

# Studies in 1 Peter-14 1 Peter 4:12-18

by Dwight Pentecost

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*As Christians, we can rejoice in suffering because it proves our identification with Jesus Christ, gives us an opportunity to testify to His sufficiency, and prepares us for the judgment seat of Christ.*

**Duration:** 40:29

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 4:12

**Topics:** "Suffering And Joy", "Christian Persecution"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the theme of rejoicing in the midst of suffering, specifically the fiery trials mentioned in 1 Peter 4:12. He emphasizes that these trials are not insignificant, but rather intense and challenging. Despite this, Peter encourages believers to rejoice and be happy because they are partakers of Christ's suffering. The preacher also highlights the reason for their suffering, which is their identification with Jesus Christ and the world's expression of hatred towards him.

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## Transcript

Turn with me to the Fourth Epistle of Peter, fifth chapter, verses twelve through nineteen. First Peter, four, twelve through nineteen. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to test you as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that, when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy.

If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you, for the spirit of glory and of God rested upon you, and on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's affairs. Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on his behalf.

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God, and if it first begin at us, what shall the envy of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful creator. It is our desire as parents to spare our children all that it is possible for us to spare them. And in being overly solicitous and overly protective, and in withholding from them the disciplines and the corrections that they need, we have produced a lawless generation.

Some day, when we are so prone to criticize the younger generation, we also forget that the younger generation is what we have made them. The problem that arises in the minds of many is the problem of why God permits any suffering in this world. This problem is particularly prevalent among believers, for since we are solicitous for our children, we conclude that God must be made in our image and must be solicitous for his children.

And since we spare our children all that it is possible for us to spare them, certainly God, if he is the kind of God we think him to be, would spare us all suffering, all testing, all hardships, and all discipline. The Apostle Peter, writing about the problem of suffering, was writing in a very personal way for those who were under his tutelage, were facing unprecedented persecution and peril because of their faith in Jesus Christ. The Apostle was writing to equip them to be able to meet the testings that would come to them because they are Christians.

Before he concludes his large treatment of this important subject, the Apostle, in verses 13-19, comes to face a very pertinent problem that existed in the minds of his readers. They obviously thought it strange that God would permit suffering. They perhaps had come to the conclusion that God could not prevent it, and if that be true, then evil is greater than God is.

Or, they perhaps thought that God was handicapped in dealing with his children, in that he was helpless to prevent that which was coming to them. They had an erroneous concept of God, an erroneous concept of the purpose that God would use or make of suffering. Man has always attempted to make God in his image, and since it seems natural for parents to protect their children, they had concluded that God, as a heavenly Father, must protect his children.

The Apostle is writing in the twelfth verse because they did think it strange that they should have fallen into the persecutions that were their lot. Peter, first of all, in dealing with this subject, in order to bring them the joy of the Lord in their textings, reminded them of what the Lord had taught them when he was present with them. We turn back to the Gospel of John, in chapter 15, where our Lord predicted just such sufferings as these believers were passing through at that time.

I read John 15, beginning at verse 18 through verse 21. If the world hate you, and it most certainly does, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, but ye most certainly are not, the world would love its own.

But because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

If they have kept my sayings, and they certainly didn't, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. Then in chapter 16, verses 1-4, these things have I spoken unto you, that is, concerning your suffering for my name's sake.

You should not be offended or caused to fall when these persecutions come. These are some of the things they will do to you. They will put you out of the synagogue.

May the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God's service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come ye may remember that I told you of them." Our Lord, just a matter of weeks

after he had spoken these words, was received up into glory.

His ascension is recorded in the first chapter of the book of Acts, and you have not read more than several pages in the book of Acts until you find that the believers are imprisoned because of their faith for Jesus Christ. That which our Lord predicted of suffering for his name's sake was fulfilled, not in a matter of years, nor in a matter of months, but literally in a matter of days. And those who had had freedom to fellowship with Christ are now imprisoned for Christ's sake.

How literally our Lord's prophecy of the fulfillment of suffering for his name's sake came to pass. Now, Peter, perhaps with those very words ringing in his ear, writes to those who are going through similar persecutions to that through which Peter has passed in the opening chapters of the book of Acts, and he says to them in 1 Peter 4.12, Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though this were unexpected and unprecedented, and as though the Lord had made no provision to forewarn you of these experiences. Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you, but rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's suffering.

The suffering through which believers were going at that time were sufferings that came to them because of the world's hatred of Jesus Christ. Peter and Paul were not imprisoned because the world did not like them. They were imprisoned because the world hated the Lord Jesus Christ, and since they could not reach up to heaven to touch a resurrected, glorified Christ, they were pouring out their venom against Christ on those who were Christ's representatives in their day.

