

“Trials and Rewards of an ‘Alien’ Lifestyle”

1 Peter 4:12-19

Last week we were in 1 Pet. 2:11-12 where Peter describes us as ‘aliens’ and ‘strangers’. ‘Alien’ refers to one who lives in a foreign country who does not have the right of citizenship there. If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Saviour, we are citizens of heaven. That is our true home, the place of your citizenship. Since we now know God we have renounced our citizenship on earth.

However, we still live here. So ‘stranger’ means we temporarily live with people whom we don’t belong to. Citizens of heaven who live temporarily on earth, should demonstrate by our lifestyles that we are from heaven. That means we should continually work at abstaining/separating ourselves from the sinful temptations this foreign to God lifestyle offers here. In 2:11 we studied

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

Abstaining from sin is an ongoing battle for us aliens because we’re surrounded by sin. We still have a sin nature. Sin is everywhere. We might be tempted to ignore or even speak against the citizens of earth who reject Jesus and speak maliciously of us but instead Peter exhorts us in 2:12 to live a beneficial life even towards the unsaved. We saw that in 2:12:

¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

A non-retaliatory lifestyle (like Jesus’ showed us) may actually be the means towards their being saved. And Peter applied that to the main areas of our life in 2:13-4:11. In 2:13-17 he says this is how you we should respond to authority. In 2:18-25 he says this is what an alien lifestyle looks like on your job. In 3:1-7 he says this is what an alien lifestyle looks like in your marriage and home. In 3:8-4:11 he says this is what an alien lifestyle looks like between fellow believers.

And now in 4:12-19 he tells us what we can expect from this kind of lifestyle. The trials we’ll experience but also the rewards of living an alien lifestyle. Trials? I thought if we put our faith in Jesus our life would be problem free and that my faith in Jesus assures me of a healthy and wealthy life? No. Don’t expect what’s waiting for us in eternity to be here now. That will happen in a sinless environment. We’re not there yet. We’re still surrounded by sin. It’s not easy living an ‘alien’ lifestyle. So Peter has told us a few times already in his letter that we will suffer various trials and verbal abuse from those who don’t know Jesus. So he tells us:

Stop Being Surprised When You Experience Trials **(4:12)**

There’s a few of ways of saying something negative in the Greek. One could simple say ‘don’t take those cookies’. One can say ‘Never even let the idea about taking a cookie enter your mind’. Or we could say ‘Stop taking those cookies.’ And that implies that you are taking cookies and you need to stop doing that.

Is it not interesting that this is how Peter tells us to not be surprised when we experience a difficulty as a Christian in this life? Peter knows personally as well as from interacting with other believers that most of us are still surprised when something negative happens to us. Most of the time when we think and even say ‘Lord, why is this happening?’, we are implying that the trial is strange to being a believer. But he intentionally uses the same word for ‘strange’ (stranger) to grab our attention. You’re a stranger here, so it’s not strange when you encounter trials; especially suffering for Jesus.

We’re not from here (v.12a; 1:1; 2:11-12; 4:4)

He reminded his audience from 1:1 that they were strangers in the world, scattered throughout ancient Turkey. Scattered because of widespread persecution of followers of Jesus that started in Jerusalem area and was now spreading further. Even though Paul was no longer Saul, persecution continued.

This was the early 60’s AD. Nero had risen to power. Because most of the persecution mentioned in this letter is verbal, most feel it is before the burning of Rome when Nero blamed the Christians and started burning them alive and throwing them to the lions. It was either just at the beginning of that time or just prior.

And of course last week’s passage in 2:11-12 mentioned them as aliens and strangers. But look at 4:4 just a few verses back from our passage. Listen to Peter’s wording here:

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. ²As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.

The unbelievers were mocking the believers who thought their lifestyle was now ‘strange/alien’ because they were no longer participating in the sinful lifestyles as they once were. Which was a backward complement. ‘You guys are aliens now.’ “Why thank you!” If we don’t want to be persecuted for our faith then act like the rest of the world. But according to 1:1-2 we are God’s elect chosen for obedience to Jesus Christ.’

Peter didn’t always feel this way. After Peter answered Jesus’ question ‘Who do you think I am?’ and Peter correctly answered the Christ/Messiah, Jesus went on to say that He would suffer and die. So,

²² *Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”*

²³ *Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”*

²⁴ *Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. ²⁶What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.*

Peter has learned now and grown in his faith to realize trials are part of life; persecution is part of the Christian life. But they are not meaningless. So he goes on to say in 4:13,

¹³ *But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

Don't be surprised that we are being persecuted for our faith or that we go through "painful ordeals". This is a fallen world so if we live in fallen world we will receive our share of difficulties. But as a believer in Christ, we have a different perspective. Because we believe in a sovereign God and we understand from His Word that

God is testing the genuineness of our faith (v.13; 1:6-9)

Remember the beginning of this letter. Peter praised God for the great salvation we have, kept in heaven for us

