

1 Peter 4:12-16 'Suffering For The Name!'

Two weeks ago we looked at 1 Peter 4:8-11 in a sermon entitled 'Love; Brotherly Love Acts!' Verse 8 "Above all, love each other deeply, from the heart." Chapter 1:22: "Have sincere love for your brothers." Chapter 2:17: "Love the brotherhood of believers." And chapter 3:8: "Love as brothers." This deep love is intense, fervent, unfeigned, real, sincere love! It is a love that is not about self or self-promotion. It is not about 'me', but about Christ *in* me. Philippians 2:5-8: Jesus "who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. But emptied himself taking on the nature of a servant." Yes, biblical love always acts! So our expression of that biblical brotherly love, is to utilise those gifts that God has given us.

Verse 9: "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." In the context of the New Testament Church of persecution, this came at great risk and great cost, while also being to some degree a cultural imperative! To not show hospitality in accordance with cultural expectations was a stain upon the family name, and also a cause of suspicion. And I explained that the blessing was found not within the gift itself (whatever that gift maybe) but within the utilising of that gift for the blessing of the Body of Christ, His Church.

So "hospitality," as with any of God's gifts, is to be used. V10: "each one should use whatever gift he has to serve others." Not for pride or vanity. We saw from 1 Corinthians 12:31 that everyone was "desiring the greater gifts." Those things which in effect could promote self. Those up front visible gifts, so to speak. They all wanted to be preachers and teachers and tongue speakers. Which is all well and good, but if this stems from a vainglorious heart, it is of the Evil One! God calls and gifts us, to be faithful, gift using servants. Not superstars!

1 Corinthians 13:18 makes it clear that all gifts will pass away. The crux of the matter is found in v13, "and now these three remain, faith hope and love. And the greatest of these is love." And the reason why "Love" is the greatest is because it is the root of all of the gifts from God, and it is the only one that will last into eternity! We will see him in whom we have had faith, and we will have received that inheritance that we've hoped for. 1 John 3:18: "Let us not love with word or tongue but with actions and in truth." Yes Love; Brotherly Love Acts!

And so we pick up the letter in 1 Peter 4:12-16 'Suffering For The Name!' Verse 12 in Greek reads literally "Beloved, be not surprised at the fiery trial among you which is happening, (or will happen) to test you as though a surprising thing were occurring." Friends, notice the tender way Peter addresses those who Matthew Henry refers to as new converts. *Agapetoi*, "Beloved ones." In view of the current and coming troubles he wraps his arms around them with his words. This is something which we can learn from him here. In the same way that our words can wound or discourage, even without intending to, a timely and well spoken word in season of tenderness, can be just the right tonic that the Holy Spirit can use to spur our brethren on, in their deepest and darkest moments! Yes "Beloved ones be not surprised, (or interestingly as the King James has it) "Beloved ones think it not strange."

Brothers and sisters, if you remember some weeks ago we saw in v4 that the unsaved world "thinks it strange that we do not plunge with them into the same flood of abandoned sexual immorality and depravity," that exists today! The perishing world "thinks we are strange."

Well, Peter now says, while firstly wrapping his arms around us to comfort us, “Beloved think it not strange that the fiery trial which you are suffering, (or are about to suffer) were some strange thing that is happening to you.” The word he uses here for trial is *Peirasmon*. It means to be put to proof. To be refined, like gold through the fire. To be tested for its authenticity. Yes “think it not strange” Peter says, when such proofs of your metal, (that metal of the purity of your faith in Jesus) come upon you from Him. Because that is just how it is for the true believer!

And Beloved, it is no different today. Though as yet in Australia on the whole Christians are not targeted and threatened with physical violence for their faith, there is a multifaceted assault upon everything that we seek to cling to and are called by God to bear witness to. While we live in these bodies, (these tents Paul calls them) we live these bodies of flesh and blood!

Under the emperor Nero, for those who didn't bow down to him in worship, murderous tyranny reigned. As we saw some weeks ago, for those who compromised their faith all was well. But for those who bowed down only to God, the One True and Living God of the Bible, that “proving” that they were put to, was all too fiery and real. And indeed for some, they paid for their declarations with their very lives in the flames. And yet Peter reassures them that those suffering's are only a “trial” a test. No, these things are not designed by God to break them but to strengthen them. To prove their faith. So do not “think it's strange” when such things come, nor let them allow you to become discouraged. No on the contrary, be encouraged. Because such hardships are a badge of honour, as we take ownership and even in a sense “participate” share, “in the sufferings of Christ.” Not for salvation of course, but as a mark of being part of His Body, His Church, for whom He also died!

