

The Fiery Trial

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[0 : 00] Here are the verses we're going to cover tonight.

! Chapter 4, verse 12-19. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial as though something strange were happening to you, but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.

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

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

For it is a 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?

[1 : 41] And if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing so.

John MacArthur, who is still with us, but weakening in his medical conditions.

He's 85 now. He has appropriately named this section of Scripture the fiery trial. The Holy Spirit impressed upon Peter to open verse 12 talking about a fiery ordeal.

Interesting terminology. Peter would have understood that. That's why he used it. The Holy Spirit impressed upon him to use it. He would have understood it quite well, the Apostle Peter.

And no doubt, his thoughts would harken back to an event well documented in history involving catastrophic fire.

[3 : 11] And I do not think there's any question that Peter remembered the nine days in the summer of 64 A.D. and that was when the city of Rome was engulfed in flames.

Rome at the time was one of the largest, if not the largest, cities in the world. It had very narrow streets and many of the buildings were made of wood and jammed in together.

And the emperor at that time was a maniac, a megalomaniac by the name of Nero. We all remember that from our history classes.

Nero had a glorious image of Rome being recreated and the new construction would bring him maximum glory.

He came up with a most interesting plan on how to accomplish this. This is Nero's form of urban renewal. He thought, well, all I have to do is burn down the old existing structures and then we'll build on top of the ruins.

[5 : 14] And that's what Nero did. He even took a position atop of the tower of Macenus where he gleefully watched the conflagration.

He ordered Roman soldiers to prevent any citizen from putting out the fires.

He wanted Rome to burn. He even instructed the Roman army to start new fires during those nine days.

You can go to Roman digs in that area of the world and you'll come down to a layer of char and, you know, it was quite a show. Well, the Roman citizens on their part were devastated by those fires. and quite frankly they were enraged. And all the talk in Rome was Nero did this. They were told Nero did this.

[6 : 34] For most, all of their worldly possessions had been totally destroyed. Knowing how such fires work, they probably couldn't even find where they used to live.

they'd lost family members, they'd lost children, parents, grandparents, and they hated Nero for what he had done.

And Nero became fearful. They were picking up some chatter about, maybe we need to assassinate him and get a new Caesar.

and so Nero was afraid that some group is going to rise up and exterminate him.

And I wouldn't have objected. So he began looking for what we today call a patsy.

[7 : 39] Someone to take the blame, someone to take the fall. Nero was looking for someone to blame the fires on, and the sole purpose was to divert attention from himself.

Well, he found a scapegoat, an excellent scapegoat called the Christian community.

we'll blame it on Christians. As far as blame for the fires, that fit perfectly into Nero's scheme.

The Christians, first of all, were already hated by the citizens. And they were hated for many reasons, but two stand out.

First thing, Christians had been falsely accused of being cannibals. It was reported in their observance of the Lord's Supper, the rumor was they consumed human flesh and drank human blood, and that was a perverse interpretation of the Lord's words that later showed up in John chapter 6.

[9 : 13] Let me read a few verses there starting in verse 48. Great chapter by the way. John 6. Jesus speaking, I am the bread of life.

your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

Well, the Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, how can this man give us his flesh to eat? So Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

[10 : 44] Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him, and I live as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

I don't think we should have any pretense that that's a difficult passage. But I can assure you, Jesus was not talking about Christians being cannibals. Not at all.

And actually, not only was it a difficult passage, but it was reported in chapter 6 by John that when Jesus said this, many of his followers turned back and followed him no more.

The other problem that Romans had with Christianity was that it was falsely reported that they greeted each other with a holy kiss.

[12 : 09] Romans falsely concluded this must be a sect of unbridled passion, exercising homosexual behavior, and so forth.

And this was the setting of Peter's first epistle that he was having to deal with.

So what can we learn from this section of Scripture in 1 Peter? Four things, which is what we'll cover tonight.

