

1 Peter 4

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[0 : 00] seeking the Lord's blessing, let's turn back to the portion of Scripture that we read, 1 Peter 4, and reading again at verse 17. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God.

And if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? No, if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? What will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?

This letter was written by Peter to the people of God, to the Christians who were scattered, as you know from the first chapter, to the pilgrims of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Why were they scattered?

Well, they were scattered because of persecution, and in particular the persecution of the early church by the Roman Empire. He is writing to encourage them and he is writing to comfort them.

Where is the comfort for them? Where is the comfort for us? Well, the comfort for them is in the relationship that Peter presents to them when he is writing to them. And that relationship is their relationship to God, and in particular their relationship to the triune God. Look what he says in chapter 1 and verse 2. Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus

Christ. He was encouraging them because he wanted them to see that their persecution needed to be seen by them in the light of their relationship to the triune God.

And he needed them to see that God has a plan and a purpose for them. And he goes on in that first chapter, and these are some of the most wonderful verses in the scripture. He says to them, grace to you and peace be multiplied. Blessed be the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[3 : 03] And so on. And he says to them, his abundant mercy, and not just his abundant mercy, but his abundant mercy that has begotten us to a lively, to a living hope. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the day, to an inheritance. You have an inheritance. You may be scattered, but you have an inheritance.

It is sure, incorruptible, undefiled, will never fade. It's reserved. It's sure that God is keeping you by his power, by his power through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

We touched on this similar situation in the morning when we were speaking about Shadrach, Mishab and Abednego, who were kept in the fire, kept by the power of God, kept by the power of God.

They had to see, as he tells them in this particular part of the letter in chapter 4 and the very end of the letter in verse 19.

He's asking them and he's pleading with them and he's encouraging them to see that their suffering was according to the will of God.

[4 : 38] They were suffering various trials, as he says in verse 6.

In this you greatly rejoice. Go now for a little while and you have been grieved by various trials. And the letter is specifically looking at the persecution.

It's a feature of this letter. And that persecution can vary in degrees. And the opposition can vary. And it can be quite vehement.

And as we said in the morning, it's a feature of not just the early church, in terms of the New Testament church, but it was a feature from the very beginning, as we saw in the lives of these three or these four young men who were captured and taken captive from Judea to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar and his armies.

Verses 12 to 19 in chapter 4 present us with a clear section.

[6 : 02] It's a complete section. And we need to understand what it's saying in this section, particularly what it's saying about suffering and fighting trials.

He's saying in verse 17, when he says, For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God, he is saying to them, the fiery trials that he's talking about in verse 12, and the other things that are part of that suffering, the reproach and the shame, this is a judgment.

It is the judgment of God. And it's beginning at the house of God. It is not judgment to condemnation, because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Rather, it is God's refining fire. God's refining fire. God's refining fire.

This is the will of God. Even you sanctification, the scriptures teach us. This is the will of God.

[7 : 17] Even you sanctification. And providence can be dark and mysterious. And it can be very hard and very sore.

And the way can be rough. John the Baptist testified to this, when he testified, I indeed baptize you with water.

But there is one coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to touch. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

And with fire. Isn't that a remarkable text? Judgment begins at the house of God.

And I'll come back to that later on. Judgment begins at the house of God. But as we see in this narrative, and in many other narratives, that judgment spreads outward.

[8 : 22] And it spreads outward towards unbelievers. Unbelievers. Not for their sanctification, but for their condemnation.

What will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? And you know the answer to the question.

Or the two questions. And they're very similar. You know the answer to them. Because you've been sitting here for a long time, listening. You know the answer.

And it's a very solemn warning to you. As it is to all of us. So how do we apply these things to us in our day?

How do we apply this to us? He says, Beloved. Beloved. His pastoral care and his love. He tells them and he speaks of love.

[9 : 29] Above all things, how fervent love for one another. He loves the people of God. And he's writing to them to encourage them, to comfort them.

He loves them. And he says to them, Beloved. And he says two things to them. Two things to them. He says, first of all, in verse 12.

Beloved, do not think it's strange concerning the fiery fire which is to try you as though some strange thing happened to you. Don't be surprised.

surprised. Don't be surprised. And then, later on, in verse 16, he says something else. Don't be ashamed.

Don't be ashamed. So let's look at these two things. First of all, don't be surprised. Because God has a plan and a purpose.

[10 : 31] Do not think it's strange concerning the fiery fire which is to try you. It's not about intensity. It is more purpose.

It is more purpose. And he uses the analogy of chapter 1 and verse 7 which we spoke about earlier.

