

I PETER 4

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to I Peter chapter 4 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

As we have seen in our study of this letter, Peter is admonishing these believers who were being persecuted for their faith in Jesus to have a steadfast endurance in the midst of this persecution and to live exemplary lives in spite of the persecution they were facing.

How appropriate for the days we are living in!

Last week we began the third and final division of this letter that we called ***THE SUFFERING OF THE BELIEVER*** and it covers I Peter 3:13-5:14.

This last section we divided up into four parts.

Last time we dealt with ***HOW WE CONDUCT OURSELVES IN SUFFERING*** and it covered I Peter 3:13-17.

We also began a section we called ***CHRIST, OUR EXAMPLE IN SUFFERING*** which began in I Peter 3:18 and continues through I Peter 4:6.

And we will finish up looking at tonight ***GOD'S COMMANDS IN SUFFERING***, and that is found in I Peter 4:7-19.

Next time, as we finish up this letter, we will conclude by looking at ***HOW WE ARE TO MINISTER IN SUFFERING*** in I Peter 5:1-14.

Suffering is not easy, it is not pleasant, but as we will see tonight, we are called to suffer for our faith and the way we can do that with joy is to not hold onto the things of this world so tightly, but to lay hold of Christ!

Let me share these words with you that will give you an idea of how some feel about what Christ endured, and it is a wrong picture. We are told,

Some would say that those who suffer most often suffer first from blind naiveté. Albert Schweitzer thought as much about Jesus, claiming that his cruel death on the cross was nothing more than the unfortunate result of naiveté.

According to Schweitzer, Jesus, the misguided visionary, never saw the sufferings of the cross coming until it was too late:

There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man, lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on the last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close.

It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn, and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them.

The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and His reign.

Peter, however, has been telling a different story. Jesus was vindicated in death. He rose victorious in the spirit and now reigns eternally as the Ascended Son at God's right hand.

According to Peter, naiveté is set aside. Jesus' suffering was not the unfortunate result of an impoverished itinerant's idealistic fervor. Instead, his suffering was by divine initiative.

Persecution was the predetermined pathway for God's Son.

All the Gospel writers concur. The Jesus they present to the world is well aware that his unique work required suffering and service. . . . Repeatedly he told his disciples, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed" (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33).

When Jesus stood before the Sanhedrin on the night of his betrayal, never once did he defend himself in hopes of avoiding the cross. In fact, when he did speak, he intentionally said what he knew would seal his fate (Mark 14:62).

- David R. Helm, 1 & 2 Peter and Jude – Sharing Christ’s Sufferings, pp. 127-128

With that said, let’s begin reading in I Peter chapter 4, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us this evening as we continue looking at ***CHRIST, OUR EXAMPLE IN SUFFERING.***

I PETER 4

VERSE 1-2

Notice how Peter opens this section up, with the word “**Therefore**” which links us to what he is about to say with what he has just said.

I believe that Peter is referring back to the suffering that Christ endured.

Remember what we read in I Peter 3:18, “**For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.**”

Peter is linking the suffering of Christ to the commitment we need to have towards God as we endure through the sufferings we face.

You see, our suffering is not going to exceed the suffering that Christ endured to save us, but like our Master, we will suffer!

Remember what Paul said in II Timothy 3:12, **“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”**

And yet, in knowing all that, in knowing we will suffer persecution in this life, many times when Christians think of suffering, struggles, difficult times they often see it as a failure, just as the world does!

But that should not be. Why is that?

Not only because the Scriptures tell us that this is not true but look again at the example that Christ has left for us, the suffering He endured on the cross that then led to victory over sin, victory over evil. It was not a failure or defeat – ***IT WAS VICTORY!***

Thus, in Matthew 16:24-26 we read, **“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’”**

One author put it like this in regard to suffering. He wrote, *“God does not promise to carry us to the skies on flowery beds of ease. God does not hand out colorful brochures offering good health, prosperity, wide popularity, and a long life to those who accept Christ. Those who array themselves in such flimsy robes are in for a shock.”*

And maybe it is because Pastor’s, teachers are not sharing the whole counsel of God with them and only telling the people what they want to hear, and when difficulty comes their way, they can’t understand it and sometimes they walk away!

