

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **The Fiery Trial 1 Peter 4:12-19 Part 1**

I am not sure that you know this, but I am an avid UCLA basketball fan. I got hooked on the team when I attended school in the late 60's when they were winning all their national championships. I am such an avid fan that even after not winning a title for 20 years I have continued to listen or watch all their games when ever possible. And of course last year UCLA again achieved that highest pinnacle of basketball excellence by winning the national championship. Going into this season they were ranked number four in the nation and I had already begun salivating. I was counting on them making a strong run at the national championship one more time. I HAD GREAT EXPECTATIONS FOR THEM.

What has happened to those expectations four games into the UCLA Basketball season? They have been dashed. They have played very poorly and look nothing like the team of last year. I have needed to remind myself that having lost three of their players to the NBA, one of them the college player of the year, and that I shouldn't have had such high expectations. But even though this is true, it doesn't change the fact that I initially saw them as a powerhouse team and with each of the first four games I have been let down and disappointed.

Expectations are a very important part of our lives. Each time our life experience falls short of our expectations it is going to have an impact on us. In the case of the 1995-96 UCLA Basketball team, if they perform badly this year I will be mildly disappointed. But in the case of other expectations it would not be nearly so easy to adjust. Expectations in such areas as our marriages, families, or careers.

If we expect that marriage is a place where all our personal needs will be met and we will live happily ever after, then we are going to have serious problems. If we expect that having children is filled with one deliriously happy day after another we are in for serious disappointment. If we think that our jobs should be fun without any stress we are in for trouble.

If we are going to function at the very highest level in this life we need to have realistic expectations. If we do not then we are setting ourselves up for disappointment, discouragement, doubt and even despair. I believe that there is no more important area for us to have realistic expectations than in the area of our Christian walk.

If you believe that when you become a Christian that your troubles are behind you then you are in big trouble. You are setting yourself up for a tremendous let down.

We will be addressing this subject this morning as we consider **1 Pet. 4:12-14**, “**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; (13) but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. (14) If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.**”

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

Peter is once again drawing the readers attention to the reoccurring theme of this epistle, which is a Christian's response to suffering, and he gives us four key features involved in a proper response. What are those four key features as Peter lists them in this section of scripture?

### EXPECT SUFFERING

When we become a Christian we may think that because we are now a child of God that He would therefore protect us from any difficulty that might come our way. If this is your understanding of what the Christian faith offers then you are very much mistaken and are setting yourself up for many disappointments and perhaps even worse.

### What should be a proper expectation of the believer in respect to suffering theologically?

Let us first of all consider the suffering that comes to all of mankind. The suffering comes to man because of his relationship to Adam and to a fallen world. Should we expect that this kind of suffering should be reduced? I propose to you that the scriptures are clear. Nothing changes! At least not until a future time spoken of in **Romans 8:18-23**, “**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (19) For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (20) for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope. (21) that the creation itself also will be set free from it's slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. (23) And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, within eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.**” But until this happens what Job stated in **Job 5:7** continues to be true. “**Man is born for trouble, As sparks fly upward.**”

In fact let me go on and add to this. Not only will we continue to suffer because of our continued identification with this world through our fleshly body inherited from Adam, but we will in addition to this actually encounter new trials and tribulations because of our identification with Christ. What is God's promise to us as Christians? **2 Tim. 3:12**, “**All those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.**”

This truth continues to be operating. There are people in this fellowship who have after having accepted Christ has their Lord and Savior desiring to be obedient to Him and to be baptized have suffered greatly at the hands of their family members who have opposed them. There are people in this fellowship who are married to unbelieving spouses who make their lives extremely difficult as they consistently and faithfully seek to live lives of obedience. There are people in this fellowship who have placed their livelihood in jeopardy in order to be obedient to Christ commands. There are people in this fellowship who have been reviled by all manner of evil accusations because of their desire to work out obedience in their lives.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

What is a proper expectation for the believer theologically. We should not expect to suffer less when we become a Christian, but actually more because we will suffer not only as a man but also as a follower of Christ.

Let us read **V. 12, “Beloved, be not surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.”** What is Peter in essence telling his readers? He is telling them to expect suffering. This expectation is very sound and a biblically correct expectation.

This theological expectation has been confirmed to us historically. Certainly if there is one thing that we see in looking at history is the fact that what goes around comes around.

Christ promised His disciples that they would suffer. In **John 15:17-20** it says, **“This I command you that you love one another. (18) If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. (19) If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (20) Remember the word that I said to you, a “slave is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you....”** After the birth of the church did His disciples suffer? And the answer is, of course, yes! They suffered greatly. But their suffering was primarily at the hands of the Jews. However in this epistle it appears that we are beginning to see an additional source of persecution rising against the church and that is an organized and directed persecution originating in Rome.

