

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

1 Peter 4:12-16

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue to read 1 Peter 4:12-16.

In 1 Peter 4:11, Peter offers praises to God: "To whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." It seems that Peter's letter could conclude here. According to the outline Peter provided in 1:13-21, this letter has three main points: the first is to set your hope fully on the revelation of Jesus Christ; the second is to learn to be holy as God is holy; and the third is to live as sojourners in the world. Peter elaborates on the second and third points, providing excellent exposition and relieving the burden in his heart. Thus, the letter could end here. However, Peter looks at the broader environment, noticing the increasing intensity of persecution. Peter himself is prepared and ready to be martyred for God at any time, but he worries that the saints in the church are not yet prepared. Therefore, he went back to the first point, encouraging the saints to set their hope fully on the revelation of Jesus Christ, especially in the midst of trials, to hold tightly to the glorious hope. In this context, Peter brings forth the final section of his first epistle, from 4:12 to 5:11, which encourages the saints to wait for the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Verse 12: "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you."

"Beloved" is Peter's affectionate address to the saints, naturally introducing the final section of his letter. When he says, "do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you," he acknowledges that saints often pray for their trials to pass and seek deliverance from them. However, given the escalating persecution, Peter prepares the saints by warning them of the impending fiery trials.

The term "fiery" conveys the severity of the trials, likening them to fire that burns intensely and is hard to withstand. Yet, this metaphor also highlights the positive purpose of the trials: to purify, like refining gold, separating impurities from the gold, making it purer and more valuable. As 1 Peter 1:7 states, "that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Trials refine faith, making it purer and helping believers look solely to Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith, and enabling them to receive His grace. This grace forms the foundation of their hope, leading to praise, honor, and glory when Christ returns, reflecting God's good will for them.

Thus, Peter advises not to be surprised as though encountering something unusual, for such experiences are normal for all saints and ordained by God. Especially in the end times, believers should understand that God has not promised a trouble-free life; fiery trials are inevitable. Paul echoes this in Romans 5:3-5, "knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint." Contrary to the prosperity theology preached by some mega-churches, which suggests that God wants believers to live prosperous lives on earth, the Bible does not support this teaching. Paul also states in 2 Timothy 3:12, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Therefore, saints should expect and accept trials and persecutions as part of their earthly sojourn. We must arm ourselves with the mindset of Christ's suffering, ready to face fiery trials.

Verse 13: "but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy."

Here, we are told not only to avoid difficult circumstances but to face them with joy because we are suffering alongside Christ. This was Peter's own experience. In Acts 5:41, after Peter was arrested and beaten by the Jewish council for preaching, he rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for Jesus' name. Similarly, Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten, and imprisoned for preaching in Philippi. In

Acts 16:25, around midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns, praising God despite their dire situation. Their joy and praise in such adversity led to the conversion of the jailer and the founding of the church in Philippi. The apostles joyfully shared in Christ's sufferings, and they encourage us to do the same, drawing on Christ's strength to endure.

Thus, when Christ's glory is revealed, we will also be exceedingly joyful. The KJV translates this as "partakers of Christ's sufferings," which implies more than merely suffering alongside Christ—it means participating in His sufferings. Paul expresses a similar thought in Colossians 1:24: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church." Peter's idea of sharing in Christ's sufferings aligns perfectly with Paul's statement about filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

We understand that Christ's sufferings fall into two categories: the first to accomplish redemption and the second for the building up of the church. For redemption, Jesus became incarnate, lived a perfect human life, walked the path to the cross, and ultimately was crucified, completing the work of redemption. In this process, Jesus endured much suffering to achieve redemption. In this aspect, Christ's sufferings are complete, and there is nothing we need to add or can add; it is entirely by grace, and we need only to accept this grace to receive salvation.

The second category, for the building up of the church, began after Jesus' resurrection when He breathed the Holy Spirit into His disciples, imparting the Spirit of life into them. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, empowering them to preach the gospel and establish the church. Jesus entrusted His disciples with the task of building up the church, which is His body. Paul took on the responsibility of filling up in his flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of His body, the church. Peter also encourages the saints to partake in Christ's sufferings. Dear brothers and sisters, as you serve the church, you will inevitably experience some suffering, which is part of Christ's sufferings. You are filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. When Christ returns, the church will receive glory, and you will share in that glory, rejoicing and exulting.