That the genuineness of your faith being much more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire. He uses that analogy of gold being tried and tested by fire.

That it may be found that that is the genuineness of the faith may be found to praise honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The purpose is this to refine to clean to burn away the impurities to make us like Christ himself.

[11 : 33] To make us like Christ himself. I think I've told before the story of Dr. Helen Rosefield when she first went down to the mission field.

And somebody said to her when she arrived, I'm paraphrasing of course because I'm trying to remember exactly what was said to her, but they said something at this to her.

Don't think that the primary purpose for you coming out here is because you have been educated to such a level that you've not qualified as a doctor and you've got gifts.

Don't think that's the primary purpose for you coming here. Don't think the primary purpose for you coming out here is because you've shown a mind for the mission and to do God's work in the mission field.

That's not the primary purpose that you hear. The primary purpose that you hear is that you're going to be made more like Christ.

[12 : 42] This is the will of God, even your sanctification. What is sanctification? It is to make you more like Christ. There may be things in your experience that will be hard.

But he tells us and he encourages them, don't be surprised. Don't be surprised. The psalm that we sang, Psalm 66, is a remarkable psalm.

I keep using the word remarkable, but I can't help myself. because the scriptures are not a single word. Psalm 66, the psalmist is calling us, make a joyful shout to God, all the earth.

He's calling us at verse 5, come and see the works of God. He is awesome and is doing towards the sons of men, towards the sons of men.

Come and see the works of God, he's saying. What works of God are that? And he lists them and included in that is this, for you, O God, have tested us.

[14 : 00] That's what you are saying. You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the earth. You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads.

We went through fire and through water. But you brought us out to rich fulfilment. You brought us out to rich fulfilment.

The end and the purpose. God has a plan and a purpose for us, for our suffering, for our trials, even for our persecutions.

You brought us out to rich, to rich fulfilment. Don't be surprised. God has a purpose. God has a plan.

Even when you're struggling, even when you're downcast, when you're asking, why are you downcast? Oh my soul.

[15 : 06] Do you know that the world thinks that one of the first signs of madness is when people start talking to themselves? themselves? Well, if you're a Christian, you never stop talking to yourself.

The word of God is full of it. The psalmist is so often speaking to himself. I find myself speaking to myself more than ever. It's usually to berate myself for the things that I do that I ought not to do and the things that I don't do that I ought to do and many other things.

Blessed, blessed, Matthew says in the Beatitudes, blessed are you, he says, when you are persecuted for righteousness sake.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. why and how? For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It's not the kingdom of heaven will be yours. It is yours now. If you're a Christian, heaven is yours.

[16 : 29] Yours. You haven't had the fullness of it yet. And it's a part of what some commentators call the already and the not yet.

But heaven is yours. No. No. Be encouraged. Be encouraged. When you are faced with all sorts of fiery trials of trials of reproach and insults and many other things that are talking about in this passage.

there are many examples that one could use. The last man to have met an apostle was a man called Polycarp of Smyrna.

Polycarp of Smyrna who was a believer in Christ. And he watched the situation emerge in that early church when it became a crime to confess the name of Christ and they were looking for him everywhere he was hiding.

But when he was 86 years of age he couldn't hide any longer and he didn't want to hide any longer. And they caught him and they urged him to offer incense to Caesar as his God and to curse Christ.

[17 : 48] And he flat refused. He didn't bow. The pressure to conform to bow as we spoke about in the morning.

Bow to this great idol or be cast into a fiery furnace. Here was the pressure to curse Christ. And he said this 86 years have I served him and he has never done me wrong.

How then can I blaspheme my king and my saviour? And they tied him to a stake. And they set the pile of wood on fire.

And remarkably a number of remarkable things happened. As it happened to many others. When the first time they lit the fire a gust of wind came and instead of the fire started properly put the fire out.

And then they tried that and they failed. And then they said well we're going to kill him anyway and they got an executioner. They lit the fire again and they got an executioner.

[19 : 00] And the executioner executed him and poured out his blood and there was so much blood that it doused the fire. eventually they managed to get the flames going and he was burned and they burned his corpse.

But he stood firm. He stood firm. A more recent example is this. An example that was used by a Roman minister in a sermon not so long ago about a man called Armando Valadez who was in prison in Cuba in 1960 for plotting against the state.

He was in prison for 32 years. And he saw prisoners being taken out to be executed. Some would openly declare their faith on the way to be executed.

