

EXPECT – REJOICE – EVALUATE – ENTRUST

What is the recipe for fruitful evangelism? What is it that will ensure our success in all of our evangelistic efforts? What is it that will most please the LORD God in our evangelistic efforts?

1 Peter 3:15, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

If you want to be a successful evangelist, if you want to please the LORD God in your evangelistic efforts, then you must always be prepared to make a defense. You must be able to articulate your knowledge of God, your knowledge of Christ, and your knowledge of the gospel. You need to be able to rationally explain what you believe and why you believe what you believe so that when people ask you for a reason for the hope that is in you, you are able to tell them. If you do not know the reason for the hope that is within you, then how will you be able to communicate and share that hope with others?

Now, as important as this is, being able to give a rational explanation and defense of why you are a Christian, this is not the main ingredient for successful evangelism. The main ingredient for successful evangelism is to honor Christ the Lord as holy in your hearts. To honor Christ the Lord as holy in our hearts is to adore Christ as Lord. It is to exalt Christ as Lord. It is to magnify Christ as Lord. It is to give the primary place in your heart to Christ as Lord, acknowledging his sovereignty, acknowledging his majesty, acknowledging his Lordship and Kingship overall. Before you can be ready to make a defense, the Lord Jesus Christ must be preeminent in your heart. The Lord Jesus Christ must be preeminent in your life. The Lord Jesus Christ must be Lord, and only then, can we be truly ready to give a defense for the hope that is within us.

The hope that is within us is the gospel. The hope that is within us is the good news. It is the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. The hope that is within us is God incarnate (God becoming man), entering into history, living a perfect life, accomplishing the will of God the Father, fulfilling all of the legal demands of the law, and standing as the perfect sacrifice in the place of sinners. Jesus Christ took upon himself the full weight and the full burden of man's sin and unrighteousness, and going to the cross, he then bore the full wrath of God and died a violent death to appease the holiness and justice of God. He accomplished all of this to glorify the Father and to reconcile sinners to him. This is the hope that is within us, and this is the defense, that we are to be ready to proclaim, in gentleness and reverence, to anyone who asks to give an account.

However, in today's culture, our proclamation of hope is not a popular message. In today's world of relative truth, political correctness, and pluralism (which is the idea that there are many pathways to God), our message of hope is spurned, our message of hope is ridiculed, and mocked, and scorned. The existence of God, the character of God, the works of God, as revealed in the Scriptures, are under constant attack. The veracity of the Scriptures, the truthfulness of the Scriptures, are under constant attack. The historicity of the LORD Jesus Christ has been perverted and twisted by gnostic gospels and fictional books that deny his person, reducing him to just another religious man, a good and well-intentioned man, but a man nonetheless. The biblical message of the exclusivity of the LORD Jesus Christ is not only rejected, it is disdained. In the world today, it doesn't matter what you believe, so long as you are open and affirming to what everyone else believes. In fact, in terms of religion, you can believe just about anything and be openly accepted by society, but the moment that you confess that there is only one way to God, the moment you confess that there is salvation in no one else, the moment you confess that those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ will perish in an

eternal fire of God's wrath, at that moment you will be hated, and you will be persecuted. Charles Spurgeon once said, "If you really long to save men's souls, then you must tell them a great deal of disagreeable truth." To the ears of the world, the truth of God is highly disagreeable. The world does not want to hear God's truth because the world is in darkness, the world has chosen darkness over light.

You see, to engage the culture is to engage in a spiritual battle. And our struggle is not against flesh and blood, our struggle is not against the world that we see, our struggle is against the world that we do not see. It is against the rulers, the powers, the world forces of this present darkness. It is against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. But, regardless of this opposition, the exclusive gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ must be faithfully proclaimed. And to proclaim the truth of God, the whole truth of God will often bring suffering and persecution. But as the puritan John Trapp said in the 1600s, "Truth must be spoken however it be taken."

Please turn with me in your Bible's to the book of 1 Peter. Our text this morning is 1 Peter 4:12-19. This morning we are going to be looking at four principles to remember as we engage our culture with the truth of the Scriptures. Let us read the text together.

1 Peter 4:12-19, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. 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? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

As you evangelize and as you engage the culture with the truth of the Scriptures:

1. Expect suffering (v12)
2. Rejoice in your suffering (v13)
3. Evaluate your suffering (vv14-18)
4. Entrust yourself to God amidst your suffering (v19)

Point #1, Expect Suffering

As you evangelize and as you engage the culture around you with the truth of the Scriptures, expect suffering –expect to suffer.

