of those who choose to defect from the faith.

The problem is it's hard for us to understand what's in our own hearts, and that's why God has to put us through a test. I'm sure that maybe you've done a test at school or in college or in your job, and maybe you failed. I'm not asking for a show of hands, but when you went in, you said, I've got this.

I know this stuff. But when the test came, you didn't make the grade, so you discovered you didn't know it. And it's the same with our faith.

We say, well, you know, remember Peter? They'll all leave you. I'll never leave you. And that night Jesus tested him in a sense, and Peter walks out and he weeps bitterly, because he had seen his own heart.

Remember, that was the point at which Peter changes dramatically and powerfully, the day he was able to see what's in his own heart. And so the test is much to do about us understanding what's in our hearts. And so the final trial, when it comes—remember the details—not if it comes, when it comes upon you.

Now, I know that the liberal theologians say, well, you know, Peter's writing, and at the time when Nero is turning bad and turning against the Christians, and the fiery trial is speaking about Nero who would set the Christians alight on poles to light up his drunken parties. I don't believe that, because this is not written just for them. This is written for us.

And the trial will come, and it will test you as though something strange were happening to you. So you see that this translation, the English Standard Version, at the beginning says, Beloved, do not be surprised. The New King James says, don't think it's strange.

And then he ends with, as though something strange, something extraordinary happened to you. Why does he use the same word twice? For emphasis. This is not a strange thing.

I'm not going to talk about whether we go through the tribulation or not. That's not the point right now. I don't believe we go through the tribulation, but I do believe that before the tribulation we will see the beginning of sorrows.

And I believe that what we're seeing is the beginning of the beginning of the beginning of sorrows. And things are going to get harder and harder the closer we come to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you believe in a mid-tribulation or post-tribulation rapture, well then you believe that that trial is going to even get worse and worse and worse.

At the end of the day, trouble is coming. Don't think it's strange. I think the music that we have at the end of the videos is, will your anchor hold in the storms of life? And that's really the question.

Where is your security? Where is your anchor? Is it in this world? Is it in the fact that everything's going to be easy and everything's going to be fine? Or is your anchor, as the Hebrew says, entered in beyond the veil, anchored into heaven itself? That doesn't matter what comes in this world. It doesn't matter what happens in November. It doesn't matter what happens with a virus.

I'm not moved because my anchor is in heaven. And I'm not surprised. I'm not caught off guard by the stuff that's happening around me because my hope is fastened upon the Lord Jesus Christ and upon the resurrection.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you, Lord, that you prepare us for the things that lie ahead. And Lord, I don't want to be a scaremonger, but at the same time, Lord, I believe and I see the signs and I believe that things are getting more and more difficult.

I pray, Lord, that each one of us who are here and each one who is watching tonight will be those who will endure to the end. Lord, that as we are tested, we won't fail, but Lord, that we will come out stronger. Lord,

I pray that you would help us.

Lord, forgive us if we are super confident like Peter was. Yes, Lord, everyone will fall away, but I won't. Lord, help us to walk humbly with you.

Help us, Lord, to walk dependent upon you, to hold us, to keep us, to strengthen us, to encourage us. And Lord, I pray for the many, maybe some even in our congregation, but certainly thousands, maybe millions across the world whose faith is shaken right now. Many falling away, many defecting to false teachings.

Lord, I pray for them. I pray that you would draw them by your spirit. Bring them back, we pray, in Jesus' name.

Lord, I pray for those who are not with us this evening. Lord, for many of our number who are afflicted, who are sick, or awaiting the results of the tests. Lord, it has to be a very stressful time for each of those families.

And Lord, we just pray that you would strengthen them and help them to just turn their eyes on Jesus and find in him solace and strength and comfort. Lord, that we pray that you would bring them through. And Lord, that we may be able to gather together again in 14 days.

And Lord, that we pray also that you would, whatever happens, that you would keep us. In Jesus' name, I pray. And so, Lord, I commit us to you now, and we pray that you would go with us, keep us, and protect us, and bring us together again safely on Sunday.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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