

ON THE FLIPSIDE

1 PETER 4:12-19

For the first 300 years of Christian history the Church wore a bulls-eye on its back... For starters, our leader, Jesus, was subjected to Roman crucifixion... His first followers were persecuted by their fellow Jews...

One of the early church leaders, “*Tertullian*” – a man who lived a few years after Peter - described the persecution of his day. “If the Tiber (River) floods the city, or if the Nile refuses to rise, or if the sky withholds its rain, if there is an earthquake, a famine, a pestilence, at once the cry is raised, ‘*Christians to the lion.*’” Everything from *natural disasters* to *deadly diseases* was blamed on the Christians. The followers of Jesus became Rome’s favorite whipping boy. They were secular society’s scapegoat.

In the beginning believers were subject to false accusation, and ridicule, and mean treatment, and discrimination - *then the animosity intensified...*

Property was confiscated and leaders were arrested. Eventually Christianity became the official enemy of the state – physical persecution, even torture grew commonplace. Christians were crucified, and thrown to the lions. The martyrdom of believers was turned into sport and spectacle.

Around 65 AD both Paul and Peter were martyred in Rome.

Here's why the Christians became the scourge of Rome. At the height of the empire every Roman was required to burn a pinch of incense as an act of worship to Caesar. He or she took the pledge, "[Caesar is Lord.](#)"

After uttering their vow the person received a certificate - "*a libellus.*"

This allowed him to worship any other god on his lists of deities. Rome didn't care which gods you worshipped as long as you put Caesar first.

Of course, this was a vow a Christian could never take. Jesus warned us, "[No man can serve two masters.](#)" Time after time when confronted with the choice, "[Christ or Caesar?](#)" the Christian would rise up in love, for the Jesus who died for him, and utter his own death sentence, "[Jesus is Lord!](#)"

Some of these courageous Christians were dipped in pitch and used as human torches to light the Emperor's parties...Other believers were stoned, beheaded, crucified... Still others were dragged behind wild horses in the arena. Spectators cheered as their bodies were torn and dismembered...

Still other believers were wrapped in animal skins and thrown to hungry dogs... Thousands of Christians were taken to the Coliseum in downtown Rome, and tossed to the lions... And if you couldn't get tickets you could watch it all on Sports Center that night. Rome's cruelty turned into sport.

When I was in Rome I visited the Coliseum. I took the tour. And it caused eerie feelings... like a victim returning to the scene of a crime.

I could almost hear the screams and cheers of the bloodthirsty mob – the insanity of the crowd calling for the death of a pastor or SS teacher.

The blood of the saints still seemed mixed with the dirt on the ground.

In the classic book *“Martyr of the Catacombs”* there’s a scene from the Coliseum. It’s an eyewitness account. Let me read it, "An old man entered the arena. His form was bowed, and his hair silver-white. His appearance was hailed with shouts of derision, although his majestic face and dignified manner only excited admiration. As the shouts of laughter and yells of derision came down to his ears, he raised his head and uttered, 'Romans, I am a Christian! My God died for me, and I gladly lay down my life for Him.'

A loud outburst of yells from the fierce mob drowned his voice.

Before it was over three panthers came bounding toward him. He folded his arms, looked to Heaven, and his lips moved as if murmuring a prayer.

The savage beast fell upon him as he stood, and in a few minutes he was torn in pieces." And this happened off and on for nearly 300 years.

Yet amazingly, despite this fierce persecution – *perhaps because of it* - the Church grew. Christianity spread like wildfire across the empire.

It's said, "[The blood of the martyrs became the seeds of the Church.](#)"

Augustine put it this way, "[The martyrs were bound, imprisoned, scourged, racked, burnt, rent, butchered - and they multiplied...](#)"

Finally, the emperor became a believer putting an end to Rome's authorized antagonism. Yet sadly, persecution continued to persist...

Today in India, Hindu terrorists regularly target Christian evangelists.

