

Tested by Fire

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. Special welcome. If you're new or visiting with us, we're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're filling seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we've become convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which means that God has something to say to everyone in his Word, which is why we come back to it week after week. We've been studying the book of 1 Peter, and as I've been telling you, the book of 1 Peter is a letter. It's a letter written by a man named Peter, and he writes it to churches in the first century AD in the 60s who are living in part of the Roman Empire in Asia Minor, what would now be known as modern-day Turkey, and he writes this letter because these Christians are struggling. They're struggling because they are feeling out of place in the world as they follow Jesus, and they're facing opposition from the world as they follow Jesus. So Peter writes to both encourage them and instruct them. He writes to encourage them that Jesus is worth it. Jesus is worth living and loving for. He's worth suffering and dying for.

And he also writes to instruct them how to live as Christians in the world and how to respond when they face opposition in the world as Christians. Now, last week we were in a section about the church, and before that we were in several sections about suffering. We're returning to suffering this week.

By the way, we're getting very near to the end of 1 Peter, so we're going to close out chapter 4 today, and then we have three more sermons to get us through chapter 5. Next week is going to be the church again. We'll have one more sermon that touches on suffering, and then we'll have a conclusion to take us to the very end. You'll remember that there are three different types of suffering, at least three different types in the Bible. First would be suffering for your own personal foolishness or sin, and I'm going to give you examples today related to jobs. So if you are lazy and you spend most of your time at your job on Facebook and you get fired, that's a type of suffering. It's suffering for your personal sin and foolishness. Suffering type 2, suffering for the general presence of sin in the world, or we could even add other people's sins. So let's say you were born in 1985 or 1986, and you graduated from college in 2008. Well, in 2008 it came out that borrowers were lying to lenders, lenders were lying to banks, and banks were lying to regulators. So guess what?

There were no jobs for you. That's a type of suffering, not because of your sin, but because of the sin of other people. Then type 3, there's suffering for righteousness sake, or suffering for the name of Jesus Christ, or as we're going to be told in this passage today, suffering as a Christian. This would be you have a job, your employer finds out that you're a Christian, and they decide they don't want that type of person working for them, and so they fire you. So these are our three categories, and we're going to head in to this passage. We're starting at verse 12, and we're going to see, Peter's going to review a lot of things that he said before, but we're also going to take a special focus on what he refers to as a fiery trial or a testing. So we're going to ask, in what sense is suffering a trial or a test for Christians? How does God use suffering in our lives to test us? We're going to continue our now, what will be a four-week streak as well, of having a hard passage to figure out, a hard verse, and here we're going to have to figure out, talk about what does it mean for judgment, this is verse 17, to begin at the household of God. If God's grace is extended to believers, if they have been taken, have the penalty of sins been removed, in what sense do Christians still face God's judgment? How can Peter say that judgment begins with the household of God? And so it's with that focus that we are in 1 Peter chapter 4, starting at verse 12. So I invite you

to open your Bible, you'll find it at the end of your worship guide, or on your phone. And as we come to this passage, remember that this is God's word.

And God tells us that while the grass withers, and the flowers fade, his word stands forever. So that's why we read it now, starting at verse 12.

[4 : 25] Verse 15.

Verse 18.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that you are a faithful creator, and we can trust our souls to you. And one of the reasons that we can trust our souls to you is that you speak to us, rather than leaving us alone. And so we simply ask that you would do that this morning.

That you would send your spirit to help us, that we would be able to hear from you. That we would be encouraged and challenged, and that we would respond in love and faith in Jesus Christ.

[6 : 10] And so we ask these things in his name. Amen. Amen. There's a man whose name is Jeff Henderson. And for a long period of time, Jeff worked at a very high level in marketing for Chick-fil-A.

And while he was working in marketing for Chick-fil-A, there was a time when he was interacting with the Chick-fil-A stores in the Atlanta area. And they came to him and they said, hey, we've been doing this Eat More Chicken cow campaign for about 10 years now.

Don't you think it's time we tried something else? I mean, people have probably got the message at this point, right? They've seen the signs of the cows on the road. By the way, this had made its way into the Advertising Hall of Fame.

Isn't it time we picked something new? People know this by now. They know that the cows want them to eat more chicken. So he said, that's a great question. Why don't we do some market research? And we are going to look and see how people in the Atlanta area are responding to this. Are they aware of this? They did this research and after 10 years of the campaign, it was just starting to catch on.

