

November 15, 2009/ 1 Peter 4:12-19 (ESV¹)

this morning we pick up 1Peter at verse 12 of Chapter 4 ... this is part of Peter's discussion (begun at verse 11 of Chapter 2) of living as a Christian in a hostile world ... he discusses the proper view of Christian suffering in this world ...

1Pe 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.

Peter needs here to answer a semi-reasonable question ... he has said how wonderfully blessed Christian people are, inheriting the promises of God to His chosen people ... so, a reasonable question for the natural mind, is "If this is all true, then how come life is full of suffering for me?" ... remember that Peter writes to Christians under real persecution ... Peter lets us know that our thinking that makes "suffering" the opposite of "being blessed" is wrong ... rather, like it or not, it is for our good and God's glory, and is a normal part of discipleship ... there is nothing at all "strange" about the fact that hard things come ...

the phrase "fiery trial" is meant to make us think of fire as the means of testing precious metal ... **Pro 27:21 The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and a man is tested by his praise.** ...

1Pe 4:13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

don't be thrown off balance by hard things, but rather rejoice ... rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings ... there is an amazing thought ... not that in any way you and I add to Christ's atoning work, but that we do have the great privilege of demonstrating to the world a measure of His mind and heart ... we follow Him in suffering, and the people who see us acting properly under suffering are given an inkling of what He did on their behalf ... in that sense, what Christians suffer helps bring people to God ...

these verbs are in a Greek tense that indicates continuation over time ... insofar as you are sharing, keep on rejoicing ...

that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed ... rejoice with great spiritual rejoicing ... be glad when His glory is revealed in at least two senses ... in one sense, God's glory is presently seen in His people reflecting His nature ... for that we ought to be glad ... in a second sense, we will in the future be overjoyed when His great glory is revealed to the whole universe at His return and we are found to belong to Him ...

Paul says similar things in Romans

Rom 8:17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Rom 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

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now Peter gives a specific example of suffering as a Christian ...

1Pe 4:14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

again these verbs indicate continual action ... if you are being reproached, you are blessed, the Spirit is resting ... you are blessed ... it's the same word Jesus used in the beatitudes ...

Mat 5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Mat 5:11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Mat 5:12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

our flabby notion that suffering is the opposite of blessedness reveals that we haven't been listening ...

in the hard thing, particularly in this example of bearing insults for the name of Christ, the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you ... we should be reminded of Stephen ... as he was being stoned, the visible glory of God was seen in his face ... we ought to think of the Spirit of God resting on the infant church in visible form in Acts 2 ... this not bad, this is good! ... this is not harmful, this is confirmation of the blessing of God ...

is should probably almost not need saying that suffering issuing from our foolishness and rebellion are not going to bring this blessing of God ... but then, we're pretty dim sometimes, and so Peter leave nothing to our imagination ...

1Pe 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.

there's no blessing of God on the natural consequences of our sin in this life ... that's not what he's talking about ... he's not talking about stoically taking the lumps we deserve ... he's talking about the misery that comes to us simply as a consequence of living in a fallen world and specifically that we endure as believers in such a world ...

1Pe 4:16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Peter knows that worldlings are going to think it's disgraceful to be identified as one who belongs body and soul to Christ ... it is, after all, in the thinking of the world narrow, unthinking/ignorant, dangerous to society, even mentally unbalanced ... but right thinking Christians from the start have counted it a privilege to suffer for Christ ...

Act 5:40 and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

Act 5:41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

Act 16:22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.

Act 16:23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely.

Act 16:24 Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Act 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

Php 3:10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Php 3:11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

2Ti 2:11 The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

2Ti 2:12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;

let him glorify God in that name ... the sense is that of acting in Christ's name, representing Him to others ... that is, as Christians suffer for being His, they represent Him to those around them ... and in that we are to bring honor to God ...

suffering for Christ both brings Him honor and confirms to our hearts that truly we are His ... Peter's advice would be "neither seek it nor run from it ... live as if you weren't going to experience it ... but if God ordains that you should, His grace is sufficient ... there will be joy and His glory in it ... count it a blessing" ... this is not some crazy glorification of seeking out martyrdom or looking for trouble ... but where it comes in the course of life, Peter tells us to seek God's glory in it ...

verses 17 and 18 put Christian suffering into a broader context ... one might ask, "What is going on in the world anyway???" Why are things out of kilter so that believers suffer and the openly rebellious often have a seemingly easier ride through life?"

1Pe 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

the "household" would probably be better rendered "house" ... the emphasis here is not on the church as a family, but rather on the church as the dwelling/house/temple of God ... in the OT, the holy visible presence of the pure One, the burning purifying God filled His temple ... now that holy presence, that purifying fire dwells in His people ... it purifies them ... trouble/suffering is part of means by which that happens ... in good time, that purifying work will extend beyond the church and the holy One will deal with those who are in rebellion against Him ... that will not be sanctification, but rather judgment ... if the suffering of God's saints as He lovingly works in them looks tough, imagine what the judgment of God on sin will look like ...

Peter is thinking of kind of thing that Malachi pictures

Mal 3:1 "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

Mal 3:2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.

Mal 3:3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.

Mal 3:4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Mal 3:5 "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

1Pe 4:18 And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

verse 18 is a quote from the Septuagint version of Proverbs 11:31 ...

God's purposes are good and wonderful ... and to work them in His people, He is willing to use means that we don't altogether enjoy all the time ... Peter urges us to take the long view and see God's gracious hand at work, and to rejoice ... but if we take the short view that all ought to be pleasant and without trouble, we're going to have a real hard time with judgment He will ultimately bring to the impious, ones without any reverence for Him ... but that's our foolishness in thinking we are the measure of all things rather than Him being so ...

1Pe 4:19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

what, therefore, ought we do? ... trust God, cast ourselves on His mercy, *and go about doing right* no matter what ... if loyalty to Christ brings tough stuff to us, so be it ... in all the things of life, including the hard ones, we must simply put all we are and do into His hands ... in this life we are not alone, but have a faithful Creator who is both our Maker and our sustaining friend ... the "entrust" their souls is the beautiful picture of giving our souls to Him for safekeeping as we go about His business in this life ... who could be more qualified to have that trust? ... and it's not just our temporal circumstances that are at issue, it is our eternal souls that we yield to His care ...