

## 1 Peter 4:17-19 'Judgement And Contending For The Faith!'

Last week's message was from 1 Peter 4:12-16; 'Suffering For The Name' I called it. V12: "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." Peter called them his "agapertoi", his beloved ones! I explained that he had in effect wrapped his arms around them with his words, encouraging them to press on despite their current trials and sufferings. They shouldn't be surprised when such things occur because for the Christian, that's just how it is.

Yes for the Christian, "peirasmon," Being put to the proof for our authenticity. That's the reality! V13. "Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ." Not that we contribute to our salvation in any way, but as part of His maligned and persecuted church for whom He suffered and died. In that, we participate in Christ's sufferings. Matthew 10: "A servant can only hope to be like his master and a student like his teacher." And in Matthew 21 we read that the tenants killed Jesus the vineyard owner's son. So uprightness ultimately, will always bring the ire and hatred of the perishing world of humanity!

Verse 14: John Calvin explained that Peter points us to his own denial of Jesus' Cross in Matthew 16. "Get behind me Satan," Jesus says. "You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men." But when writing this letter, Peter had learned of his own folly in his denying of Jesus' sufferings. Acts chapter 5, having been flogged, "the apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." V16. "However if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." Yes bearing the Name of Jesus. Testifying to Him and for Him.

This is that to which we have been called. The unashamed carrying of the Name of Christ, to the perishing world, (family, friends, strangers and even enemies) around us. Being prepared to suffer for Christ's Name. In this we prove the authenticity of our adoption as God's children!

And so we pick up the text in 1 Peter 4:17-19: 'Judgement; And Contending For The Faith!'

Verse 17, from the New Testament Greek: "The time to begin the judgement from the House of God has come, and if firstly from us, what will be the end of the ones disobeying the gospel of God?" Brothers and sisters, when Peter speaks of "judgement" here, he is not talking about the final day of reckoning which is coming upon humanity because of sin, when Christ returns. If he were, this would have already taken place, now that it is nearly 2000 years later. And also notice, that he speaks of it as "beginning."

Friends, there is a pattern throughout Israel's history that when God brings judgement down upon the nations for collective unbridled sin and rebellion, He always begins with His Very Own House. Let's remember the context: Suffering for righteousness. Suffering for bearing Christ's Name. And let's also remember, that "the Lord disciplines those whom He loves." The goal of righteous discipline, (which is what God can only do because of His character, toward the ones He loves), yes the goal of righteous discipline is always to bring us to our senses. Back into the right way. And ultimately back to God!

In 2 Chronicles 30:6-9 we read: " At the King's command, couriers went throughout Israel and Judah with letters from the king and from his officials which read, "People of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that He may return to you who are left, who have escaped from the hand of the king of kings of Assyria. Do not be like your fathers and brothers, who were unfaithful to the Lord, the God of their fathers, so that he made them an object of horror, as you

see. Do not be stiff-necked, as your father's were, submit to the Lord. Come to the sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever. Serve the Lord your God, so that his fierce anger will turn away from you. If you return to the Lord then your brothers and your children will be shown compassion by their captors and will come back to this land, for the Lord your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him."

Even when because of unbridled outright rebellion He brings wrath, in the midst of that wrath, He maintains compassion and mercy upon His remnant. His elect. His chosen ones. His true church! When Abraham pleaded for Sodom and Gomorrah, pleaded for Lot in Genesis 18:23-25 we read "Then Abraham approached him and said, "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are 50 righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the city for the sake of the 50 righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you. Will not the judge of all the earth do right?"

And from Isaiah 10:10-12: "As my hand seized the kingdoms of the idols, kingdoms whose images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria, shall I not deal with Jerusalem and her images as I dealt with Samaria and her idols? When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, I will punish the king of Assyria for the wilful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes."

And finally from Jeremiah 25:29: "See I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name and will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down a sword upon all who live upon the earth, declares the Lord Almighty." Can I also recommend Ezekiel chapters 9, 10 and 11, as God begins His judgement of the whole world with His own people. It is a powerful and frightening passage of His Truth! But that is the pattern. "God disciplines those whom he loves," having mercy upon His remnant to bring them to repentance. And then He brings judgement down upon the heads of unrepentant rebels. And oftentimes, both of these things are happening simultaneously!

From the NIV version: "For it is time for judgement to begin with the family of God" God's house. It is severe persecution sent by God for the proving and the purging of His true church. It has 'begun,' Peter says. It is God's warning that the end is coming. V7 "The end of all things is near" remember?

