

I Peter 4:12-19

God's Grace IN and THROUGH Suffering.

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

We need Peter's words to reorient us to a God-centered perspective. To do that he exposes three ways that we are man-centered in our reaction to suffering.

1. YOU ARE SURPRISED WHEN YOU UNDERGO SUFFERING / TRIALS

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Despite our stated theology, many have bought into the idea that says when you become a Christian life will be smooth sailing. But God's grace hasn't been given to remove all your troubles, but to employ those troubles to progressively transform your heart.

2. YOU BELIEVE YOUR TRIALS ARE POINTLESS

Look at how Peter categorizes suffering in Jesus oriented terms. Verse 12 explains, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you"

In verse 13 the fiery trial is called "*sharing Christ's sufferings.*" In verse 14 it is called being "*insulted for the name of Christ.*" And in verse 16 it is called "*suffering as a Christian.*" So the suffering that is coming is owing to the fact that the believers are living the way of Christ, identifying with him openly and being labeled "*Christian.*" In 17 he talks of "*God's judgment*" That "*begins at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God??*"

The judgment of God / fiery trials which come upon believers is to test and refine their faith not to condemn them, rather it is an expression of his love not his wrath.

One of the principle ways that the Love of God purifies our faith is through trials, hard times...in which we realize that God is Our Refuge, ever present help...all we need.

How does the refinement help? We loose the things of this world that have captured our heart, idols, burned in his refining fire

Perhaps the things that you're going through don't look like they come from a God of grace because you don't have a biblical view of grace. The grace of the cross assures that the difficulties God brings my way aren't punitive. They're always lovingly and personally restorative. What keeps us from recognizing God's grace is that we long for the grace of RELIEF when what we actually need is the grace of REFINEMENT. Why do you suffer? God will take you where you do not want to go, to produce in you what you could achieve on your own: uncomfortable grace. - P. Tripp

3. YOU ARE ASHAMED FOR BEING A CHRISTIAN

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Peter is not trying to say in this text that we are to rejoice in all suffering. There are times when our trials are simply a consequence of our sin. (murder) The problem Peter is addressing is that when you are insulted b/c you are a Christian...cut off - mocked - passed over - dismissed - persecuted for Jesus sake, there is a tendency in us to be ashamed of being associated with Jesus. Think of who's writing this...Peter was the one who denied Jesus and deserted Him on the night of his crucifixion.

**Which one of these responses are you having? (have had?)
What are (were) the circumstances of the suffering? (Who, what, etc)**

WHAT IS THE TRUTH DO WE NEED TO KNOW AND TREASURE?

1. Grace means GOD LOVES YOU MORE THAN YOU CAN DREAM

12 Beloved,...

His love for us is not conditional. He set His love on you before creation...He loved you so much that he sent His own Son to live the righteous life you were created to live and die in your place for your sin. Jesus loves to his own death...**can't love you anymore or love you any less.**

2. B/C OF GRACE, YOU ARE MORE CAPABLE THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE

14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

How did Jesus endure the opposition from family, betrayal from friends, abandonment, false accusation, arrest, public shaming and crucifixion...He did it by the power of God the HS. The Spirit of Glory empowers and enables us to submit, love enemies, forgive, not become bitter, the flee what Peter has already exposed

Will you measure your potential today based on the size of what you're facing or based on the magnitude of God's presence and his grace?

Referencing the instances shared above, which one of these truths had you forgotten or revealed that you really don't believe it?

What scripture comes to mind (from the Community) that can help you unbelief? (Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.)

3. GOD IS THE FAITHFUL CREATOR WHO HAS LAVISHED THIS GRACE ON YOU *19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.*

Imagine the power it took to create everything - meditate on the fact that the measure of God's love for you, His power at work in you is the same as His Power that created all things.

WHAT IS THE FRUIT OF KNOWING AND TREASURING THESE TRUTHS?

1. WE ENTRUST OURSELVES TO GOD

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator

Ultimately treasuring the truths of who God is and what is happening are not meant to add to a body of knowledge but deepen your trust in God. "entrust" - literally means to deposit some thing of value for safekeeping...

