

1 Peter 4.12-19 / COB / 09.01.13

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: title]** I hope most of you got my email about my former mentor and his wife. Bob and Susan McNabb are selling their house in the suburbs, to move to the inner city of Birmingham, AL, and they are not moving to just any house in the city, they have chosen one with a view of an ugly apartment building.
- Now, LeeAnn and I watch a lot of HGTV, and I can tell you this is not normal: most people flee houses with views of ugly apartment buildings, but Bob and Susan want this house because of that view: they want to tear a hole in that fence and put in a gate, so they have easy access to the apartment building and the people there will have easy access to Bob and Susan, because Bob and Susan are going to share the gospel with every person in that building.
 - Counter-intuitive, counter-cultural, but exactly what 1 Peter is talking about: giving up our comfort zones to sacrifice and even suffer for the sake of the gospel mission. That inspires me!
- † I have to tell you, this is harder as a pastor. When I was a guest speaker, it was easy to come into a chapel and make jokes, get everyone laughing and liking me. Now I come in as your pastor. I look out at you, and I care more, and I know more about some of you hurting physically, emotionally, relationally, financially, perhaps spiritually. Even when preparing, I feel less lighthearted about it.
- I chose to begin my preaching here with 1 Peter because he speaks to our suffering, and he assures us that we have God's love and salvation despite what we suffer through today, and that God will help us to endure our suffering if we cling to him. I wanted you to have that.
 - Let's pray...
- † We are looking at 1 Peter 4.12-19 today, so you can turn there in your Bible if you like. You might want to pull out the insert in your bulletin. Before we get to our text, we are going to review a little bit, and the insert has some blanks to fill in for those of you who like to follow along. This is a short letter, in Peter's words, just a few pages, but it is packed with important ideas.
- † **[Slide 2: suffer]** Peter's readers had been deported from their homes and exiled into pagan lands in Northern Turkey, where they were suffering persecution. Peter says Christians will suffer in this life, but enduring in faith and obedience through that suffering will prove the genuineness of our faith [1.6-7]. In fact, we are called by God to endure suffering for doing good, without retaliating, so that we follow Christ's example [2.21-23; 3.9-11, 17].
- † **[Slide 3: standing with God]** Suffering is a reality we all know. The good news is that despite suffering, we can always be sure of our relationship with God: suffering is not a sign of God's abandonment, nor can suffering hurt our standing with God [3.14]. God the Father chose us, Christ died for us, and the Holy Spirit set us apart for salvation and obedience [1.2; 2.19].
- The Holy Spirit also has given us a new birth from imperishable seed through our faith in the gospel, and promises to protect our salvation until we receive our inheritance in Heaven and are resurrected at the end of time [1.3-5, 23]. These assurances should inspire us!
- † **[Slide 4: Christ]** Christ is the Son of God who came to be born as Jesus and lived a pure human life [1.19-20]. Jesus died on the cross to take away the power of sin in our lives and to take the penalty for sins so that we could be healed and live for righteousness [2.24-25].

