

# The Heat Is On

by Warren Wiersbe

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of being prepared for persecution and suffering as a Christian, and how it can bring glory to God and purify the church.*

**Duration:** 36:25

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, 1 Peter 4:12-18

**Topics:** "Persecution", "Suffering"

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## Description

In this sermon, the Apostle Peter provides four principles for believers to follow when facing persecution. The first principle is to be aware that trials and persecution will come, and to be prepared for them. The second principle is to remember that believers are not alone in their suffering, but are sharing in Christ's suffering. The third principle is to understand that trials have a purpose, which is to glorify God. The fourth principle is to trust in God, who is in control and will take care of believers. By following these principles, believers can face persecution with courage and the desire to glorify God.

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## Transcript

We open the word to 1 Peter chapter 4, reading verses 12 through 19. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to test you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you. On their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God. And if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely or with difficulty be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful creator.

On July 16, 64 A.D., the great fire of Rome began. Now historians are not sure and they're not agreed as to whether Nero was responsible for it, but it did take place and the Christians were blamed and there began a great persecution among the Christians. And of course as succeeding emperors came to the

throne, persecution became worse.

Now Peter did not prophesy the fire of Rome, but he saw a fiery trial coming. The Christians he's writing to had been suffering. They'd been suffering from reproach.

They'd been suffering from lying. People had been telling tales about them, but Peter looked ahead and he saw an intense fiery trial coming to the church. Now I am not a prophet, but I see a time of trial coming to the church.

We have just emerged from 20 or 25 years of conservative acceptance. And already I notice in the secular magazines a revulsion against born again. Now quite frankly I'm glad, quite frankly I'm glad that we've come to a place where born again is not a slogan for a politician.

I'll be happy for the day when for a person to say I'm born again will cost something. For when it's easy to be a Christian, it's hard to win souls. When it's easy to be a Christian, it's hard to send out missionaries.

When it's easy to be a Christian, you get churches filled with people who think they're saved but they aren't, or people who are simply looking for social acceptance. I foresee a fiery trial coming to the church in America, and I see a return to the liberal position that's going to make it very, very difficult for our conservative cause to stand up and say we are here. And it may be the best thing for us.

It may be the best thing for us. Peter is telling these Christians how they can deal with persecution. Now right now there are probably not very many people in this congregation who actually are persecuted.

Oh you have a boss who makes life miserable for you. You may have an unsaved mother-in-law who does things that make makes life difficult for you. You may have unsaved loved ones or friends who laugh at you.

But I seriously doubt whether any of us here tonight really are suffering persecution because of the name of Christ. Peter is talking about a time that's coming when we're going through the furnace, and it never hurts the church to go through the furnace. Peter's talking about a time when you and I, because we name the name of Christ, verse 16, we're Christians, we're going to suffer for it.

There could well come a time when people will not be able to get or hold jobs because they're Christians. There could well come a time when the government, because our government desperately needs money, will start taxing organizations and buildings that belong to Christian causes. I'll say it again.

I foresee a time coming when it's really going to cost something to be a Christian, and quite frankly it will do us good. Now in these verses, 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 12 through 19, the Apostle Peter lays down four principles for us to follow as we face the fiery trial. I don't know when it's going to come.

It may come for you individually. Someone may be here tonight and this next week the furnace door will be open and you'll be pushed right into the fire. I don't know.

May happen to me. But Peter lays down four principles here to encourage us and to enable us to triumph when persecution comes. Now before we look at these four principles, let's just take an everyday event from your life and my life.

Let's suppose you're going to go through some difficulty. Surgery. Going to the dentist.

Frankly, I'd rather have surgery than go to the dentist. But let's suppose you have to go through surgery. Now to make it easier to go through surgery, there are certain principles that you follow.

Number one, you can take it if you know it's coming. Number two, you can take it if you aren't doing it alone. You know that out there in the surgical waiting room, there are people praying and there are people going through this right with you.

Thirdly, you can take it if you know why it's being done. It would be an awful thing to be on the table and the doctor says, no, we don't know why we're doing this. We're going to have fun.

And fourthly, you can take it if you know you can trust the one who's in charge. Right? So here you are going through surgery and someone says, well, how do you feel about this? Well, I'd rather not go through it. But number one, I know it's coming so I can be prepared for it.

And number two, I'm not going to go through this alone. My family's right there with me. The church is praying for me.

And number three, I know why we have to do it. The doctors explain the whole thing. I saw the blueprints.

I know why we're doing this. And number four, I have perfect confidence in my doctor. And so we're going to see this thing through.