We need to understand that taking up your cross spoke of death; a death to the old life and in that death is victory!

In fact, Peter tells us to “**arm yourselves**” or HOPLIZO, (hop-lid’-zo) in the Greek and it speaks of a soldier putting on his armor to prepare for battle!

And we are to put on the mind of Christ, but what does that mean?

Remember what Paul said in Philippians 2:1-5, “**Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.**”

You see, the mind of Christ is one of servanthood, humility, submission, looking out for the welfare of others, willing to suffer in this life to bring glory to God and obtain the victory!

Think of a soldier who is willing to lay his life on the line to gain the victory for the cause, he is willing to die to self!

We are doing the same thing as we place our lives on the line for the cause of Christ, to see the ultimate victory, to bring glory to God!

William MacDonald sums it up like this. He wrote, “*We have been considering Christ as an example of One who suffered unjustly. He suffered at the hands of wicked men for the cause of righteousness. Since this was so, His followers should arm themselves with the same mind. They should expect to suffer for His name. They should be prepared to endure persecution because they are Christians.*”

And I like the way that Warren Wiersbe pictures this for us. He wrote, *“The picture is that of a soldier who puts on his equipment and arms himself for battle. Our attitudes are weapons, and weak or wrong attitudes will lead us to defeat. Outlook determines outcome, and a believer must have the right attitudes if he is to live a right life.”*

I don’t think we give that much attention to our attitudes. I am sure most if not all of us are very familiar with the armor of God that Paul spoke of in Ephesians chapter 6, but if you don’t have the right attitude, it truly is worthless!

You see, as we put on the mind of Christ, as our attitude is good, then Peter says, **“... for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.”** I Peter 4:1.

Now, how does this dying to self cause us to cease from sinning?

Some believe it speaks of dying and going to heaven and that is true, we will cease from sinning at that point. But I don’t think that is what Peter is saying here.

I believe the more we suffer in this life the more it changes our outlook and sin no longer looks as inviting to us.

You see, we have prepared ourselves for battle, we have put on the mind of Christ, we are focused on doing the will of God and sin is not a focus for us as it once was.

If you are willing to suffer for Christ, why would you let the enemy back into your life to be your friend?

You wouldn’t!

As one writer put it, *“Whoever has suffered for doing right, and has still gone on obeying God in spite of the suffering it involved, has made a clear break with sin.”* (Grudem)

You see, it *“Depicts the spiritual state of the victorious sufferer. It carries a note of triumph; he has effectively broken with a life dominated by sin. It need not mean that he no longer commits any act of sin, but that his old life, dominated by the power of sin, has been terminated.”* (Hiebert)

Paul, in Romans 6:5-7 tells us, **“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.”**

And from speaking about suffering and ceasing from sin, Peter goes on to say in I Peter 4:2, **“that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lust of men, but for the will of God.”**

Peter is going to deal with this more as we read on, but this should just make sense. We have suffered for Jesus, and thus, we need to be living for the Lord, obeying His will and not mine.

And Peter has spoken about this already in I Peter 1:13-16 as he wrote, **“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; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”**

Also, in I Peter 2:11-12 he wrote, **“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”**

Thus, may we not live to satisfy the flesh but to obey the will of God!

And look at what Peter says next, the perspective he is giving to us and he wants us to take a good look at this and not go back to those old ways, that flesh life. Listen to what he tells us.

VERSES 3-5

How true that is, **“For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles . . .”** I Peter 4:3.

We have spent so much time in the world that it takes some time for the world to get out of us.

And what we found out is that it left us empty, we were always searching for more satisfaction, and we just couldn't find it.

The world left us empty, unfulfilled and we walked in lewdness or without any moral restraint, which includes sexual immorality.

We lived in lusts or seeking to gratify unlawful appetites.

We lived in drunkenness or allowing intoxicating drinks to control our life.

We lived in revelries or out of control parties.

We lived in drinking parties or drinking with the sole purpose of getting drunk.

And we lived in abominable idolatries or all kinds of immoral activities that are associated with idol worship.

The point that Peter is making is that sin stinks.

Thus, as Christians we need to make a clean break from these things and not embrace them anymore!