[7 : 23] People were just starting to realize that it was time to eat more chicken. And so they decided we need to continue with this. We need to continue this same message over and over again.

It's been 10 years. Maybe we need another 10 years. I mention that because we are coming to another passage on suffering. By my count, I've given you the three categories of suffering at least six times now in this sermon series.

And you might be thinking, we've heard this before. Why do we need to hear it again? You might be thinking the same thing for Peter. Peter said this over and over again at this point. Why does he need to keep telling these people about suffering?

Of course, this raises a larger issue of how we read the Bible. I hope that as you come here and as we are together week after week and I'm teaching you, I hope that you learn things that are true about the Bible.

But I also hope that you learn how to read the Bible. I don't want you to just walk away with truths. I want you to be able to dig into God's word for yourself. And so one, it's important when we come to God's word to understand these categories of suffering.

[8 : 30] It can be very confusing when folks come to passages and they think it's about one type and it's not about another. But the other point is that God uses repetition. He repeats things over and over to highlight and underscore how important they are.

Peter knows that we've heard about suffering before. And yet when we read the Bible and we see something repeated over and over, we're able to say, ah, that must be very important.

That must be something that Peter desperately wants us to take away. So if there's anything else that Peter wants us to know, it's pretty clear he wants us to know this. You're going to suffer as a Christian. And when you suffer, he's repeating here everything that's come before in chapters 1 through 3.

So let's look. We have verse 12. Don't be surprised at suffering. Okay, we probably already knew that at this point, right? He's been talking about suffering a lot. It's a fiery trial. Does that sound familiar at all?

Well, chapter 1, we were told that we had the tested genuineness of our faith would come out. So he's telling us in chapter 4 what we saw in chapter 1. We talked about that, by the way, in

September.

[9 : 42] We talked about the idea of not being here for the snacks. We're not here just for what we can get. Trials prove that we're here for Jesus Christ. We're seeing it in chapter 4. We saw it in chapter 1.

Then we see what we've seen before in verses 13 and 14. 13, rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you also may rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

In other words, this is what we saw in chapter 1. There's going to be praise and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Chapter 1, verse 7. I told you when we looked at chapter 1, verses 6 through 9, that suffering is the DNA test that proves that we belong to God.

So we suffer and we rejoice because we know we belong to God. Chapter 1, verses 10 through 12. I told you sufferings, part of the story, sufferings, the path to glory. It's the same thing Peter's saying here.

If you suffer, remember Jesus suffered, you're associated with him. Jesus' sufferings led to glory, your sufferings will lead to glory. Jesus was vindicated by God. You will be vindicated by God.

[10 : 44] None of this is new. Chapter 2, when we talked about slaves and masters, Jesus' path is our path. Chapter 3, Christ's sufferings led to victory.

That's why we had the whole discussion about him proclaiming to the spirits in prison, and it's also why we had the whole discussion about Noah. Noah suffered, he was rescued. You suffer, you will be rescued.

Jesus suffered, he was vindicated. Jesus suffered, he was victorious. You suffer, you'll be victorious. Peter is telling us these things over and over again, and so our response is to realize this is really important.

There's a saying that we don't rise to the occasion, we fall to the level of our training. The level of the training that Peter wants for us in suffering is to respond instinctually. When we suffer, we should remember immediately.

If someone wakes us up in the middle of the night and asks us about suffering, we need to be able to say, Jesus suffered and he was glorified. When I suffer, I will be glorified. And so Peter tells us that over and over again, that it would sink into our hearts.

[11 : 51] That's why he's reviewing this for us. That's why when we read the Bible, things are repeated over and over and over again to tell us what is so important. Same is true in other parts of the Bible. You read one of the Gospels.

Jesus doesn't just heal someone once. He heals them over and over and over. To make the point, Jesus is a healer and a restorer. You read the Gospel of Luke, you're going to hear over and over again about the appropriate use of money.

Luke could have told us once, right? But he wants us to know how important it is. Peter could have told us once, he wants us to know how important this is.

There's nothing else you take from this letter. This is the letter about suffering for the name of Jesus Christ. And Peter wants written on your heart that Jesus' sufferings led to glory.

Your sufferings will lead to glory as well. By the way, why do you think this is so important to Peter? We haven't talked about Peter as a person.

[12 : 54] I haven't talked about him as a person much since chapter one. Peter had a really poor theology of suffering. Mark chapter eight, Peter rebukes Jesus for talking about suffering.