The Muslim government of the Sudan is orchestrating a vigorous campaign to wipe out the Christian community in their country.

Roman Catholic extremists in Mexico have mounted a violent campaign to hinder Protestant evangelists from sharing the Gospel of Jesus.

Log on to the newsroom section of "[The Voice of the Martyrs](#)" website, and you'll find documented cases of persecution against Christians in [India, Nepal, Somalia, China, Iraq, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Iran.](#)

It's been estimated that more people have died for their faith in Jesus in the 20th century than in all the other centuries combined.

In an article on the suffering church *FaithWorks* magazine listed various degrees to which believers today are called on to suffer for their faith...

Here they are in order - from mildest to most severe...

17) disapproval, 16) ridicule, 15) pressure to conform, 14) loss of educational opportunities, 13) economic sanctions, 12) shunning, 11) alienation from community, 10) loss of employment, 9) loss of property, 8) physical abuse, 7) mob violence, 6) harassment by officials, 5) kidnapping, 4) forced labor, 3) imprisonment, 2) physical torture, and 1) execution.”

Thankfully, up until now Christians in the US have been spared these harsher harassments – but all Christians, in all places, suffer some form of persecution. And there’s no guarantee of what the future will bring anyone.

This is why Peter tells his readers in 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...**” In other words, don’t act surprised when you’re persecuted. *It’s not as if suffering isn’t a logical conclusion...*

We live in the same wicked world that nailed Jesus to the cross – and not much has changed. Greed, jealousy, unbelief still motivates the actions of men – just as they did in Jesus’ day. If this world rejected and executed the Savior, do we really expect it to pass out high-fives to His followers?

Remember when Jesus discussed with His disciples the persecution He expected once He reached Jerusalem. He told them He'd be arrested, tried, and crucified. Peter rebuked Him, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" Jesus being harmed or hurt was unthinkable to Peter!

But after the cross Peter considers it unthinkable that the followers of Jesus could escape this world without being harmed or hurt in some way.

He's come to realize this world is not our friend. He's encouraging his cohorts in the faith - they need to *warm up* to the idea of "*fiery trials.*"

Don't think it strange that you're persecuted. Think it's strange if you're not. *If you're buddy-buddy with everybody – if everyone likes you* - chances are you're not living for Jesus or standing up for righteousness.

Jesus is headed one way. This world is headed the opposite way. If you're living *in the world* - and *for Jesus* - there's going to be some friction.

Here's what Peter is doing in chapter 4... Since persecution is inevitable we need to approach it with the right attitude... Last week we looked at the first half of the chapter. Peter taught us that if we handle opposition properly, suffering and persecution can become a *blessing in disguise.*

This week, in the last half of chapter 4, Peter tells us when we're persecuted for Jesus' sake we need to immediately look **on the flipside**.

We taste Christ's sufferings, but *on the flipside* we rejoice in His glory.

We're reproached for Jesus, but *on the flipside* we're blessed by God.

Our lives draw blasphemy, but *on the flipside* we bring God glory.

We suffer... *on the flipside* it's for being a Christian, not an idiot.

We're saved... *on the flipside* others won't be.

Granted, persecution is no fun. Suffering gets old. Focus solely on the snubs, put downs, rejection, and threats - and you'll end up defeated. But look *on the flipside* and God is doing an awesome work in your life.

Here's what Zach did at Calvary 316 this week... In our new building we have skylights, but the sun was beaming in the skylights and causing the metal building to bake. To help our air conditioning units perform better Zach went on the roof and covered the skylights with a piece of plywood...

At the moment that strip of plywood is happy and content. It's just sitting in the sunshine, soaking up God's rays. It's lying around – hanging out.

But we know a storm will kick up. Rain will come. Winds will come. And unless that plywood gets weighted down it'll blow away in the storm.

And I didn't raise no dummy... Zach found some concrete blocks and weighted down the plywood. He used several blocks because the counterweights have to be heavier, stronger than the power of the storm.

