# Monsters: Fighting Enemies of the Faith - Part 3

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## Committed to God’s Purpose

## (1 Peter 4:12-19)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We’re in part three of our series “Monsters: Fighting Enemies of the Faith” as we’ve been looking at the letter of first Peter. We’ve been addressing how we live when life is difficult, because all of us who love and follow Jesus Christ will experience a certain amount of persecution. No matter whether it’s on the job, in school, in the neighborhood, or in your family, there are people who resist the truth and oppose the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, it’s my prayer that you would learn to have hope in the loving character of our Heavenly Father in spite of living in the shadow of suffering.

You see, the reality is that many of you right now are going through difficult times. As a matter of fact, it’s just like Jesus said,

“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

And so, as we look to God’s Word in first Peter, we find that Peter is actually taking it up a level, because this wasn’t just the kind of persecution that all Christians face, this was a fiery trial that hadn’t ever been experienced before. You see, this letter was written in the year 64 A.D. just months after the Emperor Nero had purposefully set fire to the city of Rome. So not only were many people homeless, but Nero had blamed the Christians for starting the fire, and therefore there was an increasing persecution of Christians. It’s in that context that Peter wrote this letter to those believers who very literally had the heat turned up in their life.

As we have seen over the past weeks, the topic of unjust suffering comes up again and again; and now as we read in chapter 4, Peter visits this same theme writing at verse 12,

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good” (1 Peter 4:12-19).

## 1. Don’t Be Surprised

The first thing we must acknowledge is that suffering is not something that we’re exempt from as followers of Jesus Christ. So, number one, Peter says, “Dear friends, don’t be surprised… don’t be surprised at the painful trial you’re suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.” You see, the people of God have always been ostracized and looked down upon by the unbelieving world, because we’re outsiders, aliens and strangers, we don’t do the things that they do. As a matter of fact, those characteristics that we value are often looked down upon by the world and James tells us that worldly wisdom, “is earthly, unspiritual and of the devil” (James 3:15). In verse 17, the Bible tells us,

“The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (James 3:17).

And so, Peter tells us to expect suffering, not to be surprised by it, not to think of it as a strange thing, but to expect it, because those trials and difficulties are inevitable. In fact, you should be surprised if they don’t come. As the apostle John said,

“Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:13).

Don’t be surprised. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first” (John 15:18). The apostle Paul wrote that, “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). So, what we find here is that Peter is just really echoing the Word of God, saying that we’re not to be surprised when suffering comes, because if we’re living godly lives, if we’re proclaiming the name of Jesus loud enough, we actually become offensive to an ungodly world.

The apostle Paul contrasts these two worldviews, considering the fruit of each, and he writes in Galatians chapter 5,

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:19-24).

And so, as you submit to Jesus Christ as Lord, you take up a cross, the cross itself representing the pain and suffering of the most brutal form of death known in that day. Yet Jesus said very clearly in Luke chapter 14,

“Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27).

And for that reason, he says that no one who wants to build a tower will not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it. A king will not go to war against another king without first considering whether he is able to oppose the one coming against him. And in the same way, you’re not going to become a Christian without first counting the cost, because there’s definitely a price to pay when you bear the name of Jesus Christ. He said it this way in verse 33,

“Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

And so, number one, don’t be surprised at the painful trial you’re suffering for the name of Christ. If you’re a Christian, it’s inevitable, and you should expect it, because it’s part of God’s design, it’s the way he proves our faith and purges our lives. You see, it’s through suffering that he removes all the pride, every illusion of self-control, and leaves you totally dependent on him. It’s a good process, we shouldn’t be surprised, and then number two, we rejoice in suffering.

## 2. Rejoice in Suffering

We rejoice in suffering, because it’s an honor to suffer with Christ, it’s a privilege to be treated the way the world treated him. Now, not every believer grows in their faith to the point where God can trust them with the depth of this kind of experience, but in Philippians chapter one the apostle Paul said,

“It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him” (Philippians 1:29).

And so, we rejoice when the privilege comes to us, like the apostles in Acts chapter 5. They were preaching about Jesus in the Jewish temple when they were arrested, flogged (given 39 lashes), and commanded not to speak any more in the name of Jesus. Verse 41 says,

“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:41).

So not only are we to expect it, but when it comes we are to rejoice in it. Peter says it this way in verse 13 and 14,

“Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you” (1 Peter 4:13-14).

When you’re suffering for Christ, you rejoice in it, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. And as you read the book of Acts and see all that Paul went through, you will also notice that the Lord was with him in all of his trials. As a matter of fact, you may remember when the three Hebrew boys were cast into the fiery furnace in Daniel chapter 3, that it was discovered that they were not alone (23-25).

The story tells us that King Nebuchadnezzar had commanded that everybody bow down and worship his gold statue. And so, everyone was bowing down except for these three teenage boys, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who continued to stand. Of course, King Nebuchadnezzar was furious, so he ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual, and commanded his strongest soldiers to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. The furnace was so hot that the flames killed the soldiers, but Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego still firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

Now, I love this, because in all 66 books of the Bible I think this is one of the greatest stories of faith. And it really emphasizes the fact of a believer’s responsibility to faithfully obey what God has called us to do and to trust him with the outcome. We’ve been called to be obedient, to be faithful, but how God plays that out is entirely up to him. The Bible says that King Nebuchadnezzar was overseeing the execution and leapt to his feet in amazement saying in verse 25,

“Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods" (Daniel 3:25).

