

Fiery Trial

1 Peter 4:12-16

- Today we'll be talking about Christian persecution
- In the section just preceding our passage of the day
- It talks about the manner of life Christians should lead in the midst of persecution
- In today's passage, we learn about how we should think about persecution
- What should our disposition be when persecution happens?
- And what can be accomplished when we respond correctly in persecution?

- How do we respond in a "Fiery Trial?"
- That is our theme today
- As we approach 1 Peter 4:12-16

- A chapter earlier, Peter describes the kind of persecution we'll talk about today as suffering "for righteousness' sake"
- This is oppression of Christians, specifically because we are Christians
- It's people who believe in Christ being singled out
- Being targeted by national or regional or local authorities, or even by individual citizens
- It could mean committing violence against Christians
- Or passing laws to punish and incarcerate Christians
- Or just marginalizing Christians to the point of scorn and ridicule and mockery

- Whatever the case, this is not unusual in world history
- It is not unusual in modern history
- It happens in more and less civilized nations
- More and less educated nations
- More and less religious nations
- More and less wealthy nations

- And Jesus said it would happen
- He was very clear about it
- When He said "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." in John 15
- And we're reminded about it throughout the new Testament
- In passages like II Timothy 3:12 "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."
- Therefore anyone familiar with the Bible and Jesus' own words is unsurprised when Peter talks about it
- You'll note that it's a frequent topic of conversation throughout many New Testament books

- Here is how Peter speaks of persecution at the beginning of our passage of the day...

1 Peter 4:12

12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

- These believers, all believers, should live with an understanding of potential oppression for their faith
- And that oppression could be quite serious
- It could be "fiery" as this passages proclaims
- That word means "a calamity or trial that will test the character"
- It's a "burning, by which metals are roasted and reduced"
- Facing this kind of calamity - specifically because we believe in Jesus
- Should not seem strange to a believer in any era or in any location

- This is partially because we know the world hated Jesus
- And partially because we are told, in no uncertain terms, that this is likely

- The severity and the suddenness of it could shock us
- The people carrying it out may be a surprise
- The pain of it might be alarming
- But the fact that it has reached us should not seem strange

- Here is how we should react...

1 Peter 4:13

13 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.

- This is not too unlike a verse in the previous chapter
- It says "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled" in 1 Peter 3:14
- You are hearing this correctly
- There is happiness, joy, and rejoicing in the midst of suffering
- Providing we are suffering for Christ's sake

- Let's remember a few things before we go on
- First, believers have a certain and permanent home in heaven with Christ
- This is something which no persecution can threaten
- Second, they (that is the persecutors) hate us because they hate Him
- We are not of this world, just as He was not of this world
- He brings light into the world that exposes sin
- And men love darkness rather than light
- And third, He provides power and strength and grace in every trial
- He stands with His people in trial
- We never approach anything (good or ill) without Him

- It is an honor, a joy, cause for rejoicing to be partakers of Christ's sufferings
- Remember who He is
- The One who removed our sins
- Who cast them as far away from us as east is from west
- Who entered this world the King over all and took on human flesh

- What's more, took on the form of a servant
- And became obedient even unto death
- The death of the cross
- For us - sinners
- There are more details in the next verse...

1 Peter 4:14

14 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.

- God is glorified in our suffering for Him
- The Spirit of God lives in us
- And it is possible to endure with happiness
- He provides power to make this possible
- These trials come upon all believers dishonestly
- The charges are always trumped up
- Lies are told about us
- Evidence is falsified
- Witnesses are lying
- Believers are made to be the villains, even when there is no villainy
- But God sees everything with perfect clarity
- He knows every truth and every lie
- Evil is seen for what it is
- And obedience is seen for what it is
- So often, in circumstances of fiery trial for believers, His name is proclaimed to an even greater degree
- His story is told
- His gospel is believed
- This could be because of how believers react in the midst of all this
- It is certainly because His attributes are seen clearly in our joy in fiery trial
- These are things the world cannot comprehend
- But there is a way in which suffering definitely doesn't glorify Him...

1 Peter 4:15

15 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.

- Persecution should come as a result of genuine Christianity
- He is not talking about suffering because we have done wrong
- Or committed a crime

- Or a trespass against our community and our fellow citizens
- This brings reproach to His name, rather than glory

- One last verse...

1 Peter 4:16

16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

- Suffering for Jesus is nothing to be ashamed of
- It is an opportunity to glorify God
- To shew forth His communicable attributes in the world
- Whether it be in life or in death for Him

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