- After Jesus shed his blood for us, he was resurrected from the dead and glorified by God the Father [1.19-21], and now is at the Father's right hand with all placed in submission under him [3.22]. As the prophets foretold, Christ was rejected by most of mankind, but he is the cornerstone of all that God the Father is doing in history [2.4-6].
- † **[Slide 5: response]** We respond to God's gift of deliverance through Christ by setting our hope completely on that grace, seeking to become pure and holy like God, learning to revere God day to day, loving each other fervently, and seeking to be nurtured to spiritual maturity by God [1.13-2.3].
- We are to live as slaves to God [2.16], citizens of Heaven who are temporarily exiled here on Earth [1.17]. We seek to do what is right, even when that brings us persecution and suffering, because this brings God glory and provides a witness for him [2.11, 15].
 - Part of doing what is right is learning how to submit to the authorities God has allowed over us, learning how to be good Christians within the secular community and within our homes [2.13-3.6], and learning to focus on our inner beauty and on caring for each other, rather than on the shallow things the world values [3.3-8].
 - **[Slide 6: God's people]** God is using us to construct his church community of holy priests offering spiritual sacrifices [2.5]. God has fashioned us into a new multi-ethnic people who will shout his praises to the world [2.9] and be ready to explain why we can have hope in a hopeless society [3.15].
- † **[Slide 7: the path]** Christ's path took him through suffering and death, but brought him to resurrection and glory from God [3.18]. Following Christ means taking the same path: knowing it leads to our inheritance in Heaven and resurrection to the New Earth, but that first it leads through times of suffering and even death [3.17-18].
- † The danger of being in a good church for many years is that you have heard all this before, and because your mind recognizes it, your mind might not fully engage with it. You need to engage with this theology!
- This is life changing truth! Think of what a paradigm shift this is from the world. People in the world think they are totally free, but really they are slaves to their sinful nature; they live for themselves, yet have no hope for anything better.
 - We are given hope through Christ, because we are offered freedom from the bondage to sin and forgiveness from the punishment for sin, so we know we can experience a relationship with God now and forever. But Christ's path takes us through a different way of life, one that is selfless instead of selfish, one that is righteous instead of self-righteous, one that requires sacrifice instead of satisfying comfort.
 - I will tell you what reflecting on this book has done for me. Ben talked about Eeyore Christians who feel sorry for themselves when they suffer and Red Queen Christians who strike out at others when they suffer; I used to be both, but now I am learning to expect suffering, to prepare for suffering, because following Christ is about sacrificial suffering for the sake of the gospel.
 - And I will tell you another way I have grown by reflecting on this book: I feel a lot more confident in my relationship with God. In life, we struggle with physical pain, emotional pain, handicaps, debt, poverty, unemployment, broken relationships, hurting loved ones, loneliness, failed endeavors, doubts and confusion, and when we are deep in this suffering, it is natural to wonder whether God really loves us, whether God is even there. But I have learned that God is always there and always keeping an eye on me, but his goal is to deliver me through these struggles and grow me in faith and character, rather than deliver me out of these struggles. This

changes my perspective on life and how I handle it, and even how I pray. I hope it does the same for you. That brings us to our text, 1 Peter 4.12-19. Let's see what Peter has for us today.

[Slide 8: 4.12-13] 1 Peter 4.12-13 NET: ¹²Dear friends, do not be astonished that a trial by fire is occurring among you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice in the degree that you have shared in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice and be glad.

- † This is our eighth week talking our way through 1 Peter, and I think in every passage, Peter has mentioned the likelihood of suffering. This tells us that the persecution by the pagan locals in Northern Turkey was really hurting Peter's original readers, but it also tells us how seriously Peter and God want us to take this idea.
 - If we expect God to make our lives easy, what happens when struggle comes? We begin to doubt, to have weaker faith, and to turn to worldly coping mechanisms like illegal drugs, prescription drugs, alcohol, porn, shopping, and over eating.
 - What if we take Peter's words to heart? Then we would expect struggle, and we could be prepared to rely on God to help us tough it out when struggle did come, we could be prepared to reflect God's character and represent him as we suffer, instead of whining in self pity or striking out at others.
- † The Greek of this sentence is difficult, but it definitely does describe this suffering of persecution as a trial or a test. We learned in the beginning of this letter that suffering by persecution is a test that proves the genuineness of our faith. How will you respond? Will you boldly stand for Christ and righteousness or will you conform to the culture and not express your faith?
- † **[Slide 9: rejoice in suffering]** In the gospels, we learn that non-believers persecuted Christ: they rejected him, insulted him, beat him, and killed him. Should we be surprised when they reject or insult us?
 - No, as Ben brought out in his sermon a couple of weeks ago, Jesus warned his followers in John 15 that they would face the same persecution as he did. Peter says here that these trials are not something strange, rather they are expected.
 - Paul, in multiple New Testament letters, wrote that Christians could expect suffering, and in 2 Timothy 3.12, he wrote, "Now in fact all who want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." It is not the odd thing: if you are really living out the Christian life, some non-believers will spit on you.
- † This sounds horrible, to have people reject our friendship, insult our intelligence, slander our character, vandalize our possessions, and maybe even attack us and our families, yet Peter says we should rejoice! We should rejoice in the degree that we have shared in the sufferings of Christ. Why?
 - One reason is that this suffering proves the genuineness of our faith: our authentic faith attracts hostility from what is evil and disbelieving, and it is because of our authentic faith that we persevere through these trials by depending on God.
 - The genuineness of our faith will result in us rejoicing when our savior returns to judge and we experience the completion of our salvation instead of facing condemnation as will the non-believers who persecute us. That's the first reason we rejoice.
 - The second reason is in v.14...

