

## The Fiery Trial, Part 1

1 Peter 4:12-14

60-44

Let's open our Bibles tonight to 1 Peter chapter 4 as we continue in our study of 1 Peter. It's been a number of weeks since we have had the opportunity because of all of the holiday activities, and then with our missions' conference coming up it will be a couple of more weeks before we can get back. But we want to drop right in here on 1 Peter chapter 4 to the next section for our interest, verses 12 through 19. First Peter chapter 4 verses 12 through 19. Let me see if I can't introduce this text to you, get you into the feeling of what Peter is writing and why he is saying what he's saying for just a moment.

On July 19 in the year 64 AD, Rome burned while Nero fiddled. That's sort of a famous point in history. Everybody remembers that Rome burned and Nero fiddled. But that has significant impact on the writing of this epistle. Let me give you a little background. The great city of the ancient world was consumed that day in an unbelievable holocaust of fire. Rome was a city of very narrow streets. It was a city of high wooden tenements. They built what would today be known as apartment houses out of wood, and they were very close together. The fire spread fast, and although it began on that day it lasted three days and nights, and it broke out again and again even though they tried to check it. The Romans actually believed that Nero was responsible for burning their great city and their homes. Why? Because Nero had this strange fixation with building, and he wanted to build a new city and so they believed that he burned down the old one. He stood in the Tower of Messines, and watched gleefully as the city burned to the ground. In fact, it is said that he was charmed by the loveliness of the flames. People who put the fire out or tried to put it out were hindered by his soldiers and new fires were started. The people were absolutely devastated. They lost everything.

The Temple of Luna, the *ara maxima*, the great altar, the Temple of Jupiter, the Shrine of Vesta, their homes, all their household gods, everything was gone and they were homeless. The resentment obviously was great. The bitterness was deep and somewhat deadly. And so, Nero needed to divert the attention away from himself. He needed a scapegoat. So, he selected a scapegoat, the Christians. Publicly he blamed the Christians for burning Rome. It was an ingenious choice, frankly, on his part because the Christians were already the victims of hatred and already the victims of slander. They were connected with Jews in the minds of most people who had been dispersed in the diaspora. And since there was a rather growing anti-Semitism, it was easy to have an anti-Christian attitude as well. The Lord's Supper, which Christians held, was closed to pagans and so they sort of developed all kinds of strange imaginations about what happened. They heard about these Christians who were eating flesh and drinking blood and accused them of cannibalism. In fact, they began to say that they ate babies and Gentiles at the Lord's Supper. They also said that the Christian, kiss of love which supposedly was used at their love feast, was really a demonstration of this unbridled lust and orgy that took place called the Lord's Supper.

Christians were also very unpopular because they split families. When a man became a Christian

and his wife did not, it was an obvious fracture, and the same would be true in reverse. Christians also used to talk about a time when the world would be dissolved in flames, and so it would be easy to blame them for this fire, thinking they had tried to develop a fulfillment for their own prophecy. And historians tells us that even though there were in Rome some judges who were honest enough and prepared to acquit the Christians of this baseless charge, those judges were overpowered and ignored. Christians were incendiary, Christians were anarchists, Christians were guilty of hatred against civilized society. This really began what later developed into a full-blown persecution. If you go later than Nero to Domitian, Trajan, and the other Roman emperors, you find that what began here as an initial hatred of Christians became a fixed policy. And the question whether a man was a Christian became the most essential part of any charge against him. As a result of this accusation, persecution began. Tacitus, the Roman historian, reported that Nero rolled Christians in pitch or oil and then set fire to them while they were still alive, and used them as living torches to light his garden parties. He served them up in the skins of wild animals to his hunting dogs to tear them to shreds. They were nailed to crosses, et cetera, et cetera.