Here's my point, if you're not experiencing a storm, even as we speak; I can say with certainty there's a thunder-boomer in your forecast. And God doesn't want you blown away - so He stabilizes you with counterweights.

Your partnership with Christ... joy... glory... the Holy Spirit... a clean conscience...fellowship with other believers... are all counterweights.

These are the blocks that steady a believer in the midst of a storm. When persecution comes, God's blessing proves heavier and stronger.

This is what Peter says in verse 13, “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.” Let's put verse 12 and 13 together...

On the one hand in verse 12 he talks about the “fiery trial” – it's *inevitable* - it's to be *expected* – it's *inescapable* - it's intended to *try* us...

But when I read verse 12 I have a hard time getting past the phrase, “fiery trial.” Why doesn't Peter just say “trial?”

Why “fiery trial?” In fact, what is it that makes a trial “fiery?” Why doesn’t God promise me a “remedial trial,” or “average trial,” or “semi-difficult, warm-but-not-hot, mid-level trial?”

I wish trials came packaged like sauces at Taco Bell? You don’t have to take the “fiery” sauce – you could ask for “mild” or just plain “hot” sauce.

Lord, I want a “cool trial” not a “fiery trial.”

But here’s my problem, I’ve got my eyes on the trial itself...

Rather than on the person who comes with the trial... and the blessing that comes after the trial... and the growth that will result from the trial...

I need to look on the flipside – at the counterweight God has added to my life. He always provides a force greater than the strength of the storm.

Look at verse 13... this fiery trial belongs to Jesus. It’s His trial. Peter calls it “Christ’s sufferings.” Christ and all His resources come with this trial.

And what comes afterward? “His glory is revealed.” Trials teach us that God is merciful and mighty! We experience His presence and power.

And what results? You’re “glad”... glad you went through it - glad for what you learned - glad that you glorified Jesus... Peter says you’re “glad with exceeding joy.” You don’t see all this by looking at the trial. You’ve

got to look *on the flipside...* **Don't just look at one side. Look on the flipside.**

It reminds me of the man who died and went to heaven. The angel at the gate asked him what righteous deeds had he done on earth?

He said, "*Well, once I tried to help a little old lady.*"

The angel said, "*Tell me about it?*"

The fellow replied, "*I saw a biker, a Hell's Angel – a brute and a bully. He was beating up an old lady, so I stepped in. I kicked him in the shins, and told the lady to run for help. I even tried to punch him in the nose.*"

The angel was so impressed, "*What a brave act! How long ago did this occur?*" The man answered, "It all happened about 15 seconds ago!"

Here's my point, there may come a time when you're called on to defend another person, or stand up for righteousness and do the will of God - *and it puts you in harm's way*. You're persecuted for Jesus' sake.

But after suffering comes rejoicing – *if not in this life, 15 seconds later.*

In Matthew 5 Jesus said to those who are persecuted for His sake, "*Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven...*"

Realize if you don't know Jesus, this life with all its pain, and heartache, and disappointment, and frustration – is as good as it'll ever get for you.

This life is as close to a heaven as you'll ever get. *How sad...*

But if you're a believer in Jesus this world is the only hell you'll ever experience. Your life might be rough, but it's still far better than hell.

And if you hunker down! Keep weathering the storms. Continue to trust in Jesus it'll get really good one day. The storms make heaven sweeter. *"Christ's sufferings"* are momentary, but the glory that follows is eternal!

In Philippians 3:10 Paul explains his driving passion. *"That I may know (Christ), and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings..."* A lot of people want to know Jesus – and His miracle power – *but even the "the fellowship of His sufferings" was on Paul's wish list.*

Here's how love thinks...

"I want to feel what you feel. See through your eyes. Think and process from your frame of reference. If you're going through it I'm going with you!"

This is how Peter felt about Jesus. He rejoiced to *"partake in Christ's sufferings."* Not only did Jesus experience persecution He was destined to be persecuted. Suffering wasn't His diversion. It was central to His mission.

