

Persecution and Trials - 1 Peter

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting God in the midst of persecution and trials, and how suffering can purify our faith and bring us closer to Him.

Duration: 48:35

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:28, 1 Peter 1:6, 1 Peter 2:18, 1 Peter 2:23, 1 Peter 4:13

Topics: "Trials"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of arming oneself with the mindset of Christ, especially in the face of suffering and trials. Christians should be prepared and ready for difficulties that will inevitably come their way. The speaker emphasizes the need to rejoice in the midst of suffering, as it allows believers to partake in Christ's sufferings and ultimately experience His glory. The sermon also highlights the importance of holding onto the truth of God's word and not allowing negative thoughts or propaganda from the enemy to overshadow it.

Transcript

Turn with me please to the book of Peter, the first letter of Peter, chapter 4. 1 Peter and chapter 4. And we gave an introduction to the book of Peter this morning, and we have separated the two, some of these books, you remember Timothy, we did both Timothys in one go, one week, but this time we're doing Peter in the two, separating the two books, simply because the message is very, very different in the two books. And so today we are doing 1 Peter, and I'm going to read for you from chapter 4, verses 7 through 19. 1 Peter, chapter 4, verses 7 through 19, and Peter of course is between Hebrews and Revelation.

1 Peter, chapter 4, verse 7. But the end of all things is at hand, therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

As each has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies.

That in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 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 or an evildoer, or as 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. Now just for those who were not in the adult Bible class, the first letter of Peter.

Peter writes to Christians who are being persecuted. This was a time when the Roman Emperor Caesar, or Caesar Nero, began to escalate the persecution of Christians, not only in Rome, but throughout the whole world. And you'll see in chapter 1 and verse 1, he is writing to Christians who are in the churches in northern Turkey.

But he's also writing not only to them, but to all Christians who find themselves in difficulty and in difficult times. Now persecution is something which is very foreign to us, because we don't have real persecution in this country. We don't really suffer for the faith.

And yet at the same time, there is a promise that anyone who lives godly will suffer persecution. That comes with the territory. Now this is a problem, because many Christians become Christians today, believing falsely that when you become a Christian, everything is going to be wonderful.

You're never going to have problems, you're never going to have issues. Life is going to just be smooth, and God's going to take away all the problems, and you'll be healthy and happy and wise, and everything will be rosy. But in fact, the reality is quite different.

The reality is quite different. Becoming a Christian is never an easy thing. The moment you become a Christian, there is opposition.

The opposition comes, first of all, from the devil, who is not happy that people become Christians, who is not happy that he has lost another soul to the kingdom of God. And so he's going to turn on all kinds of problems, all kinds of issues. And this is the problem.

Many Christians are unprepared, or new Christians are unprepared for the difficulties and the problems that come because of being a Christian. And I think that it is disingenuous, it's not right for us to tell people, you know, just become a Christian and all your problems will go away. Life is going to be easy.

No, life is not easy when we become Christians. And in fact, life often becomes more difficult when we become Christians. But at the same time, there are ways in which we are able to deal with that, and that is part of God's wonderful plan.

And we just read here that those who suffer according to the will of God. It is not against the will of God that we suffer. That is part of the will of God.

Because God is using our suffering and our difficulty, in whichever shape and form it comes, for our good. Remember Romans 8 verse 28, God works all things together for the good to them that love God, and to them that are called according to His purpose. So, I want this morning to go through a number of scriptures, and I'm going to go through quite a few scriptures, in the letter of Peter that deals with this issue of persecution, and of suffering, and of trials.

And I'm going to begin in chapter 1 and verse 6. And those who were in the Sunday school, please bear with me, because I'm going to repeat a little bit. But here he says, In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials. Notice he says various trials.

So he's not just speaking about persecution, he's speaking about all sorts of trials that come our way. And that come our way particularly because we are Christians. Now, he says that he's reminding us, and in fact this is the beginning and he ends the book in the same way, and I'll come back to that next verse.

But he says, In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while. For a little while. You know, it's hard when we go through hard times in our lives, and it goes on for years and years, and we say, but you know, this is forever.

No, it's not forever. It's for a little while. And we say, but you know, this has been going on for years.

