1 Peter 4:12-19

Key Verse 4:13

 *“But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, So that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed”*

Introduction: The believers should rejoice in the fiery ordeals that they were enduring because these were the opportunity for them to participate in the sufferings of Christ. Jesus already suffered in the body to judge their sins and save them, but in order to sanctify them, it was time for judgment to begin with God’s household. Their fiery ordeal was like a fiery furnace to test and purify their faith. They should not rebel against the sufferings from God, but should rejoice and praise God. Through suffering for the sake of Christ they were identified as Chistians--Christ’s people and they could look forward to the glory and abounding joy when Jesus comes again.

1. Read verses 12-13. Why should the believers not be surprised by the fiery ordeal that had come on them? (12) What purpose did God have for them through this fiery ordeal? (12, 1:7) How did Peter characterize these sufferings? (13) How should the believers respond to them? Why?

***12*** *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* ***13*** *But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

**1:*7*** *These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

1. The believers should not be surprised by the fiery ordeal that had come on them because it was not something strange. It was perfectly normal for them to suffer in this way. This shows that their suffering was from God according to God’s will. It was not something surprising or strange. Instead of being surprised, the believers should accept this fiery ordeal from God and use it as an opportunity to glorify God.
2. This fiery ordeal had come on them for the good purpose of testing and purifying their faith, so that God would be praised, glorified and honored when Jesus returned. The believers might have expected that to be blessed and to show that they were blessed by God was to live an easygoing and comfortable life--a life free from sufferings and fiery ordeals. In this way, they never expected to endure the kind of fiery ordeal they were now facing. But God did not call them to a comfortable and easy life, but to a life that suffers for the gospel. God’s will and purpose was to bless them from the inside out by testing and purifying their faith. When their faith was tested and proved genuine, they could be used as a source of blessing to others. They might not have been able to see what God was doing at the time, but in the future they would see what God had done. In this way, God was working in the midst of their sufferings and fiery ordeals, in order to reveal God’s glory, not only now, but even more when Jesus returned. At that time they would know, and everyone would see that they had passed the test and their faith had been made genuine. A missionary came to California and anticipated to have a green card soon. But it took over a decade to procure it. Many days and nights he had to shed tears and his career ruined. He wanted to go back to his mother country. But he endured and waited by the prayer of many servants. Later he realized that God had a glorious purpose behind the visa problem. God purified his heart and he began to take hold of John 12:24 to participate in the suffering of Jesus Christ to serve the world mission command by purifying his motive. Sometimes believers want to pass the test of faith as soon as possible and be free from their sufferings, but they should know that their sufferings could last to the end of their lives or until Jesus comes again, in order to fully reveal the glory of God. They should live by faith from first to last, through all the sufferings to the end of their lives or until Jesus comes again.
3. Peter characterized these sufferings as a fiery ordeal. The intense nature of the sufferings they were called to endure was necessary in order for God to test and purify their faith. These fiery ordeals worked like a furnace for refining gold. Proverbs 17:3 and 27:21 both compare the testing of faith to go gold refined in a furnace, saying, “The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart” and “The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but people are tested by their praise”. Their faith was being refined in a fiery furnace through great heat and pressure; burning away all the impurities and leaving behind the value of pure gold. In this way, fire is necessary for the faith and spiritual growth of believers, that God would be glorified through their believing lives. God knows how much suffering each person needs or can bear, and God decides how much and for how long.
4. The believers should not respond to these sufferings as something strange, rather should respond to these sufferings by rejoicing. This was not the normal or natural way of responding to sufferings. However, the believers were called to suffer and where to see suffering in a different light than the way the world sees suffering.
5. The believers should respond to sufferings by rejoicing so that they may be overjoyed when Jesus’ glory is revealed. At the second coming of Jesus, their sufferings would be changed to glory and their rejoicing to being overjoyed. Their sufferings were an opportunity to participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that they could participate in His glory upon His return. Though suffering for Christ, they could grow to become more like Christ, so that when he was revealed they would be like Him. In this way, their suffering for Christ could be seen as a sign of God’s love for them. Through suffering for Christ, they were identified as those worthy to be used by God, showing that they were the people belonging to God.
6. Read verses 14-16. In what respect were the believers blessed when they were insulted because of the name of Christ? (14) What kinds of things should they avoid suffering for? (15) How should they respond to the opportunity to suffer as a Christian? (16)

***14*** *If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.* ***15*** *If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.* ***16*** *However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.*

