

Dual Citizens: Faith in the Fires, 1 Peter 3:13-4:6, 12-19
1/13/18

We are covering a large portion of text today spanning 3:13 to the end of chapter 4. But I'm taking this section altogether today because it is one continuous train of thought where we find the most expansive theology on Christian suffering in the Bible. Now there are lots of ways we can suffer. We can drop a 50lb dumbbell on our pinky toe or drive your car through your girlfriend's dad's garage door into his 1975 red Corvette. Both which happened to me... There are lots of ways we can suffer and Scripture addresses all kinds of suffering. But Peter is most focused on **uniquely Christian suffering, that is, hostility experienced in opposition to the declaration and demonstration of our faith.** In every culture, since the beginning of time, the people of God have experienced hostility because their faith. The righteous Abel was murdered by his brother Cain because he was hostile toward his Brother's faith. Or think of Noah who was mocked and ridiculed for decades because of his faith in obeying God's command to build the ark. Or Joseph and Daniel who experienced rejection, exile and imprisonment because of they stood against corruption and would not defile themselves. Or most of the prophets and all the apostles and the first century church and the 1000s who suffer because of their faith today in openly hostile lands. Now we may look at these forms of suffering and say, "Thank God we don't have to worry about suffering for our faith. That was something back then, or in other parts of the world." But just a few decades ago in a highly Christianized America, Dr. King suffered not because he claimed he was a Christian, but because he stood up and fought for the values of equality and justice- a demonstration of his Christian faith in the midst of hostility to those values. While our culture is not so openly hostile to the message and values of Christianity like it is in parts of the Middle East, every Christian who lives out their faith openly or demonstrates their faith by standing on its values will suffer hostility in some way. I would go so far as to say, if you have never suffered some form of hostility because of your faith, you likely are not living the kind of faith that the Bible calls us to live. And Christian suffering will come in many forms as we will see. So, the question we are asking today is not will we suffer for our faith, but rather how to handle Christian suffering when it comes. Peter gives us **4 Keys to build faith through the fires of Christian suffering.**

Key #1 Be Ready for the Fires

3:15 Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude.

4:7 Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded

4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

At dawn on December 7th, 1941 360 Japanese Warplanes performed a surprise attack on **Pearl Harbor**. In three frantic hours, Japanese planes had destroyed four ships including two battleships, crippled six others, and damaged nine additional surface vessels. Nearly 200 American aircraft were also in flames. Overall, the raid inflicted more than 3,500 casualties with 2,403 dead. The disaster at Pearl Harbor is seen by most as the single worst intelligence failure

in U.S. history. One Historian said, US leadership was guilty of a "failure of imagination" in its inability to translate warning signs, which were abundant, into a specific prediction of the horror that lay ahead. In other words, they thought surely it would not happen to us.

Blank Slide I think in many ways, far more than the Christians in 1st Century Rome, we could be guilty of a "failure of imagination", being lulled to sleep thinking that we are immune to suffering for our faith. In America, Christians have enjoyed a position of prominence for many years and our beliefs, ethics and lifestyles didn't differ drastically from a majority in our culture. But we are now in an increasingly post-Christian culture where a Christian worldview seems at best irrelevant and at worst antagonistic to many in our culture. We may not be thrown in jail, losing our homes or being beheaded because of our faith like many of our brothers and sisters in Christ in the 10/40 window today, but we must be prepared to experience marginalization, loss of relevance, not being taken seriously, ridicule, loss of social status and even attacks on our institutions through legal or other means. So what does it look like to be ready? Two things Peter says

Know the reason for your hope

1 Peter 3:13-16

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

Has anyone asked about the reason for your hope lately? Why would anyone ever take that angle in interacting with a Christian? Well, when we return good for evil, context before this, when we are reviled and cursed, we bless. We submit and respect even when we disagree. We find joy even when our circumstances seem bleak. This should set us apart, why doesn't this bother you? Why don't you fire back and insult?