I have problems, and I have issues, and I have trials, and I'm struggling, and it doesn't seem to come to an end. Well, he's reminding us that it does come to an end. It is for a while.

And even though it may be 70 years, God forbid, but even if it is 70 years, it's still a little while in the light of eternity. So he's reminding us that everything that we're looking at is from our perspective, and it seems a lifetime. It seems forever.

But it's not forever. It's for a while. And that eternity is many, many, many, many times longer than the longest life that we could ever live on this earth.

Now, he concludes the book with the same thought in chapter 4 and verse 10. And so, sorry, 5 verse 10, sorry. I got it right earlier, and then I got it wrong now.

Chapter 5, verse 10. But may the God of all grace who called us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered for a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. Look at that again.

He's reminding us that he has called us to his eternal glory, and we have suffered for a while. So it's in comparison to eternity. Now, that's hard for us to come to terms with, because this life seems to be everything to us.

We become short-sighted. And in fact, in his second letter, he writes about this issue of becoming short-sighted, that we only see the here and the now. And he's reminding us, no, look beyond now.

Look beyond this lifetime. And understand that what God is doing in our lives is part of a continual eternal life that he has given to us, and that this is just the introduction. This is just the beginning.

This is just the beginning phase of a long, long time that we're going to spend in our relationship with him. And yes, there may be some difficulty and trials at this time, but in comparison to the eternity of joy in his presence, this is really nothing. This is really a very, very short time.

And one of the things that is able to help us when we go through difficult times is to know that there is an end. Sometimes when we find ourselves beset by issues and problems and situations that come against us, we despair when it looks like it's never going to end. But he's reminding us that it will end.

Now, it may not end as soon as we want it to end, because we want it to end right now. But he says, it may not end right now, but it will end. It's for a while.

It's for a limited time in your life. And it may be for one day, it may be for one month, it may be for one year, it may be for ten years, but it will come to an end. And I trust that it's not going to come to an end when Jesus comes, but it will end before then.

But if it doesn't, if it continues for the rest of your life, it's still just a short while. And so we need to be encouraged to know that it is only for a while. And then in chapter 1 and verse 7, he says, in chapter 1 and verse 7, that the genuineness... Let's begin in verse 6. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, he's saying that our faith is much more precious than gold. Our faith is much more precious than gold. But he's now also reminding us that gold needs to be refined.

In South Africa, we have many gold mines, and we are the biggest supplier of gold in the world. And when you go to the gold mines, and you go down in the heart of the earth, 2,000 meters, 1.5 miles down in the earth, and you look where they bring the gold out of, it's not particularly pretty. It's not very glamorous.

It's all rock and stone, and they have these big jackhammers and dynamite that they blast the rock, and they bring this rock up to the surface, and you look at it and you say, well, for all this dirt, all of this trouble, all of this money being spent just to bring rocks. But when that rock is put through a process, and they crush the rock, and they eventually, subjected to intense heat, eventually comes out the pure gold. But it has to go through that process to separate the rock from the gold, to separate the rubbish from the gold.

And he is saying in the same way, our gold, the gold of our faith, needs to go through a process before it is able to be seen, to be valuable, and to be the real thing that it is. You see, because when we first become Christians, we have faith, but our faith is mixed up with all sorts of stuff, just like that gold is mixed in with a rock, and with a fool's gold, and all the other junk that is down there in the heart of the earth. Our faith at the beginning is mixed up with confidence in ourselves, confidence in the church, confidence in all sorts of things.

And that needs to be sifted, and needs to be separated, so that the real thing, the real deal, our faith in the Lord, our trust in Him, can come out. But unfortunately, we have to go through a series of experiences, and those experiences are never pleasant. Because one of the things that we learn in those experiences is that we cannot trust anything else.

You see, when we first become Christians, we trust everybody, we trust other Christians. I mean, that's the last thing you should be trusting. It's sad, but it's true.

And then He puts us through these experiences of hurt, and of disappointment. And in the process, unfortunately, many say, Well, this can't be God. But what God is doing is He's saying, Don't trust people.