So how can we say we love Jesus if we run from His sufferings?

If you're given the privilege of being put down for and with Jesus - then rejoice! It's an honor... What an opportunity to taste of life's deepest joy...

Peter adds to our faith another counterweight in 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."** When the storm rages and tries to blow you over – there's another force inside you that rises up and barrels back.

On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was like a rushing mighty wind.

The Holy Storm is greater than *the storm of persecution*. The Spirit empowers us and enlightens us. He reveals Jesus. He brings heaven to earth. He fills us with joy and boldness. The glory of heaven is brought to our hearts. In the fiery trial people witness something different about us.

When all hell breaks loose around us, the Spirit gives us peace and rest.

It seems a persecuted believer receives a special allocation of God's Spirit. God fights storm with storm. The winds of persecution rage, but *on the flipside* God's Spirit is never stronger - God's grace is never sweeter.

And the biggest blessing the Holy Spirit brings to us is the love of God.

Romans 5, teaches us God shows us His love to us in two ways: it's *displayed on the cross*, but it's *diffused by*

the Spirit. God's Spirit pours out His love into our hearts. And this is desperately needed by suffering people!

Get laid-off and it's harder to feel God's love than if you're promoted.

It's easier to sense God's love at a wedding than in a divorce court.

God's love is more tangible – more real to you - after you've witnessed the birth of your baby than it is after you've attended your parent's funeral.

This is why in the fiery trial the love of the Spirit is our counterweight.

In Acts 7 Stephen had just spoken of Jesus in front of the angry Jews.

They picked up stones to pummel him. Yet in the midst of the chaos, we're told "he, being full of the Holy Spirit..." The Spirit counter balanced the stones. The Spirit made Stephen stronger than the persecution he faced. The heavens opened and He saw Jesus, even as the stones flew.

One Roman wrote of the Christians in the Coliseum

"What secret power have they - which can inspire even the youngest and the feeblest among them? My religion can only hope that I may not be unhappy; theirs leads them to death with triumphant songs of joy."

Peter writes "*The Spirit of glory and of God*" is our secret power.

Then he adds another flipside, “On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.” Listen only to the slurs, mocking, and meanness of those who persecute you and it’ll beat you down – it’ll wear you out.

But there’s a flipside... You’re only listening to what’s being said on earth. In heaven Jesus takes great pleasure in the stand you’ve taken.

He’s proud of your attempts to bring Him glory.

I love the story of John Chrysostom. He lived in the 4th century AD. John preached so strongly against sin it offended the Emperor and Empress.

When called before Caesar he was threatened with banishment if he didn’t stop preaching. Chrysostom told the Emperor, “Sire, you cannot banish me, for the world is my Father's house.” The Emperor threatened him again, “Then I will slay you.” Chrysostom rebutted, “No, you cannot, for my life is hid with Christ in God.” “Your treasures will be confiscated.” “Sire, my treasures are in heaven, where none can break through and steal.”

“Then I will drive you from man, and you will have no friends left.”

“That you can never do, for I have a Friend in heaven who has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’” John Chrysostom knew the child of God is untouchable. This world can take nothing from us that truly matters.

Verse 15 shows another flipside! Peter says it's an honor to suffer - but for God and good – not for sin, or stupidity - or for being a dork, or a jerk.

He says, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.”

Suffering is not necessarily a virtue... If you suffer for a crime – or for an evil deed – or for just sticking your nose in another person's business – *where's the value in that?* Spreading gossip – and causing division – and stirring up trouble – and being obnoxious - isn't being persecuted for Jesus' sake. There's nothing noble about suffering because you're stupid or sinful.

I've known people who were rude, or abrasive, or acted holier-than-thou, and they were ostracized – but they walked around like they were martyrs.

Oh, “Woe is me. I'm being persecuted for Jesus' sake...” - *not true!*

They were being persecuted for acting like a jerk.

I grew up in a very legalistic church. We read the OKJ where it said Christians are to be “peculiar people” – and we took that very literally.

