

Session 5

July 5, 2020

THE JOY ARISING FROM OUR HOPE

1 Peter 4:1-2, 12-19

Peter's writing is centered around two themes: making the most of our temporary sojourn on earth, and enduring tough times while here. At no time is the believer's testimony any stronger than when facing the fiery trials of persecution for the sake of Christ. Yet even in this, Christ, the One who suffered, is our role model (1 Peter 2:21). In our text, Peter mentions three areas in which we are to emulate Christ.

Attitude of Christ (vv. 1-2). In Philippians 2, the apostle Paul encouraged believers to have the mind of Christ in regard to humility. Here, Peter encourages the same attitude when it comes to suffering. No one suffered like Christ. The physical anguish of the cross was multiplied unimaginably by the dark hours of forsakenness associated with God's judgment of sin which He bore (see Matt. 27:46; 1 Pet. 2:24). Peter is not saying that we should suffer *what* Jesus suffered, but rather *how* Jesus suffered. Here, the mind of Christ is better translated as *resolve*. Believers are to be armed with the same *resolve* (consideration, determination, intent) that Christ had in *dying* according to God's will (v. 1), so that we might *live* according to God's will (v. 2). The apposition ending verse 1, "because the one who suffered in the flesh has finished with sin," is a bit difficult. One rendering suggests that literal physical death alleviates all sin. In that Christ was victorious over death, our ultimate deliverance from the presence of sin is the bliss of heaven. A more metaphorical rendering suggests that once a believer no longer fears suffering and death, the temptations of this life are more easily swept aside.

Identification with Christ (vv. 12-14). Both Paul in Romans (5:3-5) and James in his epistle (1:2-4) are quick to point out that suffering through trials and difficulties is useful in maturing our faith and strengthening our perseverance. Here, in verse 13, Peter adds the element of joy, not because of what is produced in our lives *through* our suffering, but rather because of our identification with Christ *in* our suffering (see also Phil. 3:10). The three-step approach Peter offers in his exhortation is logical and practical. Step 1: Be prepared! The imperative comes as a negative: "Don't be surprised;" or "Don't act so astonished." The implication is that suffering persecution is the normal, usual course of events for believers, so prepare for it. Step 2: Be happy! Rejoice in the sufferings, then "rejoice with great joy" at the reward that awaits (v. 13; see also James 1:12; Rev. 2:10). Step 3: Be blessed! Those who suffer persecution because of their devotion to the Lord "are (already) blessed." The Holy Spirit of God guarantees His presence *during* the fiery trial (see Mark 13:11) and His continuing approval *after* the fiery trial (v. 14).

Sanctified for Christ (vv. 15-19). Who would have thought that this simple fisherman would produce such profound Scriptures? Verse 15 is plainly stated, but problematic in its application. Some commentators see these as references to those sins of which early believers were accused. Their obligation was then to give no cause whatsoever for such accusations. Other commentators simply see these sins in contrast to that which precedes them and that which follows. In other words, if you are suffering persecution, by all means let it not be because of real transgressions, whether grave (murder or theft), or mild (evildoing or meddling). Rather, should suffering come,

let it be solely for one's commitment to Christ (v. 16). Verse 17 is equally problematic. "For the time has come" does more than make judgment a natural occurrence. Rather, it connotes intention. The judge is clearly God, and the judged (God's household) are clearly believers. The suffering and persecution the believers were facing in their sojourn had a godly purpose (v. 19). Those who bore the name of "Christian" would bear a great testimony to those who would perish apart from Christ.