And Peter, writing years later, tells those who were going through their present sufferings that they are suffering not because God is impotent, because God is careless, because God could not prevent those sufferings. He tells them that they are suffering because the world hates Jesus Christ, and that they are partakers of Christ's suffering. They are fellowshiping with Christ in his suffering.

The world must hate Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ has pronounced condemnation and judgment upon a godless world. I repeat, the world must hate Jesus Christ. And hatred must be expressed.

It cannot be self-contained. And since the world must express its hatred of Jesus Christ, the world pours out its hatred on those who are Christ's representatives. And when one names the name of Christ by that very act of professing to love and obey and believe Jesus Christ, he has put himself in a position where the world must hate him.

One of the common deceptions is that we can so live as a Christian in this present age that we can make the world like it. It is utterly impossible. The cleavage between Satan and God, between good and evil, between right and wrong, between this world's philosophy and the deep things of Christ is so deep that one cannot live as a Christian in this world and escape the hatred of the world.

And yet, the hatred that comes is only a continuation of the world's hatred of Jesus Christ. What Peter is doing, then, first of all, is to show them the reason for their suffering. It is not because God is careless, because God is omnipotent.

It is because of their identification with Jesus Christ. And since the world must express its hatred of Christ, it expresses it by persecuting those who are Christ's. Now, the great theme that Peter is striking through these verses is the theme of rejoicing in the suffering.

This is the same thing that James presented to us in James chapter 1. As he said in verse 2, "...count it all joy when ye fall into divers or different kinds of testing." Count it all joy. And even though these theaters are going through what Peter calls in 4.12, a fiery trial, not just insignificant little snipings, but fiery trials that are being poured out upon them, the theme that Peter emphasizes is the theme of rejoicing. Indeed, in verse 13, rejoice.

In verse 14, happy are ye. In verse 16, let him not be ashamed. And so, Peter wants to give believers the joy of the Lord that can be there in the midst of their trial.

Now, in the first place, Peter says that we can rejoice because the suffering that they go through proves that they belong to Jesus Christ. In verse 13, he says, "...ye are partakers of Christ's suffering." Christ will not ask one who is not his to suffer for his naysayers. Christ will not ask one who belongs to Satan to suffer for him.

Christ will permit suffering only in the experience of those who are his own. And when Christ entrusts suffering to an individual, it is proof to that individual that he is a child of God. God does not move into Satan's family and try to correct Satan's children.

He brings them into his own family before he begins the disciplining process. And they come into his family, of course, by the new birth. But Peter says that we can rejoice when we are partakers of Christ's suffering because if we partake of his suffering, we must partake of his glory.

You cannot separate suffering as a partaker with Christ and sharing in the glory with Jesus Christ. It is a truth of the gospel that is indeed glorious that since you and Jesus Christ have been joined together in salvation, Christ cannot be in heaven without you. Heaven would be incomplete without Jesus Christ.

For a child of God, heaven would be no more incomplete without Christ than it would be incomplete without you if you belong to Jesus Christ. We have been so joined to him that we are partakers of his glory. And the proof that we one day will be partakers of his glory is that now we are partakers of his suffering.

And so Peter says, did you ever doubt your salvation? Let me remind you of this fact. If you ever doubted your salvation and you suffered reproach and persecution from the world because you belong to Jesus Christ, that's one of the strongest proofs of your salvation that you can possibly have. And Peter says, let me remind you that those who partake of his suffering are those who are destined to partake of his glory.

So, child of God, when you begin to feel some persecution or some hatred from the world because you belong to Jesus Christ, your heart ought to leap up and praise to God that God has given you one more evidence that you are his child and that he has destined glory for Jesus Christ and you. Then, in the second place, he tells us in verse 14 that they can rejoice in their suffering because God has chosen to use them as the instrument to reveal his glory. God has chosen them to be instruments to reveal his glory.

I read in verse 14, If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye for the spirit of glory and of God rested on you. On their part is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. God glorifies himself or reveals his glory not through the blessings that he confers on his child, but through the suffering through which he permits his child to pass.

When God wanted to reveal how glorious he was to the nation Israel, he took Moses up on the mount, and God transfigured Moses so that Moses may show. And when Moses came down off the mount, the

children of Israel could gain some concept of how glorious God was by the glory of God that radiated from the face of Moses. When God wanted to reveal his glory to the nation Israel, God possessed the tabernacle and then the temple that became the meeting place between God and man.