And Jesus says, get behind me, Satan. Then, when Peter sees Jesus' suffering and has the opportunity to suffer on Jesus' behalf, suffer for the name of Jesus Christ, for being called a Christian, Peter decides that's the time he's gonna deny Christ.

Peter has learned the hard way the truth about suffering. And so, like a parent who warns their child over and over again not to repeat their mistakes, Peter is speaking on a very personal level to these people that they would know the truth about suffering as a Christian.

And so, that's everything we're seeing at the beginning of this section. We are seeing a review.

Suffering's a trial. Suffering means you're associated with Jesus.

Suffering means you belong to Jesus. We have some new ideas relatively here. So, verse 14, he's gonna build, right? A good teacher's gonna review and then add something more. Verse 14, if you were insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

[14:09] Now, we've seen this idea of blessing before. The spirit resting on you, I believe, is new in the book of Peter. And we could take this several ways. One, some people take it to mean there's a, God gives his presence to you in a special way if you're suffering.

That could be true. That's not clear. What we do know is that if you're suffering, God's spirit is with you. We could put it another way. If God's spirit wasn't with you, you wouldn't be able to suffer for righteousness' sake.

And so, God, your suffering for the name of Jesus Christ reminds you that God is with you. Otherwise, you wouldn't have made it this far. So, again, he's reminding us of God's presence with us, his presence with people who suffer.

Verse 15, just summarizing what we've been saying for many weeks now, don't fall into suffering type one. Don't suffer for your own sin or foolishness' sake.

And then, verse 16, he continues to encourage them here. If you're a Christian, the world is going to try to make you feel ashamed. Instead, let glorify God.

[15:22] The world may be ashamed of you. Jesus Christ is not. Amen. And when you suffer, you bring him glory.

Because you are saying, I believe Jesus is worth it. He is worth suffering for. And so, when we suffer for the name of Jesus Christ, we automatically are bringing praise and honor and glory to him.

Peter's continuing continuing to encourage. Look, this is everything we've covered. I'm coming near the end of my letter to you. Remember this. When you suffer, you belong to Jesus.

You bring him honor. He is with you. And so, you are blessed. this is a good teacher reviewing what's come before.

There's going to be a new emphasis in this section, though, and it's going to be an emphasis on the fiery trial or the test. Verse 12. Don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes. Don't be surprised by suffering as a Christian.

[16:38] That's part of following after Jesus. He suffered, you'll suffer. And suffering is a type of test. And test here, he's talking about the idea of something that reveals what's true.

If you're a student and you take a test, that test doesn't create knowledge, right? Primarily. Now, if it's an essay test, you could argue that it helps you synthesize.

But primarily, it reveals what you already know. It reveals what's true. The same is true of these trials. They reveal the faith that was already there.

God uses suffering as a Christian to reveal the faith that you have. You could think about it another way. Some of you are married. When you took marriage vows, you said, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health.

So let's imagine that you're married, there's a married couple, and the husband loses his job for a long time. And his wife sticks with him. That is a test that reveals what's true.

[17:42] When she said for richer or for poorer, she really meant it. Let's say you have a wife who comes down with a terrible illness and she ends the rest, she's gonna spend the rest of her life in a wheelchair and her husband sticks with her.

That's a suffering that's a test. It reveals that when that man said in sickness and in health, he really meant it. Jesus tests us in our suffering in the sense that he's asking us, when you said that you would take up your cross and follow me, did you really mean it?

It's a test that reveals what is true. When we suffer for the name of Jesus Christ, we reveal that we belong to him and that our faith is real and he is with us.

Suffering tests us. Will we stick with our commitments when they cause us pain? Will we stick with our commitment to Jesus Christ when it causes us pain?

In that sense, it is a test. And so God uses suffering, we're gonna get to this in the next section, he uses suffering to reveal the faith of his people. It's something that brings him honor and glory.

[19:04] In the same way, Job suffered, not for righteousness' sake, but just Job suffered in general. In a sense, he suffered for righteousness' sake because Satan wanted to test his faith. Job brought honor and glory to God in that.

And the Spirit of God was with him. That's just the first discussion or hint here to test in verse 12.

And that's gonna take us to verse 17, which is in our list here of hard to understand passages.

So, verse 17, for it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God. And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? If you're familiar with the

basics of the gospel, the basics are this, that we deserve God's punishment and that punishment is death, that's the penalty for sin.

But God has removed the punishment for those who have faith in Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ took God's punishment on our behalf, which means there's no judgment for Christians, right? And yet, Peter says, it's time for judgment to begin at the household of God.