Listen to what one writer had to say regarding this old life and the new life we have in Christ. He wrote,

Don't overlook the strong contrast between the "will of God" (v. 2) and the "desire of the Gentiles" (v. 3).

Peter says, "The time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles."

In a certain sense, all believers have in their lives a BC and an AD - before Christ and after Christ. Peter saw "year one" as the moment of conversion, officially marked by baptism (3:21).

Before this spiritual birthday, the old person lived out the old course of life - "sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries" (4:3).

Peter's list isn't exhaustive, but it paints an ugly picture of many believers' "BC" years.

When we consider that most people in the world still live in this "BC" period, it shouldn't surprise us that they expect everybody to speak their foul language, follow their distorted mind-set and customs, and uphold their corrupt cultural values.

When we don't conform, they notice.

When we allow our transformation to play out on the stage of life, we will stand out from the rest of the crowd by the fact that we don't participate in their self-indulgent escapades.

- Chuck Swindoll

And this is the problem for us when we turn to Christ and make a break from the lifestyle we had, that our friends and family will come against us. They would rather have us continue down that reckless and dangerous path because they can then continue living in their sin without any conviction because of our lifestyle.

And folks, I have seen this over the years.

I don't even have to say a word at times and the person who is living in sin is uncomfortable around me, the light of Christ comes shining through my lifestyle that I live!

It is as Meyer said, ***"It does not matter how your good deeds are received by men. If you are like God, you will find them received with contempt and ingratitude."***

Exactly. The thing is, don't let their actions towards you change you, may you continue to influence them.

And folks, as we are persecuted by the unsaved for our faith, we see the reality of sin, the ugliness of sin come forth from their lives! And I think in these last days we will see this persecution grow against Christians in this country!

But there is this warning. You see, the tragedy of a lifestyle that tries to gain the whole world, that sells their soul to the Devil, the judgment of God will come upon them!

Now for many, they believe their good deeds will get them into heaven, and yes, they are not perfect, but they have done a lot of good in this life.

If you feel that way you are wrong.

The Bible tells us that none of us do good, none of us are perfect before God and that is the only righteousness that He will accept, perfection.

Now some may then come to this conclusion. ***"Then no one can be saved!"***

Yes, that is true outside of Christ, but in Christ His righteousness can be imputed into our life by faith, we can be saved!

Paul, in Romans 6:23a tells us, “**For the wages of sin is death . . .**”

You see, your good works, your righteousness, which is like filthy rags before a holy God, will bring forth death to you, separation from God!

That is the payment for your good works – *DEATH!*

But Paul goes on to say, “**. . . but the [free] gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” Romans 6:23b.

Thus, outside of Christ you will face the judgment of God and end up in the Lake of Fire after the Great White Throne judgment for eternity!

But Jesus has given to us eternal life with Him and all we must do is receive the free gift by faith!

Thus, don’t run with them, with the world and its influences, let us live “**for the will of God.**”

VERSE 6

Here is another controversial passage and we have to be careful and interpret it according to what the rest of the Scriptures are telling us and what the context is in this portion of Scripture.

There are those who believe that when a person dies, they get a second chance, and the Gospel will be given to them and they can be saved. If that is true, then it doesn’t matter when you get saved because everyone is going to get saved, at least that is what they believe!

Please understand that Peter is not speaking about giving those who have died outside of Christ a second chance to receive Jesus because that would be contrary to the Scriptures.

Paul tells us in Hebrews 9:27-28, **“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”**

Then what is Peter talking about? There are two possibilities that can apply here.

First of all, if you remember back in I Peter 3:19-20, after Jesus was crucified but before He was raised from the dead, we were told, **“by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.”**

In this passage I believe Peter is referring to Jesus going to Hades and speaking to the demons who were chained until the day of judgment, those who co-habitated with women during the time of Noah and spoke of His victory over sin.

It is possible, that Peter here is speaking of Jesus going to the place in Hades called Abraham’s bosom, (Luke 16:19-31), where those who died believing in the coming Messiah went waiting for Him.

Then, after the death of Jesus He went down to the belly of the earth, this place called Abraham’s bosom and preached the message of salvation to them.