And some of them would shout out long with Christ the King down with communism. But in 1963 you see this was affecting some of the other prisoners and God was working.

But in 1963 they started gagging the mouths of the prisoners so they couldn't shout about Jesus when they were being executed. And this affected him so deeply and the Lord was doing a work in his heart.

[20 : 30] And he wrote this I am utterly exhausted. The lack of sleep and tension were seriously affecting me. I sought God then. My conversations with him brought me spiritual strength that gave me new energy.

I never asked him to get me out of there. I didn't think God should be used for that kind of request. I only asked that he allowed me to resist and that he gave me the faith and spiritual strength to bear up under his conditions without sickening with hatred.

I only prayed for him to accompany me and his presence which I felt made my faith an indestructible shield.

hope. He wrote a book. The title of the book is Against All Hope. This lessons which I read, one of the great lessons we learned from the scriptures I hope this morning is that in the fiery firmness of affliction, he is with us.

I am with you, I am with you. This is the faith that people ridicule of course. This is the faith that people scorn and find fault with.

[22 : 02] Don't be surprised. And he tells them secondly, don't be ashamed. But glorify God, it says in verse 16, in this matter, it should read, in that name.

If you suffer as a Christian, Christian, it associates you with Jesus Christ, the name that is so often taken in vain.

But does it really bother us when we hear Christ's name taken in vain? Have we got so used to it? Have we got so used to it that it doesn't really bother us anymore?

Peter knew shame. Peter knew shame. He's saying here, don't be ashamed, but he knew shame. He denied the law three times when he was challenged by a young girl. And Jesus looked at him and he wept bitterly.

[23 : 06] He wept bitterly. And he learned from his mistakes and you see that in his letters. full of Larry, full of growth and grace.

And he's counselling us now. And he's telling us remember, remember this he saying, Christ is our example.

You are partakers of Christ's suffering. You are partakers of Christ's sufferings. suffering. How are you a partaker of Christ's suffering?

Because when you believe in Jesus Christ, you are united to him. You're union with Christ. It joins him to us and us to him.

him. And we're reminded in chapter 3 and verse 18 of that. We are reminded of that when he says to us, for Christ also, verse 70, for it is better, it is the will of God to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

[24 : 18] For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, that we might be drawn to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit, by the Spirit.

You are made a partaker of Christ's suffering. That's what he's saying. And he's also saying this, he's saying a person, rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory is revealed you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

But he's also saying this, if you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, and read these words with me please. For the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

The Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. The Holy Spirit, it's a remarkable statement.

The Spirit of glory and of God. And it's not just because he's called the Holy Spirit. And it's not just because he's glorious in himself.

[25 : 39] Of course he is. He's the third person of the Trinity. He's glorious. But because that's where the Holy Spirit is taking you to glory.

He's taking you to glory, to heaven. Struggling with persecutions, with fiery trials, with reproach, with ridicule, with shame.

I'm giving you, God says, the Holy Spirit. Just as the Shekinah glory was above the mercy seat, so the same Holy Spirit, the same Shekinah glory rests on and in you.

In you. Poured into your hearts. Poured into your hearts. It's talking about the outcome of God's work in your life.

It's what it leads to, to glory, to glory. What does the word Shekinah actually mean? It means dwelling, or one who dwells.

[26 : 59] And it's a beautiful title. Not that it's particularly mentioned in scriptures, of course. I don't think the term Shekinah is particularly mentioned. But it's an indescribable gift.

To hell deserving sinners, such as we are. What a privilege to be a Christian, to be born again. God has a plan and a purpose and peace.

Satan will be encouraged. Be encouraged. In Fox's book of martyrs, there's a record of a man called Bishop Runley, who was also burnt at the stake.

And he wrote a letter to his family before his death. And he says this, do not be ashamed of my death. I think it is the greatest honor of my life.

And thank God for calling me to give my life for his sake and his cause. All of you that love me should rejoice that I was called to give up this temporal life in defense of his eternal, everlasting death.

[28 : 20] judgment, but not to condemnation. Not to condemnation.

When did judgment begin? It's always been there. It's always been there since sin entered the world.

When God had to exercise his judgment on Adam and on Eve and on the devil and on every sin. And down through the history of the church you see time and time again God's judgment. His judgment of his people. His judgment of his people.

we spoke this morning using that similar analogy in this chapter 1 but we spoke I think in the morning of the word of God to Malachi.

[29 : 28] The God who is the refiner and purifier. Who does he refine and who does he purify? The sons of Eli. The people of God.

The people of God. Of course he has always and always will execute his judgment on the ungodly and the unrighteousness and the unrighteous.

