

"Strange Things"

1 Peter 4:12 – 4:19

Pastor Tim Dodson

at Jesus Fellowship of Believers

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1 Peter 4:12 – 19

12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be

glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. 17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" 19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.



In Philippians 1:29, Paul declared, "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him."

We know that Peter wrote the whole of this letter to some suffering and persecuted believers. That reality has not changed, whereas even a cursory look at the world news today will confirm that being a Christian is still often a personally costly endeavor. The practice of "easy Jesus" is a purely western construct. We built it because we wanted Christ, eternal life, AND all the comforts that a first world western nation affords us. But it was never so biblically, historically, or via the teaching of Jesus.

We have a generation today who want church to be like a drive through a fast-food joint. Tasty, quick, inexpensive, and filling. Never mind that the food isn't any good for you and it will eventually contribute to killing you. We only care about *today*. There is a vast divide between the half of the church that wants to only GET from Jesus and His church, and the other half that is committed to serving Him and His church. To "further the kingdom of God." Therefore, within most every church one will find essentially two churches ... and we here in this fellowship are not any different. We seek to minister to everyone, but we also feel we have an obligation to provide for those who seek more than church attendance and the occasional group activity.

In the passage of the wedding feast in Matthew 22, we read that the event was made up only of those who truly wanted to be there. Those who made the time and gave priority to their participation. The others were left behind. To do otherwise would be to give priority to the spiritual lethargic...which is contrary to my directives as a pastor/shepherd, as well as our call to "make disciples." Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 "Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us."

Peter was preparing these believers for reality...he knew there would be difficulties, persecutions at times, and yes even sufferings. There are few benefits to such pains, except perhaps the power to separate the sheep from the goats. To differentiate between the wheat and the tares (weeds). For such times of trial will indeed come to us in this life, and how we deal with them speaks volumes concerning our heart...our true passion, and certainly concerning our commitment.

No one likes to acknowledge the reality of such testing. We generally prefer an "out of sight, out of mind" style of living when it comes to any sort of pain. But when the trials of life come down, we are then not ready to face them, and thus a lot of folks are taken out of the race because they are unable to endure. Nothing drives us more toward self-absorbed thought and self-centered priority than such times of testing. We can find ourselves in crisis and quickly go into "self-preservation" mode. And then it all becomes about us and us alone.

Peter tells his readers...*both then and now*, that we shouldn't be surprised by such intense periods of difficulty in our lives. This is a biblical fact and directive and yet many still promote an unbiblical prosperity doctrine ...a "Jesus-the-lucky-rabbit's-foot" faith that never holds up to the test of time despite its fleshly appealing aspect! We all want a world where Christianity is a bed of roses. But Christianity does not provide immunity from suffering. We must not be surprised if the world hates us...in fact, 1 Jn.3:13 says clearly "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you." We cannot be shocked when sickness or even death comes knocking.

How can we battle this earthly tendency to apathy and self? How do we protect ourselves from the danger of melt down in times of crisis? All of us will have hard times visit us. And because of that fact, we need to teach others to count the cost. Matthew 5:45 says "...*your Father in heaven... gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.*" What advantage...if any...is there then to walk through this life as a child of God? The most obvious is that you can then deal with such issues *alone* or *with God at your side*, but you *will* deal with them! Certainly an assurance of love no matter what arises produces a security in us.... this may not be true anywhere in your earthly realm, but it is true in the family of God.

The words "fiery trial" speaks of a great intensity -- a fiery ordeal. What the church was going through there in Peter's day must have been a very severe time of testing since they already had weathered other opposition; The only other NT usage of those words ... "fiery ordeal," are found in Rev. 18:9 in the burning of Babylon.