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and called Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to come out. Verse 27 says,

“The satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them” (Daniel 3:27).

You know what’s so amazing about this? This isn’t the Gospel, this isn’t the book of Acts, but here is Jesus, the Son of Man himself in the book of Daniel. And here’s what’s so important about that. Some of you are facing a fire of suffering, a season of challenge, or a season of pain, and yet it’s through that very thing that God will show his power so that you will know his presence like never before.

Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven…” (Matthew 5:11-12).

You can rejoice in suffering, because to the degree that you share in Christ’s suffering, you will also share in his glory. And so, looking at verse 14 again, Peter says,

“If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you” (1 Peter 4:14).

What an amazing promise. Rejoice because of the future reality of eternal glory. If you’re mistreated, if you’re insulted, rejoice if it’s for the name of Christ, because you’re blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you! You’re blessed in the midst of suffering for Christ’s sake because the Spirit of God rests upon you. Like Moses, whose face was shining with the glory of God, you become like the tabernacle when the glory of God rested in the holy of holies. The picture Peter paints for us is that of God’s presence, the glory that rested in the temple, coming in glorious splendor and power to rest upon suffering Christians.

I don’t know if any of you have ever read Fox’s “Book of the Martyrs” but it’s an amazing book testifying to the lives of those who gave their life for Christ. And the question that always comes to mind is how do they do it? How do they rise above the physical pain, singing hymns, praising God, and forgiving those who are persecuting them? And I believe that’s what Peter describes here as rejoicing in the sufferings of Christ, overjoyed when his glory is revealed, and blessed for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

And so, number one, “Don’t be surprised.” Number two, “Rejoice in suffering.”, and then number three, “Embrace the process.”

## 3. Embrace the Process

You see, it’s in the fiery furnace of trial, of persecution and suffering; it’s in that fiery trial that we undergo a refining process, by which God removes the dross and purifies us. It’s during this time that we can examine our lives and ministries, because not all suffering is from the Lord. You know, when Abraham, David, Jonah, and other Bible “greats” disobeyed God, they suffered for it; so who are we that we should escape? Peter tells us in verse 15,

“If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (1 Peter 4:15-16).

We embrace the process, examining ourselves, and making certain that we’re suffering because we’re Christians and not because we’ve sinned. You know, if you’re suffering while you’re doing your job, honoring those in authority, loving your parents or your spouse, serving Jesus Christ and being the best citizen that you can be, you have no reason to be ashamed. And I wonder if maybe just for a second, that Peter might’ve been reminded of his own denial of Christ, but if we can honestly say that we’re seeking to glorify God in all that we do, we’ll not be ashamed of the name of Jesus. And then verse 17 and 18,

“It is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" (1 Peter 4:17-18).

And Peter is saying that as we embrace the process we shouldn’t only be concerned about ourselves, but also about those lost sinners around us. You see, as we embrace the refiner’s fire it’s nothing compared to the flaming fire that shall punish the lost when Jesus returns in judgment. As we suffer, we experience glory and know that there will be greater glory in the future, but a sinner who causes their own suffering is only filling up the measure of God’s wrath more and more. The Bible says,

“This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

And therefore, we long for that day, we rejoice in suffering, doing what is good and right even though we suffer for it. Peter says this in verse 19, and I want to close with this,

“So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good” (1 Peter 4:19).

God’s purpose is to purify us, to make us tender, and effective. As we’re suffering according to the will of God, we commit ourselves into the sovereign hands of God, depositing our lives in God’s bank, knowing that we will receive eternal dividends on that investment. We commit ourselves to God, simply giving back to God what he’s created, and that which he is most capable of caring for. Therefore, as we do what’s right we commit ourselves to God, when we suffer, we trust God and do what’s right, we take whatever comes and commit ourselves to God. We don’t renounce the name of Jesus, but we’re committed to him and committed to doing what’s right. When suffering comes, we expect it, we rejoice in it, and we commit ourselves to God knowing that he is just in purifying the family of God. What could be more useful or more glorious?

Church, I believe we are so often lured into allowing the circumstances, the painful trial around us to define God, but he’s not confined to the things that we see or the things that we feel.  He’s the same, yesterday, today, and forever, and He’s able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, so why should we doubt?  Our faith says that God is with us, that he will never leave nor forsake us, and our faith believes no matter what we see. As we close with an attitude of prayer, so many of us are facing monsters, painful trials of some kind, and I want you to know that no matter what it is, it matters to God, you matter to God. And so, I wonder how many of you would have the courage to say, “God, I’m not asking you to keep me from this trial, but as I walk through it, let me rejoice that I’m participating in the sufferings of Christ, so that I may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed”?

Pastor John Talcott

Christ's Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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