Christians perished in a delirium of savagery at that time, and even lynching became very common. Within a few years Christians were imprisoned, racked, seared, broiled, burned, scourged, stoned and hanged. Some were lacerated with hot knives and others thrown on the horns of wild bulls. Dr. HB Workman in his chapter "Caesar or Christ" from a very interesting volume called "Persecution in the Early Church" wrote this: "For 200 years from Nero on, the leaders among the Christians were branded as anarchists and atheists and hated accordingly. For 200 years, to become a Christian meant the great renunciation, the joining of a despised and persecuted sect, the swimming against the tide of popular prejudice, the coming under the ban of the Empire, the possibility at any moment of imprisonment and death under its most fearful forms. For 200 years, he that would follow Christ must count the cost and be prepared to pay the same with his liberty and life. For 200 years the mere profession of Christianity was itself a crime. *Christianus sum* was almost the one plea for which there was no forgiveness, in itself all that was necessary on the back of the condemned as a title. For the name itself in periods of stress, not a few, meant the rack, the blazing shirt of pitch, the lion, the panther, or in the case of maidens, an infamy worse than death." End quote.

Now, what is interesting about that in relation to 1 Peter is that from the best that we can ascertain, this letter was probably written just after that all began, some time toward the end of that same year, 64 AD. So, it would be written then at a time when Christians were undergoing the beginnings of the horrors of a 200 year persecution. As we look then at verse 12, and I'll call your attention to it, we are not shocked, therefore, to read the words of Peter, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you." Now, as we approach this text, Peter then is going to draw their attention to the recurring theme of this epistle, and that is the Christian's response to suffering. And he gives them four key features in a proper response. And if we can get a grip on these it will go a long way to helping us deal with suffering for righteousness sake in our own lives.

Peter tells them basically four things are necessary if you are to be triumphant in a fiery ordeal. Number one, expect it. Number two, rejoice in it. Number three, evaluate its cause. And number four, commit yourself to God. Expect it, rejoice in it, evaluate its cause, and then entrust yourself to God. Now, this in a way sums up all of the instruction in this epistle heretofore along the lines of suffering. Much has already been said.

Let's jump right in and take that first point. We find it in verse 12, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you which comes upon you for your testing as though some strange thing were

happening to you.” The point here is to expect suffering, expect it, don’t be surprised at it, don’t think it’s some strange thing, expect it. Peter has consistently through this epistle said that persecution for the Christian in various forms is inevitable. It is inevitable. In fact, the surprise would be if it didn’t come. “Do not marvel,” said John in 1 John 3:13, “brethren, if the world hates you.” Don’t be surprised. In John 15 and 16, Jesus said they hated Me; they’re going to hate you. Paul writing to Timothy says all that live godly in this present age will suffer persecution, 2 Timothy 3:12. And so, Peter is really echoing the instruction of the others who have written in the New Testament, that we’re not to be surprised when suffering comes. Godly lives lived in an ungodly world confront that world, and we become a kind of unwelcome conscience that is distasteful. And, if we name the name of Christ loudly enough, we become offensive. The goodness alone of a Christian can be an offense to a wicked world. And when you add to that the proclamation of the name of Christ, we become particularly offensive. It’s as if Peter is saying suffering is the price of discipleship.

Certainly, Jesus had that in mind when He said, “You’re not going to become a Christian, are you, without counting the cost? Nobody even builds a tower without counting the cost. No general goes to war without counting the cost and assessing his troops and his ability to deal with the enemy.” And you certainly wouldn’t be so foolish as not to realize that when you become a Christian, you take up a cross, and the cross speaks of pain and suffering and even death. There is definitely a price to pay because if you name the name of Christ, you will become a conscience to an evil world which does not welcome such a conscience.

In chapters one and the first part of chapter 2, Peter talked about suffering for our precious salvation. Then, in the latter part of chapter 2 through the first part of chapter 4 he talked about suffering in our present situation. And now, he starts to talk about suffering until our perfect salvation. But the whole epistle is about suffering. In view of our precious salvation, he said early in the epistle, suffering is nothing. In view of our present situation, suffering is very important because how we react to it determines how effective our evangelistic testimony is. And in view of Christ’s personal Second Coming and our ultimate salvation, it isn’t even worthy to be compared, said Paul, with the glory which shall be revealed in us. So, are we are understanding already this far in the epistle that Peter is concerned that we see suffering in a right perspective.

