

## 1 Peter 4:12-14

### “The prosperity of persecution”

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#### I. Intro.

Every Christian who lives for God can expect a certain amount of persecution be that on the job, where they live and even amongst family and friends. No matter what a follower of Jesus says, or does there will always be people who will criticize them, but this isn't what Peter is writing about in chapter 4:12-19. Peter has already written about the:

- “*Occasional persecution*” from those around them!

Now he is going to give five instructions that deal with:

- “*Official persecution*” from those above them!

Peter offers these suffering saints *five things that deal with persecution from those above you:*

- A. Vs. 12 *The purpose of it: Refinement*
- B. Vs. 13 *The attitude though it: Rejoicing*
- C. Vs. 14 *The promise in it: Refreshment*
- D. Vs. 15-18 *The mindset by it: Reviewing*
- E. Vs. 19 *The outcome because of it: Recommitment*

I personally found this section convicting as I read Peter's words to this extremely persecuted church in light of my attitude. There is little doubt that our country is going through a difficult time and God's church is experiencing an increasing unpopularity among their fellow citizens but let's be clear that in no way resembles those that Peter is writing too. Yet Peter mentions that his expectation for them in verses 13-14 was to “*rejoice*” to be “*glad*” with “*exceeding joy*” and to think of themselves as being “*blessed*”. I'm left with the reality that our present circumstances are not near as bad as theirs were and I need to read this section to make sure that my heart is

being changed the right direction towards being rejoicing” being “glad” with “exceeding joy” and to think of myself as being “blessed”.

## II. Vs. 12 The purpose of it: Refinement

Vs. 12 The section starts with the word “*beloved*” in the Greek it is a word that means “*divinely loved ones*” and is a descriptive title that would remind the readers that were going through severe persecution that they were loved by the heart of God. So often when we go through difficult seasons we can count the father of lies telling us that our present circumstances are an indication that God is either angry at us our doesn’t love us. What as sweet pillow Peter’s reminder is so that these dear saints could lay their weary head upon the heart of the Father who so loved them! Such words at the start of this exhortation helps them to endure the heartache and pains they were presently experiencing. With that said Peter begins to offer his readers answers to what no doubt they questioned in light of the severe persecution they were experiencing:

### A. Vs. 12 The purpose of it: Refinement

The phrase “*do not think it strange*” in the Greek is “*STOP thinking it an alien thing to you*”. What this suggests to us by Peter’s words is that these Christians had a misconception that their faith in God had provided an immunity from suffering and that their present circumstances were abnormal to which Peter corrects their wrong thinking and tells them that what is strange is them misunderstand standing and not the persecution. Oh, how important this word from Peter is for today’s church in America with what we are currently experiencing and our attitude towards is believing that we are close to the rapture do to what we are going through. The church has experienced a long history in our country of popularity and is just now NOT as popular but again that in no way represents what our brothers and sisters go through this very hour through the world! These suffering saints were being informed that suffering for righteousness sake was the

norm and they could expect the world's hatred of Jesus to become a hatred for those who love Him and reflects His life.

Peter calls their current condition a “***fiery trial***” and the Greek wording here is very revealing as it describes a “furnace” used for smelting and refining silver and gold. The same word is used in the Greek translation of Ps. 66:10 “***For You, O God, have tested us; You have REFINED us as silver is REFINED.***” That Greek word coupled with “***as though some strange thing happened to you.***” Is Peter giving the readers the understanding that severe persecution has a “***purpose***” and it is a “***refinement***” or a “***purification***” making the raw ore of our lives closer to the 99% purity thus refinement and persecution go “***hand in hand***” as it is the process that God employs upon His children. Such persecution has gone on since the beginning as the religious Cain killed the relational Able. Whatever glorifies God angers Satan and he will attack. Because of this truth persecution is not a “strange” thing the “absence” of persecution is a strange thing. In fact, if Satan isn't attacking we need to wonder the reason? Satan and the world never attack a “***religious person***” they don't go after “***religious Christians***”! It is good for us to examine the trial we are in as there are three types of trials we can experience:

1. **Difficulties**: These are the kind of trials that are a part of human life as we know it and almost everybody goes through them. People get sick, cars break down and things generally don't go the way we think they should when we think they should.
2. **Disobedience**: These are the kinds of trials that are a direct result of our own rebellion and sin as we have gone against the things of God. Though this is a trial it is by our own doing and hand.
3. **Discipline**: This is what Peter is mentioning here and it is related to the refinement because we are His disciples and God has in His wisdom allowed the trial to purify us

and make us more like Him.