Just as he did. And the remarkable thing about the Babylonian captivity for example is that God judges his people and he casts them into or allows this enemy of God to come in his sovereign will and providence to take the people of God into captivity but he sets a boundary.

He sets a boundary 70 years no more and when they come back from the exile what does God do?

God judges Babylon. God judges Babylon and they have crushed and that's God's judgment. where do you see judgment? You see it on the cross of Calvary. You see it on the cross of Calvary when O Lord and O God the Lord Jesus Christ the just for the unjust was judged by the Father the great judge bearing our sins as the sinless sin bearer bearing our sins in his body to the three as Peter tells us.

[31 : 09] There is an unfolding of judgment an unfolding of judgment he tells us here at verse 7 in this chapter that the times have come to an end but the end of all things is at hand the end of all things is at hand he's talking about the end times and we are in the end times he's talking again about something for the time has come the time has come and it's not chronology the word that's used is not chronos but it is talking about the crucial moment the crucial moment the crucial moment for you for me for the whole world and what is he saying here for the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God and if it begins with us first what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God what does that really mean it means this if God has a judgment for the godly and if that ends in joy and life what will become of the ungodly and if the judgment of the godly is as fiery and as difficult and full of all sorts of trials and temptations and providences what on earth will the judgment of the ungodly be like and he's setting a comparison as the scriptures do

between the righteous the house of God and the ungodly the ungodly what will be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God and that text too reminds us of this it reminds us of this those who obey not that means they must have heard it means that they must have heard it it makes no sense if they're asked to obey something and they didn't hear the thing in the first place they heard it you heard it in this very building in

Scalpe for years and years and years and how long are you not going to obey the gospel of God the gospel that is calling you to come to Jesus and to believe in his name and to trust in his name and to know his presence and his power to know his blood to know him whom to know his life eternal what will be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God and he continues into the next verse verse 18 quoting quoting from Proverbs now if the righteous one is scarcely saved where will the ungodly and the sinner appear and remember he's not talking when he says ungodly and sinner he's not talking specifically about desperate criminals and murderers and terrorists and perverts and abusers he's talking about those who do not obey the gospel he's talking about you if you're still out of

Christ he's talking about you if the righteous through difficulty is saved if there is such deep suffering in the experience of the people of God what must the sufferings of the ungodly and the sinner be like in eternity what must it be like in eternity for then he tells us 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 he tells us so that we are at verse 1 to 4 we rather sorry verse 4 to 8 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure which is manifest evidence of what of the righteous judgment of God that you may be counter-worthy of the kingdom of God for which you also suffer since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the

Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire in flaming fire in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ these shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power how are you going to answer the question the two questions what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God where will the ungodly and sinner appear you're going to appear

I'm going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ what will you do then if Christ is not your savior not your friend this is very solemn and it's a solemn warning to you you can't go on please please you can't go on disobey the gospel and he encourages the believers therefore in verse 19 let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to him and doing good as to our faithful created and he says to them knowing all of this knowing everything you know most of you know everything I'm sure some of you here know the scriptures far better than I do you know it why aren't you doing something about it knowing all this he asks us to commit to entrust our soul our soul commit or entrust their souls to him this committing this entrusting is the same word that is used by Christ on the cross into your hands

[39 : 03] I commit or entrust my spirit that's the commitment that's the trusting he did it we have to do it too remember that the fire of hell will never be quenched as we spoke about in the morning and don't be tempted by the devil to ignore this he's always fanning the flames of doubt always ready to find you and to discourage you and to tell you everything is just a load of noxes ready to trip you up and to to ensure anything but Christ the Christian approach to suffering is much more than just passive endurance of course it is much more than passive endurance this narrative speaks to us about doing something it speaks to us in the middle of the fiery trials in the middle of persecution and all the treatment unjust and other the believer must put his and her hope in God the believer must look to him who judges justly and we must always persist in doing that which is good and right these are solemn verses for she would so as we leave the building as we come to the conclusion of ourselves we need to think about these things you need to think about them you need this is when life this is real life this is real life don't be put off by some other image of well it's not really real

I just go to church every week and I've done my lifting and I'm ticking the bombs this is real this is real standing at a net degree as I was yesterday it's a it's a solemn thing it's a solemn thing to see the mortal remains going to the ground one day I'll be there one day you'll be there but it's solemn what about the soul what about the soul you've got to commit your soul to Christ to he who is faithful and he who is faithful will do it Amen May the Lord bless these thoughts on his word