Now, it is inevitable that a faithful Christian will suffer some persecution, and that’s what he’s talking about. He’s talking about suffering for righteousness sake, or suffering because you’re a Christian, or suffering because you proclaim the name of Christ. When we first introduced 1 Peter, I gave you a little list, and maybe it’s time now many, many months later to remind you of that list. A list of the kinds of suffering that Christians endure. This is taken right out of the New Testament. Matthew 5:10 says we will endure persecution for righteousness. Matthew 5:11 and 12 says we will endure revilings and slanders. First Peter 4:4 says we will be evil spoken of. Matthew 10 says we will endure false accusations. Matthew 10:17, scourgings for Christ. Matthew 10:14, rejection by men. John 15:18 to 21, hatred by the world. Matthew 10:21 to 36, hatred by our own relatives. Acts 7:58 says some of us will endure martyrdom. James 1 says we will endure temptation. Acts 5:41, we will endure shame cast upon us for Christ’s sake. Acts 14:22, we will endure tribulations and troubles of all kinds. Acts 4, Acts 5, Acts 12 reminds us that many Christians will endure imprisonment. Some, according to Acts 14:19, might endure stonings. Second Corinthians 11:24 and 25 reminds us that some Christians have endured beatings. First Corinthians 4:9 says we will be made a spectacle to men. First Corinthians 4 says we will be misunderstood, we will be defamed, and we will be despised. Second Corinthians 6:8 to 10 says we will endure troubles, afflictions, distress, tumults, labors, watchings, fastings, and evil reports. Now, that’s a little list of the kind of things that a

Christian endures in a culture that is non-Christian. They are the suffering that befalls the believer in a fallen world. So, we should expect it.

Now, let's go back to our text. It starts by saying, "Beloved," literally beloved ones, and he is being very pastoral here, but he is also introducing a new section. The second section in the epistle began in chapter 2 verse 11 with the word "beloved," and now the third section and last one begins in chapter 4 verse 12 with the same word, "beloved." It does introduce the final section, but it is a pastoral word, it is a word of tenderness, it is a word of compassion, it is a word of affection, it is a word of care. You remember back in chapter 1 verse 22, that Peter talked about a sincere love of the brethren. Then, in chapter 4 verse 8 he talked about the fact that we are to keep a fervent love for one another because love covers a multitude of sins. Well, here he's exhibiting that compassion, that fervent love, that intense love as he speaks of these believers in this gracious term. It is a reminder that they are loved by Peter; and more than that, they are loved by God. That, my dear friends, is a sweet pillow to rest your weary soul on in the midst of persecution. You are still the beloved of God; you are still the beloved of a Christian brother.

I suppose it would be a temptation in the midst of suffering, in the midst of temptation and who knows that some of the very Christians to whom Peter was writing were suffering under the terrible reign of terror of Nero. It would be very easy under that kind of situation to question the love of God, wouldn't it? Do You really love me? Do You really care? If so, why is this happening? I mean, you would be sort of cashing in your chips if you had bought into the prosperity gospel, wouldn't you? You would be wondering if what you had been told was in fact true. If somebody came to you and said Jesus wants to make you healthy, wealthy, and prosperous and no sooner had you given your life to Jesus Christ then somebody was rolling your children in pitch and using them as torches in their garden party. And you might be saying, "Wait a minute, God, this doesn't look like a loving God to me." Circumstances might make it seem that you're not loved. In the midst of persecution like that the enemy would tempt you like Job's wife, curse God and die, haven't you had enough? And so, Peter gives us this lovely reminder, "Beloved, you are still the beloved of God, you are still the beloved of the Apostle. Beloved, do not be surprised."

Don't be amazed that you're being persecuted. Don't be shocked that life is difficult. Don't be surprised when somebody takes issue with your testimony. Don't be surprised when you can't get the promotion you want at work, when your employee friends are hostile toward you, when you're mocked, when you don't get what you deserve. Don't be surprised when your neighbors seem to have a vendetta against you for a reason that you can't understand. Don't be surprised. Don't be amazed. Christians should easily understand that suffering goes with the Christian faith. It isn't foreign, it isn't alien. It belongs. Christianity never promises immunity from suffering. It promises, are you ready for this? Suffering. Suffering.