Culturally we were weird. Style-wise we were old-fashioned. We used religious lingo nobody outside the church understood. And when people laughed at us, it was because we were being persecuted for Jesus' sake.

Of course we were really being laughed at because we looked odd.

Godliness has little to do with style and culture. It has everything to do with love and goodness. As Peter says, fiery trials will come. But when you're persecuted, make sure it's for Jesus sake, or it's of no spiritual value.

Peter challenges us in verse 17, “**For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God...**” Apparently, Peter believed the greatest obstacle between the world and Jesus is the hypocrisy in the Church.

We won't draw people out of darkness if we're asleep in the light.

God sends the fiery trials to us first... He *shakes us* to *wake us*.

But the fiery trial that *refines the gold*, also *consumes the straw*.

This is why Peter adds, “**And if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?**” If God isn't squeamish about disciplining His kids, He won't hesitate to hammer a wicked world...

If you and I – *God's kids* – *the apple of His eye* – *His beloved* – *people paid for by the blood of Jesus...* if God doesn't spare us from fiery trials, He certainly isn't going to shelter those who reject Him from the same.

Peter poses another thought in verse 18, “Now “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

Understand when Peter says “*scarcely saved*” he doesn’t mean “*barely saved.*” Being saved is like being pregnant. There’re no degrees to being pregnant – you’re either pregnant or not! The same is true with salvation.

The NT tells us all true believers are “*complete in Christ.*” That means when a person is saved by the blood of Jesus they’re as saved and as forgiven as they can get... *It’s the getting there that can be difficult...*

To become a Christian a person has to *overcome some distractions - step over some pride - shake off a few pleasures - unload some idols.*

And to do so is more difficult for some people than for others.

This is why if you’re not saved you need to get saved today!

Folks ask, “*Are you saving I can’t get saved tomorrow?*” “*Is there’s a specific sin I might commit that’ll cause God to pull His offer off the table?*”

Of course not! But the more you sin the harder you make it on yourself to be saved. The more layers of rebellion and stubbornness get built up.

Spiritual calluses grow. You muffle the still small voice of the Holy Spirit. You become immune to God’s conviction. You sink deeper and deeper into the sin that has you trapped. It becomes more difficult for you to repent.

This is why Peter wraps it up the way he does. **“Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.”** *If you’re suffering today here’s what you do...*

Don’t think it strange... Look on the flipside, and lean on the counterweights... Make sure you’re suffering for Jesus’ sake, not because you’re evil or odd... and if all that’s true of you, then just **keep on doing good, and commit your soul to a loving Savior and a faithful Creator.**

It might be hard today, but there’s a flipside, it’ll get better real soon.

I want to close by reminding you of a fiery trial that shook our nation in April, 1999. Two troubled students walked into Columbine High School with loaded automatic weapons, and the intent to kill. They targeted athletes, minorities, *and Christians*. Their killing spree ended up taking 13 lives.

In the school library one of the killers shouted, **“Does anyone here have a faith in Christ?”** Seventeen year-old, Cassie Bernall, stood up. One of the killers looked her in the eye, and asked Cassie, **“Do you believe in God?”**

An eyewitness reported. **“It was really cruel the way he said it. It was almost like Satan was trying to talk through him.”** Cassie answered, **“Yes, I believe in Jesus!”** The killer squeezed the trigger and shot her in the head.

Other students, 17 year old Rachel Scott, 16 year old John Tomlin were murdered in a similar fashion. Two terrorists, *“hunted down”* Christians.

When Peter wrote this letter persecution against Christians hadn't yet reached a lethal level – but it would. And as Columbine proved, even in a country historically friendly toward Christians, persecution can escalate.

If Jesus tarries, intolerance toward Christians may become increasingly hostile. It might only be a matter of time before you and I are forced to make some costly choices. Peter would tell us its time to get ready.

Learn to see the flipside. Lean on the counterweights God provides.

Let's get ready now... for what might come soon...