Expect suffering, exalt in suffering, evaluate suffering, and when you've done all those three and trust suffering to God.

Now, I'm not smart enough to come up with those, so I'm grateful to Dr. MacArthur for doing it for me. And the first thing we're going to look at is expect suffering.

[13 : 25] 1 Peter 4.12, 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.

And there can be no doubt that hostility directed at Christians caught a number of them off guard. They didn't expect that.

And they did not expect persecution at the level they were experiencing. They wanted blessings and benefits and above all they wanted protection from God.

They were in a hostile empire, Rome. So they were hoping for and expecting protection from God.

And actually that still goes on in some denominations today.

Well, people need to pay closer attention to the words of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. John 15, 18, if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

[14:46] There's some strong words in there, isn't there? The world's going to hate you. And why not? It hates our Lord. The other one by Paul, 1 Timothy 3, 12, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

And I've said before, if you're not being persecuted, be more godly, it will come. Live a more godly life, it will come. Tell your co-workers, your neighbors, your friends, your family, lost family, persecution will come.

Those two passages, one in John, one in 1 Timothy, are definitive statements concerning persecution.

And Peter even tells us that we should not be surprised at such suffering. In fact, he says, we should expect it.

It's promised to us. The gospel of Christ is a great offense to the majority of people on this earth. A great offense.

[16:09] And this is true for many reasons, but primarily Christians confront sin. We call people out and confront sin.

We're to confront it in our own life first. And if you're not confronting it in your own life, you have no right to confront it in somebody else. Let's deal with ourselves first.

But then if you see it in family members, and I do, in friends, fellow church goers even, confront it. And there's ways to do that. You don't go down on Sunday morning and ask the pastor if he'll give you the pulpit for a few minutes and single somebody out. That's not the way we do it.

It should be done lovingly, prayerfully. Two English words, fiery ordeal is one word in the Greek language.

[17:18] It is pyrosis, which translate fiery trial. But it is also used in the melting down of metals as a purification process and that's how they purged out impurities.

Melt it down. And get rid of the dross, melt it down again, get rid of more dross. When believers go through such persecution, it is God's way of testing the genuineness of our faith.

He's putting us through a fiery ordeal, a trial. He's melting down the metal in us to get rid of the dross.

And in the Greek word, you can almost see the word purity or purify. It's very close to that. God.

Well, the next thing we want to look at is exalt and suffering.

Interesting language. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.

[18:48] if you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and God rests upon you.

That's verses 13 and 14. Well, we all know that the Lord Jesus was no stranger to suffering. We understand that.

In fact, suffering reveals our faithfulness to the Lord, that we're willing to suffer for His namesake. So we see a link here between suffering and rewards for faithful Christian service. Consider these words of the Lord Jesus.

This is out of Luke's Gospel. Luke chapter 6 verses 22 and 23 Jesus speaking, blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as something evil on account of the Son of Man.

[20:09] Rejoice in that day and leap for joy. for behold your reward is great in heaven for so their fathers did to the prophets.

! God and that is to say the biblical kind of living.

If we live a biblical based life we will share in the sufferings of Christ. And Christ went so far as to promise this kind of suffering.

He said it's going to happen. Now we know that Christ Jesus was without sin. He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

But He knew no sin. But in spite of this fact He suffered at the hands of sinful men.

[21:41] In that regard the words of Jesus are very instructive. Again John 15 this time in verse 20 Remember the word I said to you a servant is not greater than his master.

And listen to this if they persecuted me they will also persecute you. if they kept my word they will also keep yours.

Works two ways. Those who have no hope in heaven and there's plenty of them walking around and driving up and down the road but if they have no hope of heaven someday why would they

want anything to do with suffering?

People don't hang around to suffer. they hang around to get blessings and rewards and all kinds but suffering is furthest from their mind.