What kind of gospel presentation would it be if instead of saying Jesus wants you to be happy, and joyful, and peaceful, and solve all your problems and make you prosperous and wealthy and healthy and all of that. If we said to someone, you know, you're in desperate need of Jesus Christ to save you because you're on your way to an eternal hell and you have this choice, you can suffer forever in hell, or you can become a Christian and suffer here for a while? Because that's the bottom line. Personally, that's not a tough choice for me. I'd rather take a few shots here than endure an eternal hell. But men seem to want to live under the illusion that if you claim Christ, and if you name Christ, and if you quote-unquote serve the church, God will eliminate all your difficulty, all your adversity, all your pain, all your persecution. That's not true. That is not true. In fact, I think the more effective you

are for God, and the more faithful to divine truth, the more you stimulate animosity. You become, to those who believe, a savior of life unto life; but to those who do not believe, a savior of death unto death.

So, don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you. Now, what does that mean? Well, literally the term is a burning. The word is used for furnace. In the Old Testament, the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew, it is used for furnace. In the New Testament it has the idea of a furnace as well. In the Old Testament it was used of a smelting furnace where metal was melted down to be purged of foreign elements. So, he is saying: don't be surprised when God puts you in the furnace to melt you down. Psalm 66:10 for example says, "Thou, O God, hast proved us, Thou hast smelted us as silver is smelted." God, You did it. It is here then, a symbol of affliction, a symbol of persecution, a symbol of rejection that God designs to be a purging, purifying process. Back in 1 Peter, look at verse 6 and 7 of chapter 1 for a moment, because here is the same concept. Verse 6 it says, "In this you greatly rejoice," that is, in the eternal salvation yet to come, "you rejoice in that even though now for a little while if necessary you have been distressed by various trials that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." And so, he says, "Look, you're willing to endure some fiery trials here because you know it will prove the genuineness of your faith which will be rewarded at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

So, the fiery trial here is not just any trouble. It's talking about persecution for your faith, persecution for righteousness sake, persecution because of the identification with Jesus Christ. But God allows it to come. Verse 12, "Which comes upon you for your," what? "Your testing." God allows it to come because it proves the genuineness of your Christianity. Do you remember the parable of our Lord Jesus, the parable about the soils? And do you remember that some seed fell on stony ground? And it went into the soil, and all of a sudden a plant shot out of the ground. But it says there was rock underneath the soil, and the roots couldn't move down to get the water and when the sun came out it burned that plant to a crisp, and it never bore fruit. And our Lord was describing the kind of person who hears the message of the gospel, has an emotional response, gives some outward semblance of reaction. But because the soil of the heart has never really been plowed up, as soon as tribulation comes, they're gone.

So, this is exactly what Peter is saying. Suffering for the sake of Christ reveals who's genuine, right? The phonies aren't going to hang around. That's why through the years we have always said the persecuted church is the pure church. That's why we worry about Russia and Eastern Europe now being open. As soon as they get open, and there's no cost to Christianity, then you don't know who's real, right? Just like in the United States of America. I had a Russian pastor say that to me right there one Sunday night not too long ago. I said, "It must be difficult in Russia to pastor the church." He said, "Not so, it must be difficult in America. In Russia we know who the true Christians are." So, it comes for your testing. It's an essential feature of God's working in you to prove you, to purge you, to cleanse you.

So, he says expect it, and don't treat it as though some strange thing were happening to you. That verb "were happening" is an interesting verb, *sumbainō*, it means to fall by chance. Don't think that when you're persecuted it's something that happened by chance. No, God allowed it and designed it for your testing, your purging, your purification, your cleansing. First, it proves whether you're real and then it purges the dross out of your life. Persecution, affliction, suffering are not accidental, nor do they interfere with God's plan. They are right in God's plan, should be common to all Christians.

They are common to all faithful Christians.

So, the first thing to deal with suffering is to expect it. I'll tell you, that helps a lot. I expect it. I get a lot of resentment. I get a lot of rejection, a lot of hostility coming at me. It doesn't help to be broadcasting all across America all the time. So, we get a lot of reaction. I expect that. And my expectation causes me to sort of find a comfort zone. When somebody comes and says, "Do you know what they said about you? So-and-so." No, but I expect it. Tell me, what is it? It never shocks me. And if you can expect it, you can waylay its initial impact. It's part of God's design. It's the way He proves the genuineness of your faith and it's the way He purges your life. It takes out all the pride and all of the sort of self, the illusion of self-control, the illusion that you can control your world and all of its responses. It strips you and makes you totally dependent on Him, and that's a good process.

