

# THIS WEEK WITH HIM...

Part of being well-armed for imitating Christ when surrounded by evil is learning to think right when being rejected and when suffering. Peter had to learn this. He hadn't done so well early on. He became very good at it. His instruction is priceless!

## Work through these questions 1 Peter 4:12-19 raises.

(Kyle's sermon and Pastor Bob's commentary below will help you.)

1. Persecution has not been a part of the surprises of the last four months in the U.S. But there have been many surprises. What are some of the things that have surprised you that should not have? Why?
2. As you listened to the explanation or Peter's words in these verses, did you become aware of some of expectations you have of life and of the Lord that need to be changed? What is at stake in you making these changes?
3. Can you identify some things about God that should give you joy that surpasses all other joy life gives you? Why don't they?
4. Identify a time when you suffered because you were a Christian. What were some things about that experience that were your own fault? What part of it came about just because you are a follower of Jesus?
5. What has the Spirit led you to do in the past that you intentionally avoided because you might be ridiculed? How can you change that in the future?

# A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

This is a faith-building activity. It is a “do-you-believe-this exercise”! It will help you process some of the most difficult things in life, like having your identity stolen, or being a victim of severe and devastating injustice and deceit, or being a victim of abuse, or being taken advantage of in some other way.

Read Isaiah 2:12-22. It’s really sobering! It talks about a “day” Yahweh has scheduled in His plan to confront evil and deal with it once-for-all. Much of your processing of your own life and all that happens on this planet will be helped by knowing this Scripture. Read these verses several times. Do you trust that God has such a day and that it will happen? There are many situations in life when we feel and behave as if we do not believe this. To trust in this “day” changes everything!

All through the Scripture this “day” is spoken of as earth’s hope of escaping the horrible curse of evil. The “day” is actually a season of time, likely a little over 1,000 years long. Jesus will be visibly present on earth and rule earth by His standards of justice and fairness. The book of Revelation is about this period of time. Renew your trust often in this certainty that God has assured us of repeatedly! Remember, when God’s plan is done, every injustice will have been made right. And better, at the end of that day Yahweh’s right judgment will stand for all of eternity.

## 1 PETER COMMENTARY

**4:12—“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;”**

The exact and precise circumstances that Peter is addressing here are unknown to us. Since it was “among” them, and since “they” included a number of churches spread throughout a geographical region, we do suspect that it was one of a number of periods of persecution that arose against the early church.

History has a way of assigning names and dates to such things. But to the readers of this letter it was simply an ordeal. It is described as a “fiery ordeal.” We don’t know if that was because it involved actual fire or because that word describes well its intensity. Literal fire could have marked it. Perhaps property had been burned, or people had been burned. Both have been common methods of humanity in reacting to and seeking to stamp out new movements and beliefs. The word *purse* (fiery—rendered “painful” in the NIV), has a figurative usage of a difficult but refining experience. It is used literally in its only other usage in the New Testament (Revelation 18:9,18).

Peter's words in this verse remind the readers of two important ideas. First, God has a purpose in allowing such "ordeals." They are to test us. Whenever the Bible speaks of us being tested, it is not a test orchestrated by God so that He Himself can learn about what's inside us. He knows all things and He sees hearts. He does not need such a test. The word used by Peter for "ordeal," is *peirasmon*, meaning to put to the test or to prove. We know by how this word is used elsewhere of trials (James 1:2 for example), that such tests are allowed so that our faith might be documented, that is, officially certified by all who might care to examine, as genuine and authentic. Again, the object is not to certify our faith so that God knows. He is omniscient. God's purpose in allowing such trials is that our faith will be proved genuine to others and exhibited as such throughout all of eternity. We will be exhibits in God's behalf of His ability to bring about genuine faith in people who had been under evil's control, and so prove His greatness and sovereignty over all.