He was not giving them a second chance, but a first chance as they waited for the Messiah and now that He is here, they received Him.

Now as Jesus rose from the dead this place called Abraham’s bosom is also empty and the only place that is occupied in Hades is the place where the dead outside of Christ go to and are waiting for the Great White Throne Judgment spoken of in Revelation chapter 20 as they await this final judgment and are cast into the Lake of Fire!

I don't think that is what Peter is speaking of here, although some do.

I think, from the context, that Peter is speaking of is those who have already been martyred for their faith. They have already heard the Gospel message when they were alive and received it, it was preached to them when they were alive.

And thus, Peter is telling them not to be afraid of death because it has no power over us anymore.

To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, (II Corinthians 5:8).

In fact, as we are read already, what Paul said in II Timothy 3:12, **“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”**

Yes, even some will die for their faith, so we should not be surprised as persecution comes our way because of our faith!

Now here is the thing and maybe it will help us see that Peter is speaking of being martyred for our faith, some have died for their faith.

If Christ came and gave His life for us to save us, His death was not in vain but brought about a great victory.

For us, as we are persecuted for our faith, as some are martyred for their faith, it may bring life to those who are dead in their sin as they see our faith lived out to the point of death.

You see, even in death it can bring forth life!

Let me share with you a few examples of what a witness these martyrs left behind, those that gave their lives for their faith:

Polycarp, venerable bishop of Smyrna was a personal friend and pupil of John the Apostle. When he was age 86, he was urged by the Roman proconsul to reproach Christ and be set free.

“Eighty and six years have I served Him and He never did me any injury. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?”

The proconsul said: “I have respect for your age. Simply say, ‘Away with the Atheists’ and be set free.” Polycarp solemnly said “Away with the Atheists” – pointing to the pagan crowd.

He joyfully went to the stake, thanking God for counting him worthy to be numbered among the martyrs.

- Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, 3344

John Huss, the courageous pastor of Prague, was arrested, condemned, and sentenced to be burned by a church council in 1415. When Huss heard his sentence pronounced, he fell to his knees and prayed, “Lord Jesus, forgive my enemies.”

Then when he was chained to the stake, he prayed, “In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed.” Then flames snuffed out the life of “The Morning Star of the Reformation.”

- Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, 3345

The persecutors of Bishop Hooper, at his martyrdom, offered a pardon upon his recantation, saying: “Consider that life is sweet and death is bitter.” “True,” said he, “but the death to come is more bitter, and the life to come is more sweet.”

- Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, 3347

On July 1st, 1555, John Bradford was burned to death. He was chaplain to King Edward the Sixth of England, and was one of the most popular preachers of his day. But he was a martyr to his faith. As he was being driven out to Newgate to be burned, permission was given him to speak, and from the wagon in which he rode to his death the entire way out from West London to Newgate he shouted: “Christ, Christ, none but Christ!”

- Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, 3346

Having been banished, Cyprain suffered martyrdom in Carthage in 258. When the sentence of death was read to him he said, “I heartily thank Almighty God who is pleased to set me free from the chains of the body.”

- Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, 3348

And you can read Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and see how millions of Christians have given their lives for their faith and the example they left as they were put to death. In saying that, may we not lose sight that not only in death are we to be a witness of Christ, but also in our everyday life, we are to live out our faith!

Now we are moving into a section that deals with ***GOD’S COMMANDS TO US IN SUFFERING*** and it covers I Peter 4:7-19.

VERSE 7

Remember that Peter is speaking to those Christians who were suffering for their faith in Christ. And he wants to admonish his readers to hang in there, why?

Because “... the end of all things is at hand ...” I Peter 4:7.

In other words, the early church was looking for the return of Christ to put down man's rebellion and to set up His Kingdom on this earth.

And I believe that he is specifically speaking of the Rapture of the Church because the Greek verb that is translated "**is at hand**" speaks of it happening or occurring at any moment, it is imminent.

In Luke 14:40 Jesus said, "**Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**"

Also, in James 5:8 we are told, "**You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.**"

And thus, Peter admonishes them to "**. . . be serious and watchful in your prayers.**"
I Peter 4:7.

Now how does that apply to us today?

It should cause us to be fervent in our prayers. We should be watchful of what is going on and pray for the situations we see happening.