The second thing that Peter wants to say to us is to rejoice in it. Not only are we to expect it, but when it comes we're to rejoice in it. Notice verse 13 and 14. "But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exaltation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you're blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." Now, just take that little phrase in verse 13 "keep on rejoicing," present tense, keep on rejoicing. This is the right attitude in the midst of persecution. This is the right attitude in the midst of affliction, rejection, anything the world brings against you for the sake of righteousness and for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ. Any of that which comes against you should be cause for rejoicing. Remember the words of our Lord? Listen to this, Matthew 5:10 through 12: "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." If you're being persecuted for righteousness, it's evidence that you belong to the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad." That is a strange one, isn't it? "Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great and that's the way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." You're in good company.

So, you rejoice in it. You keep on rejoicing in it. And you say, "Well, what's the motivation for that?" Well, there's a future motivation and a present motivation. Look at the text. Look at the future motivation. Keep on rejoicing, verse 13. Why? "Because to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, so you will share His glory at His revelation." Did you get that? To the degree that you share His suffering, you will share His glory. And so, if you keep on rejoicing now, you will really rejoice then.

Now, let's just talk about that. That phrase that begins verse 13, "But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ," must be understood. What does it mean? Well, it simply means, now listen, it's a very simple thought, you share the sufferings of Christ in this way: Jesus Christ suffered at the hands of men because He did what was right. Is that not true? He didn't do what was wrong. He was without sin. Jesus Christ suffered because He did what was right. Jesus Christ suffered because He spoke the truth. It isn't that we share in the redemptive sufferings of Christ. It isn't that we share in the atoning sufferings of Christ. That's not what Peter is saying. He is saying you are a partner in the same kind of suffering Jesus endured, suffering for doing what is right, suffering for saying what is right, suffering for preaching the right message. You share that kind of suffering, suffering for righteousness sake.

So, don't be perplexed, don't be discouraged, and don't be disheartened because you are having a privilege: the privilege to share in the same kind of sufferings Jesus experienced. My, what a

privilege. Now, Peter has had much to say about the sufferings of Christ. You remember chapter 1 and verse 11 where he talked about the suffering of Christ? Chapter 2 and verse 21 where he talked about Christ suffering again? Chapter 3 verse 18, Christ's suffering again? Chapter 4 verse 1, Christ's suffering in the flesh? This is a major theme to Peter, and we have been through that in great depth. And what he has in mind is the earthly suffering that Christ endured at the hands of persecuting sinners. The earthly suffering Christ endured at the hands of persecuting sinners. So, when you as a Christian suffer, you are sharing those same kinds of sufferings when you suffer at the hands of hostile, rejecting, mocking, unkind sinners. And you should rejoice. What a privilege.

Paul certainly understood that, didn't he? You remember what he says at the end of Galatians chapter 6? he gives a testimony there that is marvelous. He says in verse 17, "From now on, let no one cause trouble for me for I bear on my body the brand marks of Jesus." What do you mean, Paul? He means that the scars that I've received when people whipped me, when they beat me with rods, all of the scars that I've received in my life are the marks of Jesus Christ. Why? Because I received them all because of Him. The world couldn't get to Him, they hated Him, they hated me in His place, they couldn't strike Him so they struck me. And, he says, that's my badge of honor. It's as if he pulls back his cloak and says, "You want to see my trophy case? I bear on my body the marks that would have been given to Jesus had He been here, but they gave them to me because I named His name."

In Philippians, the same apostle, chapter 1 verse 29 reminds all of us that it has been granted for Christ's sake not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake and to experience the same conflict which Paul was having. Anyone who is a faithful Christian living in a hostile world to one degree or another is going to receive suffering. You remember in chapter 3 verse 10 Paul said, "I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings. I want to know the comfort that comes to me from the one who has endured everything that I will endure, and He has endured it even greater than I. He sees there a camaraderie, a bond between himself and the suffering Christ. In Colossians 1:24 he says, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I share on behalf of His body in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions." In other words, again the same thing he said in Galatians, "I'm scarred with wounds that were meant for Christ." And again, I remind you of that great truth. Paul was eager to take the blows for Christ who took the blows for him.