Now this text used to make me anxious, making me feel like I have to be prepared with every apologetics answer to every question people may have from creation to morality to the problem of evil...but notice it doesn't say "make a defense to anyone who asks you for 6 proofs of the resurrection." It says, for the hope! Any Christian can do that. You ARE a Christian because you have reasons for hope. We have a pulsating hope that looks to the end and measures things in terms of the future. Unless you have this, how on earth will you find the nerve to stand up to persecution and say, "I can't go along with this evil or these ways of the world because my citizenship is in heaven with a supreme Lord. This doesn't warrant us being nasty, not smug, harsh or pushy like a telemarketer. "Gentleness and respect, with clear conscience." We are poor beggars telling other poor beggars where to find bread.

We prepare by knowing intimately with a conviction the source of our hope. **Would you be ready to give an answer for your hope?** Go home and get a half sheet of paper and write down, why do I believe this? Now if some of us don't know... maybe you have been just doing what your parents have done, or you enjoy the music or it makes you feel good when you leave. Then get on your knees and say, "God, I actually don't know if I have hope. Ask Him to show you in his Word and whisper into your heart." God isn't honored for you to trust him for no reason. Where do you get your confidence? Now you may be here and you are trying to figure that out...welcome, this is safe. Christianity 101 Class in April...reach out to me, one of our pastors, deacons, any of our Christian Ed leaders to name a few. So first, we must live our lives in a way that people would question why we have hope. But then we must be ready to respond.

The second way we get ready:

Be Willing to Suffer for your Faith

1 Peter 4:1-4

¹Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, **arm yourselves** also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. ²As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

³For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.

Since Christ suffered, "arm yourselves" with the same attitude. Notice, this is not merely believing in Jesus as our savior and going on with a happy life. It is proactively carrying this mentality: "Christ suffered, I must be willing to suffer too." See the world's motto is maximize comfort and minimize suffering. This is the way our natural desires are going to take us. In our flesh we want to live for what brings us maximum pleasure and happiness but arming ourselves with the mindset of Christ is to say I'm following the Will of God, whatever that means.

I came to Christ out of a party lifestyle. And the guy who led me to Christ told me a story of St. Augustine. St. Augustine wasn't always a saint. He used to be a party guy. Heavy drinking, he was a womanizer. And then he came to Christ dramatically. He was convicted that following Christ meant putting an end to the party lifestyle. And he was mocked and alienated by his friends for it. Much like Peter says can happen. One day he was walking down the street and a former mistress saw him and called out to him, "Augustine" but he did not turn around, and so she called out again and still nothing. She finally said, "Augustine, it is I." And he stopped and said, "Yes, dear, but it is no longer I."

I'm thankful I had a mentor in my life early in those days who helped me "arm myself" with this mentality, seeing that following Christ was going to come at a cost, this is the break from sin that Peter talks about. Because the willingness to suffer destroys the power of a lifestyle of sin. In the early days of following Christ, this meant being willing to suffer by breaking up with my girlfriend who was not a Christian even though it would be hard and I would be mocked for it.

Being willing to suffer through humiliation and alienation from my friends when I wouldn't do the same things anymore and when I started getting called "Father Keeler" and my friends started mocking me by "confessing their sins" and called me a "buzzkill." For a guy that made an idol out of being the life of the party that was very difficult at the time. But looking back I'm so thankful I was armed with this mentality, I never regret it.

Peter says must be willing to count the cost of discipleship to Jesus. We must develop a grittiness. Have you counted the cost? Or maybe you thought Christianity was merely a get out of hell free card so you can live your life however you want? What might that mean for us? Real honest- you are a gamer? It might mean that game you play that dishonors God, having to tell all your friends you aren't going to be playing anymore. It might mean breaking off a relationship with someone who are dating who doesn't share your faith. It may mean having to tell your boss you cannot participate in a business practice or project that is unethical, which might label you as not a team player, might be made fun of or even fired. It may mean not listening to or participating in the office gossip so you feel like an outsider.

Now some of you just heard me say, Christianity is just about a list of don'ts. Yes there are ethics that reflect the heart of God that restrict our behavior...for our good. But that's actually not the focus for Peter in suffering.

Key #2 Focus on Doing Good in spite of Suffering

Have you noticed in this book and particularly in this passage how Peter is constantly chiming this bell?