The second important idea that Peter's words remind us of is that such trials should not surprise us or seem strange and out of the ordinary to us. The truth never stands on equal footing to be judged by the same standard as pseudo truth in the kingdom of evil. The rule of this world is that every other lifestyle and every other philosophy must be approached with tolerance and open mindedness. Not so with Christianity, and that should not surprise us or seem strange to us. As John wrote, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Because this is true, having to witness and endure a "fiery ordeal," while painful and even agonizing, should not be surprising.

This agrees with the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 5:12-15). Peter wanted his readers to understand that while such things are abnormal in terms of God's standard of justice and should never happen, they should not lead us to conclude that God has lost control. They should in fact confirm His word which repeatedly warns that this will be our experience in this world (John 16:33).

It is likely best to understand suffering and trial as having its immediate source in Satan. He is permitted to bring it about only to the degree that such a thing brings about something that in the end serves God's purpose and can be shown to be beneficial in the eternal sense to us. Satan means it for harm. In fact, he intends it for destruction, so it is cruel and severe and dangerous. God will ultimately conform it to His purposes and work it around for our eternal benefit. He will reward us for all eternity for the thing our suffering accomplished.

There is perhaps no more accurate picture of God's immense power than His ability to bring good from His allowance of evil. The focus of the following instructions of Peter will show that this is exactly the thinking that should carry us through trial. The revelation of Jesus Christ as the ruler and judge of the world will be the event that will make all wrongs right. It will be at this time that good is brought about by God in the personal lives of all who have suffered and the testimony of all living things will be that he is good and that He has been good even though allowing evil.

**4:13—"but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation."**

The principle that God is a righteous judge is a very important one that the early church embraced in trial (see 2:23, 4:19). We must believe in both God's ability and His intention to make all wrongs right. We must believe that this is more than a concept with Him. There is an appointed day when it will happen (Isaiah 2:12-22). It is a scheduled event. All who have trusted this great fact and so waded in and taken their lumps will be rewarded. If we have courts that enforce payment for damages how much more the all-knowing all-powerful judge! This is a certainty, and we must embrace it.

Therefore, to the degree to which we suffer as Christ did, to bring about through our lives His plan, we will be filled with joy by our reward on the day appointed by God for the unveiling of Christ as the ruler of creation. A new era will be established on that day with new standards of right and wrong, justice and injustice. There will be a new order in which the meek will inherit the earth, those who have pursued righteousness will be the one's filled, and those cast aside in this world will be embraced by Christ as His leaders (Matthew 5:1-12). Therefore, when we suffer in this life, we are commanded by Peter to rejoice.

Such willingness to suffer and persist in trial is the means by which we share in all that belongs to Christ. To him who has such faith and commitment more will be given. That is a principle that relates to truth in this life and reward in the next (Matthew 13:10-17, Matthew 25:24-30, Mark 4:24-25, Luke 8:18, 19:11-26).

#### **4:14—“If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”**

Being reviled, or rejected because of our beliefs is one of the experiences that Christians hold in common. This is not to say we should not work hard at articulating our faith in a way that does not cause undue offense. But we should always remember that when God became a human and articulated the faith to perfection, He was reviled. That has been the most common reaction to the truth and it has been the reaction of the world to some of the greatest and best men and women that have lived.

Peter said that those who experience this rejection are blessed. He heard this word used by Jesus (Matthew 5:1-12). It is the word from which our word “happy” eventually evolved. So Peter says that this rejection is really something that should produce a positive emotion in us. I don't believe he means by this that we should have a happy-go-lucky attitude about people rejecting the truth. There is a proper heaviness and burden that comes over us when we see people journeying away from the truth. That burden is appropriate.