Beloved there is no doubt that what began during Peter's day, continues to be played out during our own time, and is also heralding Christ's imminent return! And as I explained some weeks ago, much of what is proclaimed as the gospel and truth of God amongst those who are supposedly the Church of Christ, is actually "Ichabod" "The glory of God has departed." The grip of the scriptures upon those who profess to be God's people, yes the grip of His Word, His Truth, the Bible, upon those who claim His Name tragically, has lost its hold! While everything and anything is preached and is called the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But it isn't! You have all heard those kinds of things. 'Come to Jesus and you can be healthy wealthy and wise. You'll never have any problems, you will never be sick, and life will be a breeze. You'll have an easy road to heaven indeed; you can even have heaven on earth. Just come to Jesus and claim everything in His Name.' But we know it's all lies! If such things were true, why is Peter writing this letter? Yes, just talk about love and all will be well.

Now while yes, Beloved, praise God that God is love. And that His Love is the very foundation upon which we live and breathe, indeed in effect it is out eternal life's breath, expressed in that greatest of all acts of His Love, His Son Jesus upon that Cross for you and I. "Father forgive them for they know not what they do," Yes, whenever we speak of the Cross we proclaim God's Love. And yet what Peter is talking about here, is the reality of suffering for Christ's Name, and that God's Love is expressed here in His disciplining love of judgement, beginning with His own people. His church!

Friends, there is a perpetual purging which is taking place. God is perpetually “separating the wheat from the tares.” Those who are and those who are not truly His people. He's proving our faith by trial and hardship. And this also includes His judgement at times!

Sometimes it falls upon a single church. Sometimes on an area of a city. Sometimes a whole denomination, even a whole nation, for apostate religion. And it comes to the church, by the compromise and the casting aside of his Holy Spirit breathed Word, the Bible!

Look again at the words: “And if it begins with God's house what will be the end of the ones disobeying the gospel of God?” Brothers and sisters, we have all most likely at some time, heard someone say something like, ‘You can take that as gospel’. And what they mean is that the truth of this statement is absolute. Without question. Beyond doubt! You might be interested to know, that the word “gospel” appears in the Bible 111 times. 14 times it is called the “gospel of Jesus Christ” and 6 times “the gospel of God.” The Collins dictionary defines the word “gospel” as ‘glad tidings’. The revelation of the Christian faith. The story of Christ’s life and sayings as set down in the first four books of the New Testament. And perhaps most telling, anything accepted as infallibly true!

Brothers and sisters, may I suggest that we generally think of the “gospel” in relation to Jesus, and with good reason and rightfully so. Luke 2:9-11: “An Angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the Angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you glad tidings of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord.”

So to think of the gospel in relation to Jesus is only right and proper. But when we break it down, the very reason that the gospel exists, is because John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. That whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” So though indeed the gospel is the truth about Jesus life, and him having come in fulfilment to the prophecies of the scriptures, *it is the gospel of God*, because it is he who sent his son Jesus.

And friends *this is* the gospel. This is the good news. The glad tidings. The judgement of God is coming upon humanity because of sin, but in the midst of that judgement the light of “God's Gospel” through Jesus bursts forth. For, “if judgement begins with the House of God what will be the end of the ones disobeying the gospel of God?” Yes, “what will be the end of the ones disobeying” the infallible, the undeniable, the absolute truth of God revealed and fulfilled in the coming of His Son Jesus! Yes what will their end be? It's a terrifying thought.

Paul puts it this way in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10: “God is just, he will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. That will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.”

Dear friends, it is a terrifying, unimaginable thing to fall into the hands of our righteous God without the righteousness of Christ, because “the books will be opened,” and the eternal audit will take place! What will become of them? Those who refuse to respond to God's truth? Only God knows.

And Beloved may I again suggest, that God's greatest judgement will be kept for those who have declared and do declare Jesus, (and today they are a number without end it seems) yes those who declare Jesus as a deceitful means to their evil ends! “Wolves in sheep’s clothing” Paul calls them. Yes ravenous wolves. With the frightening thing being, that they are dressed in the same garments as the sheep! Jude the brother of our Lord spoke of them like this in v3-4: “Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the Saints. For certain men whose

condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who changed the grace of our God into a licence for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only sovereign Lord." Notice that he says, "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation that we share...." Jude was keen to encourage them. He was keen to rejoice with them in their shared salvation through Jesus. And although Jude was "very eager" to do that, he goes on to say "I felt I had to write."