Now, just pick up that everyday illustration and move it into first Peter chapter four. This is what he says. He lays down these four principles in verse 12.

He says, you can go through the fiery trial because you know it's coming. You can take it if you know it's coming. That's verse 12.

In verse 13, he says you can take it because you aren't going through it alone. You're sharing in Christ's suffering. Verses 14 through 18, he says you can take it because you know why it's coming.

You understand the purpose behind it. And verse 19, he says you can take it because you can trust the one who's in charge. And so when you find yourself going through the furnace, lay hold of these four principles.

And these four principles will help you so that the furnace of tribulation and the furnace of trial and the furnace of persecution will not ruin you. Rather, it will benefit you. Verse 12, we can take it when we know that the trial is coming.

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you. So some strange thing happened. Have you noticed that new Christians do not recognize the fact that trials are a part of life? I've seen this over and over again.

You have the joy of leading someone to Christ and you give them a Bible and you get them enrolled in a correspondence course or you give them some books and they're studying and growing and they come to the church services and they're just having a great time. And then bang, the devil reaches over and gets a hold of the thermostat and turns up the heat. And they come staggering into church.

Well, Pastor, I've got to talk to you. I've lost my salvation. Really? How did that happen? Oh, what I'm going through.

My family has turned against me and this has happened and that has happened. And I was in the lunch room at work and I just bowed my head to thank the Lord for the food. And they're all against me there.

Is this what it means to be a Christian? And the answer is yes. Don't be surprised when it comes. In fact, be surprised if it doesn't come.

You see, you and I as believers should not be surprised when difficulties and persecutions come. Because everybody in the Bible, whoever lived for God, went through difficulty. Abraham obeyed God and got to the promised land and discovered a famine.

Jacob obeyed God and discovered his family had turned against him. David obeyed God and was chased all over the Holy Land, hiding in caves by King Saul. Paul obeyed God, found himself in prison.

Peter obeyed God, found himself in prison. Wherever you go in your Bible, you find people who live for God, who have the right priorities in life, who aren't casually sneaking through life, but who are boldly walking through life to the glory of God, suffer persecution. In fact, Paul wrote and said, yea and all who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

So we expect it. We expect it because we're Christians. If you be reproached for the name of Christ, have you noticed this? You're with a group of people, maybe strangers, and someone says, well, where do you go to church? Oh, I'm a Baptist, or I'm a Methodist, or I go to an independent church.

That's fine. You can mention any denomination on the face of the earth and nobody will argue with you. But you bring the name of Jesus Christ into the conversation, see what happens.

Ever notice that? Temperature changes, people get a little bit embarrassed. Oh, I'm a Christian. You get his name in there.

Jesus said that. He said, you're going to suffer for my name's sake. They don't like my name.

So we expect it to come. We expect it to come because it comes to everybody who lives for the Lord. We expect it to come because we're identified with his name.

We're Christians. We expect it to come because we need it. We get complacent.

We get in our evangelical rocking chairs and we think that because we're making motion, we're making progress. And we're blessed in the heavenlies. We have our Bible all marked up and our notebooks full of outlines.

And God says, you're a little bit complacent down there, better stoke up the fire a little bit. There's nothing like persecution to get you praying. Nothing like the furnace to get you into the word of God.

Nothing like the furnace to burn away the dross in our lives. We aren't surprised when persecution and difficulty comes because our Bible tells us that in these last days, evil men and seducers are going to wax worse and worse. Now, the sociologists may tell us that things are getting better and better, and perhaps in some areas they are.

But ultimately, essentially, basically, fundamentally, things are getting worse and worse. The veneer over the surface of the swamp is beautiful, but underneath that veneer there is ugliness and dirtiness, and there is disease, and there is defilement, and there is corruption. It's getting worse and worse.

Now, you put these four factors together, and I'm surprised we aren't going through more persecution. Everybody in the Bible went through it. When you're identified with the name of Christ, you go through it.

We need to be tested and purified, and things are getting worse and worse out there in the world. Principle number one, you can go through it when you know that the trial is coming. I've done some very stupid things in visitation.

I remember getting a call from a hospital chaplain. He said, Pastor Worsby, can you come down to the hospital? There's a lady here who has called for you. She wants to talk to you.

She's apparently heard you on the radio. Could you come and talk to her? I said, sure I would. I made a mistake.

Usually, I stop at the desk and get the information. First thing a pastor wants to do, get the information. I didn't do it in a big hurry.

