

**Theme:** Faith in Exile

**Title:** No Surprise - I Peter 4:12-19

**Aim:** Suffering has purpose; suffering for Christ has positive results.

**Intro:** After a couple of Sundays talking about being stewards of God's grace, using our gifts as the Holy Spirit leads, in the strength which God supplies to minister to others to the glory of God, now we turn back to that invigorating & uplifting topic of suffering. Peter had written to those exiles in Asia Minor about how to live in exile. He knew they had already encountered suffering & trials & would continue to do so, so he addressed the matter of suffering as Christians from the very beginning of his epistle. He reminded them of their relationship w/God & that suffering didn't mean God had forsaken them. They were God's chosen ones, living stones being built together as God's household. They were to follow the example of Christ, who likewise suffered. As Peter approached the conclusion of this epistle (tho we have another chapter to go), he addressed suffering again, because suffering was a huge issue in their lives, as it is in ours today. Theme: Faith in exile. As believers in & followers of Jesus Christ, we are exiles in this world that's not our home. That needs to be repeated again & again, because we are apt to become satisfied & complacent in this world & we need reminder. Suffering is part of the life of an exile & we're no exceptions. Suffering is defined in the dictionary as "the state of undergoing pain, distress & hardship." Everyone experiences suffering from time to time; it is part of the curse of sin, & it's hard, unpleasant. We need God's help to deliver us, which we want most, or to carry us thru the midst of it, which He always does for His children. For the Christian the meaning expands: "the afflictions which Christians must undergo in behalf of the same cause which Christ patiently endured" (Strong's). In other words, suffering for the gospel, or for the name of Christ – that's what Peter was writing about & what those exiles experienced. I Peter 4:12-19 [READ]. I) **It should be no surprise if we suffer**. Again, that statement applies to all suffering we might encounter. Jesus said, "*In the world you will have tribulation*" (John 16:33), & He didn't specify the source of that tribulation/

suffering. However, He did add, “***But take heart. I have overcome the world.***” No suffering should surprise us but also no suffering will last. Jesus our overcomer is coming again & suffering & sorrow will be forever banished! In this passage, Peter is specifically referring to suffering for Jesus’ sake, & he said, “Don’t be surprised.” The primary reason we should not be surprised is that the suffering for Christ that believers may experience always passes thru the hand of God. “Fiery trial” means “a burning by which metals are roasted & reduced; calamities or trials that test the character” (Strong’s). Who do you think is doing the testing? Yes, it may be an attack of Satan, but like w/Job he can only do what God allows for His purposes. Now, we in America may tend to be taken aback/surprised by such attacks/testing but for Christians in much of the world it’s no surprise but an expectation. Arrested, imprisoned, put to death, simply for distributing Bibles, proclaiming the gospel, or standing for the truth of Scripture. And it’s coming here – has already – don’t be surprised. Teachers already face it; Pregnancy Resource Centers already experience it. Now, any Christians not “woke.” We already are called hate-mongers but it’s going to get worse. It’s not “something strange” but to be expected, & it’s all in God’s hand. Therefore, II) **We can/should rejoice when we share Christ’s sufferings.** That sounds crazy doesn’t it? Rejoice in suffering? What are we, masochists? No, Peter doesn’t mean that we should rejoice in the suffering itself, but in the fact that we enter into fellowship w/Christ when we suffer in His name, for His cause. We come into communion w/Christ, made to be a partner w/Him in suffering. Jesus learned obedience thru suffering (Heb.5:8) & so do we. God teaches us thru trials & suffering. And, as David Gudzik wrote, “suffering is a necessary prelude to glory & joy.” Those who suffer for Christ will also share in His glory. “***That you may also rejoice & be glad when His glory is revealed.***” As Christians we continually live in the “now & the not yet.” Life here is often difficult, but we know God is w/us, actively to continually look toward eternity while serving God here & now. When we see Jesus, we will be like Him & share in His glorious reign in

