

XL. I Peter in Biblical Perspective
The Elect in Exile
“Unsurprised”
I Peter 4:12–19
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May 12, 2019 • Morning Sermon

Let’s look at God’s Word for it’s inspired, inerrant, and will be brought to you today. We are entering a new paragraph in I Peter 4:12–19 and I’ll be taking a couple of studies on this but for this study I will only be reading I Peter 4:12–16 which says *[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.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

There are a couple of things Peter has manifested in an unwavering fidelity to you. He has identified believers as elect exiles in which he is using the imagery of God’s Old Covenant people out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt through the wilderness to the Promised Land. So we have been delivered as the elect of God in the New Covenant from the bondage of sin and we have been delivered by a victory of Christ, not over a Pharaoh, but over Satan, death, hell and the grave. We are now being taken to the glories of a new heaven and a new earth but we are sojourners on the journey in this earth where this world is not our home. We have a mission, a message and a calling of God as elect exiles, sojourners, pilgrims that are making progress by the grace of God for the glory of God.

As we have been in the study of I Peter we have learned that there are 14 Gospel blessings that are yours in Christ and then there are seven Gospel commands as to what you do for Christ which guide us on this journey. We don’t do these commands for salvation because Christ has done that on the cross, but we do them for Christ. So Peter is unmistakably giving us Good News. What you couldn’t do for yourself God did for you. What you needed to be done but didn’t want to be done, God who didn’t need you wanted to do it for you. God sent His Son to the cross so that you and I could have everlasting life in Christ. Therefore you have those Gospel blessings, not secured by your progress but secured by Christ for you. Now we are on the journey for Christ, not for salvation but for the Savior.

We now come to an eighth command that is now tied to a second thing he has unwaveringly communicated. There is no bait and switch or promises that aren’t true. Peter is telling us that salvation is a free gift that has been secured by God through Christ. God bankrupted heaven to bring you to heaven for He gave His only Son that you could have everlasting life in Him. It is a free gift but unmistakably he keeps communicating that it will cost you everything. It cost you, you, your sin and your life which is no longer yours but it’s now Christ’s. It was not as a payment for or a payback for salvation, but as an offering of love to Him who first loved you.

You can rest assured that on this pilgrim way you will be persecuted for you will suffer for Christ. The things Peter is communicating here are also communicated by James, Jude, and Paul. They communicate it because Jesus communicated it – all who would live godly for Christ will suffer persecution. Therefore I borrowed from one of my mentors a statement he gave and have paraphrased it for you. Every true Christian to some degree, in some manner, at some time will suffer for Christ on the way to heaven. Jesus said this in the Sermon on Mount from Matthew 5:11–12, *[11] Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Peter wants us to understand the essence of this, how to respond to it and how to deal with it so much that he has taken over a third of this epistle to talk about this from I Peter 3:13 through I Peter 5:11. The paragraph that we are in right now is the key paragraph telling us how we are to respond to the inevitable suffering. The ‘fiery trial’ is what Peter calls it. We won’t be able to cover everything in this but in this study we’ll get started into it because I want to be a faithful pastor in this. Peter is being a faithful pastor to Christians and churches that he has never even visited. He wants them to understand who they are in Christ as the elect, what they are to do for Christ on the journey to heaven and then he wants them to understand the cost of this journey.

Now where is God in the suffering? Is this beyond Him? Does He have to pick up the pieces of it? Why is it here if God is good and gracious? If God is good, gracious and almighty why doesn’t He just get rid of the suffering? Why is the suffering still here and how does that match up with God’s goodness and graciousness? This paragraph of I Peter 4:12–19 gives us some direction in this. We will get a first start today by breaking this paragraph down into the admonition to the beloved, the exhortation to the beloved and then finally the benediction to the beloved. I’ll then close with some takeaways for us and at the end I am going to give you an invitation to join something, because what is in the text will define it for you.

So let’s start by looking at the admonition which is a negative for Peter is admonishing us not to do something. What is it? I Peter 4:12 says *[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.* Don’t miss this. The first word in this verse is ‘beloved’ and it is not a throw-away word for Peter has only used it two times. Peter considers this vocabulary from heaven for he knows of two times it was spoken from heaven. When Jesus is being ordained as Messiah as Prophet, Priest and King which took place when He was 30 years of age, due to the fact that was when a priest could begin his ministry, He had to be baptized also by another priest and that was John the Baptist. This would fulfill Numbers 8 which was sprinkling water of purification upon them to be fit for ministry in the temple.