He was compelled by the Holy Spirit you see. Moved by God to warn them of this deceptive danger from within. "I had to write to urge you to contend for the faith." Friends "contend" and "entrusted." Underline them in your Bibles if that is your thing. "Entrusted" to you and I.

But we cannot "contend" for something by doing nothing. You cannot be a contender for the world championship without training, without discipline and without competing. It takes focus, it takes commitment to the goal. And notice that we are to "contend" for that which with which we have been "entrusted." The gospel. Christ's gospel. The gospel of God!

Brothers and sisters, think now of the word "entrusted." Because of God's mercy through Jesus we live in a privileged position of trust. We have been "entrusted" with the most rare, the most precious, the most valuable of all gifts. The gospel. God's gospel. His message of salvation His message of warning. And think about it. It has been entrusted to us by God himself, so that we do "contend for the faith!"

Brethren, whether it be the paring away by small increments, or the carving off of great foundational Biblical truths, Satan's goal is always the same. That that which is absolute and undeniably infallible, is called into question. By even the faithful, through "the imaginations of men's minds."

Yet again dear friends, notice the words from Peter verse 17 "what will the outcome be?" What will become of them?" And he drives the point home here by reiterating it in verse 18: "And, if it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the Sinner?" Beloved, as "no eye has seen, nor ear has heard nor mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love him," equally I believe it to be true, that hell, (what it contains and entails for the belligerent unrepentant lost souls, "who disobey the gospel of God") have not even begun to grasp the unimaginable everlasting horror that awaits them. How could they!

Brethren, perhaps you feel that I have blurred the lines between suffering for our faith while 'bearing the name,' and contending for our faith against "wolves in sheep's clothing." But may I put it to you, that they are indeed two sides of the same coin. One is standing for our faith against an antagonistic ambivalent and evil world, while the other is about doing the same, against those who falsely claim to "bear the Name" and hold high the banner of Jesus. And when Peter says, "And if it is hard for the righteous to be saved." It is not as though he were saying that when we stand before God it is going to be hard to be good enough to be accepted, as though Christ's Blood were not sufficient for us to have full assurance, no. Blessed assurance Jesus is mine, oh what a foretaste of glory divine we sing.

No, what Peter is doing here, is simply conveying the difficulties, that everyone who truly puts their shoulder to the plough for Christ's Kingdom, and following in our Lord's steps, will face! The life of ease which many preach and many more profess today, didn't exist in Peter's time. If any of the apostles were here today (and I mean the actual apostles not those who call themselves apostles today) yes if any of them were alive today they would tell us, that the life of ease you are seeking is not in any way our experience. That is what Peter is conveying here. "And if it is hard for the righteous to be saved."

Beloved, it is hard (the life of the Christian) on every level. Tremendous blessing and eternal riches yes, but hard in every level. Purchased with the suffering and the Shed Blood of the Very Son of God Himself. The reality of seeking to live in a world that is not only opposed to all that we believe in and

hold dear, but that same world which Satan uses to entice us and drag us away from the path of God's gospel truth. And also that daily dilemma of wrestling with the baggage of sin that the old person and the old nature would have us cling to! Jesus didn't talk about the way of the Cross for nothing. He didn't seek to do as many do today to lure people to Himself under false pretences no, He said "count the cost."

"How hard it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven." Consider the cross. "Take up the cross." Coming after Me is the hardest thing you will ever do. The cross was a one way ticket to death. An horrendous death. Yes, what Peter is describing here is the difficulty and the reality of living for Jesus! "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" If God puts to proof because of his love his own people, what hope is there for everyone else? And he sums up this reality in verse 19, and take note of the words "So then, those who suffer according to God's will."

These difficulties and judgements in this sense, come to us from God in "accordance with His will." These things are not Satan having any power over us. The Evil One cannot touch a hair on our head unless God give him permission. We know this from the book of Job. "So then those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator. And continue to do good." What is he saying? Stay the course. Trust in God. Continue to do what is right, though it bring you into hardship and conflict with those around you. Because God is faithful. And such difficulties and judgments ultimately, eternally, (though you don't understand it now) are for your building up and not for your tearing down. These things will spell victory and not defeat!

So in closing today, these "judgments," that Peter speaks of here as beginning with us (with the true church) are those God sent difficulties, those disciplines and trials of life, that He is using to prove our faith! He is "separating the wheat from the tares" as He brings His People into glory. And as I explained last time, that we need to recognise and rejoice that these things come from God, for the proving of our adoption as His children! Then and only then, will we be able to rejoice in those trials and be able "to contend for the faith."

Let's pray.