His eternal kingdom. So we can/should rejoice now, even in the midst of trials/suffering, knowing what awaits us in Christ & that now He is working w/in us. III) **We are blessed if we suffer insult for the name of Christ.** Again, we wouldn't be happy to be insulted, called names or otherwise berated. But we can be happy/blessed w/God's coinciding blessing. "*The Spirit of glory (some texts include power also) & of God rests upon you.*" When Peter & John were arrested after a lame man was healed just outside the temple, Peter was "filled w/the Holy Spirit" & preached to their captors. They were told not to speak in the name of Jesus any longer, said, "We will listen to God before you, we can't help but speak what we have seen/heard." They were beaten & released, going to where the others were gathered, praying. They prayed together & asked for boldness, which God gave them & they continued to speak the word of God. Later all the apostles were arrested, but God freed them & they went right back to the temple to preach the gospel. They were brought again to the religious leaders who said, "we told you to stop speaking in Jesus' name!" "We must obey God rather than men." Again, they were beaten & released & they went their way "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" of Jesus. And they "didn't cease teaching & preaching" Jesus (Acts 4 & 5). The Holy Spirit filled them w/power & words. God showed up to use them. He'll do the same w/us. Peter again urged his readers that if we're going to suffer, let it be for the sake of Christ, not because we're guilty of any crime or sin, even being a meddler/busybody. But if suffering comes for the sake of Christ, don't be ashamed. It's shameful to be thrown in jail as the disciples were. It's shameful to be publicly accused or maligned. But don't be ashamed. Rather glorify God in the name of Jesus. IV) **One of God's purposes for allowing suffering for His name is to refine & purify the Church.** "*It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God...*" God uses suffering as a judgment – in a positive, purifying sense – for Christians. Not punishment – all of which Christ took for us on the cross – but purification, cleansing, refining. Gudzik wrote, "The same fire that consumes straw will purify gold. The fire is the same but

its purpose in application is different & its effect is different upon the straw & the gold. Even so, Christians do suffer some of the same things the ungodly do, yet the purpose of God is different & the effect is different.” And, also, suffering for the name/cause of Christ is different, tho it may look the same. I believe we are in a time of refinement for the Church. Covid may have even been a part of that but persecution is definitely part of that, God using it to separate the faithful from those who are Christian in name only. At the same time, it is thru persecution that the true Church will grow & always has. We in America know little of persecution, but it is coming soon. When it comes, will we stand? Now, we have Christ, the Lord of the Church, whose judgment of us refines us & makes us stronger. But His judgment will destroy those apart from Him. We in Christ will share His glory, eternity, but those apart from Christ will endure His righteous punishment. Peter quoted Proverbs 11:31 – *“If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly & the sinner?”* Gudzik wrote, “It isn’t that our salvation is difficult in the sense of earning it or finding a way to deserve it; it is all a free gift of Jesus Christ. Yet our salvation is hard in the sense that the claims of discipleship challenge us & demand that we cast away our idols & our sins. Real discipleship & genuine following after Jesus is sometimes a hard thing.” God help us! V) **When we suffer for the name of Christ, let us entrust our souls to our faithful Creator God.**

It's not a matter of if we will suffer, if fiery trials will come, but when. When they come we must follow the example of our Savior & Lord, Jesus Christ. That word “entrust” means “to place beside or near, to commit to one’s charge” (Strong’s). It’s a financial term, as in entrusting/committing to the bank a sum of money for safe keeping. It’s the same word spoken by Jesus on the cross, when He said, “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). And, as we have already seen, in I Peter 2:23, Peter wrote of Jesus, our example, *“When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.”* We have to entrust our souls, lives to God, knowing that He will always

balance the scales & see us thru whatever suffering we may endure for His sake. And while we entrust ourselves to Him, let us do good. Never use hardship, struggle as an excuse to do wrong, but seek to glorify God in everything. So, we have been warned. Suffering for the sake of Christ will come. It shouldn't surprise us or catch us off guard. Rejoice, knowing that you share Christ's sufferings, be happy because God will show Himself strong & carry out His purposes. Don't be ashamed but glorify God. Trust God to refine you & His Church. Pray for those who persecute you, that they may know Christ & escape His judgment. Entrust yourself to God while doing good. It will all take faith – faith in exile.