What does he mean? We have to understand that judgment has several stages to it. And when we talk about judgment, often we mean God's punishment, but judgment is actually a little bit more comprehensive than that.

[20 : 23] So, I've been doing some judgments at my house recently. I'm a purger, so at least every year or so I go through and I figure out what I don't want anymore and what needs to leave my house.

So, recently I've been taking some trips to the Goodwill and when I go and I stand at my closet, there is a stage of judgment there. I'm assessing all the items in my closet.

Have I worn that recently? If I haven't worn it since the last time I purged, it might be time to go. Does that fit anymore? Do I like that? In that sense, every item in my closet experiences judgment. There is a sorting element to judgment. There's also a penalty or a punishment element to judgment. So, there are some items that will not stand in the judgment.

Those items go into the Trader Joe's bag. The items that are in the Trader Joe's bag are banished from my presence forever and I take them to the Goodwill. all of my clothing experience judgment in the first stage.

[21 : 28] Not all of them experience the punishment of judgment. Everyone experienced the sorting element of judgment, not all the penalty element of judgment. So, there's a sense in which then when we're talking about this judgment, we have to have that category in mind.

everyone in this world will experience God's judgment in the first sense. Everyone will be sorted. Think Matthew chapter 25, the separation of the sheep from the goats.

Everyone's going to be there for that portion of the judgment. When I'm going through my closet, sheep, sheep, goat, sheep, sheep, goat. Goats go to Goodwill.

All of my clothing experienced judgment in that sense. Not all of them experienced judgment in the sense that I separated them from myself forever. When we suffer as Christians, that is part of God's sorting.

It is his way of saying that person belongs to me. I have proof that that person is a sheep and not a goat.

[22 : 46] Because if they were a goat, they would not stand. They would not suffer for righteousness sake. And so there's a sense in which the sorting portion of God's judgment is going on even now.

Every time we suffer for the name of Jesus Christ, that is part of God's sorting out of those who will stand in the judgment and those who will not. He is showing.

We're not earning something from him. In my earlier example, when the husband or the wife keeps their vows, they don't suddenly become married at that point. They were married the whole time. But now that they were serious that they really meant it is finally revealed.

They meant it all the way back at the beginning. They meant it on the wedding day. But now the judgment, as they stand and remain faithful in suffering, it becomes clear that they meant it. And so that's a sorting that happens.

By the way, this is a helpful category for coming to other portions of Scripture. If we have this holistic idea of judgment, it's helpful in reading Matthew 25. It's helpful in reading Romans 2.

[23 : 49] It's helpful in reading the end of John 5. It makes sense of how judgment works. This is the way Psalm 1 speaks, by the way. It says, the wicked will not stand in the judgment. So there's a judgment.

Some people will stand in it. Some people will not. In that sense, judgment begins at the household of God. In other words, the sorting element of judgment has begun for Christians even now.

And he asked this question, if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? In other words, if this is how God treats the faithful, unfaithful, if God allows Christians to have a little bit of suffering in this world, imagine how much suffering those who are not Christians will experience.

If this is what judgment looks like now for you here, imagine how much worse it will be. It is something that's painful, right, that reveals help.

When I was little and I'd go to the doctor for checkups, he would have this little rubber mallet, and this may have happened to you, it hadn't happened to me recently, for some reason they've gotten smart and they don't do this to adults, but they hit you with the mallet on the knee, right, and you're supposed to swing your knee out to prove that your reflexes are working, and if your reflexes are working, of course you have no choice, right, but to kick the doctor.

[25 : 22] And so it's something that's painful, that reveals health. That's the same sense in which judgment begins at the household of God.

It's something painful, suffering for the name of Jesus, that reveals health. If this is what, you might imagine the doctor saying, if this is what I do to the healthy, imagine what happens to the sick.

If this is what you are experiencing, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? How much more suffering will they experience one day?

That continues to be the point he's making in verse 18. If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Scarcely saved here is not talking about God's power, sinning and sinning and sorting now.

The righteous is scarcely saved in the sense that the righteous suffer because they belong to Jesus. There's a difficulty to remaining a Christian. It's not easy.

[26 : 39] If it's not easy to be a Christian, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Imagine how much worse it is for those who are not Christians. put it another way, if the righteous suffer in this life, imagine how much the wicked will suffer in the next.

In other words, choose your suffering. You can suffer now or you can suffer later, but you cannot put it off forever.