So, when we suffer, we share with Christ. Not in His atoning suffering, but in the same kind of suffering, suffering for righteousness sake, and one step beyond that, we are literally taking the blows meant for Him. The sinners hate Him; they only hate us because they hate Him. And we take the blows they would otherwise give to Him.

You might imagine it would be different if Jesus came back into the world today. They would do to Him today the same thing they did to Him the first time. If you need proof, look at how the world treats Christians.

Then, he says, back to our verse, and we want to understand every great truth here as much as we can. He says, "Keep on rejoicing so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exaltation." Now, the revelation of His glory is what Luke 17:30 calls the day that the Son of Man is revealed. It's His Second Coming. By the way, a little theological footnote, Jesus is now glorified, don't miss that. He is now glorified, but His glory is not yet revealed on earth. Understood? He is glorified. In John 17 when He said, "Restore to Me the glory I had with You before the world began," that glory was given to Him when He ascended and went back to the right hand of the Father. He is glorified but His glory is not yet revealed. It is not yet unveiled for man to see. But at the revelation of

His glory, when He comes in great glory, Matthew 24 verses 29 and 30, Matthew 25, I think it's verse 31, both talked about Christ returning in great glory. Well, in that day when He comes back at the revelation of His glory, he says, "Then, you may rejoice with exaltation." You say, "What does that mean?" Well, it's a stronger word than the first word. When it says "keep on rejoicing," that's the word *chairō*, it's the usual word for joy. But when it says "rejoice with exaltation," what it means is to exalt and rejoice with a rapturous joy, to really rejoice. It would be the difference in English if we said, "Keep on being happy." And if you keep on being happy, someday you'll be ecstatic. That's the idea.

And what is he saying? If you're faithful to suffer and to take persecution for righteousness sake in this life, bearing as it were the marks of Christ, then someday when He appears you will really rejoice, you will really rejoice with a rapturous joy, a joyous outburst surpassing all other joys. Peter's point is pretty clear. If you suffer for Him here, rejoicing in the privilege of such fellowship in His sufferings, and remember that the degree to which you suffer here will be the degree to which you will receive glory at His revelation, you know then that you can rejoice now because you will greatly rejoice then. You're eternal reward will bring you eternal joy.

Now, if we had time we could go into a deeper study, but let me just give you the thought. Your eternal reward will directly reflect your suffering. Your eternal reward will directly reflect your suffering. Your suffering will reflect, to some degree, your faithfulness. I mean, if you're a secret Christian, you're not going to suffer a lot. If you're a bold, aggressive, faithful, confrontive Christian, you're going to suffer, but your eternal glory will reflect God's reward for that.

Listen to the words of Jesus in Luke 6:22. "Blessed are you when men hate you and ostracize you and cast insults at you and spurn your name as evil for the sake of the Son of Man." Listen to this. "Be glad in that day," get this "and leap," the Greek says. Be so happy you're jumping around. I'm being persecuted, I'm being persecuted. "For behold, your reward is great in heaven."

Remember when James and John with their mother came to Jesus and they said, "We want to sit on your right and left hand in the kingdom?" Jesus said, "That's not mine to give, it's not mine to give, that's the Father's to give." And then, He said this, "Can you drink the cup that I'm going to drink?" What did He mean by that? He meant that glory is related to what? Suffering. It was the cup of suffering. He was in effect saying, "If you expect to be glorified in the kingdom to come, you better be ready to endure suffering in the here and now." Eternal glory will be proportionate to temporal suffering. And so, we would rejoice, wouldn't we, because of the future reality that as we suffer in identification with the Lord Jesus Christ, suffering at the hands of sinners for righteousness sake, we in a sense are gaining an eternal reward which will bring us an eternal joy. That's what caused Paul to say in Romans 8:17 that we suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him, and that the sufferings of this present time aren't worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

If you've got your head screwed on right, you're going to live your Christian life this way, you're going to live an aggressive Christian life, you're going to live a bold and loving Christian life, you're going to live a confrontive Christian life, you're going to be conscience in the world, you're going to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ courageously because you know that if they persecute you, and if they alienate you, and if they ostracize you, and if they reject you, and if they scorn you, you are simply being persecuted for righteousness sake, which was what came to Jesus, and so you identify with Him. Furthermore, you are gaining for yourself an eternal weight of glory. And so, you can leap for joy in the midst of it because you can anticipate that eternal joy which will come to you by the grace

of God.