Note that we are clearly being called to do more than simply "overcome." We are audaciously told to actually "rejoice." No...not rejoice in the pain of the moment or the anguish of the situation. But rather rejoice that we are counted worthy of walking the same paths that Christ walked. Rejoice that we have somewhere to go in such times...someone with the power to actually intervene. Rejoice as we overcome...as we endure through the test. Rejoice because we are "still standing." Rejoice in the victory on the other side of the trial. Rejoice in the stronger and more intimate relationship with Christ that springs forth from passing through that fire together with Him. God's purpose is to make us like His Son; thus we must go thru same school of obedience (Heb. 5:8, Philip. 3:10-11)

We are...as true and faithful children of God, to have more than a passive surrender to such sufferings, but rather we are to "rejoice." That seems a lot to ask, and yet Peter is asking. Such serves as a litmus test of where we are on this faith journey. For to successfully pull this off, one must have died to the things of this world, and now desire to operate in a realm where "to live is Christ," with no reservation. Contrary to the message of the "I-need-to-feel-good-healing-ministries," Peter says we will be actually "reproached" for our stand in Christ and we will "suffer" for our stand on the gospel. It is natural in our flesh to want to feel good and avoid pain, but in reality, both real joy and real pain are overt aspects of the walk of a disciple. For many of us, it is an easy thing to walk with Christ when all is going well. Yet, Peter here in this letter and in fact the whole of the Bible, makes it clear that the committed disciple will indeed suffer earthly for his faith. By doing so, we share in Christ's being, and in His life.

Please note that God is not herein calling us to some sort of weird ritual masochistic living, where we don the biblical "sack cloth and ashes" and wail and mourn because we are Christians! Peter began this very letter back in chapter 1 verse 8, saying that God loves His children and brings a "joy inexpressible and full of glory." But with that other-world joy that we experience, also comes trials, tribulations and yes even persecutions at times. The ultimate question in this passage is can we find joy even in that? Is there a joy in sharing in the experience of Jesus? It's hard to imagine on this side of such an experience to be sure.

I'm not saying it is easy. It certainly isn't for me. That is why it is mandatory to be filled with the Spirit of God if we are to endure and moreover thrive as Peter is calling us to do. Church attendance alone will never do that for you. We must be in a walking and talking relationship with the Master. We must be in an active engagement of our faith and service. The reality is, many of us are only one personal crisis away from calling it quits.

While the truth of this passage may grate upon our fleshly tendencies, for the disciple it is a character element of our Savior that we are able to grab hold of and make it our own also. Again, it is not that we are to seek to suffer needlessly. We are not to try to be a self-proclaimed martyr. Christ does not desire that we seek to physically die for Him, but to physically live for Him! And if need be, we should be ready to die if it is required of us to remain true to the faith. Yet our desire must be to actually and dynamically live for Him, which in truth is the more difficult of the two!

A believer who seeks to walk as Jesus walked, must know that to spiritually trace His steps, is to walk a path of great joy and at the same time endure trials, difficulties, and even persecution. Even Peter...as he wrote this letter from Rome, was likely aware that martyrdom was imminently waiting for him, not perfect health, comfort and ease. For again it was soon after these letters that Peter was executed for his faith. History tells us that Peter would be crucified for his witness and his work for Christ.

Peter warns us then that faith suffering is nothing short of commendable conduct! Indeed, at times there is nothing righteous or blessed about our suffering if it is simply a consequence of our poor decisions and un-christlike behavior. Peter clarifies that we should never let it be said that we are suffering under a righteous persecution, if in truth we have found ourselves in such a state through sin or flesh decisions! Certainly it's a whole lot easier to claim we are being persecuted because of our righteous actions then to acknowledge the truth that we are under fire because we are being stupid, rebellious, nosey, or controlling.

Note the presence of the term and judgement of the individual verse 15 dubs a "meddler." The New American Standard uses the phrase "troublesome meddler." Other versions say "troublemaker" or "busybody." The text lumps together the sins of murder, theft, or evildoing, with that of a "busybody" ...a "meddler." It seems God takes such behavior quite seriously!