So I walked into the room, and there she was. Oh, I'm so glad you've come, and you've got to break the ice a little bit. You've got to get acquainted, and I said, have you been here long? Oh, just since last night.

I said, oh. I said, did you know you were coming in? She said, yes, I had a baby. Now, the reason this threw me off guard was because she was not in the right ward.

Apparently, the OB ward was too full, and they had to put her in another room. Had she been on the right floor, I would have known automatically she was here to have a baby. Can you imagine saying to a new mother, did you know you were coming? Well, she knew she was coming, and she prepared for it.

Now, we know persecution is coming. Don't be surprised when it starts to cut loose, when that fire starts to get hotter. Don't be surprised.

Be prepared. It's not strange. It belongs to the Christian life.

Now, in verse 13, he gives us a second principle. We can take it when trial comes, when we know we don't suffer alone, but rejoice. That's so easy to do.

Oh, when the fire starts getting hot, and the devil starts stoking up the flames, we rejoice. Sure we do. Rejoice.

How can you rejoice when you're going through times of tribulation and trial? Well, you can rejoice because you are not alone. He goes on to tell us here we're partakers of Christ's suffering. This is one of the privileges of the Christian life.

It is given unto you, Paul wrote to the Philippians. It's given to you. It's a gift.

It is given unto you on the behalf of Christ, not only to suffer, not only to believe in him, but to suffer for his sake. It's a gift. God is giving to you the privilege of suffering for his sake.

The early apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for his name's sake. Now, no one minds suffering if it's for a good cause. And when you and I are going through the furnace, and this is a good night to talk about furnaces, instead of complaining, we say, hey, praise the Lord.

It's for his name's sake. And as I stand true to the Lord, as you stand true to the Lord, it's for his name's sake, that I may know him, wrote Paul, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering. Jesus said, if they've treated me like this, I'll treat you this way.

If they treat the master this way, the disciples will be treated this way. If the head of the church, Jesus Christ, went through the furnace, what about the body, the members of the body? And so we're able to take it because we know we don't suffer alone. Christ shares our suffering with us.

That's what happened to those three Hebrew children back in Daniel. I would like to have been there with a mini camera taking videotape of that whole experience. What a tremendous experience.

The king throws three men in and looks through his monitor and there are four. And one of them is like unto the son of God. When you go through the furnace, he's right there with you.

And so we're able to take it when difficulty and persecution come because we don't suffer alone. He tells us in verse 13, rejoice in as much as ye are partaker of Christ's suffering, that when his glory shall appear, when his glory shall be revealed. You see, suffering and glory, suffering and glory, all the way through this section, suffering and glory.

Chapter 5, verse 1, a witness of the suffering of Christ, a partaker of the glory. Verse 16 of chapter 4, if any man suffer, let him glorify God. Verse 10 of chapter 5, the God of all grace who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus after you've suffered a while.

That's the combination, suffering, glory. Now many of us want to get to the glory without the suffering. We want the throne without the furnace.

Peter says it can't be done. So while we are suffering here with Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ, we are rejoicing and we're contemplating the joy we're going to have when he comes again. I get the impression from verse 13 that as we rejoice in the Lord now, we shall rejoice in the Lord then.

If we're not rejoicing in the Lord now, we'll not really be rejoicing in the Lord then. There's a two-fold joy here as we suffer with Christ. A joy right now and a joy that will come when Jesus will appear.

Now there's a third principle that Peter lays down. We can take it because we know the trial is coming. We're not going to be caught off guard.

We can take it because we know we don't suffer alone. Jesus is there with us and by the way all the saints are with us. He's talking about the household of God.

They're all together in this thing. Thirdly, verses 14 through 18, we can take it by the grace of God because we know the purpose that's behind it. What is that purpose? Well it's a word that's repeated one, two, three times in this section, glorify God.

In fact all the way through here it's suffering and glory. What's the purpose behind the fiery trial? Well part of it is to burn away the dross in my life. Part of it is to purify the church.

Times of persecution are times of purification and did you know that times of purification are times of revival? Whenever the fire of persecution has come to the church, the fire of revival has come to the church. Whenever it has cost something to be a Christian, God's spirit has come in great power. Perhaps this explains why we don't see real revival in our days today.

It's just too easy to be a Christian, too complacent, too comfortable. We can take it because we understand the purpose. Did you ever have to go through something and not understand what's behind it? Kind of drives you up the wall.

Why is this happening? That's part of Job's trouble. Job didn't have the book of Job. Some people have the idea that when Job was going through his difficulty, he should have reached for his Scofield Bible and said, here's the book of Job someplace.