Don't trust the church. Now, we value the church, and one of the things that Peter writes in this book is the value and the importance of the church in our struggle, and the comfort, and the consolation that we're able to get from the believers. But at the end of the day, my faith needs to be in God, and in Him alone.

You see, too many people are trusting the church to get them to heaven, or trusting other Christians, or trusting the pastor to get them to heaven. But there's only one who's going to get you there, and that's Jesus. And so He takes us through a process where He sifts out all of the stuff that we put our confidence in, that we can come to a point where our confidence, and our hope, and our trust, and our faith is in Him, and in Him alone.

And so when we've gone through that process, the pure faith comes out. And He says, that is more valuable than gold. And that's part of the deal, that's part of what God is doing in our lives when we go through these problems.

One of the other things that we trust a lot in is ourselves. We have tremendous confidence in my ability to do what I need to do. Now, remember who's writing this letter.

This is Peter. And remember when Peter walked with Jesus? What was the thing that differentiated, that distinguished Peter? What was the thing that made Peter stand out? Peter was the self-made man. I did it my way.

Lord, everybody will forsake you, but I'll never leave you. Lord, just show me who's against you, and I'll get my sword out, and I'll kill them. I'll sort them out.

Peter was the self-made man who had all the answers. And we see him now, 30 years down the road, having gone through many, many hardships and many experiences, and he now comes to a point where he says, I can't trust myself. You remember the first time he learned that? When that little girl, that young woman pointed the finger at him and said, you're one of his disciples.

You're one of them. And Peter cursed, and he said, I don't know the man. And we say, why did God allow that to happen in Peter's life? God allowed it to happen so that Peter could learn that he cannot trust himself.

That he needs to trust God to keep him. That he needs to trust the Lord to hold him. He needs to trust the Lord to keep him faithful.

And so we need to go through these experiences, and they're painful. You remember what happened when Peter denied the Lord? He went outside and says he wept bitterly. But you know, praise God, out of that process, out of that fire of that hurt and disappointment of failure, came the genuine faith of saying, I can't do it.

I can't even be a good Christian. But he is able to hold me. He is able to keep me.

He is able to present me faultless on that day, before the presence of his glory. I wrote a little about that in the bulletin this morning. And so, we need to go through this purifying process of our faith.

Chapter 1 and verse 13. Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Now, this is a powerful verse, and it's just a few thoughts in there, and we need to spend a lot more time than we have in this.

Firstly, he says, gird up the loins of your mind. Gird up the loins of your mind. Where do we find this idea elsewhere in scripture? Remember in Ephesians chapter 6, we have the armor of God.

And he speaks about having your loins girt about with truth. Now, where are the loins? They're down here. So, what does that have to do with the mind? Now, let's go back to Ephesians.

He's talking about a soldier, and he's speaking about the armor of the soldier. And he says that one of the first things the soldier needs is he needs a belt around his loins. What is the purpose of the belt? So he can hang his revolver on it.

No, the purpose of the belt is to keep his clothing, his robes together. Remember, these guys didn't wear suits like we do, or fatigues like soldiers do today. They wore caftan type things, robes, loose robes.

And if you're going to fight the battle, if you didn't tie this whole lot up, and in fact what they would do is sometimes these things would be down to their feet, they would pull them up to above their knees so that they can have their legs free to fight and to run and to move and to maneuver. And so they would take all of these robes and they would tie them together with a belt so that they don't get tripped up. Because if you do not have that robe tied up, it's going to get between your legs, it's going to get under your feet, it's going to get in the way, and you're going to fall.

And so you need to tie this whole lot together so that you're able to move, so that you're able to fight. That's what he's speaking about in Ephesians. And remember that he says that I need to have my belt of truth.

Remember that. I'm going to come back to that in a moment. Now, we go to Peter.

And Peter says that I need to gird up the loins of my mind. So the same way as the soldier needs to tie up his loose clothes so that he doesn't get tripped up, now he says I need to gird up the loins of my mind. It's the same principle.

What do I have in my mind? I have thoughts. And those thoughts are able to trip me up if they are not under control. The same way as the man has to bring his garment under control, I need to bring my thoughts under control.