But what awaits those in heaven who have suffered for Christ? Matthew chapter 5 blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[23 : 19] Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

That's out of the Sermon on the Mount in that portion we call the Beatitudes. when we consider the sufferings of Peter that takes us all the way back into the book of Acts and it takes us back to the early days of the church.

On more than one occasion Peter and John had been hauled before the Sanhedrin to make a defense of their beliefs. The Sanhedrin was the equivalent if we did that in America it would be the U.S.

Congress the U.S. Senate the Supreme Court and the executive branch headed up by the president. Well that was the Sanhedrin it was all those things.

In the first 12 verses of Acts chapter 4 we read this and as they were speaking to the people that's Peter and John the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead and so they arrested them Peter and John placed them under arrest put them in custody until the next day before it was already evening but many of those who had heard the word believed and the number of the men came to about 5,000 on the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem with Annas the high priest and

[25 : 49] Caiaphas and John and Alexander who all were of the high priestly family and when they'd set them in the midst they inquired by what power or by what name did you do this then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said to them rulers of the people and elders if we're being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple man remember they passed a guy we're doing good we did a good deed for a crippled man and you're inquiring by what means was this man healed let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified whom God raised from the dead by him this man is standing before you well this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you the builders which has become the cornerstone and there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we are saved

I feel compelled to inject something here that's not in your notes I've talked about this before but years later Thomas Aquinas went to Jerusalem pay a visit look at all the structures and everything he was a brilliant guy I've got his book and I can't understand it so I know he's brilliant and the pope heard that he was in town so he sent for him and when he got there the pope said what are you doing Thomas he said oh I'm just taking a tour of rumble let me take you on a tour let me start out in the Vatican and I'll show you things that most people will never see so he took him down to the treasury and this reported even now it's basically plunder that the

Roman army did in all the nations of the known world and they turned it over to the church and it's supposedly still there worth millions or billions of dollars so he took him on a tour of the treasury and the pope said well Thomas never again do we have to say as did Peter and John when they healed the lame man silver and gold have we none but what we do have we give to you and the name of you know rise and walk you remember the story in Acts they healed him and Thomas Aquinas said holiness that's what they called the pope he said you're correct I mean here I'm looking at this and I'm stunned and never again does the catholic church have to say silver and gold have we none it's everywhere in here everything under the

Vatican is silver and gold and he said but holiness neither can we say as did Peter and John in the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise and walk and it was at that point the pope realized we've got all the trappings and none of the power we can't do that we can't command people to walk in the name of Jesus as Peter and John did it was a very poignant moment well back to our lesson here later Peter and John were arrested and beaten by officials of the Sanhedrin and they issued a warning to them said do not teach in the name of Jesus Christ so when they were released they went about immediately teaching and preaching in the name of

Jesus Christ and they were arrested again so they had this discussion and some wanted to kill the apostles but they were very popular with the people and they feared a major riot would break out so this is what they did book of Acts chapter 5 verse 40 and 41 when they called in the apostles they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus and then they let them go and then they left that's Peter and John in the presence of the council that's the Sanhedrin rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Christ they exalted in their suffering the third item on our list is evaluate your suffering verses 15 to 18 but let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler yet if anyone suffers as a

[32 : 06] Christian let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in that name for it is time for judgment to begin in 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 and if the righteous is scarcely saved what will become of the ungodly and sinners if you find yourself one day suffering make sure it is because you are doing the right thing and that is to say the biblical thing you are doing what the bible commanded you to do now let me say this some people including believers suffer because they are obnoxious that is deserved suffering that is deserved suffering but it is not godly suffering that is why if you enter into suffering evaluate the suffering and make sure it is for the cause of

Christ make sure of that I am doing what Jesus commanded me to do in John in 1 Peter and most of Paul's writings I knew a man who wanted to suffer more for Jesus than anyone in here can imagine he would have loved he went to Africa a lot and Europe and he wanted nothing more than to be arrested for his faith and serve in prison for a period of time then be released and come back and be a hero well can you see in my little brief snippet there that's all for the wrong motives that's all for the wrong motives he would go to persecuted countries hoping to be arrested and incarcerated a few months maybe a year and then he would be released and go on a speaking tour in various churches he would talk about his personal sufferings for the