1. The believers were blessed when they were insulted because of the name of Christ because the Spirit of glory and of God rested on them. Here the Spirit of glory and of God is the Holy Spirit. God sent the Holy Spirit after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension; after he was glorified in the presence of God. So Peter refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of glory and of God. When the Holy Spirit rests on a believer, that believer experiences a deep and intimate fellowship with God. There are several ways in which the Holy Spirit comes to rest on believers. The Holy Spirit rests on believers when they gather together in prayer and worship (Act 2:1-4, 13:2), when one hears, repents and believes the gospel (Act 2:38, 10:44), when they ask for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13), when they obey God’s commands or a mission from God (Act 5:32, John 14:15-18), or through the laying on of hands or the prayer of other believers (Act 19:6, Rom 1:11 1Tim 4:14). However, here the Holy Spirit also comes to rest on believers when they are insulted because of the name of Christ. When believers suffer or are persecuted for the sake of Christ, God strengthens them through the Holy Spirit and they can speak God’s words through the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:9-11). The Holy Spirit resting on them shows that God was pleased. Through suffering for Christ, they were doing good and doing what was right; they were doing the will of God and what they were called to do.
2. The believers should avoid suffering as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. They had already spent enough time in the past living a sinful lifestyle (4:3). They were not called to suffer for doing evil, but to suffer for doing good (2:20, 3:9, 3:17). When believers suffer for doing wrong or doing evil, they do not represent Christ well and cannot be a good example to the world. The lives of believers should be distinguishable from the lives of unbelievers, in order for believers to influence and save some of them.
3. They should respond to the opportunity to suffer as a Christian not though being ashamed, but through praising God. Suffering is considered shameful in the eyes of the world. People suffer because of their sins; because they do what is wrong or evil. However, those that suffer for the sake of Christ, suffer for doing good and for doing what is right. They suffer because as Christians they bear the name of Christ, so that they represent Christ to the world. If they are ashamed of this suffering, they are ashamed of Christ, and Jesus said, that *“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels”* (Mark 8:38). Believers should praise God when they suffer for Christ, because they know that by doing so they will be honored and will be overjoyed when Jesus comes again. As Peter said earlier, quoting from Isaiah 28:16, *“For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame”* (2:6). Those that trust in Jesus who suffered for them, that they also suffer for his name should not be ashamed, but praise God.
4. Read 17-19. When did God’s judgement begin? (17) Why did God’s judgement begin with God’s household? (17, 12, 1 Cor 11:32) What implication does this have for those who do not obey the gospel? (17-18) How should the believers respond to sufferings in light of God’s will and judgement? (19)

***17*** *For it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* ***18*** *And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”* ***19*** *So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.*

1. God’s judgment began at that time. It began with the first generation of believers. It began after Jesus judged their sins through the cross. After having their sins judged on the cross, they were called to participate in the sufferings of Christ.
2. God’s judgment began with God’s household to test their faith. As 1Corinthians 11:32 says, *“Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.with God’s household after Jesus’ sufferings.”* After Jesus suffered on the cross to judge sins, judgement came upon God’s household--those that trusted in Jesus. God’s judgement came upon them through suffering for the name of Christ, through which their sins and body were judged together with Jesus on the cross. As Paul said, *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* This is not something theoretical, but rather the actual judgement and putting to death of their sins within them through the fire of the Holy Spirit. As Paul also said, *“For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh”* (Rom 8:3). Believers cannot expect to escape God’s judgment while in the flesh. Their sins and their body will be judged that their spirit can live (Jer 25:29, 49:12). In this way, the judgment of believers while in the flesh has a redemptive purpose.
3. The implication here is that if even those that obey Christ have to be judged and suffer to be saved, what will judgment look like for those that disobey. Surely, those that disobey will face a greater judgment. Here, Peter was quoting Proverbs 11:31, which says, *“If the righteous receive their due on earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner!”* Not only will the judgment of the disobedient be more severe, it will also be God’s final judgement. As Paul said, *“For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality”* (Rom 9:29). In speaking of God’s judgment on earth as it relates to believers, Jesus said, *“... those will be days of distress unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again.* ***20*** *“If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them”* (Mark 13:19-20).
4. In light of God’s judgment, believers should respond to sufferings by committing themselves to their faithful Creator and continuing to do good. When believers suffer they might become rebellious toward God and stop doing good. They might become frustrated and tempted to give up. But knowing that their suffering is what they need according to God’s will to test and purify their faith, they can instead commit themselves to God more. In this way, sufferings are a make or break test from God. In order to pass the test, believers should not become rebellious and stop doing good, but should commit themselves to God and continue to do good. They should bear all the burning pressure of their sufferings by relying on God. Their Creator God has a recreation or redemptive purpose in the sufferings; to prove their faith genuine and to transform them into the image of Christ.

One word: Rejoice in the sufferings of Christ