We need to be praying for a steadfast endurance in the faith as persecution comes our way and to live exemplary lives in the midst of the persecution so that no matter what comes our way, we will shine forth brightly for Jesus, as did the martyrs we looked at!

Knowing that Jesus is coming back soon should motivated us to live a life pleasing to God and one that is serious in regard to our faith!

It is as Paul said in Ephesians 5:15-21, **“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.”**

Let us be wise, let us be controlled by the Spirit of God and not our flesh! Let us pray fervently!

VERSES 8-11

Keep in mind that what Peter is writing about here is linked to what he just spoke of, that the Lord’s return is close, and we need to be serious and watchful in our prayers and in all that we do.

Of this, Warren Wiersbe put it like this. He wrote,

If we really look for the return of Christ, then we shall think of others and properly relate to them. Love for the saints is important, “above [before] all things.” Love is the badge of a believer in this world (John 13:34-35). Especially in times of testing and persecution, Christians need to love one another and be united in heart.

This love should be “fervent.” The word pictures an athlete straining to reach the goal. It speaks of eagerness and intensity. Christian love is something we have to work at, just the way an athlete works on his skills. It is not a matter of emotional feeling, though that is included, but of dedicated will. Christian love means that we treat others the way God treats us, obeying His commandments in the Word. It is even possible to love people that we do not like!

- Warren Wiersbe, the Wiersbe Bible Commentary – NT, p. 919

Now here is where it gets difficult for us. When things are not going our way, when persecution or difficult times come upon us, it is hard to love others, it is hard to forgive their sins against us, it is hard to be hospitable and not complain and we tend to withdraw from the body and not use the gifts that God has given to us for the edifying of the body, for the betterment of the body of Christ!

But that is what we are called to do, to love and forgive, to be hospitable, to use the gifts that God has given to us! And folks, this is done as you submit yourself to the will of God for only then will you be able to submit to others, especially during difficult times!

We tend to look out for ourselves and as we do, we hurt others, and that is not a fervent type of love. Not even close.

Now what does Peter mean when he says that “**love will cover a multitude of sins**” as he quotes out of Proverbs 10:12?

In regard to our love covering a multitude of sins, Grudem tells us: *“Where love abounds in a fellowship of Christians, many small offences, and even some large ones, are readily overlooked and forgotten. But where love is lacking, every word is viewed with suspicion, every action is liable to misunderstanding, and conflicts abound – to Satan’s perverse delight.”*

Let us be wise and obey the will of God for our lives and forgive others as God has freely and graciously forgiven us!

Now that is not saying we condone their sin or ignore their sin. But can we love them as Christ loves us? That puts it into perspective for us!

And look at what God has done for us so we can minister to others. He has given us His multi-faceted or manifold grace; He has given to us gifts to minister in the body of Christ.

Now, if we don’t use these gifts Peter tells us it is as if God’s grace gift was given to us in vain. And folks, if we don’t use these gifts they are wasted.

Meyer puts it this way, *“Manifold grace is many-coloured grace. As when a ray of light breaks into a spray of many hues, so each of us receives God’s grace at a different angle, and flashes it back broken up into some fresh colour.”*

It is as Paul said in I Corinthians chapter 12, **“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all . . . But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”** I Corinthians 12:7, 11.

As Peter continues on here, he is admonishing us to live holy lives in spite of what comes our way, the persecution we face because as we do, God is glorified!

And Peter ends this section with a big **“Amen!”** or *“so let it be!”*

Don’t be sidetracked by these things but keep your eyes and heart focused on the Lord and then walk accordingly.

J. C. Ryle rightly observes regarding holy living in a hostile world. He tells us: *“A holy man will follow after spiritual-mindedness. He will endeavor to set his affections entirely on things above, and to hold things on earth with a very loose hand. He will not neglect the business of the life that now is; but the first place in his mind and thoughts will be given to the life to come. He will aim to live like one whose treasure is in heaven, and to pass through this world like a stranger and pilgrim traveling to his home.”*

Amen to that!

VERSES 12-13

This is an interesting statement by Peter for he once rebuked Jesus for saying that He would have to suffer on the cross and be put to death!