[Slide 10: 4.14] 1 Peter 4.14 NET: ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory, who is the Spirit of God, rests on you.

- † When we are persecuted, we have the Holy Spirit empowering us to endure. I checked nine English translations, and they all said the Spirit “rests” on you in these moments. This could mean that you are blessed because the Holy Spirit is paying special attention to empowering you in these moments.
 - This also could be an allusion to Isaiah 11.2. Isaiah prophesied about the coming Messiah and how the Holy Spirit would rest or settle on this Messiah to empower him. If Peter is thinking of this passage in Isaiah, then perhaps he is encouraging those of us who suffer persecution that the same Spirit who empowered Jesus will empower us, that the same Spirit who brought Jesus from suffering to glory will bring us from suffering to glory.
 - But the Greek verb, ἀναπαύω, can also mean to give rest, in other words to refresh or revive. I think that makes a lot of sense in this context: when you are suffering for Christ, on the ropes, and being pummeled by the world, the Holy Spirit is actively reviving you, so that you can endure, so that you do not lose the fight.
 - Of course, we don’t strike back when facing persecution; instead we stand ready to sacrifice in faith; that’s what the Holy Spirit empowers us to do.
 - Karen Jobes – I hope I am saying her name correctly – is a professor at Wheaton and I think the best commentator on 1 Peter. She wrote, “For it is only by the power of the Spirit that one finds the resolve and strength to live an uncompromising life in a society that is hostile to one’s fundamental convictions and values. One’s willingness to suffer rather than compromise indicates the inner transformation of the sanctifying work of the Spirit (1:2) that has set one apart as a living stone in the spiritual house of God (2:5). God has not abandoned the Christian who suffers; to the contrary, God is powerfully present in the experience of suffering for Christ” [Jobes: *1 Peter*; Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; 288].
- † So we are blessed in that we successfully identify with Christ in his suffering, and because [one way or another] we will experience the Spirit’s empowerment.
 - Because the Holy Spirit empowers us, we can continue to walk in faith and obedience, even though we are suffering, even if it is this faith and obedience that brings our suffering.
 - And, if we are yielded to the Spirit, and living like God designed us to live, then we will experience the fruit of the Spirit, which includes a transcendent inner peace and joy, even when suffering, because we know of our right standing with God, because we know that the judgment of the world means nothing to us, because we know that the suffering of this life is but temporary.

[Slide 11: 4.14] 1 Peter 4.15-16 NET: ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or thief or criminal or as a troublemaker. ¹⁶ But if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but glorify God that you bear such a name.

- † As Peter pointed out earlier, he is not talking about when we suffer for doing wrong. We should be avoiding sin, but if we do sin and that causes us to suffer, that is simply the repercussion for sin.
- † Peter’s point is about when we suffer for being identified with Christ, when we are living righteously and sharing our faith with others.
 - The world says we should be ashamed of our faith: they say we are ignorant, foolish, and judgmental for believing in Christ as the only way to salvation.

- But Peter says the opposite: when the world judges you, don't be ashamed, rather praise God that you get to be identified with Christ and face this trouble! The alternative is a lot worse...

[Slide 12: 4.17-19] 1 Peter 4.17-19 NET: ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin, starting with the house of God. And if it starts with us, what will be the fate of those who are disobedient to the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And if the righteous are barely saved, what will become of the ungodly and sinners? ¹⁹ So then let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator as they do good.