1 Peter 3:13 *Who is going to harm you if you are **eager to do good?***

1 Peter 3:17 *For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for **doing good** than for doing evil.*

1 Peter 4:19 *So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and **continue to do good.***

A major aspect of Peter's gospel strategy in the community is doing public good.

1 Peter 2:12 *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

And Peter is saying, as we do good for the sake of the gospel, there are many forms of suffering that we can experience. Suffering through self-denial as we are generous with our money for the sake of the good of others. Or the new trials that show up in our lives when we begin to be open to reaching our neighbors, or the challenges of adopting a child who may have a number of challenges from their background. Or the risks we take from rolling up our sleeves and being involved in places like West-Center City. But the Christian life is one of doing!

Be so busy being a doer that you don't have time to be a don'ter! Listen, parents- your kids are going to say, "Don't, Don't, Don't that's all you say." But be a doer- go on a missions trip together, do a weekend at a soup kitchen, give stuff away, go to a nursing home, visit kids at Al or Ronald McDonald house, serve in kids ministry.

Key #3 Embrace the Christian Perspective on Suffering

1 Peter 3:17 *For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*

1 Peter 4:19 *So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.*

What? How can that be God's will that I suffer, even when I'm doing good? But I actually find this to be so encouraging, especially considering the alternative. If God is just as surprised that suffering is happening as I am, "wow, that's a shame, I didn't see that coming." That is not encouraging but terrifying. God is sovereign over the events of the universe, yes, even my suffering. Now he is not the originator of evil or bad things that happen, but he takes what is meant for evil against us and uses it for good. This is how Paul says it in Romans, but let's look at how Peter says it.

1 Peter 4:12

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

The suffering and trials that we face Peter calls a "Fiery ordeal"- *Pureosis*- a refining fire that cleans. Put in the metal and it comes out pure as it cleans off the impurities and dross. Silversmith- how do you know that you have put the silver through the fire enough? I know because when I look into it and I can see my own face enough, it's reflected, I know that it is purified. This is what Jesus does with us, he puts us through the fire until his own image is reflected in us. That's the idea behind this word. Suffering is not a surprise but a plan.

These trials have come to "Test"- by nature, a trial shows you what you really trust. What you are made of. Troubles are all about trust. You cannot refine metal without the fires, you can't refine our faith without suffering. We think we trust God, but we also trust in many other things...and we don't realize it until it is tested, when those things are threatened that we will lose it. When our allegiance to God becomes tested by our allegiance to other things. **A fiery trial is anytime something is threatened that is very, very dear to you.** Your health, your relationships, your money, your job, your kids, your reputation, your influence, your sexuality. And one of the things God is doing in this trials is saying, "We will find out whether you got into this religion to get me to serve you, or you to serve me. If I'm the means and you're the end, or these things are the means and I'm the end." The fire incinerates the dross. In the fire that you see your inadequacies of your false trust. In the fires of a marriage, you say- I would like to have God, but I'm realizing that I have to have happiness. I would like to have God but I'm now seeing that I must have respect from my peers. I would like to have God, but I'm now seeing that want to be with this guy even though he's not a Christian.

Christian suffering has great purpose and mercy in it. Ultimately, God is in it for our good! 1

Peter 4:13 *But rejoice!* You say, rejoice? That's sadistic. No, Peter goes on to list several good things that come from it that we don't have time to look at but read them.

Verse 19: So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

When I was a kid and had a splinter I wriggled and writhed and got up and bargained with my parents...all trying them having to get the needle and poke at it to get it to come out. My dad would say, do you trust me? Do you trust your creator? He made us, he knows how we work and what is best for us.

I have never heard anyone say, "The deepest and rarest and most satisfying joys of my life have come in times of extended ease and earthly comfort." Nobody says that. It isn't true. What's true is what Samuel Rutherford said when he was put in the cellars of affliction: "The Great King keeps his wine there" — not in the courtyard where the sun shines.

What's true is what Charles Spurgeon once said: "They who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls."

4 Keys to build faith through the fires of Christian suffering

Key #1 Be Ready for the Fires

Key #2 Focus on Doing Good in spite of Suffering

Key #3 Embrace the Christian Perspective on Suffering

Key #4 Look to Jesus Christ for Strength

1 Peter 3:18 *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.*