

## 1 Peter 4:12-19

“Suffer As A Christian Not As A Criminal”

After you get there put your finger there and make your way back to Matthew 5

As we come into this particular portion of scripture a transition of sorts is made, a segue whereby Peter takes us from *servicing* for God’s glory (which we hit fairly pointedly last week) to *suffering* for God’s glory; and at 1<sup>st</sup> glance we sit here, sorta scratch our heads and think, “How do these dots connect?” It seems almost like a ricochet effect whereby we bounced from one direction to another.

In reality the two (serving [doing what you do to glorify God] and suffering) connect much closer than we might think at first thought. Jesus made a similar segue, a comparable connection in Matthew Ch 5. You’re already there and have probably already noticed that this is the very familiar passage of scripture otherwise known as the sermon on the Mt. You know the story, the multitudes were gathered *around* the Lord, all of them wanting to get a glimmer *of* the Lord, they were wanting to hear *from* the Lord so He went up on the side of a Mt (or a big hill) and He opened His mouth and began to teach. Beginning in Vs 3 this is what He said.

Vs3-9

Now as you know these are known as the “Beatitudes” simply because as believers these are the attitudes that should *be* in our lives. Now, as you meditate upon them and contemplate concerning them you would think that a person like this would be hailed by everyone around them. A person who was the polar opposite of prideful and full of themselves but rather they moved in humility, a person who was stricken with the broken down plight of not only themselves but of humanity, a person who was gentle and full of meekness, who sought after and lived a life of righteousness, someone who was abundant in mercy, who led life in purity and far from making trouble they lived life peaceably. I would think that, that guy, that gal would be the winner of Nobel Peace prizes, would be the recipient of lifetime achievement awards, would be honored and highly esteemed as an instrumental force for good on this planet, wouldn’t you?

But think it through, aren’t these attitudes, these attributes embodied in the person of Jesus Christ? Absolutely they are. Yet people took Him and they beat Him, and they nailed Him to a cross and left Him to hang there until He was dead... In John’s gospel Jesus helps to put it into perspective for us like this, “...*the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*” John 3:19 Earlier on John explained it this way, “*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.*” John 1:10-11 You see if you love the pseudo sense of security that darkness brings you thinking that you’re under it’s “cover” so that no one sees and no one knows than when light enters the equation what are you going to want to do? You’re going to want to get that light turned off as quickly and as permanently as you can. So, far from being hailed, you’re hated, far from winning some sorta “peace prize” you’re persecuted, far from being well spoken of you’re slandered. Jesus was readily familiar with that fact, so He carries on so as to encourage us, look at Vs 10.

Vs10-12

So you see this attitude of *humility*, seeking lead a life of service that edifies the body and brings God *glory* is connected to suffering very *definitely*. So as Peter makes his way out of this passage that deals the end times attitude of approaching life prayerfully, interacting with one another lovingly and serving the body of Christ actively to the glory of God he really makes his way quite naturally to this section that deals with suffering.

Now, we should qualify/clarify what kind of suffering we're talking about.

Because there are various and sundry reasons that suffering enters into the arena of our lives. Some suffering is the result of poor decisions, which is to say that we bring it on ourselves, we act in some way unruly or again simply make decisions with out thinking clearly and we reap the ramifications of that.

Sometimes suffering enters into our lives simply because life is full of hardship. Jesus made it clear "*These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*" John 16:33 In this world there are going to be problems, you *will have* tribulation, it rains on both the just and the unjust, the storms will come, the winds of tribulation will blow and the waves hardship will ebb and flow into and out of our lives. But Jesus encouraged us in a few different ways right there in Jhn 16:33 didn't He? #1 He told us it would happen, it shouldn't catch us off guard or somehow shock us or make us think that God doesn't know what's happening in our lives, Jesus gave us fair warning, tough times are simply a reality in this life. #2 He refocused us upon the fact that we were never guaranteed peace *circumstantially*, but rather we would find peace in Him *personally*. He said, "that in *Me* you may have peace" not because things are so peachy in your life circumstantially, but because you have a relationship with Jesus, you abide in Him personally. Finally #3 He said, "But be of good cheer, don't lose heart, I have overcome the world." The world will try to drag you down, you're in Me and I've overcome the world," which is to say that, "...*in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*" Rom 8:37

But then there's another kind of suffering, a kind of suffering that comes into our lives not because life is hard, and not because we've done something wrong, but because we've done something right. It's a kind of suffering that though God doesn't initiate it, He does at times allow it and He does utilize it *not to punish us*, but *to purge and purify us*, to get us to loosen our grip on this life/the things of this world and fixate our focus upon Him. This is the context that Peter calls our attention to today.

