

May 8, 2005  
Easter 7  
Mother's Day

*"Don't Be Surprised about Fiery Trials"*

## **1 PETER 4:12-17, 5:6-11**

**D**ear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. <sup>15</sup> If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. <sup>16</sup> However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. <sup>17</sup> 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? <sup>5:6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. <sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup> Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. <sup>10</sup> And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. <sup>11</sup> To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Do you like surprises? That depends on what the surprise is doesn't it? A bigger than expected refund check. That is a nice surprise. A phone call from an old friend. An "A" on the test when you thought you would get a C. An arrangement of flowers delivered to the door yesterday with the words, "I Love you Mom."

Do you like surprises? That depends on what the surprise is. A tire blows out as you are driving down the freeway. That's not a good surprise. A check up at the dentist reveals you need a root canal. An earthquake shakes the Central Coast. Two of your best friends tell you they are getting a divorce. Life is full of surprises. Some we like and some we never forget because they changed the course of our lives.

The Apostle Peter wrote to Christians who are undergoing persecution and suffering for their faith. He told them they should not be surprised about the painful or fiery trials that were coming to them. That is all part of being a Christian. He also wanted them to know they should not be surprised if the Lord is always there to strengthen them and help them. The words Peter wrote to first century Christians apply to 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians living on the Central Coast of California this Mother's Day. Our message today is, **"Don't Be Surprised If Fiery Trials Come to You."**

### **1) Don't be surprised when they come**

Don't make the mistake this morning of thinking that your life could never experience

bouts with persecution similar to what the early Christians experienced. "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you." Have you ever heard the word, "xenophobia?" It means a fear of strangers or foreigners? All through history people have been suspicious of strangers and even driven them out of their lands. Because we are Christians we are in this world but not part of this world. We even sing a hymn that says, "I'm but a stranger here. Heaven is my home." The closer you live your life to Jesus Christ and the more you love him for all he has done for you, the more weird and strange and different you will be to the world around you.

When we lived on the family farm my father would order boxes of little chicks in the spring of the year. We placed them into a large box under a warm light, with water and special chick food. Our job as kids was to check on the little chicks, for you see, if a chick had a spot of dirt the others would start picking at the spot, it would start bleeding and the chick would die. That's what happens in this world. As long as you blend in and don't stand out, the world will leave you alone. If you stand out as different you will be picked or ridiculed for your Christian faith.

What if someone thinks you are strange for being a Christian? Do you try to hide so they do not notice you? No, Peter tells us, "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." Listen to what Jesus said in his famous Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and say all kinds of evil about you. Rejoice because your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Those who are persecuted for their faith will have a double joy when Jesus returns in glory. They will see their Lord Jesus and also see clearly how their sufferings for Christ gave glory to him and promoted the honor of his name. One Roman historian wrote about the Christians who died in persecution, "They seem to die happy they are going to a better world."

There is more in this text to prepare us for the suffering that comes from our faith in Jesus. "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." Remember how the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in form of dove at his baptism. It was a way of marking Jesus, pointing him out and saying, "This is the Christ!" When you suffer for Christ the Spirit of glory rests on you and points to you saying, "These are the people who believe in Jesus." Former president Jimmy Carter once said the turning point in his life came when he heard a sermon where the pastor said, "If Christianity again became an illegal religion, would there be enough evidence from your life for people to come and arrest you?" The Holy Spirit marks you as a Christian.

"We bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ." The body that is being beaten and whipped for Christ elicits a much more powerful witness to Christ than one that is walking through aisles at Costco or Home Depot dreaming of new things for the kitchen or bathroom. Richard Wurmbrand was a Luther pastor who was badly beaten for his faith in Rumania. A US Senate committee investigating the atrocities of communist regimes implied that Wurmbrand was lying. In a dramatic moment, to show them the truth of what he was saying, he took off his shirt and revealed the scars on his body, scars from his outspoken love for Jesus.

We don't want our suffering in this life to come from bad behavior. "If you suffer, it should

not be as murderer or thief or any kind of criminal, or even as a meddler." Sometimes we suffer because we do bad things. Galatians tells us, "What a man sows he shall also reap." If you are nasty to people, don't complain, "Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, guess I'll just have to go and eat worms." If you open yourselves up to immorality, don't complain if your life becomes a stinking mess. The newspaper is full of stories from the lives of people who are suffering because they do not follow God's ways. God's ways are always the best ways.

You have a special name. You are a Christian! "If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." It is a privilege to suffer as a Christian for what we believe and by that suffering to praise God and to bear his name. You are a Christian, someone who reflects Christ. The light that shines off you shines mostly brightly in the dark, in times of pain and suffering. Patrick, missionary to Ireland, suffered terrible from the hands of the Druid priests. He spoke these well known words about reflecting Jesus in everything even our suffering. "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me."

Why is suffering and pain so important for exalting Christ? Listen to the answer: "For it is time for judgment to begin with family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" Do you want the Lord to deal with the sin that shows up in your life? Do you even want him to work with you, change you, and thrust you into different circumstances if necessary to get rid of sin? If we want God to purify and cleanse us and get rid of sin in our lives what is going to happen to people who do not believe in Christ, who do not have his blood to wash them clean and his robe of righteousness to cover them? If my suffering for Christ, or my cross that I bear for him, or my shame that I endure because of what I believe causes me pain and exalts the name of Christ, then bring it on. It will all be worth it if my pain helps one more person escape from the judgment to come. With Paul we can confidently say, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

## **2) Don't be surprised how you will be delivered**

We should not be surprised if the Lord uses our suffering to advance the glory of his name, and we should also not be surprised at how the Lord will deliver us from even the worst things that could happen to us. The Lord will be there to deliver us just as just as he promises us in his Word. Our text tells us, "Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him for he cares for you." Do you ever get tired of someone hearing someone say, "It is in the Lord's hands?" We never grow weary of hearing brothers and sister in Christ say this, especially in times of pain and suffering and fiery trials.

Notice it says that we can cast our cares on him. That word for "cast" is used for throwing something on a horse or donkey. If a load was too heavy to carry, people in ancient times, put their burdens on a donkey or horse. How many times in your life did you not cast your burden on your mother when you were having problems? We can humble ourselves under God's mighty hand because he cares even more for us than the most loving mother. The

Lord tells us in Isaiah 41:10, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you: I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

During the times of fiery trials, Satan is especially active and powerful. He looks for low moments to attack us, the way a lion might look for the weakest animal at the watering hole and attack. He knows us better than we know ourselves. "Your enemy, the devil prowls around like roaring lion looking for someone to devour." We are not alone. Our brothers and sisters in Jesus are undergoing similar attacks, and it will only get worse as the end draws near. Like the old Roman phalanx, we need to lock arms and lock shields, and stay tight and close together in the Lord.

A few years a pastor in Southern California who preaches possibility thinking instead of Christ coined the phrase, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." How awful that statement is for the Christian because it implies that we need to use our strength to get going when the going gets tough. Today God's Word tells us to cast our cares on the Lord and put our trust in his unfailing strength and not in ourselves.

What an honor and privilege it is to end this sermon about going through fiery trials with the final verses from our text. Listen as I read these words again, "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power forever and ever." The Lord has called you to an inheritance that will not fade, that is reserved in heaven for you. He who calls is also faithful. He will restore you. He will make you strong. He will make you firm. He will make you steadfast. Don't be surprised! Your Lord will come through, also for you. Amen.