⁶In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

And here he reminds them and us that we should

But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed

Rejoice has the idea of inner confidence in spite of outer turmoil. Jesus suffered and is now in glory. We will suffer but glory awaits us. What happens to us has a purpose; God is shaping us more into His son, who suffered more than us and , as Peter said in 2:21-22 left us an example to follow in His steps. Especially when it comes to being reviled for being His followers. Stop being surprised at trials, instead keep on rejoicing, remaining confident in god's purpose and plan because it has a great end and is achieving His purpose for us. He continues on this rejoicing theme and encourages us to

Maintain a Joy-filled Future Perspective on Trials **(4:13-14)**

Peter goes on to essentially say that persecution,

Show that we're truly following Jesus (v.13)

The reason we can rejoice is because we know what the future holds for Jesus' followers. He rose from the dead, we'll rise from the dead. He's in glory working on our heavenly accommodations according to John 14.

²In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

This is the future perspective we're to keep in mind when we are ridiculed for being a Jesus' follower. And we have to keep a future perspective because that's when we'll be vindicated.

But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Not now, then. Which makes it hard for us. But we can be confident now because

Our future vindication is assured (v.14)

¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you

“If” in the Greek is what they call a 1st class conditional statement. First class “if” means ‘if and you know it is happening’; better translated ‘since’ you are being insulted for the name of Christ, then God is blessing you. His Spirit gives you His peace. He’s got you and He’s not letting go.

Peter of course was there when Jesus gave the blessings, the beatitudes. Jesus said

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Great is your reward in heaven. Future. Delayed gratification. We are blessed now in God’s eyes because He’s reassuring us that we are secure in Him. He never leaves us nor forsakes us. We will suffer and be insulted for Jesus so don’t be surprised and stop looking for rewards here. Sometimes they come as blessings from God, but the real rewards are not here. They are in our future home.

Peter reminds his readers that not all suffering is spiritual. Some of it is because of our own disobedience.

If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Peter encourages all believers when we are insulted for following Jesus to remember,

There’s No Shame in Suffering for Christ **(4:15-19)**

We can feel shamed by people who have no regard for Jesus and therefore no regard for us. We feel this now. Unfortunately, our society has been persuaded that anyone who opposes their beliefs or opinions are hate-mongers and racists. Which of course is not true. Ironically the hatred spewed by those towards Christians is hypocritically harsh. Yet Jesus modelled love without tolerating sin when He refused to participate in the stoning of the adulterous woman. However, He did tell her not to sin anymore. Love, yes. Tolerate sexual immorality, no.

When we follow Jesus’ example of being reviled without hurting back,

God is being glorified ***(vv.15-16)***

God isn’t glorified if we sin and get punished for it. Notice Peter starts with the extreme to the average. ‘Murder, theft, and lawbreaking activity and then meddling. What does meddling mean? It means to feel superior to others and express your opinion about things that don’t concern you. So if

we felt we could bypass because we're not murderers, thieves or law breakers, Peter gets us with meddling. Yeah, if people call you out because you're opinionated about things you're not an expert on then that doesn't glorify God. But if you do actually get reviled because of your love for Jesus, then you have no need to be ashamed. The world will try and shame you because you're not like them, but that's okay. God is watching and He knows when He gets the glory.

Vv.17-18 may seem puzzling but its actually encouraging:

17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

"For" gives another reason we are persecuted. God is using persecution and trials now to conform us into Jesus, which is His ultimate plan for us. Therefore, this is

The worst thing that will ever happen to you (vv.17-18)

As believers our future is secure. We are spared from God's wrath and won't be judged for our sins since we accepted Jesus as the One who paid for our sins. If we find being insulted for Jesus 'hard' Peter says, how do you think unbelievers will find an eternity of pain and suffering? Whatever pain and suffering we as believers receive now is nothing compared to the pain and suffering of eternal damnation. In a strange way it's a reason to rejoice because it reassures us we're God's. that His Spirit comforts us. And that nothing can separate us from the love of God. So Peter concludes this section reminding us to

Rely on the trustworthiness of God (v.19)

19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

The persecution we receive is not random, God uses it for the purpose of making us more like Jesus. 'Commit' is a banking term. Put your money with someone who will look after it for you. God is consistently trustworthy. 'Commit to our faithful Creator'. Creator? Why mention God as Creator here? Because the world has continually existed since creation. The sun comes up and the sun goes down. There's been evening and morning since Day 1. God said He wouldn't flood the world again and He hasn't. Every time we see a rainbow we're reminded of a faithful Creator. If I can trust Him for another evening and morning tonight and tomorrow I can trust Him with my life and know that whatever trials and persecution that come my way, I can trust God.

We will ever completely stop being surprised by life's difficulties and persecution? Probably not immediately, but if our Initial reaction is 'Lord, why is this happening to me' I pray that we will answer that question almost as quickly and say,

'Yes Lord, I know You are sovereign and nothing that happens in my life is a surprise to You and You will use it somehow for two reasons: 1) You want to glorify Yourself as I humbly rely on Your faithfulness to me and 2) that You think I'm not quite Jesus-like enough yet and need to be more.

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivvet@rideau.net