Speaking to Christians who might be tempted to think, is it worth it? Is it worth suffering for the name of Jesus? Peter reminds them the suffering that will come if you're not with Jesus is much, much worse.

And so remain faithful to the end. You can skip suffering now, but you can't skip it forever. You can have a little bit of suffering now for the sake of Jesus Christ, or you can have a lot of suffering later because you rejected Jesus Christ.

this is what the righteous suffer. Imagine what the unrighteous will suffer one day. That's the point of Psalm 73, by the way, which we looked at last summer.

[27 : 55] The psalmist is crying out to God, hey, it looks like the ungodly have all the benefits. What do I get? And then he realizes you stretch things out over a long enough period of time and the end is not good for the ungodly.

And so there's a reminder and a challenge here is there often is that there are only two ways to live. We can live with faith in Jesus Christ without faith in Jesus Christ. If we have faith in Jesus Christ, we will suffer a little now for his name and experience glory later with him.

If we do not have faith in Jesus Christ, we may be able to avoid some suffering. We may be able to have comfort now, but God's judgment is coming. It is real and he will bring it fully and finally to this world one day.

His judgment is coming for everyone. He will sort every person in this world. He will sort them to those who belong to him and those who do not. And those who do not belong to him will not just experience the sorting element of judgment, they will experience the punishment element of judgment.

And so there's a call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. There's a call to you if you do not have faith in Christ. Things might seem good now, right? We looked at the days of Noah a couple weeks ago.

[29 : 15] Everything was great in the days of Noah until the flood came. Everything might be going great until Jesus returns.

And when he returns, it will be too late. God and so the time to repent is now. God offers his forgiveness to anyone and everyone who asks for it, who repents of their sin and follows after Jesus Christ in faith.

If that's something that you're wrestling with or you want to talk about more, I'm happy to talk about it with you. After any of our elders, many of the people around you in this congregation would be happy to talk to you about it. But when God brings his judgment, there will only be two camps, those

who belong to him and those who do not.

There will be a sorting. And those who do not belong to him face only God's judgment. If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

If it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? In other words, hold fast. This suffering is for a little time before Jesus returns for his people.

[30 : 31] And so that's why we end with this final admonition. Therefore, verse 19, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. God is bringing justice to the world.

Trust him. He's the creator of the world. Trust him. Trust him in suffering. Don't let suffering stop you from doing good.

Because that would be to fail the test of the sorting. Instead, continue doing good knowing that it's a judgment, it's a sorting, it's a way that God proves that his people belong to him.

By the way, Peter failed. Peter was tested by God. Remember when Jesus was going to his death, people asked Peter if they knew Jesus, and Peter, being afraid that he would suffer for the name of Jesus Christ, said no.

And yet he repented and returned and was faithful. And so God's grace is even for those who are imperfect and faltering, calling everyone back to obedience in him.

[31 : 45] Peter feels so strongly about this in part because he was the one who failed the test, but has now chosen that suffering is worth it. He betrayed Jesus, and then later he died upside down on a cross, according to church history, for the name of Jesus.

And so God's grace is enough. We don't pass the sorting, we don't stand in the judgment, ultimately based on our works, what we do, but we stand, verse 14, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

In other words, if you belong to Christ, he is a faithful creator, verse 19, and his spirit is with you to help you stand and stay firm.

And so ultimately, we rest on his strength and his ability, just like Peter did, turning away from sin and towards righteousness, remaining faithful, knowing that God is using it to reveal our faith. Faith, that it's only for a time, and he is bringing his redemption. The reminder in this is the same reminder at the beginning, what happened to Jesus will happen to us.

[33 : 01] Jesus suffered, we will suffer. If we stick with him in suffering, we will be glorified as he is glorified. And so verse 19, we suffer, we trust God, and we do good.

In what sense is suffering a task? It's a task in the sense that it reveals our faith. God uses it to show that our faith is real, and we can rejoice in it because it proves that we belong to him and that he is with us.

And so because of that, we can suffer according to God's will, entrusting our souls to a faithful creator and continuing to do good. Please pray with me.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your encouragement, and we thank you that you are a faithful and trustworthy creator. We ask that you would send us your spirit to help us do what you've called us to do because we know that we cannot do it without your help.

That you would strengthen us, that you'd help us to reign faithful in suffering so that we could glorify God in that name. We ask all these things, not in our own strength, but in the mighty name of Jesus.

[34 : 14] Amen.