

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

JULY 24 - 28, 2023

Sermon Series 5.28 - 8.13

FORGED

IN THE FURNACE

MONDAY

Read **1 Peter 4:7-11**

Preparation for Suffering

Peter, having told us in the first six verses of chapter 4 what “*living for Christ*” does NOT look like (“*evil human desires*,” “*doing what the pagans choose to do*,” etc.), now switches to the positive in telling his readers to be aware that this world is not all there is, and that we need to prepare for the “end.” We do this as followers of Christ by living today as if tomorrow were indeed the end. What an amazing perspective!

Peter suggests that, for the true believer, this includes at least FOUR things. The first is to be “*clear minded*.” Isn’t it interesting that he starts there? This is a reminder that Jesus told us to love the Lord with our mind (Mark 12:30), and Paul urges us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2).

But then we also need to be “*self-controlled*” since submission to God’s will for our lives means a willingness to control desires and attitudes that may run counter to that. Once our minds and passions are in order, we can then pray, since prayer needs to be approached in humility that it is truly God’s will that we desire for our lives—His will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

How can we be sure that all of the above are true of us—when we offer our “*bodies as living sacrifices*” (Romans 12:1-2) presenting back to God the gifts with which He has endowed us. Peter gives us a fairly abbreviated list of spiritual gifts (see also 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4), but hospitality, service, and preaching/speaking are simply expressions of what God’s grace looks like “in its various forms.”

Peter is about to transition into a much more somber section of his epistle, but there is no use talking about suffering for Christ if we are not already showing evidence that we belong to Him. Counterfeits abound! There are hypocrites on every corner! Peter wants to be sure that we have the basics right; otherwise, as we will see through the rest of 1 Peter, we may suffer for being “a pain in the neck” rather than for being committed Christians!

QUESTIONS

In what ways have you been challenged to be clear-minded and have self-control in “living a life for Christ”?

PRAYERS

For *Ethnos Asia Ministries*

Ethnos Asia, headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand, is an organization founded by Asian missionaries to serve churches in the restricted-access countries of Southeast Asia. Christians in these countries are often seriously restricted by governmental policies and persecuted by anti-Christian radicals. Pray that the Ethnos Asia leaders will have God’s vision and wisdom for doing His work.

TUESDAY

Read **1 Peter 4:12**

Inevitability of Suffering

If God is to be praised “*in all things*” (v. 11), then we need to note that when “painful trials” happen, it should not be a cause for surprise. To listen to some (false) teachers, one would think that following Jesus ensured health, wealth, and prosperity, surrounded by roses and amazing music! Yet, of course, even a cursory study of Jesus’ teachings reveals that this is not what He promised His disciples.

Consider how the person who introduced Jesus as a Man, John the Baptist, was cruelly put to death with Jesus not acting to save him, although it broke His heart (Matthew 14:1-13). Think of the Beatitude where Jesus taught that we are blessed when persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Matthew 5:10). And who can forget Jesus telling His disciples that following Him would involve taking up a cross and perhaps losing their lives (Luke 9:23)—which is exactly what happened to many of them?

Peter is authentic when he tells his readers that suffering for following Jesus is inevitable. Jesus’ half-brother, James, even suggested that we should “*count it pure joy*” when suffering for Jesus’ sake (James 1:2), because suffering teaches us so many important lessons. Peter advises that it should not be “*strange*” that we suffer for following Jesus. Christians in many parts of our world experience this lesson daily.

As society grows from being disinterested “non-Christians” to being aggressively “anti-Christians,” Christ followers will find ourselves the target of painful trials. This happens already in the West; when we stand on the Bible’s authority, society is increasingly inclined to label our views as “hate speech.”

The immediate human temptation is to adjust our teaching or ideology to accommodate a godless culture, or at least minimize being antagonistic to others. We must hold firmly to the position that if God has deemed something good, it IS good. Conversely, if God declares something evil and wrong, we are being rebellious if we sin anyway. The world may think we are “strange,” but God is good and sovereign and He smiles on His children if we trust Him as our Father!

QUESTIONS

How have you experienced antagonism from non-Christians?
What helps you to resist the temptation to adjust your belief in the truth of God’s Word in a godless culture?

PRAYERS

For Ethnos Asia Ministries

The population of the Isaan region of Northeast Thailand is 22 million; 0.2% are Christians. During August 2023 the “Revival Inside to Reach Outside” campaign will be started in Isaan. Churches will be mobilized to simultaneously “blitz” their communities with praise, prayer and preaching the gospel. Pray for Christians to be bold witnesses and for many to be saved.

WEDNESDAY

Read **1 Peter 4:13-16**

Response to Suffering

We saw yesterday that painful trials are the reality of being a follower of Jesus. Peter continues in this passage of Scripture to expound on how we, as disciples of Jesus, should respond to such suffering. Amazingly, the response includes words like “rejoice,” “blessed” and “praise”—hardly the words that spring first to mind when we are going through difficult times! Yet, note why it is possible to have that mindset.

First of all, such trials show that we “*participate in the sufferings of Christ*” (v. 13). Now, of course, we cannot literally share the horror that Jesus experienced on the cross, but we will recall that Jesus used the imagery of “*taking up a cross*” to describe the Christian walk. He knew that we would face opposition and ridicule. He understood that most of His disciples were going to be martyred for their faith. He mapped out very clearly that to follow Him was going to be a sacrifice; Paul, Peter, James and John all echo this same sentiment in their writings.