But Peter explains why we can find good news in the midst of this negative experience. The good news is the presence in us of the One who led us to live out and articulate the truth so that others rejected us. It was a certain spirit that engineered and brought about our transformation. Peter refers to this spirit as the Spirit “of glory and of God.” This is a profound choice of words that, like all of Scripture, was not accidental. The word order of this phrase in the Greek text is “the of glory and of God Spirit . . .” The syntax of this phrase combined with our theology derived from the rest of the testimony of Scripture, suggests the following rendering of this verse: “the Spirit that produces the glory that is of God, rests on you.” The word glory itself means weighty or significant. The word glory in this context (see 4:11,13), refers to the wonderfully just, orderly, beautiful, majestic and right state of things in the presence of God. The Spirit of God, the one who orchestrates this justice and orderliness and beauty that is present in God, is the one who is resting on us. We can be certain that even in the chaos, He is moving, as in Genesis 1:2. The result will be that glory will be produced once His actions are fully completed and revealed.

Part of the glory He is orchestrating is our character and our eternal reward. This will be included in the “new reality,” when the true nature of all things is unveiled and all the various masks torn off on the appointed day of Jesus Christ. That will be a day of glory for all who have trusted the truth and a day of horror for those who have rejected it. The lines are being drawn now. We can begin to taste what that day will reveal by the response of people to us. We must mature beyond needing to belong and beyond the self-consciousness and embarrassment brought about by rejection. When we are burdened for those rejecting truth and when at the same time that experience becomes a reminder of the glory of having the truth, we are processing rejection properly.

**4:15—“By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;”**

God puts no premium on suffering in itself. It is not a glory to suffer consequences of foolish and sinful actions. We must not fall into the trap of twisting our self-motivated misdeeds into Spirit-directed behavior and then comfort ourselves with the idea that we are suffering because we are being directed by the Spirit of God. Scores of people have fallen into this trap of Satan because they have not governed actions they contemplate by the standard of the written word. They are then “led” into all manner of sinful actions, some of which are noted by Peter here. They range from murder to being a trouble-maker. They are all borne out of failing to love the truth, which translates into a love of darkness.

Satan loves zeal. It is because it can easily be channeled into lawlessness. We must rule ourselves by submitting our inner leadings to the scrutiny of the sword of the Spirit, Scripture, and to the people of the Spirit, the Church’s leaders. Then we can be assured that our chosen path is of the Spirit not simply of a spirit (see 1 John 4:1 and the entire message of 1 John where walking in the light, which is truth, is the theme). Many Christians have been ruined and lost their reward because their zeal got out of hand and their own emotions gave Satan a great opportunity. This is how the Church has been led into things like the inquisitions, the crusades, and the selling of indulgences. It is how presently some Christian’s zeal for the lives of the unborn, a very legitimate concern, have led them to abusive speech and even acts of violence. We must stand for the truth, but we must be ruled by truth in our inner beings and accept the truth about what is at any moment really motivating us.

**4:16—“But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.”**

It is a wonderful thing to be labeled as a Christian. Christian means “of or pertaining to Christ.” There could be no greater compliment than to be associated with Him and have His name attached to you. It is proof that in some way others are seeing Christ in you. You are either intentionally aligning yourself with Him verbally or by how you behave. Either way is good though the latter is the supreme compliment.

There are places today, and there have always been those places, where nothing more is required than to be associated with Christ, and it is enough to be persecuted. Suffering has been perhaps the experience that has been most common to Christians of different cultures and eras.

But there is one thing that has comforted all those in the generations since Christ that have suffered. It has been that to be a Christian shows that God has done a great work in you. That you came to hear, understand, recognize and embrace the truth about yourself and Christ is proof of a very great work that God has carried out in you. It means that you are the objects of His special love and care. You are in covenant relationship with Him. He has embraced all that you are as His own and you in turn have free access to all that He is and has. It means you have a certain and wonderful destiny.

All this happens because you are a Christian, a believer in Christ. Each time you are reminded of that, no matter how the reminder is intended, you should glorify God for all that it means, because it is the greatest of blessings. It is security, the right kind of achievement. It is to have freedom, liberty and everything else that really matters.