V13: “But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” Now again, we “share in Jesus sufferings” not as though we were contributing toward our salvation, but as part of His mistreated and persecuted church for whom he suffered and died. Yes “Christ sufferings” are our suffering's, when we walk in His steps and we testify to the truth about Him!

Brothers and sisters, when we face difficulties because we are Christian, “if we suffer for doing good” chapter 3:17, in this we are blessed! Yes in this we in effect “share in his sufferings,” the very sufferings of Jesus! He Himself said in Matthew 10:24-25 “the student is not above his teacher nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher and the servant like his master.”

Also in the parable of the tenants, Matthew 21:38-39, Jesus revealed His Sonship and his being the true heir to the throne to those pretenders of the day, the Jewish ruling elite. We read: “But when the tenants saw the Son they said to each other, “This is the Heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance”. So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.” Granted, this is a parable, and we need to be careful when we draw our theology directly from parables. But clearly, God is the vineyard owner, Jesus is the heir. The tenants are the Jews firstly, and then the wider world. And they believe, by killing the Heir, killing the Son, (even the promised deliverer) they believe they would cast off the owner's right to the land, and then have full sovereignty over it and themselves. Yes they would be masters of their own destiny!

So if they did that to the Heir, even the very Son of God Beloved, we “should think it not strange” when the evil perishing world has destructive designs upon us His servants, who seek to follow, to honour, and to testify to, and to glorify Him!

No, a servant is not above his master, he can only hope to be *like* his master. But we have to remember that these trials and difficulties will last for only a season, even if it be the season of our whole life, which is the great tribulation. And we also need to remember that “the end of all things is near” v7. “Jesus is ready to judge the living and the dead.” V5. We have been living in the last days since Jesus had His victory over sin and death at the cross. And also that He “is coming soon” Revelation 22:20.

No we cannot expect heaven on earth, or even an easy ride in this life, if we are truly following the king. What the Lord has promised us is troubles in this life and a cross, if we would but come after Him. But with them, a future, and an inheritance that humanity has not even begun to imagine!

Praise God! Yes “Come Lord Jesus come.” And in those trials and difficulties in this life, for His Name's sake, “we share in Christ's sufferings.” And also in those things, our joy will be fulfilled and complete. When His glory is revealed Hallelujah!

In v14, Peter continues this forewarning to the believers of what lay ahead. He explains what an honour it is, (not in the sight of men in this world and this life, but in view of the Kingdom, and in the sight of God Almighty Himself), to bear the scars and sufferings of His Son. V14: “If you are insulted, (so reviled or reproached or ridiculed) because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

John Calvin explains that what Peter does here is point us to his own denial of Jesus' sufferings of what lay ahead at the cross. Matthew 16:21-23 “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never Lord,” he said. “This shall never happen to you”. Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan. You are a stumbling block to me, you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Yes, Peter is using his own hatred of Jesus' sufferings, even trying to dissuade the Lord from what lay ahead. In his ignorance of the path that Jesus must take to glory, he even tried to keep the Lord from that which salvation would come! “Never Lord this shall never happen to you.”

Beloved we can see in Peter's own experience that suffering leading to glory is counter intuitive to every aspect of our being. Perhaps we can understand suffering for that which we can see, which we can hear and touch, but for an unseen promised inheritance, even in the presence of the King Himself, “Never Lord, this shall never happen to you”. “Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

‘You need to raise your vision Peter’, Jesus is saying. ‘You need to lift your focus. I Am looking to the end goal of my mission. You are only looking to the here and now’.

And he continues in Matthew 16:24- 27 “If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what would it profit a man were he to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? And what can a man give in exchange for his

soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with the holy angels, and he will reward each person according to what he has done.”

Dear friends, if we are ashamed of, if we in any way despise the sufferings and Cross of Jesus, His Spirit is not at work in us. Peter, after his years of sufferings and service for Jesus had come to understand that fiery trials, difficulties, and sufferings for our faith in Jesus in the midst of an evil perishing world, are the hallmarks of the authenticity of our adoption into the family of God! If your road as a Christian is an easy one, there is a problem. Because may I suggest, that you are not living in the real world, with its neon lights of sin and temptation flashing on every corner. The evidence that “The Spirit of God and of glory” is resting upon us, is our strangeness to the perishing world around us. This world and this life are not our real home. We are just passing through.

We are sojourners in a foreign land. So our treatment at times at the hands of the world, (perhaps even family and friends) for the stand that we are making in Christ we should “not think strange.” The world's indifference, contempt, enmity, even murderous persecution toward we who claim Christ, we should “not think strange.” And we should even wear these things as a badge of honour, because in these things, we truly walk in the steps of our Lord and Saviour. Even these are the hallmarks that we are not sons and daughters of the world. “The Spirit of God and of glory,” not only for the here and now, but the glory that is to come when Jesus returns. These difficulties which we face in the world are the hallmarks of the authenticity of our adoption by God in Christ!