2. WE REJOICE & BE GLAD

rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

The glory of God is coming...the restoration of all things is coming...no more pain, tears, heartache, death, poverty, racism, murder. If you are not a follower of Jesus, this is as close to heaven as you will ever get. Your heaven is our hell...unless you repent.

3. GLORIFY GOD

16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

- If you trust him, you show that he is gloriously praiseworthy.
- If you rejoice in suffering for his sake, you show that he is gloriously more valuable than the pleasures and approval of man.
- If you do good to your persecutors instead of retaliating, you show that he is gloriously sufficient to satisfy your longings.
- The one all-consuming desire of true Christians is that Christ be glorified in their bodies whether by life or death.

What could one of these responses look like in the instance shared above, if the gospel were embraced?

Not long after this letter was written...the social persecution would turn into state sponsored persecution. Christians in this region would be tortured, beaten, have the skins of sheep sewn onto their bodies and they were placed in the fields for the wild beasts... In this region of Turkey a man named Polycarp would be made Bishop. He was a disciple of John and fully versed in the letters that Peter had written. The story of his death is the story of a man who epitomized spiritual sanity and steel reinforced spine.

The threat of persecution always hung over the head of the church in those days. There were times of relative peace and surcease from persecution in its most brutal forms, but there were also times when persecution broke out in fury. The church was hated in the Roman Empire, especially by the Jews and pagan Romans. Every natural calamity, whether flood or earthquake or drought, was blamed on the Christians and on their refusal to worship Caesar as God.

When Polycarp was an old man, at least 85 years old, a flurry of persecution broke out in Smyrna, brought on by the mobs who were thirsting for the blood of the Christians. Fourteen Christians were seized and dragged to the public arena where they were fed to wild beasts. All but one died gloriously, one even slapping a wild animal that seemed to be too lazy to attack the Christian who was intended to be its dinner.

The crowd was not placated and began to shout for more. Particularly, they began to shout for Polycarp whom they knew to be minister in the church and who was, at the urgings of his flock, in hiding. The police were sent to find him, and finally did find him, after exacting information of his hiding place from a servant, who was subjected to hideous torture.

The crowd and the local magistrate were present in the arena when Polycarp was apprehended. He was brought before the magistrate in the stands of the arena and immediately tried and convicted while the frenzied crowd shouted for his blood. It was a most unusual and illegal trial that went something like this, the magistrate speaking first.

"Swear by the fortune of Caesar! Repent! Declare: Death to the atheists!"

Turning to the mob, with a lift of his head and a wave of his hand, Polycarp shouted, "Death to the atheists!"

But the magistrate knew what Polycarp meant. "Apostatize! Swear, and I will set you free at once! You have but to insult Christ."

"I have served Him for eighty-six years and He has never done me any wrong. Why then should I blaspheme against my King and my Savior?"

"Swear by Caesar's fortune!"

"You flatter yourself if you hope to persuade me. In all truth I solemnly declare to you: I am a Christian."

"I have the lions here, to use as I think fit."

"Give your orders. As for us Christians, when we change it is not from good to bad: it is splendid to pass through evil into God's justice."

"If you do not repent I shall have you burned at the stake, since you are so contemptuous of the lions."

"You threaten me with a fire that burns for an hour and then dies down. But do you know the eternal fire of the justice that is to come? Do you know the punishment that is to devour the ungodly? Come, don't delay! Do what you want with me."

The condemnation was proclaimed; the mob rushed from the seats to gather sticks and faggots, with the Jews gleefully helping along. Polycarp told the soldiers in charge of the execution that they need not fasten him to the stake, for he had no intention of fleeing. The flames leaped high, while from the flames could be heard this prayer from the lips of Christ's faithful servant:

Lord God Almighty, Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the grace of knowing Thee, God of angels and powers, and the whole creation, and of the whole race of the righteous who live in Thy presence; I bless Thee for deigning me worthy of this day and this hour that I may be among Thy martyrs and drink of the cup of my Lord Jesus Christ ... I praise Thee for all Thy mercies; I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, through the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, with whom to Thyself and the Holy Spirit, be glory both now and forever. Amen.