He said, here's the way it's going to work out. Sometimes I like to read the last chapter of a book. I sneak when I do it.

I love to read good mystery novels, not the salacious kind, but good ones. You read that last chapter and you don't worry about the rest of the book. Or when you're watching the rerun of something on television, maybe a rerun of a football game, and you know how it ended up anyway.

So you just sit there and watch it. Job didn't have that. Job said, why am I sick? Why did I lose my cattle? Why did my family die? He didn't know.

Then one day God explained it to him and it all worked out for God's glory. But you see, we know why the tribulation is coming. 16 times in Peter's letter, he talks about the glory of God.

Over and over again, Peter is saying the important thing is not that you are comfortable. The important thing is glorify God. The important thing is not that people accept you.

The important thing is to glorify God. A hundred years from now, who's going to care what social list you're on? A hundred years from now, what difference is it going to make whether or not people bow down to us? But it's going to make a great deal of difference whether or not we glorified God. We're suffering for the glory of God.

Look at this. If ye be, verse 14, reproached for the name of Christ, not because we've done some evil thing. There are saints who don't know the difference between the offense of the cross and the offensiveness of Christians.

There are some saints of God who are offensive and then people react to that. And then the saints come and say, oh, I'm being persecuted. They aren't being persecuted.

They just don't know how to keep their mouths shut. I remember a saint of God who felt it was her calling to sneak tracks into the merchandise on the tables of the stores. And so people would start going through the blue jeans and here's four things God wants you to know.

And I remember when the manager of the store called me up because the tracks that she was distributing, quote unquote, were stamped with the name of our church. That's great public relations. He called me up.

He said, what are you people doing down there? I said, we're not doing that. I said, I know who's doing it. I'll take care of it.

And I had to talk to her about, oh, she's being persecuted. No, she wasn't being persecuted. I was just trying to make a lady out of her.

You don't use tracks that way. Peter is saying, if you are reproached for the name of Christ, because you bear his name, because you won't lie when other people are lying, you won't steal when other people are stealing, you won't falsify your expense account because you're a Christian. Happy are ye for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.

Let me retranslate that for you, not because this is wrong, but because there is an expansion to it that's beautiful. Happy are ye for the presence of the glory, even the spirit of God rests upon you. Now, every Jew knows what the presence of the glory is, the Shekinah glory.

When they dedicated the tabernacle, down came the glory. When they dedicated the temple, down came the glory. When Jesus was born at Bethlehem, down came the glory.

When you got saved, down came the glory. Heaven came down and glory filled your soul. And Peter says, now, when you're suffering, I want you to know something.

The Holy Spirit of God, who is the Shekinah glory of God, is going to come upon you in a fresh new way. I would much rather have the Holy Spirit of God upon my life, glorifying God in a time of difficulty than speaking in tongues. I'd much rather have the Holy Spirit of God glorifying God in the furnace of affliction than doing miracles.

We have people today who are chasing after the Holy Spirit, wanting some ecstatic thing. Peter says, I'll tell you what you really need. Go through the furnace.

And when you go through the furnace to the glory of God, the Spirit of God comes upon you, and there's a joy in your heart, and you glorify God. How were the early apostles able to lose their civil rights and rejoice over it? How were the early apostles able to be arrested illegally, beaten illegally, yes, they were even killed illegally, and they rejoiced? The Holy Spirit of God so filled them and so came upon them. That's what we need today.

I think one reason why God is going to permit persecution to come to the church of the United States of America is because we really need to know what the Holy Spirit can do. It's time we laid aside childish things. It's time we got rid of our toys and quit playing in the playpen and got down to business in the furnace.

Sometimes the only way God can teach His church is to put us through the furnace. The Spirit of glory and of God tabernacles upon you, rests upon you. On their part, He's evil spoken up, but on your part, He is glorified.

So we can go through it. We can take it because we know it's coming. We know we aren't going to go through it alone, and we know that there's a purpose behind it, to glorify God.

And I want you to know, and you know this already, but let me remind you, a Christian glorifies God the most when he's going through circumstances over which he has no control. Think that through. When the furnace is turned on and we have no control over these things, that's when God is going to get the greatest glory.

That's why verse 17 says judgment's going to begin at the house of God. In these last days, the Holy Spirit of God is going to be purging His sanctuary. Back in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet Ezekiel saw God's judgment coming, and God said, begin at the house of the Lord.

God always begins with His people. By the way, there may be one person here tonight who's never been saved. I want to warn you, if there is a fiery trial coming to God's children, what in the world is going to happen to you? That's what Peter says.

