

1 Peter 4b

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" Oy...it's so hot!"

[For those online, there is the text of Scripture at the end]

INTRODUCTION

I'm not sure why we think it should be different. We want comfort. We watch the leather sofa commercials on TV, and we think we should be reclining there. We listen to the news of the rising Aussie dollar and note it's climbing faster than a Kiwi try against Tonga and say, yippee, things are good. Plenty is abundance and abundance is ease and we are to live in the land of comfort and ease, right here in Sydney, in Australia. Land of pleasure and bounty.

So it's a little confusing when we read in the Bible passages like we heard John read to us today. Peter the Jewish apostle and apostle to the Jews is telling his followers to expect tsuris. He commends troubles and tribulations to us as almost normative. He tells us to expect them. Obviously Peter had never heard of the Great Southland of the Holy Spirit and missed the history lesson with Captain Cook. My tongue is deep in my cheek. Peter knew a comfort, you see, from a source far deeper than a leather lounge. He knew the Almighty, and the sufferings of Y'shua he knew all too well also. From that rich experience and the aches of his relationship with the Lord, Peter commends to us four instructions in light of the troubles ahead. You might say, "Oy, it's so hot" but you ain't seen nothing yet.

Let's turn to the text and see how Peter describes these four instructions. First we are to expect suffering. Second we are to rejoice in suffering. Third we are to examine our life and fourth commit ourselves to the Lord who is faithful.

I. Expect suffering (v. 12)

First we are to expect suffering. This is diametrically opposed to the thesis of the modern age. We have conveniences and comforts. We are to get along with neighbours and relatives. Our worst suffering occurs we think when the traffic doesn't move quickly enough through the tunnel. We anger ourselves over bad referee calls on the football ground. But is that biblical suffering?

Someone asked CS Lewis, "Why do the righteous suffer?" "Why not?" he replied. "They're the only ones who can take it." Suffering is the heritage of the bad, of the penitent, and of the Son of God. Each one ends in the cross. The bad thief is crucified, the penitent thief is crucified, and the Son of God is crucified. By these signs we know the widespread heritage of suffering. [[Oswald Chambers in *Christian Discipline*](#)]. At the Nicene Council, an important church meeting in the 4th century AD, of the 318 delegates attending, fewer than 12 had not lost an eye or lost a hand or did not limp on a leg lamed by torture for their Christian faith.

Somerset Maugham, the English writer, once wrote a story about a janitor at St Peter's Church in London. One day a young vicar discovered that the janitor was illiterate and fired him. Jobless, the man invested his meager savings in a tiny tobacco shop, where he prospered, bought another, expanded, and ended up with a chain of tobacco stores worth several hundred thousand dollars. One day the man's banker said, "You've done well for an illiterate, but

where would you be if you could read and write?" "Well," replied the man, "I'd be janitor of St. Peter's Church in Neville Square."

I'm telling you these things to emphasize the ordinariness of suffering. It's in the believing world. The Messiah promises us this. Remember his words in John 16. "These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (Verse 33)

Most of the Psalms were born in difficulty. Most of the Epistles were written in prisons. Most of the greatest thoughts of the greatest thinkers of all time had to pass through the fire. Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* from jail. Florence Nightingale, too ill to move from her bed, reorganized the hospitals of England. Semiparalyzed and under the constant menace of apoplexy, Pasteur was tireless in his attack on disease.

Sometimes it seems that when God is about to make preeminent use of a man, he puts him through the fire. [Tim Hansel, *You Gotta Keep Dancin'*, David C. Cook, 1985, p. 87.](#)

Peter uses the word 'fiery' in verse 12 to modify this ordeal, this testing that is occurring to the believers. Remember he had used the term earlier to describe cleansing or purifying, rather than divine judgment or holiness as we might imagine for someone immersed in the Older Testament. But fire cleanses as every smelter would know and Peter uses this imagery earlier in this epistle and uses it here as a way of reminding us that ordinary suffering is just that. It's ordinary. It's significant and should be welcomed rather than rebuffed.