Vs12-13

What's Peter doing here? He's looking to give us the proper perspective on our present suffering. The theme of suffering is threaded all throughout this his 1<sup>st</sup> epistle, and in reality where it says, "which is to try you" there in Vs 12 more literally it should read "Which *is testing* you." He's talking about something that was happening to them and/or around them even in that moment in that day. They were being tested, being *tried* through suffering, and Peter says, "Don't think it a strange thing when you're tried by various trials, for the Christian it's not *strange* it's *standard*."

Yet it never fails does it. It seems as though anytime we're really in the "fire" when the "heat is on" in our lives and a fiery trial is upon us and we know that we haven't done anything to really "deserve it" that is we haven't knowingly sinned or made some sorta foolish decision that invariably we seem to take the position, the perspective, "What's going on here? I don't get it, why is this happening to me? It doesn't make sense that this would come upon me, or that this would happen to me...it's so weird, it's so *strange*." Yet Peter is exhorting us to take the position that when you call yourself Christian and there's *no* resistance, there's *no* hardship, trial, or tribulation, that's what you should think is strange. That's when you should be concerned because problems, persecution, trials and tribulations are part and parcel with the Christian experience. That doesn't mean that everyday should be a dismal drag, but that you're no stranger to tough times and trying experiences as a child of God.

Again that's why we don't look for our peace in the things of this world, in our circumstances being all peachy, but in the person of Jesus Christ

The word of God pulls no punches with you or me, it demonstrates *principally*, illustrates *practically*, and states very *definitively* that fiery tests and trials are to be expected in the life of the believer. When you read through 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians you find that Paul was concerned for them and so he sent Timothy to them. In order (he said), "...to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this." 1 Thess 3:2-3 In the book of Acts Ch 14 you find Paul visiting various cities that he'd preached in previously, "...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'" Acts 14:22 I'll give you one more; 2 Tim 3:12, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." So you see there's no controversy, no confusion, the bible states these things quite clearly, yet simultaneously encourages us in the fact that God has a purpose in it very specifically (a # of them actually though we're only focusing on 1 of them primarily today).

But let's quickly differentiate where the conflict lies, suffering/persecution doesn't come to you because you're *religious*, but because you're *righteous*. Big difference, Cain was a "religious" man, yet he hated and killed his brother (Gen 4) because he was *righteous* (1 Jhn 3:12). The Pharisees/Sadducees were and Jewish leaders were religious people, yet they crucified Christ and persecuted the early church because they were *righteous*. There's a distinct difference.

So don't think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you or perhaps is already upon you as though some strange thing is happening to you. You know, it's unique unto you and no one else has been through what you've gone through, no one else is subjected to the things in life you've had to endure. Paul told the Corinthians, "*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*" 1 Cor 10:13

You see the enemy wants to isolate you in your temptation, or in your tribulation and make you think that you're the only one who's ever experienced this particular type of trial or grief. When the fact of the matter is that though often times tragic, that kind of pain, that type of trial is not something unique unto you, but others have been there before you and still others will be there after you. God is faithful to you, He knows what you can stand more so than what you do and in the end He'll bring you through as gold. Even as Job said, "*He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.*" Job 23:10 Trust in the goodness of God toward you, understand that He has a heart that's for you and not against you, that at the root of your fiery trial is a refining process that will remove the slag and the dross from your heart and your life, cause you to walk closer to God, more sensitive to the Spirit, it'll work for your eternal good and God's eternal glory. Remember these words from James, "*My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord — that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.*" James 5:10-11

You see, God's not *punishing* you through the trial, He's *purifying* you. The bible teaches that there is a necessary and even a needful element of suffering in the Christians life. Even Jesus Himself was taken through the school of suffering, how much more will it be necessary for you and me?

