

PERSECUTION & PROMISE, 1PETER 4:12-19

A New Hope #9

◆ call to worship: Isa.55:6-11

◆ **Intro:** Let me tell you about a particularly nervous fella and his first day at a new school. He was a Christian. He father was even a minister! He'd attended Christian education in his earlier years but now, was a bit apprehensive as he headed to a public High School. Not only that, this school was notorious for being a rather irreligious place. So you might imagine his consternation. Mom encouraged,

◆ "Don't worry son, it'll be alright. God promises to give us words when we need them. And besides, Jesus is the King of the universe, including that High School. Just be your friendly and polite self."

◆ Well the first sweaty day of classes was gone in a flash and after he hopped off the bus that afternoon, Mom wanted to know how it all went.

◆ "So what was it like? Did anyone bother you about your beliefs?"

◆ "No, Mom. Everything went fine. Nobody ever found out!"

◆ You can sympathize with this fellow, I'm sure. A lot of us get a little anxious at the thought of addressing controversial topics. We might think, "Our House of Representatives is pretty divided right now. If I say what I think on an issue, it's gonna make somebody tense. I'll just keep quiet." It's pretty easy to do that with religion too. Who wants tension? And so the cultural result is ambivalence; "you do you", "everybody's right", "all religions

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are the same really", and other unintelligent conclusions that we make in the name of peace.

◆ According the Pew Research Center, the vast majority of evangelical Protestants (70%) try to "understand the person's beliefs and agree to disagree," while about one-in-six (18%) say they "avoid discussing religion with the person" altogether. That's 88% altogether of people who consider themselves Christian that would not challenge a non-Christians beliefs! Ouch. You might not like this but...

◆ **1. Persecution: Part of Christian maturity is to accept and expect persecution.** Do you know why that is?

◆ **A.** Persecution is normal for the Christian because Christ's way is not aimed at happiness so much as obedience. Our target it not what it popular, but what is right. God does not call us merely to peace, but to holiness in which we will find ultimate peace. So here's step one if you are wanting a blessed life: stop chasing your own happiness; look for holiness instead.

◆ *Matthew 10:34,37-38. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.... Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

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◆ What's going on here? Jesus is pointing out that he came to draw a line in the sand. The good and beautiful life is specific and clear. Wherever you find a line, you will have opposition. So holiness and sin are by nature forever at war.

◆ 1 Peter 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. (surprised = "think it strange.")

◆ What are these trials they are suffering? Go back to verse 4:

◆ 1 Peter 4:4 They "think it strange" that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.

◆ **B.** Why is persecution for siding with God normal in a fallen world? Because Jesus' family *doesn't live* like the rest of the world. It *doesn't value* what the world values. Christianity disagrees with many practices most people are fine with and that implies guilt. But man's ways are not God's ways. Jesus draws lines in the sand, and so Jesus' followers have lines they will not cross. How is that going to make other people stepping over those lines react? They're not gonna like you because it implies they shouldn't either. True goodness always makes badness look bad. It is the nature of things. But goodness is still good. Peter is saying, "*Hey, don't be shocked when they are shocked that you won't do what they do. It's perfectly logical.*"

◆ So here's a group of guys and one of them tells a crude, off-color joke. What do the rest do? Well, probably they'll

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all laugh, maybe even the guy who finds it repulsive. Why? Because if he doesn't, it will seem he disapproves, which he does. But if he disapproves, it will make the other guy look bad. That narrows the joker's options: 1) he can repent of the joke, agree it was inappropriate and ask forgiveness (but who wants to do that?); or 2) he can reaffirm himself by making fun of the objector and calling him a sissy, or a joke-a-phobe, or a "hater". "What's a matter, nerd? Can't you take a little joking? What are you a goodie goodie?"

◆[And often our weak response is, "No, I'm not a goodie goodie. Im a baddie baddie, like you! Let's do some bad stuff together so you will like me more!"]

◆This scene of failure to speak truth, or the ridicule of truth, or buckling under pressure, etc. repeats itself in a thousand ways all over the land. It happens during **voting** on the Senate Floor. It happens on the **cheerleading** squad. It affects how our culture labels **bathrooms**, and it affects what politicians say in their **speeches**. It happens between kids who **studied** for the test and those who didn't. It happens when a **brother** warns a sibling about something. It happens every time you are faced with the option of risking tension, or just being quiet. Peter is telling us not to be quiet. Expect persecution because you have chosen to back truth. Let's pause to consider a couple of things.

◆1) Have you faced trouble in any way on account of following Jesus? Because since it is by nature normal in an

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evil world, if you are not encountering any opposition in your attempts to obey God, perhaps no one can tell you side with Him. Has anyone ever been surprised to find out you believe in Jesus? That would mean they couldn't tell, right? And that should make us wonder what we really believe in.