Lord and at the conclusion they'd pass an offering plate that is not Christian suffering I said that to him one time and he never has talked to me since that's the price you pay this is not Christian suffering Paul understood proper Christian suffering Peter did too Acts 14 verses 19 to 22 but Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and having persuaded the crowds they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city and they supposed him to be dead now most people think he was just unconscious some people though think he died and God resurrected him maybe we'll find out someday but when the disciples gather about him he rose up and entered the city and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe and when they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch strengthening the souls of the disciples encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of

God another example of Paul's right response to suffering is found in 2nd Corinthians chapter 12 verses 7 to 10 so to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations a thorn was given me in the flesh a messenger of Satan to harass me to keep me from being conceited three times I pleaded with the Lord about this that he should leave me but he said to me my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me for the sake of Christ then I'm content for weaknesses insults hardships persecutions and calamities for when I am weak then I am strong!

well one final point tonight is this entrust any suffering you may be experiencing to God verses 18 and 19 of 1 Peter 4 if the righteous is scarcely saved what will become of the ungodly and the sinner therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good I like how the new American standard bible puts this passage of scripture here's what it says therefore those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful creator in doing what is right doing the right thing what do some believers suffer and even suffer greatly or terribly well according to God who cannot lie in this passage they suffer according to the will of

[38 : 37] God if we knew in some future event that we were going to suffer because of it that somehow it is God's will how would we or should we handle that according to the apostle Peter writing words provided by the inspiration of the spirit of God we entrust our very souls to the creator and he always does what is right we could also say the creator always does what is righteous that word entrust is interesting in Greek it is a banker's term it refers to putting a deposit in the bank for

safe keeping interestingly this same term was used by our Lord when he was on the cross we find that it's in the gospel of

Luke 23:46 then Jesus calling out with a loud voice said father into your hands I commit my spirit and having said this he breathed his last the word commit used in Luke is the same word translated entrust in first Peter same word well I'm going to close tonight and I'm going to quote Psalm 31 this is perhaps the greatest passage on entrusting our souls to our perfect God who always does what is right starting in verse 1 chapter 31 of the Psalms in you oh Lord do I take refuge let me never be put to shame in your righteousness deliver me incline your ear to me rescue me speedily be a rock of refuge for me a strong fortress to save me for you are my rock and my fortress and for your namesake you lead me and guide me you take me out of the net they have hidden from me for you are my refuge into your hand

I commit my spirit you have redeemed me oh Lord faithful God I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols but I trust the Lord I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love because you have seen my affliction you have known the distress of my soul and you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy you have set my feet in a broad place be gracious to me oh Lord for I am in distress my eyes eyes wasted with grief my soul and my body also for my life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighing my strength fails because of my iniquity and my bones waste away because of all my adversaries!

I become a reproach especially to my neighbors and an object of dread to my acquaintances those who see me in the street flee from me I have been forgotten like one who is dead I become like a broken vessel for I hear the whispering of many tear on every side as they scheme together against me as they plot to take my life but I trust in you O Lord I say you are my God my times are in your hand rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors make your face shine on your servant save me in your steadfast love O Lord let me not put to shame for

I call upon you let the wicked be put to shame let them go silently to Sheol let the lying lips be mute which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt O how abundant is your goodness which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you in the sight of the children of mankind in the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men you store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues blessed be the Lord for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city I had said in my alarm I am cut off from your sight but you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when

[44 : 18] I cried to you for help love the Lord all you his saints the Lord preserves the faithful and abundantly repays those who acts in pride be strong and let your heart take courage all you who wait on the Lord that's the 24 verses in Psalm 31