Because if I don't bring them under control, they're going to be just like that loose garment that's flapping all over the way, that gets in the way, and that's going to trip me up. And so I can't allow my thoughts to run away with me. Now remember, he's writing to people who are in persecution, who are suffering.

And one of the problems when we go through difficulties is not the problem as much that we're dealing with right now, but the fear of what's going to happen tomorrow. And so we see things going wrong in our lives. We see persecution coming.

We see we have problems with our job, or whatever the problem is. And part of the struggle is not just what I'm facing right now, but it's the tricks my mind plays with me. I'm saying, well, this is going to get a lot... And if this happens and if that... And I begin to... My mind just... And especially at night.

Now I know it doesn't happen to you. It happens only to me. I wake up in the middle of the night, and you think, what if? What if this happens? And then what's happening? My mind's running away with me.

I need to bring all of those thoughts under control. Paul writes about this in Corinthians, and he says we need to bring every thought under the control or under the captivity to the obedience of Christ. Don't allow your thoughts to run away with you.

Don't let worry take control of you. Don't allow worry about tomorrow, and about what is this and what about that, and if this happens and if that happens. Don't bring these things under control.

Gird up the loins of your mind. And what do I do it with? What is the thing that ties these things together, that brings them under control? Truth. Ephesians 6. Gird up the loins of your mind with truth.

And so what is the truth? You see, little children sometimes wake up in the middle of the night, and they see a man in the room. They see all these shapes and things, and shadows. And then when the day comes, they see the truth.

Oh, but it was just the tree outside, or it was just something in the room, whatever it was. But our minds blow it out of proportion, and it becomes some huge issue. So the truth.

What is the truth? The truth of God's Word. What does God's Word teach me? I will never leave you, nor forsake you. Even though I go through the valley of the shadow of death, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

That's the truth. So don't believe the shadows. Don't believe the propaganda that the devil's going to bring against you.

That your own mind will bring into your own thoughts. But bring those things under control. And so gird up the loins of your mind.

And then verse 13, Be sober. In other words, think clearly. This is not against drunkenness.

Of course, there are many scriptures against drunkenness, but when he speaks about being sober here, he's not speaking about that, but he's speaking about think soberly. Think clearly. Be level-headed when you think about things.

Don't blow things out of proportion. Don't bring tomorrow's problems into today. Be sober.

And rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Rest your hope fully. And there's a lot of words there.

I'm just going to sum it up by saying, the coming of the Lord. Rest your hope on Jesus' return. Too many, I think I said this this morning, too many Christians are not eagerly waiting and looking for the return of the Lord because life is just too good.

They don't have problems. Life is wonderful. Everything is going their way.

So why do I want the Lord to come? But you know, it's amazing that when Christians suffer real problems, real persecution, they understand and they realize that my true hope is in the coming of the Lord. Don't put your hope in yourself. Don't put your hope in the elections of a new president or a new government or in a change in the economy.

Don't put your hope in the fact that the price of houses is going to drop and you're going to be able to afford a house or the price of houses is going to stay up and you can afford to pay your mortgage. Don't put your hope in these things. Rest your hope fully.

Don't put a little bit of... You see, this is the problem is that we, you know, we put some of our hope in the world and we put some of it in the Lord, like we have two feet. And we put one here and one there and we're putting our hope, we're hedging our bets. No, he says don't hedge your bets.

I can't explain that term, I hope you... Put your hope fully. Put both of your feet upon this hope. Jesus is coming again.

That is our hope. Our hope is not in a change in government. Our hope is not in a change in the economy.

Our hope is not in the stock market. Our hope is not in retirement. Our hope is in Jesus.

And we need to put our total confidence, put all your money, let's see if we use that gambling term that we've been using. Put all your money on one thing. Put it on Jesus.

Because he is the only sure bet. He is the only one who is going to be able to deliver on the promises. Everything else will be a disappointment.

Chapter 2 and verse 18. Now, he's dealing here about suffering that comes as a result of unjust masters. So you can see that the book is not only dealing about persecution that comes from the government, but it's also dealing with persecution and from suffering that can come as a result of masters who are unfair and masters who treat their servants unjustly.

So, verse 18, he says, servants be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and the gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it? When you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently.