If the righteous with difficulty are saved, if they have to go through a furnace of suffering, what in the world is going to happen to you who aren't saved? There's a fourth principle, and here we close. We can take it because we know it's coming, and we can take it because we aren't going through it alone, and we can take it because we know the purpose behind it, and we can take it because we trust the one who's in charge. Verse 19, wherefore, I like the wherefores of the Bible.

They're practical. Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God. You see, there is suffering outside the will of God.

I mean by that His directive will. If I go out and disobey the Lord, and I get into sin, and I reap the consequences of my sin, that's one thing. If I go out and stand for what is right and suffer for it, that's something else.

Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing as unto a faithful creator. That word commit is a banking term. It's the same word you would use to put money in the bank.

Peter is saying, your souls are valuable to God, so valuable that the whole world couldn't purchase them. Your souls are so valuable it took the blood of Jesus Christ to purchase them. You are valuable to God.

He never permits cheap merchandise to go through the fire. If you're going through the fire, it's because you're worth something to God, and He wants to make you more valuable. Now, what do you do? You take your life and you deposit it with the divine banker, with the heavenly banker.

You say, here is my soul. I'm depositing it with you. It's what Paul wrote, I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he's able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.

Now, I'm glad Peter used a banking term here. Peter didn't have money. Remember that? Peter said, silver and gold have I none.

But Peter knew something about banking. When you put money in a bank, two things are true. Number one, there is protection, and number two, there are dividends.

When you commit the keeping of your soul, when you commit the life that God's given you to him, two things are true. Number one, there's protection, and number two, there are dividends. And the dividends that come are worth the suffering that we endure.

You can trust the one who's in charge. You'd think that Peter would write, commit the keeping of your soul to him in well-doing as unto a faithful Savior. It doesn't say Savior.

As unto a faithful Lord. It doesn't say Lord. It says creator.

You know what that means? Peter said, when you're going through the fire, look around at creation. Just remember that the creator of the universe, who names the stars, who hangs the earth out there on nothing, who keeps all the seasons going, just remember the creator of the universe has your life in his hands. That's an encouragement to me.

Jesus said the same thing. He saw his disciples biting their fingernails and worrying and fretting and tossing and turning. He said, what are you worrying about? Oh, what are we going to eat? Oh, what are we going to drink? What are we going to wear? And Jesus said, why are you worried about those things? See that beautiful bird over there? He never worries about that.

Birds don't die of ulcers. Birds don't run to psychiatrists. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with going to a psychiatrist.

But I read a statement the other day by a very famous man who said, if people would just believe what Jesus preached, many of them would never have to go to a psychiatrist. Either the father takes care of those birds, won't he take care of you? You're of much more value than those birds. He's the creator.

So the next time you worry, just listen for the birds and tell you're worrying to go to the birds. Did you see those lilies over there? They don't toil, they don't spin, they aren't worried. Look how beautiful they are.

The father takes care of them. The creator. That's what Isaiah said to those Jews who were so scared.

Don't you know that the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth, never gets tired? And he'll take care of you. Here then are four principles to take with you this next week. I don't know when the furnace is going to come on.

I don't know when the fire is going to start. Number one, we can take it by the grace of God. We know it's coming.

We aren't going to be surprised. Number two, we can take it by the grace of God. We aren't going to suffer alone.

The Lord is right there with us. Number three, we can take it by the grace of God. We know the purpose behind it to glorify God.

And finally, we can take it by the grace of God because we can trust the one who's in charge. I think with this kind of preparation, we can face the fiery trial with courage and we can pray, oh Lord, grant to me the privilege of glorifying your name. It's not important that I'm comfortable.

It's not important that I'm popular, but it is important that Christ be glorified in my life, whether it be by life or by death. That's what Peter's talking about. And that's what you and I need to lay hold of and live.

Gracious Father, how easy it is to read these verses and explain them and make notes about them. But oh, when the fire comes, only what's written on our hearts will really last. Our notes will burn up.

I pray, gracious Lord, that you'll write these words in our heart. Help us to face the fiery trial of the future unafraid. We don't want to be casualties in the field of battle.

We want to go through the fire with Jesus to his glory and through it all, win people to Christ. Oh God, if you see fit to send fiery trial to our lives, we are not afraid. We will count it a privilege, Father, to be given grace to glorify your name.

So help us to be faithful. Help us not to fall apart. Help us to walk with the Lord in the light of his word.

For Jesus' sake, amen.

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