II. Rejoice in suffering (13-14)

Untold suffering seldom is. Because of that, we hear about it and hear about it from some. Don't you know people whom you are probably keen to avoid just about now? They have one woeful tale or another to share. They bemoan their fate and if only, oh for a break, oh for a government official, oh for a parent to have changed the way they treated them as a child. The list of should-be penitents goes on interminably. The dysfunction is very apparent.

Peter here is telling us to not only experience suffering, but to welcome and rejoice in it. Listen to the number of times in this text, in just two verses he commends it. Verse 13 'keep on rejoicing', verse 13 again 'rejoice with exultation', and verse 14 'you are blessed'. These ideas of joy are found in Paul's letters as well. Last week I was thinking much about Paul and his constant sufferings in shipwrecks, and beatings. He was charged with false crimes and brought up before courts and found guilty. He was often without food. He lived a tough life. [ref. 2 Cor 11: I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. 24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.]

But this same Paul rejoiced in the Lord throughout his ministry and throughout his letters, encouraging the believers to join him in this rejoicing. Peter picks up the theme and sings it together with Paul. It's a good song to sing. It's the right song to sing. Don't sing the "Nobody loves me, everybody hates me, guess I'll go eat worms" anthem of so many. Rejoice in your suffering. Peter says this assures you of knowing whose you are!

In fact, suffering Peter says, is an assurance of the fellowship of Messiah, of the glory to come in the future with Him, and enables us to truly glorify the name of the Lord. (Verses 13-14)

So we will not only expect suffering, we will rejoice in it, as long as it's suffering for the sake of Y'shua and not for wrongdoing. Let's be very clear on that one. It's not because you are a jerk or a loudmouth; it's not due to some mistakes you are making at work or in your personal relationships. It's due to the identification of your life with the life of Y'shua.

III. Examine your life (15-18)

When Jewish psychiatrist Victor Frankl was arrested by the Nazis in World War II, he was stripped of everything--property, family, possessions. He had spent years researching and writing a book on the importance of finding meaning in life--concepts that later would be known as logotherapy. When he arrived in Auschwitz, the infamous death camp, even his manuscript, which he had hidden in the lining of his coat, was taken away.

"I had to undergo and overcome the loss of my spiritual child, " Frankl wrote. "Now it seemed as if nothing and no one would survive me; neither a physical nor a spiritual child of my own! I found myself confronted with the

question of whether under such circumstances my life was ultimately void of any meaning. "He was still wrestling with that question a few days later when the Nazis forced the prisoners to give up their clothes.

"I had to surrender my clothes and in turn inherited the worn-out rags of an inmate who had been sent to the gas chamber," said Frankl. "Instead of the many pages of my manuscript, I found in the pocket of the newly acquired coat a single page torn out of a Hebrew prayer book, which contained the main Jewish prayer, *Shema Yisrael* (Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one God. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.)

"How should I have interpreted such a 'coincidence' other than as a challenge to *live* my thoughts instead of merely putting them on paper?"

Later, as Frankl reflected on his ordeal, he wrote in his book *Man's search for Meaning*, "There is nothing in the world that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions, as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life . . . 'He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*.'"

We who are believers in Y'shua know this purpose driven life, don't we? We examine ourselves according to the apostle Peter in light of imminent judgment that is befalling the world. Of course in context, Peter is referencing the fall of Rome and Nero's fiddling flame throwing. But in our day, we are under another judgment to come, and we again await the return of Y'shua. We again are hoping for justice in an unjust world. In a world where 50,000 sheep are now making their way after 80 days to Eritrea or where Senator Brown parades himself in a stunt in Parliament with President Bush, we all long for justice.

Iraqis are still beset by injustice as are people living in the Territories in Israel. Where is justice? Peter commends us to God who is the only Just One and the only one who will bring justice to this fallen earth.