But when you do good and suffer, if you do it patiently, this is commendable before God. Now, sometimes in our relationship with our earthly masters, or our bosses, or our supervisors, we get some bad treatment. And sometimes that bad treatment is because we did wrong.

We didn't do a good job. We were not on time, whatever it is. And some Christians say, well, you know, he doesn't like me because I'm a Christian.

No, he doesn't like you because you're not doing a decent job. Or you're not being on time, or you're taking too much, too long lunch break, or whatever it is. Now, Peter's reminding us here, and he's saying, don't suffer at the hand of your boss because you are not doing a good job.

Or because you're doing bad things in your job situation. But he says, when we suffer because of the faith, that we can say is legitimate suffering. Then we can say, this is God who is, well, sorry, I'm suffering because of the message of the gospel.

And so, folks, we need to be very sure, very clear in our minds when it comes to, and I'm going to come to the other areas of suffering in a moment. But as far as our job is concerned, don't feel that you're being discriminated against because you're not doing a good job. Be sure that you're the best employee that company has.

And if you are the best employee that company has, you're doing the best possible job, you're always on time, you're doing exactly what you should be doing, and more, and they still don't like you because you're a Christian, then he says you're suffering for the sake of Christ. Then you can say, this is legitimate suffering. But if you're suffering because you are stealing, or whatever, because of your own fault, don't say, I'm suffering for Christ.

Don't say, I'm suffering as a Christian. No, you're not suffering as a Christian, you're suffering as an employee who is not delivering on their responsibilities. I'm going to come back to that thought, just hold that for a moment.

Then, in chapter 2 and verse 23, and I'm just taking a few out of, I'm skipping quite a lot of stuff because there's just so much here, but I want to get the most important ones. And this verse here is a very, very important verse. This is a verse which I have found tremendous comfort in for myself.

Verse 23, who, speaking of Jesus, when he was reviled, did not revile in return, and when he suffered, he did not threaten, but committed himself to him who judges righteously. This is how we should respond to persecution. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return.

It's so easy to react and to respond to someone who says something to you because you're a Christian. And to say, oh, well, you know, you, whatever. To accuse them of something, to find some way of hitting back at the source of the difficulty or the persecution or the suffering.

But he's reminding us of Jesus. Remember all of the Scriptures that spoke about Jesus. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter.

He opened not his mouth as a sheep is done before his shearers. And how that Jesus stood there wrongly accused, and he never defended himself. He never pointed the finger at Pilate and said, you've done this, and you do that, and you're the other thing.

He just stood there and he took it. And as he hung up on that cross, the old King James says, they cast these things in his teeth. They just threw accusations and ridicule and mocking at him.

And you know, Jesus could have hung on that cross and said, you know, you just wait. I'll get you. But you know, he just took it.

And he's reminding us and he's saying, if Jesus did it that way, that's the way we need to do it. Though he was reviled, he did not revile in return. And then he says that when he suffered, he did not threaten.

We like to threaten. We like to say, I'll get you. Just wait.

And even when it comes to other Christians, many times, folks, our suffering comes at the hands of other Christians, unfortunately. And we say, you know, judgment's coming. God's going to get you.

If I don't get you, God will get you. Jesus never threatened. You know, he had real threats.

He could say, I'll wipe you out. I'll destroy you. I'll bring fire down from heaven and destroy this city.

He could have done that. He could have made those threats, but he never threatened. He just took it.

Because he recognized this very, very important principle. Now, that's hard for us to do. It's hard for us to not revile in return.

It's hard for us not to threaten until we can understand this truth. And he says, he did not threaten, but he committed himself to him who judges righteously. He committed himself to him who judges righteously.

You see, Jesus understood this principle, that it was not up to Pilate. Remember, when Pilate says, don't you defend yourself? Jesus says, I'm not in your hands. I'm in the hands of a higher power.

I'm in the hands of God. And when we understand that God is the one who's going to judge in the end, and that God's judgment is righteous, and that God's judgment is true, and we're able to commit ourselves into his hands, and we say, Father, I'm putting myself in your hands. You take care of me.

And if what these people are doing to me, and if what is happening to me is unjust and unfair, Father, it's up to you. Remember, vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord.