And the tabernacle and the temple radiated the glory of God. And Israel knew how glorious God was by the Shekinah glory of God that radiated from the temple. When God wanted to reveal his glory to this earth, he sent his son, and the apostles could testify that we beheld the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Those who fellowship with Jesus Christ learned of the glory of a glorious God as they watched the Lord Jesus Christ live before them. Do you realize the method God has chosen to reveal himself to the world today? God sends suffering into the lives of his saints, and the way the saints respond to the suffering that God sends reveals God's glory to a world that is ignorant of the greatness of the glory of our God. And Peter is emphasizing that fact when he says, if ye be reposed for the name of Christ, then God is glorifying himself through the believer.

And the believer, suffering repose for Christ's sake, becomes to his generation what a transfigured Moses was in his generation. I can well imagine that Moses found it pretty rough climbing up to the top of Sinai. Nobody had preceded him to make an easy trail up that mountain so that his going was easy.

Can't you imagine Moses making his way up to the top of that craggy mountain? God, why did you ask me to do this? God, deliver me from this. God, don't ask me to go any further. These rocks are cutting my feet, and these thorns are tearing my legs, and perspiration is staining my robe.

God took him up there through all that was entailed in getting to that summit. But it was there that God revealed himself to Moses and transfigured Moses, and then told him to go down so that he could reveal the glory of God to his generation. No glory without suffering.

Even Jesus Christ could not reveal the glory of God to man apart from his perfect obedience that took him to the cross. The fullness of God's glory was revealed to man as Jesus Christ suffered in obedience to the will of God for man. And we so glibly pray, God, use me as an instrument to reveal thy glory.

But don't ask me to suffer anything to do it. I'm willing to travel down a broad superhighway in comfort and ease, but don't ask me to get off into a difficult path. Don't ask me to feel any rocks or any thorns.

There's a burning sweat in my eyes, and our prayers are empty and hollow. Because God glorifies himself through the response of his children to the suffering that an unbelieving and hostile world pours upon. The next thing Peter points out is in verse 16, as he tells us that they can rejoice in the sufferings that God sends because sufferings are a means of testimony for Jesus Christ.

If any man suffers a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf. If you were to suddenly receive an inheritance, a totally unexpected, unanticipated inheritance, I imagine that you would find a certain amount of rejoicing. And unsaved friends, loved ones or neighbors would not be moved one iota toward Jesus Christ by your rejoicing in that unexpected inheritance.

They would envy you, but not rejoice with you. But when instead of an inheritance, God sends a financial reverse, and you can rejoice in the reverse as much as you would rejoice in the inheritance, then the world has a testimony to what Jesus Christ can mean to an individual that they cannot gain back. It is not our blessings that give us a testimony before unbelievers.

It is the sufferings that give us a testimony before unbelievers. Peter wants us to be very careful in our thinking, though, because there are some sufferings that are well deserved. If an individual is a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a busybody in other men's matters, and he suffers because of what he has done, and then he piously thanks God for it, there is no testimony to Christ in that.

He is only getting what he deserves. But when a believer suffers unjustly simply because he is a believer in Jesus Christ, and receives that gratefully and thankfully, then there is a testimony that the world cannot understand because it has never had a life experience. So, Peter wants to remind us that they can rejoice because suffering gives an opportunity for testimony as to the sufficiency of the grace of Jesus Christ.

Then, in verses 17-19, Peter reminds us that we can rejoice in suffering, for suffering prepares a believer for the judgment seat of Christ. Peter reminds us of that which was such a central theme in Paul's epistle, that the time will come when every believer must stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The judgment seat of Christ is an examination of a believer's life, an examination of a believer's stewardship, not to determine whether he enters heaven or not, but to determine his degree of reward in heaven.

The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 5, said that it was the great consuming passion and desire of his life to so conduct his life as a believer that he might find approval at the judgment seat of Christ. Peter has that same concept in mind when he reminds us that judgment must begin at the house of God. He reminds us that when the Lord Jesus shall have completed the church which is his body, and at the rapture translate us into his presence, he is going to sit as an examiner in order that he might bestow rewards upon believers.

If we live our lives in indolence, indifferent to the will of God, if we dissipate our lives in the pursuit of selfish ends and interests, if we operate in the realm of the flesh instead of according to the spirit of God, if we guide our lives according to our own philosophies instead of the philosophies of the word of God, there can be nothing but disapproval, and Christ will have to withhold any reward from us. Peter says that sufferings are sent into the lives of God's children to be disciplinary measures, so that when we come to stand before Christ, we will not present a wasted life to him. He reminds us that this is a very serious and sobering consideration, for God is a just examiner.

He reminds us in verse 18 that the righteous are saved with difficulty. The righteous were saved by the sacrifice of the righteous one. If a man could not be saved apart from the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, if Christ must suffer in order to provide salvation, who are we to think that we who belong to Christ can be fitted for rewarding glory apart from suffering? Oh, by faith in Jesus Christ we are made acceptable, we are perfected in the beloved.