Listen, times of persecution are times of opportunity for the people of God in evangelism. Warren Wiersbe says 'it wasn't the earthquake that brought that Philippian jailer to Messiah. That frightened him into almost committing suicide. No, it was Paul's loving concern for him that brought the jailer to faith in Jesus.'

We need to be looking for opportunities, for a moment in a person's life, to share the Good News of salvation with them. Don't be reluctant. Don't be reticent. Let's get on with it!

IV. Commit yourself to God (19)

I don't know about you, but I don't like the queue at the bank. It's rarely short and I never do like speaking through those Plexiglas protectors. I don't know where my mouth goes or how loudly to speak. Banking is not good in this country if you don't want fees applied either, so I try to avoid it at all, pardon me, costs.

So how is it that in verse 19 Peter uses a banking term and I like it? It's the word 'entrust' and it's the term that means 'to make a deposit for safe keeping.' So even though I'm anti banks here, I'm all for Peter's use of the spiritual express deposit bag. He tells us to deposit our lives in God's hands. God knows all things and will take care of this deposit. He won't even charge us a fee! He will do what is right. He will be faithful to His own promises. He will bring us to Himself at the last. Is that what you will do with God today?

Summary

Here are some things I see as we conclude, and you can add your thoughts to your own list.

- 1) Suffering is normative for all people, but only the believers in someone outside them will see it as an opportunity to grow by it
- 2) Judgment begins with the house of God so live holy in light of His return
- 3) Rejoicing is a command from God in light of or even in the darkness of persecution.
- 4) Sharing Y'shua is a good natural spiritual result of having your faith tested.

Next week we will look at chapter five, the great Shepherd lesson and learn how to care for one another as sheep. This will be especially good as we congregationally prepare for Behold Your God and welcoming those who are new to us. And, hey, you can start today with welcome, to those who are new to you and unknown. Please make sure you meet and greet all new folks each week. Let welcome be our watchword and no one slip through the proverbial cracks. OK?

Invitation

Dear friends, God wants us all to be born again to a living hope. If you are without that hope, despairing for your soul or for the disrepair of the world, or of your family or friends, God wants you to have true hope. This hope will not

disappoint; it's alive and supportive. And that hope is found in Y'shua. He is the anchor of our souls, and the evidence is in. He rose from the dead, just when all hope was apparently lost. That resurrection powered him from the grave and into the seat of authority in heaven. He is there for you, risen over our circumstances and risen to new meaning and life. Open your heart to him today. Receive Y'shua as the lamb slain from the foundation of the world for you.

If you have never experienced this eternal and new life about which we are speaking, if you are yet outside this relationship with God, then pray with me. I'll say a few words in prayer and if these words are your words, that is, if you agree with this prayer, then say it with me. In this prayer I will ask God to forgive us of our sins, whatever they might be and to make us born again. If that's what you want, then pray this prayer with me. Lord forgive me in the name of the Messiah Y'shua. Forgive me for all my sins, and make me clean again. I believe you died and rose again. Give me eternal life in the name of Y'shua, and make me born again. I trust you. Amen.

Actual Text

1Pet. 4.1 ¶ Therefore, since Messiah has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you;

but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.

1Pet. 4.7 ¶ The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Messiah, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1Pet. 4.12 ¶ Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;

but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Messiah, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.

If you are reviled for the name of Messiah, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;

but if anyone suffers as a believer, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.

For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?

Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

Other notes on suffering:

John Donne, a 17th century poet, experienced great pain. Because he married the daughter of a disapproving lord, he was fired from his job as assistant to the Lord Chancellor, yanked from his wife, and locked in a dungeon. (This is when he wrote that succinct line of despair, "John Donne/ Anne Donne/ Undone.") Later, he endured a long illness, which sapped his strength almost to the point of death. In the midst of this illness, Donne wrote a series of devotions on suffering which rank among the most poignant meditations on the subject. In one of these, he considers a parallel: The sickness, which keeps him in bed, forces him to think about his spiritual condition. Suffering gets our attention; it forces us to look to God, when otherwise we would just as well ignore Him.