So don't rebel against God in it, but rather *rejoice* to the extent that God allows you to partake of Christ's sufferings, that is, to enter into the fellowship of His sufferings. Why? Among other reasons because our temporal suffering is a prelude to eternal glory, Peter says, "Stay focused on the eternal, you may suffer temporarily, but the joy you experience, the glory you enter into will last eternally."

You should also be encouraged with the fact that God will never be a debtor to man. We've mentioned this before, you will never "pay a price" for God here on this earth that leaves Him somehow "owing" you in eternity. Paul said, "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*" Rom 8:18 and Again, 2 Cor 4:17, "*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,*"

Now God won't *replace* suffering with glory, He *transforms* suffering to glory. Jesus used the illustration of a woman giving birth in Jhn 16, the same baby that brought the woman pain also gave her joy. The pain was *transformed* to joy by the birth of the baby; here's the point. Those who suffer more for the Lord will glory more, and rejoice more at His coming. We have a tendency to want to embrace the glory, hold on to the joy and avoid any form of suffering. Paul understood one as a necessary prelude to the other. So he told the Philippians that the things that worked for his gain in this world he counted as loss for Christ. He said he didn't want to try and obtain his own righteousness, but the righteousness which is through faith in Christ, why? He said, "...*that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*" Phil 3:10-11

But I have found that God won't entrust the same measure of suffering to everyone, because not all of us will be faithful in/or with our suffering. We've mentioned this before, God doesn't *inflict upon us* a degree of suffering, but He might *entrust to us* a degree of suffering. For what purpose? That He might through us and to us demonstrate His person, His power, His faithfulness, His care and concern through tough times and trials. That others might turn *to* and trust *in* Him when they see Him care for you, and they see you trust unconditionally in Him knowing that He is good.

It's true (as one commentator put it), the Christian life is a banquet-because God has invited us to the table of salvation- but it's no picnic. We won't know all of the reasons here in this life, but we will (for various reasons that eternity will unfold) be tested through trials and proved through suffering in this life.

But the scriptures do give us this much; sharing in the sufferings of Christ will result in joy when we *see* Christ, deeper fellowship now *with* Christ, we'll be glorified *together* and *reign* with Christ. So you may be going through the fire *presently* but if it's for Christ's sake God will ensure that it'll be for your gain and His glory *eternally*.

Vs14

Sounds familiar doesn't it? Peter no doubt expounding a bit on what we read in our introduction, "Blessed are you if you're reproached for the name of Christ." That is, if you're insulted, put down, made fun of or whatever. Here's the idea, anything that you suffer for the sake of Christ is not a penalty, it's a privilege. On their part He's blasphemed (and they'll be held accountable for that) but on your part He's glorified. You see their problem with you as a believer points to the fact that the Holy Spirit is at *work in* you and at *rest upon* you.

Vs15-16

Here it is; if you're going to suffer make sure you don't deserve it. Make sure that you suffer as a Christian, not as a criminal. If you're being persecuted for Christ's sake that's not justification for retaliation, they may take your property, don't compensate by stealing. They might persecute you physically, don't retaliate through murder; don't justify your suffering through criminal behavior.

Now we have to stop for a minute here don't we and take note of this list of evil activity that Peter draws into the light.

Because with out missing a beat the Spirit inserts the "busybody" in the same list of wrong doing as He does the murderer, the thief and the evildoer. I point that out because I think the "busybody" is commonly found in the body of Christ. Who's the "busybody"? He's the one; she's the one who's always busy about somebody else's business. Literally this word speaks of one who takes supervision of affairs pertaining to others, a self appointed overseer in other people's problems or matters.

The situation has nothing to do with you at all yet somehow you're in the middle of it and taking it upon yourself to be Mr. or Mrs. Fix it concerning it. This is a problem in the body of Christ because people can fall prey to this with out always having sinister motive but listen. If it walks like a duck, and it quacks like a duck, by any other name it's still a duck. Well, if you in the midst of other people's affairs, in the know of other people's problems, are always getting in on other people's business, by any other name you're a busybody and you do well to back off and be mindful of your own affairs. I've never met anyone who didn't have enough problems of their own so that they needed to occupy themselves with the problems of other people. Now listen, the busybody will bring all kinds of grief upon themselves, but that's not suffering to the glory of God, that's meddling in other people's affairs and its sin. What Peter is saying is clear, that's not Christian behavior, it doesn't qualify as being grieved because you're in Christ when you bring trouble into your life because you got up into other people's problems or matters.