Just put yourself in his trust and his care, and leave the rest up to him. Don't try and carry an account and carry a tally of all the stuff that people have done, and all the things that are happening, and all the problems in your life. No, just give it up to him.

Commit it to him. And say, Lord, you're the one who's going to judge righteously. I'm just leaving it to you.

You can keep an account if you wish. And he does keep an account, and he will repay, and he will bring vengeance on his enemies. But let's leave that to him.

Let's make sure that our attitude is right, that our spirit is good, and that even when we are reviled, we don't revile in return. When we are threatened, we don't threaten, because there is someone who is seeing, and someone who is keeping an account, and someone to whom we have entrusted ourselves. And then chapter 3, and verse 13.

Chapter 3, 13. And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed, and do not be afraid for their threats, nor be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear, having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. Now, four times, once the passage that we looked in chapter 3, where he speaks about, sorry, chapter 2, he speaks about masters. Here in chapter 4, then in chapter 4 and verse 15, So four times he deals with this issue in different ways.

And the issue is this. Be sure that you're not suffering for your own faults. Now, we spoke about that in the context of a servant and a master, or of an employee and an employer.

But in all of our, you know, I've come across so many Christians who have problems. People don't like them. And I say, you know, they're persecuting me because I'm a Christian.

But when you look at the life of the individual, you discover they're not suffering, and they're not being persecuted because they're a Christian. They're being persecuted because of the things that they're doing. Because they're being obnoxious.

Because they're being unfriendly. They never greet anybody. And they say, I'm not coming back to this church.

Nobody greets me. But when anyone wants to greet them, they look down. I bumped into someone in the hallway this morning.

I greeted them and said, good morning. They just stared at me. Now, I need to be sure that that reaction was not because of the fact that I never greet people.

You see, we can bring on certain responses from people because of the way we are, because of the things that we do. And if that's because of what I did, let me not blame it on the Lord and say I'm suffering for Christ. And I feel all holy because I'm suffering for Christ.

When you break the law and the highway patrolman pulls you over and writes you a ticket because you went 90 miles an hour, don't say I'm suffering for Christ. You're suffering for your own stupidity or whatever makes us drive the speeds that we do. And so we need to get it clear in our minds that when... You know the most amazing thing that happens, and I can get on to this for hours, but one of the most amazing things that happen is that as a shepherd, I speak to people about issues in their lives.

I say, brother, you know, this thing that you do is not good. And you know what happens? They go away and they say, I suffered for Christ. No, you didn't suffer for Christ.

You suffered because of your own sin. So we need to be sure in our minds that the suffering that we are enduring is not because of anything that we have done. And he lists a few things here.

One of the things is that they... Busybodies and other people's matters. Gossiping. You know how many Christians do that? And then they say, when people don't like them or people don't want to tell them anything because they know the moment they tell them, they're going to tell... You know, oh no, it's because I'm a Christian.

That's got nothing to do with being a Christian. It has to do everything... It has everything to do with who you are. And so what is Peter writing? He's saying, let me make sure that my whole life, all of my conduct is above reproach, is blameless.

That no one can bring any accusation against me, that no one can bring suffering to me, whether it's the government or whether it's my boss or whether it is the church or whether it is other people around me, my neighbors. So let me make sure that my side is clean. And then if I am suffering, and I'm suffering for Christ, well, then I can do the things that he speaks about here that I need to do.

And I'm going to just try and deal with one or two of those responses. So there needs to be clarity in our minds. It's something we all struggle with.

And it's so easy just to fall back and say, I'm suffering for Christ when I'm not. So I need to have that clear in my mind. All right.

Now, Leo's told me I must hurry up. So, chapter 4, verse 1. Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. Now, there's a lot of complicated stuff there.

But I just want to focus on this one little thought. Arm yourselves with this mind. What do you do when you arm yourself? You get ready to fight.

You put a bullet in the chamber or you pull your sword out and you're ready to fight. You're not going to be caught by surprise. And that's what he is saying.

You see, so many Christians are caught by surprise when problems come, when suffering comes, because they're not ready. They're not armed. But I need to be armed.