[Adapted from Philip Yancey, *Where is God When it Hurts?* p. 58.](#)

The famous preacher D.L. Moody told about a Christian woman, who was always bright, cheerful, and optimistic, even though she was confined to her room because of illness. She lived in an attic apartment on the fifth floor of an old, rundown building. A friend decided to visit her one day and brought along another woman -- a person of great wealth. Since there was no elevator, the two ladies began the long climb upward. When they reached the second floor, the well-to-do woman commented, "What a dark and filthy place!" Her friend replied, "It's better higher up." When they arrived at the third landing, the remark was made, "Things look even worse here." Again the reply, "It's better higher up." The two women finally reached the attic level, where they found the bedridden saint of God. A smile on her face radiated the joy that filled her heart. Although the room was clean and flowers were on the windowsill, the wealthy visitor could not get over the stark surroundings in which this woman lived. She blurted out; "It must be very difficult for

you to be here like this!" Without a moment's hesitation the shut-in responded, "It's better higher up." She was not looking at temporal things. With the eye of faith fixed on the eternal, she had found the secret of true satisfaction and contentment.

Our Daily Bread.

In 1962, Victor and Mildred Goertzel published a revealing study of 413 "famous and exceptionally gifted people" called Cradles of Eminence. They spent years attempting to understand what produced such greatness, what common thread might run through all of these outstanding people's lives. Surprisingly, the most outstanding fact was

that virtually all of them, 392 had to overcome very difficult obstacles in order to become that they were.

Tim Hansel, *Holy Sweat*, 1987, Word Books Publisher,
p. 134.

On a wall in his bedroom Charles Spurgeon had a plaque with Isaiah 48:10 on it: "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." "It is no mean thing to be chosen of God," he wrote. "God's choice makes chosen men choice men...We are chosen, not in the palace, but in the furnace. In the furnace, beauty is marred, fashion is destroyed, strength is melted, glory is consumed; yet here eternal love reveals its secrets, and declares its choice."

W. Wiersbe, *Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers*, p. 223.

When William Sangster was told he was dying of progressive muscular atrophy, he made four resolutions and faithfully kept them: 1) I will never complain; 2) I will keep the home bright; 3) I will count my blessings; 4) I will try to turn it to gain.

W. Wiersbe, *Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers*, p. 215.

Elena Bonner, wife of Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, says that as he wrote his memoirs she typed, edited, and

nursed the work, doing everything she could to make sure it survived seizure by the government. Sakharov worked on his memoirs in Gorky, rewriting sections because they kept vanishing. Then one day he met Elena at the train station and with trembling lips told her, "They stole it." She says he looked like a man who had just learned of the death of a close friend. But after a few days, Sakharov returned to his work. According to his wife, each time he rewrote his memoirs there was something new--something better.

Today in the Word, Moody Bible Institute, January

1991, p. 34.

A clay pot sitting in the sun will always be a clay pot. It has to go through the white heat of the furnace to become porcelain.

Mildred Witte Struven, in *Bits and Pieces*, September 19, 1991, p. 6.

A man found a cocoon of the emperor moth and took it home to watch it emerge. One day a small opening appeared, and for several hours the moth struggled but couldn't seem to force its body past a certain point.

Deciding something was wrong, the man took scissors and snipped the remaining bit of cocoon. The moth emerged

easily, its body large and swollen, the wings small and shriveled.

He expected that in a few hours the wings would spread out in their natural beauty, but they did not. Instead of developing into a creature free to fly, the moth spent its life dragging around a swollen body and shriveled wings.

The constricting cocoon and the struggle necessary to pass through the tiny opening are God's way of forcing fluid from the body into the wings. The "merciful" snip was, in reality, cruel. Sometimes the struggle is exactly what we need.

