

Introduction

- Back near the beginning of this series I commented that one of the verses we read this morning probably captures the purpose of this letter most clearly:
 - *"So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."* (4:19)
 - Peter is writing to a **suffering church**, a church that is struggling, one under pressure from external persecution, and into **this** situation he writes his **encouragement to faith and obedience**, all in light of the fullness of the salvation received in Christ
- And it is around that theme of suffering that we listen to God this morning:
 - not just any suffering, but particularly **suffering for following Christ**

Exegesis

(12) Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

- They are going through a painful trial!
 - and they are **surprised** by the trial - **they weren't expecting it!**
 - why surprised?
 - did they say to themselves: **"Jesus is king, he's come and sorted everything, we are now citizens of the heavenly kingdom, surely we'll be OK?!"**
 - **analagous to treatment a Roman citizen would receive** in the Empire - respect, open doors, protection by legions...
- **Do we do the same thing?**
 - assume that good things will happen to us - and perhaps the more so with God watching over us?
 - **and are puzzled, perhaps even distressed, when we face suffering?**
 - but our lives are just as painful as our neighbours - and sometimes even more so
- Peter says something very important here:
 - **its not strange, but to be expected to face trials for being a Christian**
 - its part of the package...
- The word Peter uses to describes the trials, translated by the NIV as **painful** is more properly **fiery**:
 - the connotation is of **refining** - trials that refine, purify, strengthen, ultimately draw Christians closer to Christ

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

- Part of the package because we become participants with Christ...
 - we are joined with him
 - the Greek here for **"that you participate"** would be better translated **"in so far as you participate"**
 - in other words, they are not to rejoice in suffering for itself, but to rejoice in as much as the suffering points to the **connection between us and Christ**
 - and that **connection with Christ** will point us **forward** to the time when we are **with him in glory**, and share in his joy, participate in his glory!

(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.

- **"Spirit of glory and of glory"** rests on you - when?
 - when you are insulted for the name of Christ!!
 - that is the nature of the blessing you receive: the **"Spirit of glory and of glory"**
 - this was mind-blowing in the 1st century, and is still pretty weird today!
- How can God suffer, be associated with such weakness?
 - those who are powerless suffer, those who can't stop it happening to them... to suffer is to be weak

(15) If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

- Building up towards something here:
 - simply clarifying that it is not the suffering **in itself** that is being commended
 - if you deserve to suffer, if you are being punished for some evil you have done, that's your own lookout!

(16) However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

- Ashamed?
 - why - thinking they were second class Christians?
 - "if I suffer I must be doing something wrong"
 - no need for that shame!
- Rather a contrasting reaction is suggested: **praise God!**
 - praise in the face of suffering, not praise for the suffering...
 - praise that we are so identified with Christ, so much one with him, that we suffer as he suffered, because now we bear his 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?

- Judgement is sin being destroyed, is purity being brought...
 - the continuing picture is of **purifying fire**
 - when a metal was smelted they put the ore into the fire, complete with all the impurities, the other rock or earth that was with the ore....
 - that which is pure remains, that which is impure is burned up
 - this suffering is a part of God's process of judgement, burning up sin...
 - we have been transformed from worthless rock into pure metal by the sacrifice of Christ, but sin is still mixed into our lives - so we come through the judgement, but changed
 - such fire is devastating (Ravenscraig stories about the brickies in the ovens?)
 - what then will happen to those who have not been transformed by Christ when they too come to face the purifying fire of judgement? Nothing will be left...
- God is already in the midst of his people
 - we should not be surprised that his judgement process comes to us first
 - but we should be concerned for those who face that judgement without Christ's purification and transformation

(18) And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

- **Indeed!**
 - (same thought again, this time quoting from Proverbs 11:31)

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

- Here then is the practical response
 - not mere **passive acceptance** of the suffering, but **active commitment** to the Lord whose name brings the suffering
- There are times when God does ordain suffering - and that is hard to hear
 - Peter is particularly thinking of the suffering that comes as a result of our obedience and the opposition of others, of persecution, of suffering that comes **because** we have lived according to God's will
 - (there can also be suffering that comes completely without connection to our behaviour - cancer, tragic accident... that is not so much in Peter's mind here)
 - **yet suffering that comes in God's will comes with the potential to be blessing**

Application

- Practical implication is?
 - realisation that suffering isn't strange
 - *(indeed, we should be somewhat concerned if we are not aware of times when we suffer for the sake of Christ...)*
 - re-assessing suffering for Christ as a blessing
 - re-committing ourselves to (a) God, and (b) doing good