What a tremendous promise. So, rejoice. Rejoice because of the future reality of eternal glory. But there's also a present reason for rejoicing. Look at verse 14. This is a present reason for rejoicing. "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed." Now, wait a minute, what does he mean if you are reviled for the name of Christ? Well, to be reviled means basically to be insulted. It's a word used in the Septuagint again to speak of reproach or insult which was heaped on God, and heaped on God's people by the wicked of the world. And it's also used in the New Testament to speak of indignities and mistreatments against Christ, the things that He endured at the hands of sinners. So, if you are mistreated, if you are reproached, if you were insulted, if indignities are done against you, if you're treated unfairly, unkindly, unlovingly, unjustly, well, rejoice. Rejoice, if it's for the name of Christ. Keep that in mind, will you? That ought to be underlined. If it's for the name of Christ.

Now, what do we mean "for the name of Christ?" Well, it simply means for being a representative of all that He is. His name sums up all that He is. But there's something more here. The name of Christ refers to the fact that Christians were always proclaiming His name, okay? It implies a public proclamation of Christ's name as the cause of hostility. It wasn't just that they bore the name of Christ in their hearts and minds; it was that they proclaimed the name of Christ. You could almost add to this verse these words, "If you are reviled for the proclamation of the name of Christ." That's the idea. The name, even the term "name" as a term in and of itself became synonymous with Christianity. The pagans would say, "Well, they're always talking about that name, the name. They're always preaching the name." And if you had been preaching the name, and identified with the name and were vocal about it, then you would be reviled and reproached and insulted. In Acts 5:41 it says that the Christians went on their way from the presence of the council, the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for the name. They were suffering shame for the name. You didn't even have to say what name it was; everybody knew what name it was. It was almost as if they didn't want to say it. And then, Peter, you'll remember, said to them, "Look, there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Well, that's why we preach the name.

When the apostle Paul was on the Damascus Road and confronted by God, the Lord said, "He is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles." He'll take My name and proclaim it to the Gentiles, and I'll show him how much he must suffer for My namesake. In Acts chapter 15 and verse 26 it says, "Men risked their lives for the name." They risked their lives for the name.

So, says Peter, "Look, if you're insulted because you proclaim the name of Christ, you are blessed. You are blessed." What do you mean we're blessed? What does that mean? Is that a feeling? No, no it's not some giddy feeling. You could translate it this way: you are benefited, you are benefited. Why? Well, first of all we already learned because you're gaining an eternal weight of glory, and you have the privilege of identification with the suffering of Christ; but he gives another reason. Look at verse 14, I love this: "Because, you're blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." He's not saying you're blessed period. You're just saying, "Oh, this is such a blessing." No, it's not a non-descript blessing. Here is the blessing: you are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. The blessing is not subjective happiness. It is objective presence. Did you get that? It is not a subjective happiness; it is the objective presence and power of the Holy Spirit. You're blessed in the midst of suffering for righteousness sake because the Spirit of God comes upon you. My, what a statement.

The Spirit of God, first of all, is called the Spirit of glory. What does that mean? Well, I can say it another way. The Spirit who has glory, the Spirit who is glorious, the Spirit who has glory as His essential attribute. Do you think they knew what that meant? Sure. They knew what that meant. They knew all about the Shekinah glory of God. And they knew the only being who had glory was God. In the Old Testament, the glory of God was represented by the Shekinah light. The Shekinah glory that appeared in the garden, the Shekinah glory was that luminous glow that signified the presence of God, that glow that Moses saw on the mount, that glow that came to dwell in the tabernacle, and moved into the sky to lead the children of Israel, that glow that came into the temple. The Shekinah was the presence of God. And when Peter says you are suffering, and you have the Spirit of glory, he means you have the presence of God. And he says it, "The Spirit of glory, even of God rests upon you." You become like Moses, whose face was shining with the glory of God. You become like the tabernacle which was so filled with the glory of God that no one could even go in there. You become like the temple when the glory of God still occupied the Holy of Holies, the presence of God.