Beth Landers.

Once when Bob Hope received a major award he responded, "I don't deserve this, but then I have arthritis and I don't deserve that either."

Unknown.

B.M. Lauderville has written, "The vine clings to the oak during the fiercest of storms. Although the violence of nature may uproot the oak, twining tendrils still cling to it. If the vine is on the side opposite the wind, the great oak is its protection; if it is on the exposed side, the tempest only presses it closer to the trunk. In some of the storms of life, God intervenes and shelters us; while in others He allows us to be exposed, so that we will be pressed more closely to Him."

Today in the Word, April 1989, p. 17.

Those who know the path to God can find it in the dark.

Maclaren.

Suffering teaches us patience. These words were found penned on the wall of a prison cell in Europe: "I believe in love even when I don't feel it. I believe in God even when He is silent."

Billy Graham, Till Armageddon.

Though many of us have seen pictures of a huge eagle's nest high in the branches of a tree or in the crag of a cliff, few of us have gotten a glimpse inside. When a mother eagle builds her nest she starts with thorns, broken branches, sharp rocks, and a number of other items that seem entirely unsuitable for the project. But then she lines the nest with a thick padding of wool, feathers, and fur from animals she has killed, making it soft and comfortable for the eggs. By the time the growing birds reach flying age, the comfort of the nest and the luxuries of free meals make them quite reluctant to leave. That's when the mother eagle begins "stirring up the nest." With her strong talons she begins pulling up the thick carpet of fur and feathers, bringing the sharp rocks and branches to the surface. As more of the bedding gets plucked

up, the nest becomes more uncomfortable for the young eagles. Eventually, this and other urgings prompt the growing eagles to leave their once-comfortable abode and move on to more mature behavior.

Today in the Word, June 11, 1989.

David, a 2-year old with leukemia, was taken by his mother, Deborah, to Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, to see Dr. John Truman who specializes in treating children with cancer and various blood diseases. Dr. Truman's prognosis was devastating: "He has a 50-50 chance." The countless clinic visits, the blood tests, the intravenous drugs, the fear and pain--the mother's ordeal can be almost as bad as the child's because she must stand by,

unable to bear the pain herself. David never cried in the waiting room, and although his friends in the clinic had to hurt him and stick needles in him, he hustled in ahead of his mother with a smile, sure of the welcome he always got.

When he was three, David had to have a spinal tap--a painful procedure at any age. It was explained to him that, because he was sick, Dr. Truman had to do something to make him better. "If it hurts, remember it's because he loves you,"

Deborah said. The procedure was horrendous. It took three nurses to hold David still, while he yelled and sobbed and struggled. When it was almost over, the tiny boy, soaked in sweat and tears, looked up at the doctor and gasped, "Thank you, Dr. Tooman, for my hurting."

[Monica Dickens, Miracles of Courage, 1985.](#)

Billie Wilcox, on the lessons of a disaster: While my husband Frank and I were living in Pakistan many years ago, our six-month-old baby died. An old Punjabi who heard of our grief came to comfort us. "A tragedy like this is similar to being plunged into boiling water," he explained. "If you are an egg, your affliction will make you hard-boiled and unresponsive. If you are a potato, you will emerge soft and pliable, resilient and adaptable." It may sound funny to God, but there have been times when I have prayed, "O Lord, let me be a potato."

Guideposts Magazine.

When the emperor Valens threatened Eusebius with confiscation of all his goods, torture, banishment, or even

death, the courageous Christian replied, "He needs not fear confiscation, who has nothing to lose; nor banishment, to whom heaven is his country; nor torments, when his body can be destroyed at one blow; nor death, which is the only way to set him at liberty from sin and sorrow."

When I hear my friends say they hope their children don't have to experience the hardships they went through--I don't agree. Those hardships made us what we are. You can be disadvantaged in many ways, and one way may be not having had to struggle.

[William M. Batten, Fortune.](#)