When was this epistle written? Most people believe that it was written in 64 A.D. This would place the epistle in the time of Nero, near or just after the start of the first great Roman persecution against the church. So which one is it? Had the persecution of the Church under Nero already started or was it only about to start? It is my belief that Peter wrote this epistle shortly after the start of this particular persecution. Why do I say this? It is because of this verse. What does Peter tell his readers? **“Beloved, be not surprised at the fiery ordeal among you.”** It is difficult for me to think that Peter would have used these particular words if the persecution under Nero had not yet reached them. But though it is described as fiery the suffering they were then experiencing was only the tip of the iceberg of what was going to come to them.

Why do I think this? It is because the ferocity of Nero’s persecution did not begin to be unleashed until after the burning of Rome on July 19, 64 A.D. History records for us that there was a very close connection with this particular fire and Nero’s persecution of the church. And because this is so it would have been very difficult for the full brunt of the persecution which would have started in Rome to have spread throughout the empire and to these readers who were in Asia Minor that quickly. Let us for a moment consider this fire and how it impacted the church.

This particular fire broke out in a slum area near the Capena Gate and destroyed half of Rome. The people were devastated. Thousands died in the flames, tens of thousands had lost their homes and all of their possessions. Some of the most famous structures of Rome had been destroyed. The Temple of Luna, The Great Altar, The Temple of Jupiter and the Shrine of Vesta had all fallen victim to the flames.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

The people were not happy campers, and initially after the fire had been extinguished a dangerous rumor had begun circulating that Nero himself had put his capital in flames in a spirit of wanton vandalism, and to free space for his own megalomaniac building plans. Unfortunately many historians in studying various writings of the time actually believe that this rumor was true. Obviously this was a rumor that Nero wanted to squelch. Whether it was true or not. How would he do this? He needed a scapegoat. And the scapegoats, were Christians, whose withdrawal from the close knit framework of pagan society had won them the animosity of the Roman society. It was therefore at this point in history that the persecution of the church became state policy.

Obviously the initial brunt of this persecution fell on Christians in Rome. Tacitus, a Roman historian records for us how Christians were rolled and pitched, attached to poles, and then set on fire in order to serve as torches for garden parties in Rome. He records how they were sewn into the skins of wild animals and were allowed to be attacked by hunting dogs until they were torn to pieces. They were placed on crosses and crucified etc. etc. etc.

Had these kinds of persecutions reached the Christians Peter was writing this epistle to? Probably not. What I picture taking place among his readers in their communities was a growing hostility. This animosity was being expressed from Peter's own statements in this epistle verbally. In addition to this, I would believe that the authorities in these communities where they lived were probably already beginning to express the official policy of Rome in their various judgments. I would assume therefore that they were already suffering under the law, but probably of greatest concern was for their future. Their situation was already bad as is clearly communicated to us by **V. 12**, but certainly as they heard the reports of what was happening to Christians in Rome their concerns could have only been intensified.

And these concerns did become their reality. Within a few years of the fire in Rome, Christians throughout the empire, certainly including the Christians that Peter was writing, were imprisoned, racked, seared, broiled, burned, scourged, stoned, hanged, and crucified.

These Christians that Peter was writing needed to understand that these things which they were suffering should not be surprising to them but rather EXPECTED.

Why would God allow this to happen? Peter wants them to know that this has come upon them for their testing not for their destruction. Look again at **V. 12**, “(Beloved of myself and the Lord Himself), **do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing.**” Notice not for your destruction but for your testing. This is not a negative process but rather a very positive one. What does it accomplish? It ministers to the two areas that are most important to me. I want to know Him and to be like Him.

How does it minister to my desire to know Him, or in other words to know that I am truly His child. Let us go back to **1 Pet. 1:6-7**, “**In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, (7) that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**”

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

Our perseverance under trial demonstrates the genuineness of our faith. It truly identifies us as a truly born again believer. The sun of persecution has risen over our lives, but we have not wilted and died. We press forward with even greater determination. Why? Because we are genuine and our faith is real.

How does it minister to my desire to be like Him. Let us go to **James 1:2-3 “count it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (4) and let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”** Trials and tribulations brings all the impurities of our lives to the surface so that we might be able to effectively deal with them. Day by day becoming more like Him.

### CONCLUSION

WHAT IS THE FIRST OF FOUR FEATURES NECESSARY IN OUR LIVES IF WE ARE GOING TO PROPERLY RESPOND TO SUFFERING? WE NEED TO EXPECT IT.

AND HOPEFULLY THIS PROSPECT OF TRIALS AND TROUBLES DOES NOT THREATEN US BECAUSE WE UNDERSTAND AS THE BELOVED OF GOD HE IS SIMPLY TESTING US SO THAT WE MIGHT EXPERIENCE WHAT WE VALUE FAR BEYOND ANYTHING THAT THIS WORLD MIGHT HAVE TO OFFER..... THE CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE OF GENUINE SAVING FAITH AND THE GLORY OF BECOMING MORE LIKE JESUS DAY BY DAY.