- † We read last week in 4.5, that Christ will return to judge the living and the dead. This includes believers, as we can see from other New Testament passages [Matthew 25.31-46; John 5.22-29; Acts 10.42-43].
 - Matthew 25.31-34, 41 NIV [Jesus speaking]: ³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world...’ ⁴¹ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”
- † As believers, we do not fear this judgment. Why? Because we know Christ paid the penalty for our sins and as a result God the Father has declared us to be righteous [1.19; 2.24; 3.18; see also Romans 3.24; Galatians 2.16].
 - Romans 3.24 NLT: Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.
- † Coming back to our verse in 1 Peter, the Greek word translated here as “judgment” is κρίμα. κρίμα does not necessarily mean condemnation, here it means the actual decision of the judge. Jesus will declare a legal decision for every person, but we believers can know right now that he will declare us righteous, because God the Father accounted to us the righteousness of Christ when we trusted in Christ's death to pay our punishment for sin.
- † When Peter says the judgment is beginning now, starting with the house of God, he means that God has begun his evaluation of mankind with those of us in the church. God is evaluating our response to persecution to see who has genuine faith and thus will persevere in faith and obedience despite their suffering [1.7].
 - Those who are hostile toward us and those who fall away from us to conform to the world in the face of persecution reveal their lack of faith and will be judged as unrighteous by Christ.
- † **[Slide 13: barely saved]** In v.18, Peter says that we are “barely saved,” “scarcely saved,” or saved “with difficulty,” depending on your translation. He is not saying it is hard for God to save us, though we should remember that Christ did have to die and take on the burden of the penalty for all our sins in order for this offer of salvation to be effective.
 - Rather, the idea is that it is hard for us to prove our faith genuine by standing firm in the face of persecution and other difficulties.
 - In Mark 13.20, Jesus said that the time of the Tribulation, which will feature the absolute worst persecution and other suffering, had to be limited, or else nobody would persevere in faith.

- So the question is whether our faith is real enough that we stand for Christ no matter what comes: will we resist temptation to sin and not conform? will we withstand persecution and other suffering with our faith and walk with Christ intact?
 - Those who fall away were never really saved. Those who endure glorify God, encourage the rest of us, and shine God's light out into the darkness.
- † **[Slide 14: unsaved]** Our fate is to suffer and endure, with the result of true spiritual life now and eternal life in Heaven and the New Earth after our physical death. This is far preferable to the fate of those who do not believe in Christ and do not walk with God.
- Those who reject God and never receive his grace will suffer far worse and eternally for being condemned, because they did not receive forgiveness through Christ. At physical death, they will be eternally separated from God.
 - Though they live in sin and are spiritually dead, non-believers presently benefit from the Holy Spirit's restraint of evil and the general blessings God provides to the Earth. When they are in Hell, these benefits will be gone, and they will suffer the complete effects of sin and evil forever.
 - If you have loved ones who do not know Christ, be praying for them and seeking ways to share the gospel truth with them.
- † **[Slide 15: v.19]** When we are suffering for Christ and righteousness, we must continue to trust our souls to God, never doubting God's love or protection of our salvation! Because we have this trust in our deliverance, we must continue to obediently do what is good.
- Such obedience can be difficult, in part because we are more vulnerable to fleshly impulses and secular coping mechanisms when we are suffering, and in part because if our suffering is from persecution then we will be tempted to relieve the suffering by conforming to the culture instead of following Christ.
 - We must prove our trust in God's deliverance by continuing to identify with Christ in faith and obedience, no matter what happens.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 16: Title]** So here is the question: Are you more interested in being accepted by God or in being accepted by society? Are you more interested in the pleasures of knowing Christ or in the pleasures of the world?
- It's your choice. But don't think that you can have both. The one who believes is regenerated, the one who is regenerated is purified over time to be like Christ. On the other hand, the one walking in sin is not walking with God.
 - If you are really a regenerated, spiritually alive, saved Christian, then – at least eventually – you will take the path that follows Christ, a path that puts your relationship with God first, that leads you to live righteously, and that will bring you some persecution because you refuse to conform or give up openly identifying with Christ.
- † Hey... if that's you, then you are one of us, and you are part of a loving family who all are going through the same struggles empowered by the same Spirit. We are about to take communion, which allows us to identify with each other and remember what Christ has done for us, thankful that we can identify with him and have our salvation, even if it means a little suffering together now.

- But maybe you are not sure. Maybe you think you might believe in God and Jesus, but you still feel the pull of the world very strongly, and you are not yet ready to stand up for your faith. That's ok. But don't neglect this decision. Keep praying for God's guidance, keep reading the Bible and thinking things through, come talk to me or someone else in this church about your questions and doubts. We won't laugh at you: we all started in the same place. Just remember, Christ could return at any moment or you could die at any moment, so the time to work through this decision of whether or not to believe and stand with Christ is now.

† Let's pray...

[Slide 17: picture only; should be up for all of communion]