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

The death of Christ marked the beginning of judgment (John 12:27-36, 16:5-11). The judgment against the work of Satan that he had perpetuated in humankind had occurred and the sentence against it carried out in the death of Christ. That was the act that allowed all who would believe in Christ to be forgiven, to enter into relationship with God. Their sins were laid on Christ, judged by God and punished so that they can be blotted out. The result is that all who believe enter into relationship with Him. They begin a process whereby He seeks to weed out the habits that their slavery to sin had established. Their thinking patterns and behavior patterns come under God’s judgment. The Holy Spirit’s conviction gives impetus to this process.

The nation of Israel also came under judgment in the work of Christ’s death. Those who had been special objects of His love, who had been referred to throughout the Old Testament continually as His household, were now being set aside for a season of judgment. This was because they had added to their sins of rebellion their rejection of Christ as their Messiah. They would go through a period of centuries when all the curses associated with violation of the Old Covenant would be carried out against them (Deuteronomy 28). It would be a season of calamity and tragedy that Jesus had spoken of to the disciples (Luke 19:41-44, 23:28-30).

We err today in our common belief that God was concerned only with the “elect” in Israel. While it is true that only those will be saved, He viewed them all in a special way and holds them responsible for the truth they were entrusted with. So judgment had begun with the household of God. Christians today experience God’s mercy and grace, but also His displeasure with sin. His hand is extended into their lives to separate them from the evil that was a part of their past.

This is the primary activity of God that Peter is referring to here, as proven by his statement regarding those who reject the gospel. Their judgment will come later, and his words reflect a shuddering at the thought of the intensity of that judgment. Since God knows the secret sins of all and zealously addresses them in the lives of His own, who can imagine the intensity of His pursuit of the wicked when the time for their judgment arrives? Peter leaves the question unanswered. It is sobering.

**4:18—“And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the Godless man and the sinner?”**

This is a summary and re-expression of the thought recorded in Proverbs 11:31. It is similar to the thought expressed by Jesus while in route to the cross when He addressed those who mourned His fate and expressed their grief at His judgment (Luke 23:31).

Humanity’s salvation is a dilemma. It is such a great one that it can only be solved by God. Salvation is never represented as being easy in the Scripture. It is not easy for God and it is not easy for humankind. The lost are truly lost and there is absolutely no hope for them. Only by the special intervention of God can the “righteous” be saved. In other words, humanity’s righteousness is not enough. They fall short. They are “good” in the sense that they accept the truth as God has revealed it about themselves and about God. But as “good” as that is, it would not be enough to save them had Christ not died and paid the penalty for their sin. So great is the evil and “lostness” of even the so-called righteous, that it cannot be overlooked by God. The demand of justice has to be met, and humankind on their own can not meet it. It is too difficult.

God did what humankind could not possible do and so there came to be a new class of people whom God viewed as righteous, those who accept the truth about this dilemma and God's solution to it. These are saved by their faith. Their salvation is difficult in this sense.

The salvation of those who separate themselves from God and reject His truth is simply impossible. There is no basis for it, there is nothing to which they can appeal. They have rejected their only hope for salvation, the only possible course of action that could have saved them. Their fate is heart-breaking, but is their own doing. Though we do not see or understand the particulars of God's dealings with them, we know that they have not responded to the truth He has exposed them to. Whether a large or small amount, they have done nothing with it, and so have chosen to be godless and so will be separated from God for eternity.

**4:19—“Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”**

God can be trusted in the matter of our salvation from sin. He is in fact, the only hope we have in solving that dilemma. To not trust Him is to not be saved. The same is true of our rescue from our present sufferings. Whatever God's design is in allowing our pain, His justice will be served in the end. Because His justice cannot be violated and because even in the case of the “righteous,” He overlooks nothing, we can be certain that evil done against us will not be overlooked. We can trust Him as both our defender and our judge.

Even Christ had to exercise this “faith not sight” mentality. This mentality was the persistent practice of obeying God, though it produced in humans a reaction that was personally harmful. It was trusting that God will in the end right all wrongs. And so in our imitation of Jesus we must persist in obeying God through times of suffering. That is Peter's message to his readers. God is watching and He will reward you and will judge your antagonists.