Vs16

If you invite trouble, trials, hardship, difficulty, stress or strain into your life due to things like what's mentioned in Vs 15 you *should be ashamed*. But if you're just minding your own business and serving the Lord and you suffer because of it, don't be ashamed of that, glorify God for that. He counted you worthy to suffer for His name's sake, rejoice and be exceedingly glad, great will be your reward for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Now you might notice that we don't glorify God *for* the suffering, but we do glorify God *in* the suffering and for what He'll accomplish in and through us *by* the suffering.

Vs17

God will purge us, He will purify us through the *fiery* trials that come into our lives. For you your fiery trial is now, for the ungodly their fire is still to come. The fire you endure purifies you, the fire they endure will only punish them. The issue of punishment concerning the believer was settled at the cross, God isn't seeking to punish you, but to purify you, to purge and refine you. But Peter's point here in Vs 17 is clear, our present *fiery trial* is nothing compared to the *flaming fire* that will punish the lost at the return of Christ. If God allows this type of turmoil to come upon His children, with what kind of resolve will He deal with the unrepentant and ungodly. You see as God purges us it makes our lives both a good witness and a good warning to the lost.

You've heard it before but it's appropriately noted, for the child of God this world is as bad as it's ever going to get, but for those who don't obey the gospel God, for those who've made themselves the enemy of God this is as good as it's ever going to get. This life demonstrates the worst we'll ever see it, for the ungodly, those who reject Jesus Christ this life is the best that eternity holds in store for them. How critical it is to have your heart in Christ's hands right now and in this moment, we're not guaranteed another day, we have right now with eternity resting in the balance.

Vs18

Quoting Prov 11:31 Peter continues to drive home his point. It's not that we're scarcely saved in the sense of it's hard to *earn* our salvation. Salvation is a free gift of the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ But it's difficult in the sense that the claims and disciplines of discipleship challenge us and demand of us a life that is holy and set apart to God. Jesus told us that narrow, and difficult is the way that leads to life and there are few who find it, because wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and many go that way. It's the easy, go with the flow kinda way. But to truly be a follower of Christ...it isn't easy, it's difficult and demanding. However the eternal rewards by far outweigh the temporary demands.

But if it's tough on the righteous, what will become of the ungodly and the unrepentant?

Vs19

We note again how Peter draws a distinction between those who suffer according the will of God and those who suffer otherwise. But should you suffer according to the will of God, commit your soul to Him in doing good. That is, continue to be resolved in your commitment to do good, to lead a godly life knowing that He's faithful, He's compassionate and when you see Him face to face everything that's brought pain into your life (not because of some poor decision of your own) that has been for His sake you'll find that it will be for your gain and His glory and you will rejoice with exceeding joy.

I think we do well to end on this thought; "Commit your soul to Him." That word "commit" means to entrust, or to "deposit." It's the same word that Jesus used when He said, "Father into Your hands I *commit* My spirit" (Luke 23:46). It's an absolute abandoning of our soul into the care and the loving hands of our Creator.

Whether you're *in* Christ, or you need to be saved from the penalty of your sins *through* Christ, *by* Christ. The exhortation stands, "Commit your soul to Him." Make sure that before you leave here today that your heart is in His hands...

### Prayer Points:

Lord give us the resolve to commit our souls to You. May we lead lives pleasing *to* You, that are available to be used *by* You, that should we suffer that it not be because we deserve it due to some sorta sin in our lives but because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. I pray for anyone here who maybe in the midst of the refiners fire even now, strengthen them, renew the eternal perspective in them and God may you glorify Yourself through them.

Should you be in a place whereby you need to commit your soul *to* Christ because you don't *know* Christ, you've never been forgiven of your sin, you've never asked Christ to come into your heart and make you right with God, not because of anything you do but because of all that He's done than I want to give you that opportunity even now. We've pulled no punches, the Christian life isn't an easy life, it's a difficult life, but an easy life isn't what you need, what you need is to be forgiven of your sin and made new in Christ. So here's the deal, if God is knocking on the door of your heart and you're ready to open it and let Jesus in; you're not interested in being religious, but you want Christ to make you righteous before God, cleansed from the guilt/shame and stain of sin than now is your time, open your heart to Jesus that He might give you new life and make your heart His home.