In fact, in Mark 8:31-33 we are told of this incident, **“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’”**

But now Peter has matured, he is empowered by the Spirit of God and he sees things differently.

In fact, he tells us that it is a strange thing if you think you are not going to be persecuted for your faith!

Keep in mind that Nero's persecution against Christians was growing and he was burning Christians alive at the stake and Peter is warning them not to be surprised because what is happening in Rome is spreading throughout the Roman Empire!

Thus, instead of sorrow, rejoice in these things knowing that you are suffering for your faith just as the Lord did.

Now that is hard, how do we do that?

Paul tells us in Hebrews 12:2-4, **“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.”**

What was the joy that was set before Jesus?

That joy was knowing that He was going to be received back to glory with the Father, but first came death!

Thus, our joy in the midst of these fiery trials is to be identified with our Lord and to understand we will be raised in glory one day to be with Him!

And this persecution from Nero would make sense, since Peter wrote his first epistle around 63 A. D. and then his second epistle sometime in 64 A. D.

You see, in 64 A. D. Emperor Nero is believed to have been responsible for setting Rome on fire and blaming the Christians.

As one writer said,

For nine days during the summer of A.D. 64, a huge fire raged in the city of Rome. The flames spread rapidly through the city's narrow streets and the many tightly bunched wooden tenements, ordinarily crowded with residents. Because of his well-known desire to refurbish Rome by whatever means, the populace believed Emperor Nero was responsible for starting the blaze.

As the fire destroyed most of the city's districts, he watched gleefully from the Tower of Maecenas. Roman troops prevented people from extinguishing the fire and even started new fires.

The disaster thoroughly demoralized the Romans because many lost nearly all their earthly goods and found their civic pride scorched as well. With public resentment toward him at a high level, Nero diverted the focus away from himself and made the Christian community the scapegoat for the fire.

Nero's ploy was a clever one because Christians in the Roman Empire were already the unjust targets of much hatred and slander.

Unbelievers falsely reported that Christians consumed human flesh and blood during the Lord's Supper (cf. Mark 14:22–25; 1 Cor. 11:23–26) and that the holy kiss (cf. 5:14; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26) was actually a sign of uncontrolled lust.

In addition, the Romans viewed Christianity as a sect of Judaism. With the increasing anti-Semitism of those days, the populace easily adopted an anti-Christian attitude as well. . . .

Following the burning of Rome, Nero capitalized on that anti-Christian sentiment and punished the Christians by using them as human torches to light his garden parties, by allowing them to be sewn inside animal skins to be devoured by predatory animals, by crucifying them, and by subjecting them to other heinous, unjust tortures.

The apostle Peter likely wrote this letter just before Nero's persecution began . . . Peter's major recurring theme is how his readers should respond to unjust suffering.

Today hostility toward Christians who speak out against the culture's sins and in defense of the exclusivity of the gospel is on the rise. Therefore, to endure the present hostility, as well as what might come in the future, believers need to heed this passage's instructions on enduring severe trials.

- Source Unknown

But think about Christianity in America. We tend to look at persecution as strange and abnormal, and yet, in the first century church persecution was considered normal and it was odd if Christians were not persecuted for their faith!

In fact, the words "*suffer*", "*suffered*" and "*suffering*" are used a total of twenty-one times in this Epistle.

Remember what Jesus said in John 15:18-19, "**If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.**"

So don't think it strange or abnormal to be persecuted for your faith in Christ!

Paul, in Romans 8:18, gives us this perspective of things as he tells us, **“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.”**

And in Philippians 3:9-10 we are told, **“and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death”**

Now when many read this, they love the power and they stop there, but Paul tells us that it is not only **“the power of His resurrection”**, but also **“the fellowship of His sufferings.”**

Why is this important for us?

Because the more you go through tough times, the more you face persecution, the more you will seek His Kingdom and His righteousness to come!

Your eyes will be focused upward and not on the things of this world!

And, as Peter said in I Peter 4:7, **“But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.”**

VERSES 14-16

Notice once again Peter is speaking of being persecuted for your faith in Christ not for being obnoxious or weird!

And if you do suffer for being evil, for doing wrong, there is no glory for God in that.