After Jesus has been ordained and baptized, from heaven comes a voice and Matthew 3:17 says *[17] and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my **beloved** Son, with whom I am well pleased.”* The Spirit of God and glory poured out upon Him. Peter could have been there for at the time he was a follower of John the Baptist but I know another time that for sure he was there. It is days before Jesus is to go up to Jerusalem to the cross and He takes Peter, James and John up on a mountain. This is not only recorded in the Gospels but Peter records this in the epistle he wrote right before he dies in a fiery trial under Nero.

A few years after Peter writes I Peter he writes II Peter and we see in II Peter 1:16–18, *[16] For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (referring to His incarnation), but we were eyewitnesses of his*

majesty. [17] For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” [18] we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. There on the mount of Transfiguration the voice of God spoke to be heard and they heard this vocabulary from heaven using the word ‘beloved.’ It is that word that Peter takes because of the victory of Christ, the cross and the tomb and places it upon you who will encounter a fiery trial.

Why is this important? The reason this is important is in our working through a theology of suffering we know that suffering is only here because of sin. If there was no sin there would be no suffering. Sin has an ultimate suffering called hell which is an eternal torment of suffering and is identified by the terminology – the lake of fire. That fiery trial is unending. We will all live and die and the only two I know of who didn’t die were Enoch and Elijah. According to Hebrews 9:27, [27] *it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.* When we face judgment there are two destinations – the new heavens and the new earth or the eternal judgment of hell. So we know suffering is here because of sin.

Therefore when we suffer as a Christian my default is to automatically begin to consider what I did wrong or does God still love me. Peter is telling believers that they are going to suffer but he wants us to know that we don’t suffer because God doesn’t love us for we are suffering as those who are loved by God. The fiery trial that He has allowed that the world will inevitably bring against you is there under His sovereign purposes. He takes and co-ops what the world would do to shame you and silence you and uses it to platform you and perfect you. He is giving you a platform, an opportunity to speak for Him and He is burning away the dross. It is the reason Peter uses the terminology ‘fiery trial.’

Many people think Peter is using this terminology because in a few years Nero is going to introduce by decree that Christians are an illicit religion and therefore they are free to be burned. They all had a death warrant out on them. Nero will take Christians and impale them, pour coal oil on them, light the roads with them like a street light and then mockingly put the phrase by them that says ‘These are the light of the world.’ I don’t think Peter is talking about that here for these are fiery trials that aren’t coming in five to six years of Nero for that’s a further iteration of it, but these are the fiery trials that are happening now that threaten their livelihood and could even take their life. He uses this language to tell you what the trials will do and how God is going to use them.

In fact, Peter has already used this terminology once – fiery trials – in I Peter 1. I Peter 1:6–7 says [6] *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* He is saying that in this world, at this time, it will be necessary for God to sovereignly use the fiery trials that come upon you from the world but He is co-opting it to use it for His purposes.

Peter tells us that when these fiery trials come we are to rejoice but he also says we’ll be grieved. So which one are we to do? We are to do both. He is not trying to tell us this is some kind of stoicism where these trials will cause us to lose a job or this or that, even including a disowning of family and that we act like this is a piece of cake. No, we will grieve because it hurts for fire hurts but he says to rejoice in the Lord. There is a theology of suffering and it’s not because He doesn’t love you or that you’re suffering for a sin but you are suffering for Him.

We are to rejoice because He just did two things for us. One He just showed you and the world the genuineness of your faith which is a gift from God. Many times I have parents who ask me when their children has prayed to received Christ at 6 years of age if it's the real deal. I say 'I don't know' but it maybe the process of bringing your child to conversion. It may be the fruit that your child is converted. Once there is a profession of faith Satan and the world will find out whether it's the real deal for there will be a fiery trial. What kind of fiery trial can a 6 year old have? They can be isolated and made fun of as a Christian in school. This kind of trial can happen at any age and it hurts at any age. When it begins to cost them for owning Christ then you'll begin to find out if they tell you that did they do it because they knew it would please you or because God has been pleased to save them, because it will cost them. That will show the genuineness of their faith that once it's tested it stand the test. The believer realizes this is platform to tell people about Christ.

Secondly this is God burning away the dross that is in my life. When the ship is battered by the trials of this age, I'll find out the Anchor holds for Christ holds me by faith. God is developing you, growing you, perfecting you and giving you a platform and it's fiery because that's what fire does. Fire perfects, purifies, and reveals what is true and what is accurate. We are not to be surprised at this and this is what Peter is calling upon. What surprises us? It is something that is out of the ordinary, something unexpected. Peter is doing his best to tell us not to be surprised when the world doesn't give us a parade, but the world decides to make you a parade.