Again, Hallelujah and praise the Lord! What a privilege. What a tremendous privilege we have laid upon us when the testimony of our Lord Jesus moves those around us in some way. Even to take up action against us. Because when it does, we stand in good company! Matthew 5:11-12: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Acts 5:40-41: “His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” Brothers and sisters, what Peter is also doing here is helping us understand that ultimately, the barbs and reproaches that we endure for bearing the name Christian, the Name of Christ, fall not on us, but on Him!

In Psalm 69:7-9, writing of his own struggles, which we understand as being messianic and speaking of Jesus, we read: “For I endure scorn for your sake, and shame covers my face. I am a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother`s sons, for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you, fall on me.” The writer of the old hymn understood what Peter is telling us: “To the old rugged cross I will ever be true, its shame and reproach gladly bear. Then he'll call me someday to my home far away, when his glory forever I'll share. So I will cherish the old rugged cross. Till my trophies at last I lay down. I will cling to the old rugged cross and exchange it someday for a crown!”

Friends we might be the target, but their enemy is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yes, their enemy is God! And it is clear that the “Spirit of God and of glory” rests upon us, when we stand firm in Him! And now Peter actually qualifies this suffering for us. As he has done before more than once in this letter he explains that doing it hard and facing difficulties and

enmity for our faith in him who saved us is one thing. But reaping what we sow, because of sin in our life, is another thing altogether.

V15: "If you suffer it should not be as a murderer, or a thief or any other kind of criminal or even a meddler." The meddler here means someone who pries into another man's affairs. Brothers and sisters this verse doesn't need much explanation. Receiving due penalty or enmity, or ostracising for any kind of wrongdoing or ungodly behaviour should not surprise us, and indeed should be expected in a just society! We see every day the lack of the fulfilment of such an expectation. Justice is not done, as the evildoer goes free and the victims are left asking why? So receiving just punishment for one's own foolish or wicked actions should be a given, Peter explains. V16: "however, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." In Greek it says, "Glorify God in the name."

Brethren, I love the way that Peter puts it here. "Praise God (or glorify God) that you bear that name." But of course it raises a confronting question: how are we "bearing that name?" Peter says, "Do not be ashamed." Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16) Jesus himself says in Mark 8:38 "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Yes, the question remains: are we "ashamed to bear the name?" The Name of Christ.

Christian! Notice how Jesus describes the world. "This adulterous and sinful generation." But He is not talking about physical adultery here, (though that is a given because immorality and perversion abound like never before) but no what He is speaking about here is spiritual adultery. Claiming the Name of Jesus while playing the harlot, (or the male equivalent) with some other god!

Dear friends, can you see that this gets at the very heart of how we "bear," how we carry, "that Name." Though we be forgiven sinners, washed clean by the Blood of the Lamb, do we hold high the banner of Christ in our lives for all to see? Yes, though we be in our stumbling's, we are overtly, and ashamed to carry, to "bear the Name" of our Saviour. Even as one who carried the banner of the king, as the army marched into battle.

Brethren that is the imagery conveyed here. The person who carried the banner into battle wielded no sword. They relied upon the king for their protection! James the brother of Jesus put it this way in v2-4 of chapter one: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Brothers and sisters, Alistair Begg explains that though it be totally counter intuitive to everything in our being, if we seek to embrace the trials and difficulties that we face in this life because of our faith, as coming directly from God, then as James says in verse 2, we will begin to see such things as "pure joy." Meaning that our joy would be pure, unadulterated, uncorrupted. Having been purified by those trials of living for Christ, in a world that has abandoned God! Because He is seeking to strengthen us, to develop our perseverance, and to bring us to maturity as full grown adults in our faith. Beloved if we can by God's grace

learn to embrace such things, then, will we truly be prepared to “bear the name unashamedly.”

Peter knew experientially of what he wrote. In Acts 5:40-42 we read: “His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.”

Friends, notice what they did, they continued to preach and teach in those very places amongst where they were arrested and warned, to “never speak in the Name of Jesus again, under the threat and fear of death! Yes, brothers and sisters, suffering for the Name! Bearing witness to the Name! Being not ashamed of Christ’s Name! This is that to which we have been called. And in many ways, how we carry the Name of our Saviour, how we “Bear the Name,” both personally and collectively as a church, really does testify to the authenticity of our adoption into Christ’s Kingdom as God's sons and daughters!

Beloved, let's seek to “Bear His Name with all honour and integrity, until He comes to take us home!

Let's pray!