Though “refining trials” go hand in hand with our maturing development we still need to be reassured that what we are experiencing is within God’s plan!

### III. Vs. 13 *The attitude though it: Rejoicing*

Vs. 13 Having established that the believer shouldn’t think that the trial was foreign to them then attitude should they have in regard to it? *Peter tells them the strange attitude of rejoicing and then goes on to tell them two reasons to rejoice when suffering persecution:*

1. *“To the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings”*: Peter says that it is a highest honor to *“partake of Christ’s sufferings”* as they are a gift from God. Not every Christian will be mature enough in their faith to see their persecution this way, but we know of many both in the bible and outside the bible. In Acts 5:41 we are told of the apostles as they departed the religious leader’s persecution *“rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.”* What Peter is talking about is the special blessing that allows us what the three Hebrew’s friends of Daniel experienced when thrown into the fiery furnace as they discovered a fourth One with them in the midst the “Son of God” Dan 3:23-25. Jesus promised to be with His followers to the “END” in Matt. 28:20 and he wasn’t just speaking of those disciples as Steven saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father in Acts 7:56.
2. *“When His glory is revealed”*: *The world and many in the church today wrongly believe that the “absence of suffering” means “glory” but the truth is that it is the opposite as the trial of our faith today is the assurance of glory when Jesus returns.* God is not going to *“replace”* suffering with *“glory”* instead He will *“transform”* suffering into glory. To illustrate this Jesus told the parable in John 16:20-22 of a woman giving birth as He gave

understanding that the same child that brings the expectant mother pain will also give her extreme joy. The pain she experienced at childbirth was “transformed” into joy by the birth of her baby. We see it spiritually in Paul’s example in 2 Corinth. 12:7-10 as Paul’s “***thorn in the flesh***” gave him a greater amount of God’s grace and strength so much so that he would proclaim that “***For when I am weak, then I am strong.***”

#### IV. Vs. 14 ***The promise in it: Refreshment***

Vs. 14 The Greek word “***reproach***” means a casting of teeth and refers to the general suffering that Christians can expect when their life is like that of Jesus as the world hates to see Him. Peter tells them that severe persecution further indicates two promises:

1. ***Prosperity***: Peter says that when the world reacts to a Christian that way you are “***blessed***”, and the Greek word means to be “***prosperous***”. I can’t help but see the irony of what Peter is saying that such treatment means prosperity when the false teaching “***prosperity movement***” is teaching the opposite. The world doesn’t persecute “***worldly Christians***” it only goes after “***spiritual Christians.***” The Cross gave Jesus shame and pain, but it also brought power and glory. The Christian needs to understand this principal so that they can rejoice when our life includes “***postponed pleasures***”. We may pay today in order to enjoy for our future in eternity. Our sufferings will one day be transformed into glory and then we will be glad about exceeding joy.
2. ***Refreshment***: Peter says that their sufferings brought blessings as it ensured that the “Spirit of glory of God” would rest upon them. The Holy Spirit would rest upon them and the word “rest” is an agricultural one that describes the “resting” of the soil in a field to produce a more bountiful crop as the soil would receive more strength. It is the same

word that Jesus used in Matt. 11:28 where He encouraged those who labored and heavy laden to come to Him and He would give them “REST”! The Holy Spirit refreshes the believer as He takes over the saint’s battle with his flesh and enables him to enjoy the presence and power of a life enjoyed in the Lord. The reference also has a significance to the Shekinah glory of God that dwelt in the tabernacle in Ex. 40:34 and 1 Kings 8:10-11. It was what Paul and others saw when they were stoning Stephen in Acts 6-7. The truth is suffering saints don’t have to wait for heaven in order to experience His glory. Through the Holy Spirit they can have the glory now. These explains how martyrs can sing praises to God while they are being burned alive or go to prison bound in the darkest dungeon. The Bishop of Smyrna Polycarp who lived in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century was arrested for his faith and threatened with death if he didn’t deny his trust in Jesus. He said in response, ***“Eighty-six years is have served Jesus and He never did me any injury. How am I to blaspheme my King and my Savior.”***

Next week we will finish this section by examining two more aspects of what severe persecution should do in the life of the believer.