◆2) Another thing: I'm not saying you should be rude, stand on street corners and preach, condemn all your friends whenever they "sin" in your presence, correcting every flaw you observe about their pitiful, lost lives. That's not "bearing the name of Christ" as verse 16 references. It is no great thing to be persecuted for being judgmental and rude. Peter has already told us to be compassionate, humble and harmonious (3:8). The wise Christian winningly invites others into God's better will, instead of condemning them for their errors.

◆C. Now believe me, Jesus will make your life better, he did promise peace (peace with God!). And he can solve all your problems. But he doesn't promise this, at least not in this world.

◆*John 16:33 In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

◆In fact Jesus never said it was blessed to be happy. He did say it was blessed to be persecuted. Odd. That brings us to a second observation in our text: the Promise of blessing!

◆2. **The Christian hope is not for the faint of heart.**

However, take heart, it is for the hopeful! Jesus does not

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call you to a trouble free world, but he promises he can handle the world.

◆**A.** Guess what? The world is in the pain of labor, like a mother. There is a cosmic birthing of God's Kingdom going on right now, ever since Jesus was resurrected outside Jerusalem two millennia ago. And it necessarily hurts! So, if you are hoping for an easy life, you'll want to think again before you choose to join the Church of Jesus. For at the very core of belief in the Holy God, is the opposition to all that is unholy. And at the core of God's Kingdom is the requirement of admitting our own unholiness. If you cannot do this, your only other option is to reject God's holiness, make fun of it and persecute it in hopes of making yourself feel better for a little while.

◆But if you can do this, you become a family member with Jesus, God's Son! (Jn1:12). Do you know how significant it is to "bear the name" of Christ? (v16) How can Peter say to "praise God" that you get persecuted for Jesus? How could Peter write "rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ (v13)? By the way, that's exactly what Peter and other apostles did, when dragged before the Jewish leaders for preaching Jesus, and flogged and instructed not to mention Jesus' name again. Acts 5:41 says they left "rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."? They understood what we need to understand.

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◆**A.** Suffering as a Christian reminds us we are his special agents.

It is proof that God is at work in the world through your life!

That's right. It's the people on the front lines that get shot, right?

When you are persecuted for Christ it means God's hand is on you!

◆v14 *If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*

◆Why was pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer arrested by the Nazi's and killed in WW2? Because God's Spirit of glory was on him. He was a threat to the evil of Hitler's Germany. (And Christians still read his writings today.) Have you acted on your faith and suffered for it? Rejoice! It only means you're part of God's Special Ops. The Kingdom of God is forcefully advancing, partly through you! The sufferings are not yours, they are Christ's! All he asks is the loan of your body. But don't forget what he can do for a body! It is the resurrected Lord you're siding with.

◆**B.** Suffering as a Christian makes you stronger. There are some interesting facts about the sisal plant from which is made tough sisal twine. It grows in Yucatan, Mexico, in hard stony soil. Some Americans visited the area and decided that there might be good money to be made in growing it in richer soil under better conditions. So they started a sisal plantation in Florida where the plant found life no longer a struggle for survival and grew to enormous size. The business promised tremendous returns until the time came for reaping. It was then that the leaf from which

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fibre, vital for the twine, comes collapsed into a soft pulp. The tough-fibre quality was missing. They learned then that the sisal plant acquired its toughness by its battle with adverse circumstances - the wind, the heat and the barren soil.

◆ You've heard the adage "No pain no gain". Not only is it a physical reality (for example, scar tissue is harder than it's surrounding normal tissue), it's a spiritual reality as well.

◆ **C.** Suffering as a Christian makes your heart softer toward others., which is more like Jesus! Just as those who've lost a job, or a child, or a dream can empathize with someone going through it, so folks that have been treated poorly because of their faith can and do develop the caring heart of Christ.

◆ Ninety-seven percent of Pakistanis are Muslims. Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws pose a constant threat for Christians. Rumalshah, a Christian leader in the northern city of Peshawar, said that in his province alone local mobs have publicly urinated on Bibles and closed four churches. However, despite this overt hatred towards Christians, Rumalshah isn't bitter. He views the persecution as an opportunity to display Christ's love to others, even militant Muslims like al-Qaeda members. "We clean the wounds of those who hate us and those who would kill us." That's God softening hearts in miraculous ways, through suffering.

◆ **Conclusion:** Can anybody tell you love Jesus for dying for your sin and promising you a better world? Theologian and

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philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote: "When one preaches Christianity in such a way that the echo answers, 'Away with that man, he does not deserve to live,' know that this is the Christianity of the New Testament. Capital punishment is the penalty for preaching Christianity as it truly is." If you really want others to share in the truth of your faith you must be ready to suffer persecution. Just plan on it. But you also have the promises of God.

◆Romans 8:18-25 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ... We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.