All sin is cleansed, and all charge against us has been fully paid, so that the one who accepts Christ as a personal savior is fitted for the presence of God. But there can be no reward for the child of God apart from a life that is invested for Jesus Christ. Peter says, as Christ provided salvation by his suffering, God sends suffering to us and permits the suffering of the world to come to us, that in the light of the seriousness of this judgment we might be conformed to Jesus Christ.

Peter's conclusion to this matter is in the 19th verse, and this is actually his conclusion and explanation as to why the fiery trials of verse 12 stop. Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing as unto a faithful creator. What Peter says is this, we know from the word of God that God has created us, and in Jesus Christ by a new birth he has recreated us and made us a new creation.

The evidence of God's care for creation is seen on every hand. The stars move in their courses with perfect precision. Not a star can fall to the ground without his knowledge.

He who creates the snow out of raindrops has yet to duplicate a single design that he has ever used before. The Creator exercises care over his creation, and the one who has recreated us in Jesus Christ exercises care over his new creation. And what are we to do? Trust him.

Commit the keeping of our souls to him in the midst of the suffering. We remind you once again of that which we have seen to be Peter's emphasis over and over in dealing with this question of suffering in believers' lives, that God does not ask us to explain or always to understand the suffering, but he does ask us to trust him in the suffering. And no one will commit himself to Jesus Christ until he comes to the end of himself.

As long as he sees a way to handle the situation, he'll try to do it. As long as he sees a way out of a dark tunnel, he'll keep pressing, and not until he can see no light in the darkness, and until he has no strength within himself, will he come to cast himself totally and completely upon the sustaining grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter says, I want you to rejoice.

Rejoice because these sufferings are a proof of your sonship and a proof of your glory. I want you to rejoice because God is using you as an instrument to reveal his glory. I want you to rejoice because God has given you an opportunity to bear testimony to others in his sustaining grace.

I want you to rejoice because these sufferings are preparing you for reward in the judgment of Jesus Christ. But in your suffering, I want you to so completely commit yourself to the one who has created and recreated you in Jesus Christ, that his strength will be yours, and that his purposes will be realized in improving to his glory. A number of years ago, when I was a pastor in western Pennsylvania, I made a trip about 100 miles south of where we lived.

I was speaking to a young people's conference, and during one of the afternoon sessions, I found an antique shop in a little out-of-the-way place, and I had a heyday. The antique shop was run by a widow who, because war was going on, could no longer get any help to refinish the things that she had collected in the countryside, and she wanted to get rid of all the things she had. She was willing to sell them very, very inexpensively.

For a long time, I had wanted a cherry corner cupboard, and she had a number of them there. I saw one that I liked very much, and I began to talk to her about it, and she said, Oh, I'm almost willing to let you haul it away. It takes up so much room.

And I asked her, Well, how much was that? And she said, Well, would you give me \$10 for it? And believe me, I was delighted to do it, even though \$10 then was \$10. A year later, a year and a half later, an antique dealer came by and saw that corner cupboard, and he offered me 25 times what I paid for it. If one came by today, he'd probably offer me 50 times what I paid for it.

What made the difference? I'll tell you what made the difference. It was the same corner cupboard, but there had been hours of scraping, innumerable sheets of sandpaper that had been used up, sacks of steel wool, lots of plumbing, abrasive, rubbing, grinding, sanding. That which made the difference was that grinding, sanding, rubbing process.

I hesitate to say I'm looking out on a congregation this morning of antiques in the rough. I'll just say you're in the rough. We're all in the rough.

And if God is going to make us into something of which he can be proud, something that can reveal the handiwork, his handiwork to his glory, it's going to take a lot of scraping, and rubbing, and sanding, and polishing, before we can reflect his glory. Child of God, you realize that when you ask God to lift those sufferings that he sends to you, you're asking him to leave you just as you are in the rough. Nothing attractive, nothing beautiful, nothing that radiates his handiwork, just as you were.

But if you want to be an instrument to reflect his glory now, to be an instrument to reflect his glory throughout eternity, and reach out and embrace with rejoicing the sufferings that he chooses to send, knowing that he knows what it will take to reveal his image and his glory in you, you have to confess this morning that you are an unpolished mirror to radiate Christ. I would ask him, are you willing to let him polish you so that his image can be seen in you? Are you willing? We pray, our Father, that the Spirit of God, who has revealed these truths from the words, may apply them to our hearts, that we might have a biblical attitude toward the test through which we go, to realize that thou art shaping, and molding, and refinishing, so that we can radiate and reflect the glory of Christ. Let thy blessing rest upon this congregation here assembled.

Give us a willingness to submit to God's polishing process, that we might be instruments to thy glory for time and for eternity. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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