Secondly, Peter says that being insulted because of the name of Christ is evidence that “*the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you*” (v. 14). When we are insulted—for the right reason and not because we deserve it—it is proof that we are faithfully “*bearing the name*” (v. 16) of Christ in a lost world. The implication of this Scripture is that if this

is not happening, we should look very closely at how we are living. If the world cannot see the difference between us and the godless people around us, then there is definitely something wrong.

Historically, there were clear attributes differentiating those who professed faith in Christ and the “heathens”—the role of the Sabbath, church attendance, language, alcohol, marriage in the church, and many other “expectations of believers.” With changing times, these are less obvious, and so there is even a greater responsibility for unbelievers to be a Christian witness through our love, our lifestyle, our attitudes, and our acts of mercy.

We would do well to follow Paul’s exhortation to young Timothy when directing him to be an example for the believers by demonstrating Christlikeness “*in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity*” (1 Timothy 4:12). When suffering comes, our response must be to act like Christ in these areas. The world will take note!

QUESTIONS

Can you name someone in your life who is a great example of responding to trials with rejoicing, praising God, and feeling blessed in spite of the difficult circumstances?

PRAYERS

For Ethnos Asia Ministries

Pray for Karen tribal refugees who have fled persecution in Myanmar and are now living in refugee camps along the Thai border. Forty-three youth leaders from these camps recently completed a leadership training program sponsored by Ethnos Asia. Pray that they will become effective leaders who impact their communities.

THURSDAY

Read **1 Peter 4:17-18**

Suffering Identifies Us

Peter then goes on to share with us a very important but hard-hitting point. Just in case we are tempted to become proud like the Pharisee who compared himself to the poor man, we are reminded that committing our lives to a personal relationship with Jesus does not give us a “Get Out of Jail” card to live as we like for the rest of our time on earth. We are reminded that judgment will “*begin with the family of God*” (v. 17a).

Just what does Peter mean? Simply, as Paul reminds the Corinthians, “*We must ALL appear before the judgment seat of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Yes, it is true that if we are truly children of God who are persevering to the end, this is not a “sheep and goats” judgment to decide whether or not we gain access to heaven. But it IS a time when we will have to give account to God for how we lived as His disciples in those areas that Peter outlined earlier in this chapter. Were our minds devoted to the things of Christ? Did we allow the Spirit to fill us so that we were self-controlled at all times? How deep was our relationship with God in prayer? To what extent did we offer back to God the spiritual gifts that He gave us to be used for His Kingdom and His glory?

We are reminded that even if we get all these things in place and are “righteous,” that is not what gets us into heaven. It is only the blood of Jesus that takes away sin, not our “good works”— important as those are after we come to faith in Christ. So Peter uses this as a warning to those who “*do not obey the gospel of God*” (v. 17b).

All of Scripture is clear that there will one day be a separation between those who have loved and followed Christ faithfully and those who have rejected Him. One of the amazing “benefits” of suffering is that it uniquely identifies believers since Satan does not need to cause trials to an individual who is already under his control. Persecution should, in fact, be a badge of honour for believers since it declares that we are indeed the “genuine article” as followers of a risen Christ.

QUESTIONS

When you are reminded that judgment will “*begin with the family of God,*” what is your response?

PRAYERS

For Ethnos Asia Ministries

China’s updated anti-espionage law has sparked worries for Christian leaders, as it gives the government more authority to crack down on perceived threats to national security. The law’s vague wording and increased discretion for authorities creates a danger for any innocent party. Pray for wisdom for Christian leaders and for God’s protection over them.

FRIDAY

Read **1 Peter 4:19**

Divine Appointment in Suffering

Peter finishes this section of Scripture with a powerful truth when he speaks about suffering “*according to God’s will*” (v. 19a). At first, this seems a tough pill to swallow. Does God really WANT us to suffer? Well, if we understand the sovereignty of God correctly, we will know that NOTHING can happen to us as believers that is outside of the Lord’s control. That means that just as we adults will sometimes stand by and watch while little children experience some of the cuts and bruises of growing up (loving them and comfortng them afterwards), God knows that our faith will be strengthened when it is tested.

Paul reminds us that we have been given a spiritual armor to withstand “*the devil’s schemes*” (Ephesians 6:11), but nowhere are we told that we can avoid the battle. That doesn’t mean we will enjoy it. Even Jesus asked the Father if there was any other way apart from the cross when He prayed in Gethsemane.

Notice how Peter says we must respond to the fact that there is a divine appointment in suffering: “**commit**” and “**continue.**” As in any battle, the soldier is required to have a commitment to the task, despite any temptation that may come to run away and hide.

Likewise, no battle is won unless the soldier continues until victory is won. So we are told here, first of all, to commit to the “Creator.” God is the One who made us and therefore has the divine right to demand of us whatever He chooses for His purposes. To make this a reality, we are “*a new creation*” (2 Corinthians 5:17) so that the indwelling Holy Spirit equips us to be and do whatever we need to be and do.

Peter then says, “... *continue to do good*” (v. 19b). He is not talking about people in the world who appear to “do good” as a means of being recognized, or praised, or even earning some kind of credit from the Almighty. No, the apostle is addressing directly those who are already a new creation, who have the marks of suffering to prove it, and who are pressing on “*toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:14). Simply, do good to the end!

QUESTIONS

What helps you to accept the divine appointment in suffering: “*commit to the Creator*” and “*continue to do good*”?

PRAYERS

For Ethnos Asia Ministries

The Ethnos Asia U.S. office is sponsoring a Southern California conference on September 16, 2023, to inform its supporters about its current work in Asia. Pray that attendees will gain a stronger vision for God’s work. Pray for quick processing of Visa requests for Ethnos Asia workers who are coming from Asia.



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