

1 Peter

Week 9: Rejoicing in Trials -- 1 Peter 4:12–19

When something goes badly wrong in our lives, one of the first things we do, often without noticing, is ask whether it should be happening at all. We have a quiet assumption that if we are doing the right things, following God, trying to live well, then life should go reasonably smoothly. So when the fire comes anyway, a layer of confusion gets added on top of the pain. Not just, this hurts, but, this is not supposed to happen to me. Peter writes to take that second layer away.

“Beloved,” he says, and the warmth of that word matters, “do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” Do not be surprised. Suffering for the name of Christ is not a sign that something has gone wrong with your faith; it is, in a strange and difficult way, part of what it means to follow a crucified Lord. The fire is not a detour off the path. Sometimes it is the path.

And then Peter says something almost scandalous to our comfort-loving ears. He tells these suffering believers to rejoice. Not to grit their teeth and endure, but to rejoice, “insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” To suffer for Christ is to be drawn into fellowship with Him, to walk where He walked, and that fellowship is cause for joy even in the heat. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, Peter says, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

Peter is careful, though, not to glamorize all suffering. He draws a sharp line: make sure you are suffering as a Christian and not as a wrongdoer. There is no honor in suffering the consequences of our own sin. But when we suffer for bearing the name of Christ, we are not to be ashamed; we are to glorify God in that very name. And through it all, Peter says, we entrust our souls to “a faithful Creator while doing good.” So read this passage if you are in the fire now, or if you will be someday, which means read it carefully. It will not promise you an easy road. It will give you something better: a reason to rejoice on the hard one.

Group Discussion: Peter tells suffering believers not to be “surprised” by fiery trials, “as though something strange were happening to you” (v. 12). Why do we so often assume that following Christ should make life go smoothly? How does it change our experience of suffering when we stop being surprised by it?

Personal Reflection: Peter says that if we are insulted for the name of Christ, we are “blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (v. 14). Have you ever suffered, even in a small way, specifically because you belong to Christ? How did you handle it, and how might Peter’s words reframe it?

Read 1 Peter 4:12–19

Study Questions

1. Peter says not to be surprised at “the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (v. 12). What does this teach about the place of suffering in the normal Christian life, and why is suffering for Christ not a sign that something has gone wrong?
2. Peter assumes trials will come and warns us not to be caught off guard (v. 12). Are you living as though following Christ should guarantee a smooth life, so that hardship feels like a betrayal? How would bracing yourself with Peter’s realism change the way you face your next trial?
3. Peter says to “rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed” (v. 13). What does it mean to “share Christ’s sufferings,” and how can a Christian genuinely rejoice in suffering rather than merely endure it?
4. Peter speaks of rejoicing even in the fire (v. 13). Joy in suffering sounds impossible until we have tasted it. Where in your life right now do you most need to learn this kind of joy, and what would it look like to seek joy in Christ in the middle of a hard situation, not only after it?
5. Peter says, “If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (v. 14). What does it mean that the Spirit of God rests on those who suffer for Christ, and how does this turn shame and insult into blessing?
6. Peter draws a sharp line between suffering as a Christian and suffering “as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler” (v. 15). Are you sometimes tempted to wear self-inflicted trouble as if it were persecution? Where do you need to take honest responsibility rather than claim the honor of suffering for Christ?
7. Peter says, “If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name” (v. 16). What does it mean to glorify God in the very midst of suffering for His name, and why does Peter say we should not be ashamed?
8. Peter calls us not to be “ashamed” when we suffer as Christians (v. 16). Where does the fear of being embarrassed, mocked, or thought strange make you hide your faith or soften your witness? What would it look like to glorify God in that name instead?
9. Peter says, “It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God,” and asks what the end will be for those who do not obey the gospel, adding, “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly?” (vv. 17–18). What does this teach about God’s purpose in the suffering of His people, the seriousness of obeying the gospel, and the call to remain faithful?
10. Look back over the whole passage. Peter calls suffering believers to expect trials, to rejoice in sharing Christ’s sufferings, to glorify God without shame, and to entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good (v. 19). Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Peter 4:12–19 you most need to carry into this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Acts 5:41, the apostles rejoicing to be counted worthy to suffer for the name; Romans 8:16–18, present sufferings not worth comparing to coming glory; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18, light, momentary affliction preparing an eternal weight of glory; Matthew 5:10–12, the blessing on those persecuted for righteousness; James 1:2–4, counting trials as joy because they produce steadfastness