It's tough for us because we've lived in God's kindness of great awakenings that have struck this nation in all of its imperfections, we have been blessed so that much of what is in Christianity has been valued and affirmed. What we have enjoyed for a couple of hundred years in the course of our nation's history that we did not deserve which has been a gift of God's kind providence is the anomaly. Last week hundreds of your brothers and sisters in Nigeria and Congo lost their lives. They were utterly butchered for the name of Christ. It didn't make our newspapers but it was true. It amazed me that it actually made the European newspapers. Three hundred million professing believers now live under the threat of persecution every single day of their life, according to Open Doors Ministry. That's the course of history.

I don't understand all of God's providence as to why I have been born in a place that has been an anomaly to that but I thank God for it and I see a turning in which I'll do my best to make sure you and your children are ready for it if does turn. Part of my getting you ready for it is don't be surprised. It's not a strange thing. Here are the reasons. The world is always going to attack sin be trying to remove the shame of sin and then attacking those who say the only way to get rid of the shame of sin is to get rid of the guilt of sin and the only way to get rid of the guilt of sin is to get rid of sin and the only eater is Jesus. He is the One who eradicates your sin, at the cross and the world says 'no.'

You might be thinking 'I said 'yes' and I was part of the world.' That is because of God's grace who gave you a different heart. That's why we sing Amazing Grace when it says 'I was lost and now I'm found.' I didn't find my way. I was found by the Way, Christ Himself. That's what ought to surprise us, that we're amazed at grace, not amazed at suffering, because of sin or the suffering because of the name of Christ in this world. Peter is trying to get us ready and so I want to get you ready.

Then Peter gives us the exhortation which is instead of being surprised, we are to rejoice. I Peter 4:12-13 says [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.

This is the course of life for believers. This is not something strange. We are to rejoice in the Lord, in that trial for when we rejoice in that trial it is actually a foundation and a catapult that you will rejoice with exceeding gladness when Christ is revealed.

Your rejoicing now in the trial actually lays the groundwork, impulse and the propelling power for even untold rejoicing and gladness in the Day that He is revealed. So he wants us to rejoice now, then you will rejoice then for then he gives us the reason. Do you remember what happened to Jesus? The Spirit of Glory came down upon Him as the beloved for the presence of Christ is upon you. The reason for this exhortation is you share in Christ's suffering now and you are prepared for Christ's coming then. Because of this Peter gives us a benediction.

The benediction is in I Peter 4:14 which says *[14] If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.* You are not blessed because of the trial for the trial is only telling you that the Spirit of God rests upon you, the beloved. You are blessed in the trial.

Peter is not talking about suffering for the sake of sin which he points out in the next verse, I Peter 4:15 but he is talking about suffering for the name of Christ. I Peter 4:15–16 says *[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.* He is showing us that when the world brings the test they are trying to shame you to silence. Don't be ashamed of suffering for Christ, but rejoice in Him and suffer for Christ and His name, for it is the mark of His love in life.

At the end of our service on the Lord's Day I give a benediction to the congregation. When we do this we are picking up on something that has been done for over 2,000 years. This is something that developed in the early church where some of them were so small that the pastor at the end of the service would go to each one attending and lay hands on them as he gave them a benediction, typically a verse from Scripture. A benediction is not a prayer to God but it's a word from God to you. Due to the fact that our congregation is so large that would take a long time for me to do and I'm not sure I have memorized that many verses.

As the church got larger the pastor would invoke the presence of God and at the end of the service he would declare the blessing of God as he raised his hands up facing the congregation as a symbolic touch. The congregation would raise their hands to receive it. So when that suffering comes, even though it grieves us, it's a fiery trial and it's our livelihood, we are to rejoice.

We are living in a time where if you were to say at a job that you believe in the Biblical gift of sex within marriage that God ordained you may get a note that says 'bigot' whereas in earlier times most would have agreed with you. So will you abandon the Biblical ethic for the approval of the world or will you say Christ is King? When they told Peter and John not to preach the name they said 'We must obey God rather than man' so they continued to preach Jesus. Paul said 'I make it my goal to embrace the fellowship of His suffering.' When we suffer with Christ we're not adding to the atonement for Christ has done all that, but what we are doing is identifying with our Savior willingly, even though it costs. We are in fellowship with Him and the only reason we are suffering is because we own Jesus. Suffering doesn't make us quit owning Jesus for it just gives us a higher platform to proclaim Jesus.