Verse 14: "If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. If we share in Christ's sufferings, we will also be insulted for His name's sake, and this is a blessing. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:11-12, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven." Jesus also tells us that if we are insulted and persecuted for the sake of Christ, we should rejoice and be glad, for our reward in heaven is great.

Peter then adds that the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. Peter here introduces a new term, "the Spirit of glory and of God." What does this mean? It might be unclear just from the Chinese, and the translation in the KJV is also unique: "the spirit of glory and of God rest upon you." If translated directly, it means both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of glory rest upon you. In fact, here both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of glory refer to the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. When we are born again, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our spirits, and this Holy Spirit is often referred to as the Spirit of God because He is sent by God and brings various riches of God to supply us.

If we share in Christ's sufferings and are insulted for His name's sake, the Spirit of God is called the Spirit of glory because the suffering we experience brings glory. Although both refer to the Holy Spirit, Peter presents two different levels, calling it the Spirit of God and the Spirit of glory, to depict that our participation in Christ's sufferings stores up glory in us, and this Spirit of God and glory does not only dwell in us but also rests upon us.

So, if we are willing to suffer for the sake of the Lord's name, glory will be produced in us. If you refuse to suffer, you are refusing glory. Let's hope that we all can see the value of suffering. Then, we will treasure every environment that God gives us and share in the sufferings of Christ within those environments. And these

momentary and light afflictions will achieve for us an exceedingly great and eternal glory.

Verse 15: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters."

Here we see Peter being very practical. He doesn't just say that suffering brings glory; rather, he emphasizes the reason for suffering. If you suffer as a partaker of Christ's sufferings, if you suffer for the sake of Christ's name, if you suffer for the building of the church, then these sufferings have value, and they will accumulate glory upon you. However, if you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters, this suffering is what you deserve; it is the consequence of your wrongdoing, and there is no glory in it.

Murder, theft, and wrongdoing are clearly moral flaws. But what does it mean to be a busybody in other people's matters? Generally, it refers to meddling in affairs that are not your concern. I looked up some dictionaries, and the explanation in the Thayer's Greek Lexicon is quite thought-provoking. It says, "refer to those who meddle with the affairs of the Gentiles in order to make them conform to the Christian standards." In other words, it refers to those who intervene in the affairs of Gentiles to make them conform to Christian standards. God has entrusted us with responsibilities within His household, and suffering for the sake of His household is blessed; this suffering will accumulate the glory of God upon you.

On the other hand, if you meddle in the affairs of Gentiles, even if your motive is good and you aim to make them conform to Christian values, Peter wants to say that this is being a busybody, and for this, you will suffer, and your suffering is deserved, without any glory coming from God. Dear brothers and sisters, how many Christian groups today try to turn Christian values into Christian nationalism, making everyone, including unbelievers, adhere to them? Perhaps your initial intention is good, but Peter wants to say that this is meddling in other people's matters. God has entrusted us with responsibilities within His household.

Verse 16: "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter."

If someone suffers as a Christian, what does that mean? The term "Christian" originated from the church in Antioch, where it was a name given by the Gentiles to the disciples because they were a group of people following Christ; it was a term uttered in a mocking tone, as Gentiles called this group of Christ's followers "Christians." So from the beginning, in the eyes of people, being a Christian was a name held in contempt. By the time Peter wrote his letters, Christians were commonly facing persecution and hardship. If people knew you were a Christian, you might face persecution for no reason at all. Yet Peter says, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed; rather, glorify God in this name. While others follow Satan and pursue worldly fame and power, we are the ones following Christ. If we face unjust mistreatment for following Christ, we should rejoice and glorify God in this name.

Dear brothers and sisters, over the past 2000 years, how many saints have suffered unjustly because they bore the name of Christian? They have given wonderful testimonies for this name, and because of their testimonies, the name of Christ has been spread. The number of Christians has increased, and churches have been established in every city. Today, in the free world, the name "Christian" carries some influence in society. Therefore, many politicians want to use this name to seize power, leading to its misuse and even association with immoral activities, bringing shame upon the name of Christian. Originally, people suffered because of the name "Christian," but today, the name "Christian" is used to make unbelievers suffer. If Peter were to come to this era, to your and my church, what would he say?

Let's pray together: Lord, have mercy on us. In these last days, help us fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, and let us eagerly await Your return together. Encourage us to rejoice and be willing to suffer for the sake of Christ, to suffer as Christians, for only through suffering can we attain glory. Grant us the mindset to endure suffering and to wait earnestly for Your return. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.