This is a great statement. What it says is that when you suffer, God's presence rests on you. And God's presence comes in the form of His Spirit, the Spirit who is glory in His essential attribute, even the Spirit who is God. My, what a tremendous, tremendous truth. The Spirit of glory, yea, the Spirit of God. As the Shekinah rested in the tabernacle and the temple long ago, so the Shekinah glory of God, the Holy Spirit in glorious splendor and power rests upon suffering Christians.

Now, what does the word "rest" mean? What is that talking about? Well, simply to refresh by taking over for you. Rest, in the sense of refreshing by taking over, by becoming the dominant power in the midst of your suffering. Perhaps the best illustration of this would be to have you turn to Acts chapter 6 for a moment and see the testimony of a wonderful servant of God by the name of Stephen. Verse 8 of chapter 6 says he was full of grace and power. He was performing great wonders and signs among the people. Obviously, he had the power of the Spirit of God. And when he was being persecuted at the end of chapter 6, they accused him of blasphemy, verse 12, they dragged him away, they falsely witnessed against him. And verse 15 it says, "And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the council saw his face like the face of an angel." I believe the Spirit of glory, yea, the Spirit of God rested upon him.

What is the face of an angel? What does it mean? I don't think it means like a light bulb, I think it means peace, serenity, tranquility, a gentle joy, absolutely unaffected by all the hostility. And then, in chapter 7 verse 54, after he had spoken to them, they were so infuriated that they literally began to grind their teeth at him, verse 54, but he was full of the Holy Spirit, so he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He was literally detached. He was beholding the glory of God. He was seeing Jesus Christ. His face was occupied only with that transcendent scene. And they were grinding their teeth in anger and fury. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." You know what happened? The Spirit of glory, and grace came upon him, the Spirit of God came upon him and literally took over, took over his mind, took control of his life so that he saw beyond the hostility to the glory of God. And they rushed on him screaming, and covering their ears so they wouldn't hear what he said. They drove him out of the city, began stoning him. And the witnesses laid their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

It's my conviction that he was absolutely oblivious to what was going on around him. He saw heaven open. He saw the Lord Jesus, and he was asking the Lord to receive him, unconscious of the

pummeling of the rocks that were crushing out his earthly life. And he cried loudly at the last, said, "Lord, don't hold this sin against them," and he fell asleep.

In the midst of the severest persecution and suffering, God grants a special dispensation of the presence of His Holy Spirit, and He rests on the believer, which means He takes over. And the mind transcends.

If you read Fox's "Book of Martyrs," you'll ask yourself the question a hundred times, "How can these Christians being martyred for their faith so totally transcend the physical pain? How can they do that? How can they be singing hymns? How can they be praising God? How can they be forgiving their tormentors? One, because they see the richness of sharing the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. Two, because they know the character of their suffering will issue in an eternal weight of glory. And three, because the Spirit of glory, yes the Spirit of God has rested upon them to lift them beyond the physical dimension. So, Peter says suffering, point one, expect it. Point two, rejoice in it. And for points three and four, come back three weeks from tonight. Let's bow in prayer.

It's so refreshing, Lord, to share in Your Word tonight, to sing the simple, yet profound songs of our faith, so refreshing to be with those we love as the world rushes madly by. So, refreshing to welcome new brothers and sisters into the family as they come in the waters of baptism to give testimony to Your great grace. We are refreshed, O God, and we know that we have the promise that no matter what this world may bring upon us, if we suffer for righteousness sake, we can rejoice because we have the privilege of sharing in suffering meant for you. The same kind You endured, suffering for righteousness, because we are gaining an eternal weight of glory and because we are experiencing the presence of the Spirit of God, who rests to lift us up, to transcend what the world brings. And we thank You for that in Jesus' dear name. Amen.

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