I have three children and they all came to Christ at different ages. One came in their 20s, one came in their teenage years and then one came to Christ in a bathtub at age 4. Here is what I know. With all my children, I knew when their faith was true because whether it cost them in

elementary school or in college when they owned Christ, I knew it was a genuine faith. It didn't earn them salvation but it was fellowship with Christ and they were willing to be identified with Christ. That's how I know it about you for it is the fellowship of His sufferings. When the world brings the trial to shame you, you with glory and power that rests upon you, will own Him and be unashamed.

This is why Paul says in Romans 1:16–17, [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* [17] *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* The world was trying to shame Paul especially in Rome. He basically tells them he won't be shamed to silence and nothing they do him will let this happen to him. If they take his life then he has just been promoted for we are sheep counted to be slaughtered for Christ. I do that not in any way that it earns my salvation but because of the One who earned my salvation. I gladly embrace, not the suffering but the fellowship of His sufferings for it's a platform. It shows genuineness and perfects that in my life.

I invite you to join the company of the unashamed who in this world are ready and willing to suffer for Christ. Will you join? There is an African pastor who gave his life for Christ but I don't know his name. I do know he gave everything for Christ. Papers were found in his room and this is what he wrote the night before he was killed:

*I am part of the "Fellowship of the Unashamed."
The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line.
The decision has been made. I am a disciple of
Jesus Christ. I won't look back, let up, slow down,
back away, or be still. My past is redeemed (by the grace of God), my present
makes sense (because of the glory of God), and my future is secure (because of God's power).
I am finished and done with low living, sight walking,
small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams,
chintzy giving, and dwarfed goals.*

*I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position,
promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I now live by the
presence of God, lean by faith in my Savior, love by patience in Him,
I lift up my prayers to Him, and labor by His power for Him. My pace
is set, my gait is fast, my goal is Heaven, my
road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions may be few,
but my Guide and Master is reliable, my mission is clear. I cannot be bought,
compromised, deterred, lured away, turned back,
diluted, delayed or shamed into silence.*

*I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the
presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy,
ponder my image at the pool of popularity, or meander
in the maze of mediocrity.*

*I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I must go until
Heaven returns, give until I drop, preach until all know,
and work until He comes. And when He comes to get
His own, He (by His grace and for His glory) will have no problem recognizing me.
My colors will be clear and fly for His glory.*

Will you join me in all of my inadequacies to trust in the power of Christ? Will you join Job to tell Satan ‘You’re a liar’? Satan will say ‘the only reason Job likes You is because things are going well for when things aren’t going well watch how quickly he deserts You, God.’ Will you say with Job ‘Though he slay me, yet I will serve Him’ (Job 13:15)? Would you join the company of the unashamed, willingly suffering for Christ, standing on the platform it gives, growing through the grace that it brings and rejoice in the One who suffered for you? Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You so much for the Lord’s Day. God would You take this day and receive our praise as we have assembled together and would You take Your Word from this day and speak to the hearts who are reading this right now? Take a moment for the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. If you would like to pray with someone as He speaks to you please do not hesitate to call us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we would love to pray with you personally and confidentially. Holy Spirit thank You for Your grace and Your mercy as You strive within our hearts that we may see Jesus and lift Him up to the glory of the Father, for I pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

GOSPEL COMMAND #8

I. The Admonition to the Beloved:

Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you.

The Reason

Inevitable–Intended

II. The Exhortation to the Beloved:

Rejoice and be glad.

The Reason

You share in Christ’s sufferings now...

You are prepared for Christ’s coming then...

III. The Benediction

When you suffer not for sin but for the Name of Christ, you are Blessed by God.

The Reason

Because the Presence and Glory of the Spirit of God rests upon you.

LIFE TAKEAWAY

Come and join the Company of those who Unashamedly proclaim Christ and the Gospel and who rejoice when they suffer for it because...

1. Suffering in this world in the evidence of God’s common grace to all sinners.
2. Suffering for Christ is an instrument of God’s saving grace to His Beloved...
3. Suffering for Christ a Benediction of Blessings...
 - Reminder of God’s grace and our sins
 - Purifies and Perfects all of His Beloved

- Prepares and motivates us for the Glory to come
- Platform to proclaim Christ and the Gospel
- Join the Company of the Unashamed