It is agape love that causes me to translate my God-given, Spirit anointed gifts into service to others. It's about them. Peter calls us to serve with anointed gusto...with all that we have and all that we are. And when we do, we likely will experience some "fiery trials." Because Jesus loved in that way, and He paid dearly for doing so! Such love has one overwhelming attribute, and that is it is sacrificial. It gives, even if and when it pains us.

In verse 17 Peter directs his word's right at us. We, *...the authentic body of Christ*, ...are being called out... into this path of Christ, this path of discipleship fires. We in the house of God are being held accountable. One of the purposes of such judgment (in the form of persecution) is to purify the church. The church will always serve to be a hospital to the lost, but it must never be satisfied with leaving people in the condition in which they came to the church. We must always accept in the sick and broken, but we must serve to heal and restore and make strong those who enter through its doors. If we simply accepted folks as they are and left them that way because it was easier, we wouldn't be much of a hospital!

Certainly we all understand that in order to heal and be restored in any hospital there is most often going to be some pain and discomfort involved. If such was not the case, we would effectively be a hospice, not a hospital. We can't just make people as comfortable as possible while they wait to die. The church must be able to be a holy example and a righteous witness to the lost. This then serves as a warning to the lost! For we in the church know better. We have been showed the path and have seen the light, thus we are "without excuse."

The point is that God's judgment is forever moving through the earth, and certainly the church does not escape. When the fire of judgment come upon the church, it is a testing, proving, purifying fire. Scripture tells us that those who remain are truly members of the church and those that endure to the end will be saved (Heb 3:6, 14).

If God sends trials to the church now, it is evidence that He will someday judge the lost. We have our trials now and our glory later; the lost have their glory now and their suffering later. The only heaven the lost sinner will know is on earth today! One day, a fiery judgment will overtake the whole world. Meanwhile, God's judgment begins "at the house of God," ...the church. This truth ought to motivate us to continually grow and mature...to be as pure and obedient as possible, both individually as well as corporately. Again, the fires of judgement and testing's that occur herein for believers are not for punishment but for refining. For "purification."

All of this passage comes down to verse 19. We know that the Word tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. Do we have such a faith today? Do we trust Him with the whole of our care? Are we willing to "commit the keeping of our souls to Him?" He, the very Creator of our being?

Persecution will either cause you to grow or grumble in the Christian life. It all depends on your response! Living in close proximity to Jesus Christ for more than three years had provided the apostle Peter the best possible example of what it looked like to live in holiness amid a hostile world. More than any other man who walked the earth, Jesus modeled that lifestyle. Peter therefore pointed his readers in the best possible direction, *to Jesus Himself*. The apostle called Christians to "sanctify Christ as Lord" in their hearts, that believers might live and act as Jesus desires during their short time here on earth. (Charles Swindall).

John Watson, in his book "Mind of the Master," summarized the rejection...the persecution and the trials of Christ in these words: "*He was exiled as soon as He was born; His townsmen would have killed Him; His brethren counted Him mad; the city of His mighty works did not believe; the multitudes He had helped forsook Him; the professional representatives of religion set themselves against Jesus, and pursued this holiest of men with ingenious slanders; He was a 'Samaritan' (or heretic) and 'had a devil'; He was a 'gluttonous man and a wine bibber,' and kept disreputable company; He was a blasphemer and deceiver. A huge conspiracy encompassed Him, and laboured for His death; one of His intimates betrayed Him; the priests of God produced false witnesses against Him; the people He loved clamoured for His death; the Roman power He had respected denied Him justice; He was sent to the vilest death. During this long ordeal His serenity was never disturbed; He was never angry save with sin. He never lost control of Himself or became the slave of circumstances. His bequest to the disciples was Peace, and He spake of Joy in the upper room. He was so lifted above the turmoil of this life, that Pilate was amazed; and, amid the agony of the Cross, He prayed for His enemies.*"

What will do when faced with the same?