I need to brace myself. You know what a sucker punch is. When somebody's not ready and somebody hits them in the stomach, because if you know it's coming, you brace yourself and you can take it.

But when it comes and you're relaxed and you didn't think it was going to come and somebody sucker punches you, you're caught by surprise. Now, he says, don't be caught by surprise. Brace yourself.

Be ready. Because it's going to come. And as Christians in a Western country, I think too many Christians are not armed and not ready and prepared for difficulty.

And it will come. So, arm yourselves. And then connected to that 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.

That's connected to verse 1. Don't be surprised. Persecution, suffering, problems, trials are not a strange thing. It's going to happen.

All right, chapter 4, verse 13. 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. Now, I wish I had another 10 minutes just to deal with this verse.

What happens when difficulties come? Woe me! I complain and I groan and I feel sorry for myself. We all do that. But what does He say I should be doing? Rejoice! Now, did Peter ever do that? Oh, no, no, Peter didn't have a clue what he was talking about.

He just says, you know, as a Christian, you should be rejoicing when you're in trouble. But remember way back in the book of Acts, Peter was brought before the council together with some of the other apostles, and it says that they left there rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ. They saw it as an honor to be counted worthy, to just be put in the same bracket as Jesus.

Now, folk, when we are truly suffering for Christ's sake, it's not something we should bewail or complain about or moan about. It's something we should rejoice about. Because you know what? Somebody has put us in the same category as Jesus.

And that's an honor. Remember what the seven sons of Sceva said to Paul? They said, Jesus we know and Paul we know, but who are you? We've taken note of Paul, and we've taken note of Jesus, but we don't have a clue who you are. Now, he says when we suffer persecution, even the gates of hell have taken note of who we are, and that's an honor.

That's something that we can rejoice about. Chapter 4, verse 14. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you.

That's a strange thought. Blessed? When we are reproached for the sake of Christ. But that's the truth.

Why? Because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified. And then verse 16.

If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. Folks, the way we deal with our problems, either we glorify God, or we bring shame to his name. And you know, one of the most powerful testimonies that we can have as Christians is when people around us, unsaved people around us, say, they have something I don't have.

Because in spite of their problems, they're able to rejoice. In spite of their problems, they haven't fallen apart. In spite of all the stuff that they have in their lives, they have kept a positive attitude.

That's what will set us apart. And that is what glorifies God. And we're able to say, it's not because of me, it's not because of Valium, or because of antidepressants, or this or that, and I'm not preaching against those things, but it's because of Jesus in my life.

When the most terrible tragedy happens to Christians, and they're able to show people and say, it's because Jesus has strengthened me. That's glorifying God. And let's glorify God.

Let's not complain against God. Let's not accuse God. Let's not bring reproach upon his name because we react in the way that the world reacts.

But let's glorify God in the things that we suffer from day to day. Father, we thank you for your word. And Lord, maybe some of these thoughts, O God, are just so far away from us here in comfortable California.

And maybe, Lord, today some of us, the worst problems we have is just the heat. And yet, Lord, we know that if we want to live a godly life, there will be ramifications. There will be consequences.

And so, Lord, we pray that you'd help us to have the right attitude when reproach comes, to have the right attitude in trials, to glorify you in every area of our lives. Forgive us, Lord, for the times that we suffer because we have done wrong. But, Lord, help us to suffer for the right reasons.

And in that suffering, to rejoice that we have been counted worthy to be put in the same category as Jesus. Help us, Lord, to be like him. Help us, Lord, not to revile again.

Help us, Lord, not to threaten. But, Lord, help us to put our trust and our confidence in you and you alone. And, Lord, that understanding that in all of this you are working in our hearts and in our lives and you are producing a work.

And that work is our faith, which is more precious than gold. Make this real to us, Lord. We ask it in Jesus' name.

We pray, Lord, for those who are apart from us now. We pray that you'd go with them, keep them safe and protect them, bring them back again next week, Lord, to hear your word again and to worship you. But, Lord, for those of us who come around your table now, we pray that you would be present with us, that this would be a sweet and a precious time as we remember you and what you have done for us.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

If you need to leave, then please leave quietly.

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