And please note that with those who do murder, and steal, those that are evil, are those that are busybodies, and we don't tend to link murder and being a busybody together, but God does!

Don't go back to that which Christ set you free from!

Now, if you are suffering for Christ, as much as the world comes against you, God is with you!

Paul, in Romans 8:37-39 tells us this, **“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

Please don't forget that or let the enemy tell you otherwise!

Keep in mind that the word **“Christian”** is only found in three places in the New Testament. We see it spoken of here in I Peter 4:16.

Then in Acts 11:26 we see that they were first called Christians in Antioch.

And in Acts 26:28 we see King Agrippa use this word for those who were followers of Christ, saying that Paul almost convinced him of becoming a Christian or one who follows Christ, that is what the word means.

You see, we not only follow His teachings, but we identify with Him, even in His sufferings!

And I realize with all we see going on in our country, many Christians are ready to rebel. I will let you decide if that is right or wrong, I know where I stand.

But I will just share with you what our brothers and sisters are enduring for Christ and maybe that will help you to see what we are to do.

One pastor gives us this insight. He wrote,

“Christians are never to be troublemakers or agitators in society or in their places of work (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1–3; Titus 3:1–5). They may confront the sins in the lives of other believers, help administer church discipline, challenge unbelievers with the gospel, and exhort fellow saints to greater levels of godliness; but regarding others’ private matters that do not concern them, believers should never intrude inappropriately.

More specifically, Peter was referring to political activism and civil agitation - disruptive or illegal activity that interferes with the smooth functioning of society and government. Such activity would compel the authorities to mete out punishment (Rom. 13:2-4) . . . It is wrong for believers to view that punishment as persecution for their faith. If they step outside the faith and bring trouble, hostility, resentment, or persecution on themselves, they have no more right to expect Holy Spirit relief than if they were murderers.”

The pastor then added a personal anecdote,

“I remember a conversation I once had with a Russian pastor who had suffered greatly under Soviet communism. I asked if he or his fellow Christians ever rebelled against that form of government. He replied that it was all their convictions that if they were ever resented and persecuted by the secular authorities, it would be for the gospel only. The Russian church actually grew strong in that environment . . .”

Something to think about!

VERSES 17-19

Yes, God will use judgment, persecution to purify us, to make us more like Him. But please understand that this is done with the idea of building up, it is done in a positive way even though the situation may be difficult.

Now as Peter compares the judgment of the godly with the ungodly, they don't compare, it is like apples and oranges.

Thus, it is far better to suffer now, enduring through these tough times with joy because God is working in us to bring us to glory.

But for the ungodly, it doesn't even compare, the judgment for them is eternal, it will never end.

There is the coming Tribulation Period that lasts for seven years, but that is nothing compared to the Lake of Fire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth for eternity as the ungodly are separated from God.

Thus, there is darkness and cold!

It is as Proverbs 11:31 tells us, **“If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, How much more the ungodly and the sinner.”**

Also, Paul in Hebrews 12:27-29 tells us, **“Now this, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.”**

Fire can purify as it does with gold, and that is what God is doing in our lives.

Fire can also destroy and for the unsaved, their righteousness will be burned up for it is like filthy rags before a holy and righteous God, it will not be able to stand His judgment!

And Paul tells us that God is going to shake everything that can be shaken and only that which is of Him will stand!

As I close this evening Peter tells us to commit our souls to Jesus.

That word “**commit**” is a word that was used for leaving money on deposit with a trusted friend.

You see that friend was duty bound to return the money intact. Thus, when we commit our souls to Jesus, we can rest assured it is safe, you can take that to the bank you might say! It is that safe!

Remember the All-State commercials, “*You’re in good hands with All-State*”? Well, I have one that is more secure, “*You’re in better hands with Jesus*” Why? Because He is faithful.

You see, He is not only our faithful Creator who has molded and shaped us from the dust of the earth, but He is also the Creator and Sustainer of our salvation!

It is as Peter said in I Peter 1:3-5, “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**”

God has saved us by His power, and He will keep us and there is a place reserved in Heaven for us.

Thus, as persecution comes, know He is in control and He will allow us to go through these times for our best, to bring us to glory one day! And a big “*AMEN!*” to that!