1 Peter 4:12, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Here Peter is very direct and to the point; persecution is inevitable. Persecution is inescapable. For those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ, persecution is a certainty. At the end of his ministry and life, in his last letter, the apostle Paul reminded Timothy of this truth.

2 Timothy 3:12, Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

To make a defense for the hope that is within you is to walk directly in the line of the enemy's fire. It is to put a giant target on your back, it is to squarely face off against the adversary and his spiritual forces, so do not be surprised when fiery ordeals come. You see, a godly life, a life that is pleasing to God, a life that

has sanctified Christ as Lord, a life that has sanctified Christ the Lord as holy, will expose the error of the world, it will expose the sinfulness of the world. It will do this both directly and indirectly.

Ephesians 5:11-14, Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light.

According to these verses, our responsibility to the LORD God goes far beyond, not participating in the unfruitful deeds of darkness; our responsibility to the LORD God is to expose the unfruitful deeds of darkness. In Ephesians 5:11, the word translated expose, could also be translated as reproof, or correction. This term carries with it the idea of confronting error and sin with great prejudice and intolerance. Now sometimes, just by living a faithful and obedient life, that will be enough, the world will get the message. Through our actions and our behavior, even without saying a word, the unfruitful works of darkness will be exposed by our lives. A sanctified and holy life will often be a sufficient and powerful rebuke to a sinful world. Other times, it will not be enough. A silent testimony will only go so far. Sometimes, in addition to this, an open rebuke, in love and gentleness, will be necessary. In fact, many times, an open rebuke will be the most loving response that you can give. Love that does not expose, love that does not correct error and sin, is not biblical love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Authentic biblical love will seek out the best for the other person; it will seek out their greatest good, regardless of the personal cost. True biblical love will not rejoice with unrighteousness, but rather, it will expose unrighteousness, it will seek to correct unrighteousness, and it will rejoice with the truth. Always remember, that those without the Lord Jesus Christ will ultimately perish. And what is keeping them from the Lord Jesus Christ is their sinfulness, it is their imperfection (they have missed the holy mark of God's standard). They are guilty before the LORD God and stand condemned, and unless they recognize their sin, unless they recognize their great need for a Savior, they will most assuredly die in their transgressions. The world needs to be shown its error and sinfulness by the light of the gospel, by the light of the Lord Jesus Christ. The solution to man's problem is not more love, love that is accepting of sin and accepting of error. Rather, the solution to man's problem is love that rejects sin, love that rejects error, love that seeks to purify and to sanctify –the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. By loving the world in this manner, by exposing and correcting error and sin, you will face fiery ordeals, you will face persecution because this message is an offense, this message strikes at the very heart of the battle.

What if you do not experience suffering? What if you've never experienced any kind of suffering? What if you've never experienced fiery ordeals? What does this mean? Well, there are varying degrees of persecution. Not every believer is going to be beaten and maligned for the faith. Not every believer is going to be imprisoned. Not every believer is going to be martyred for the faith, but there should be some push back, there should be some opposition in your life as you engage the culture of this world with the truth of the Scriptures. Remember what the LORD Jesus Christ told his disciples:

John 15:18-21, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

If you've never experienced suffering, persecution, or any other opposition in your life as you have

engaged with the culture, then let me suggest to you a couple of possibilities. If you are not suffering persecution, it may be that you are on the wrong side of things. The world loves its own and you may not be suffering because you may not truly know the LORD God. According to Matthew 7:21-23, on that day, the day of judgment, many people will say, "Lord I prophesied in your name; I cast out demons in your name; I did many mighty works in your name; but God will declare to them, 'I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" On that day, many people will honestly think that they are known by God, that they have a relationship with God, but in reality, they do not. Do not presume that because of your profession of faith, this warning does not apply to you. This warnings applies to each and every one of us. Make sure that you are known by God.

Another possibility, it could be that you are not suffering persecution because, even though you are on the right side of things, you look so much like the other side, that you are not much of a threat. Those who never contend for the truth, those who never expose doctrinal error, those who never confront sin, those who never go out on a limb and proclaim the exclusivity of the Lord Jesus Christ, will probably live a relatively easy life without too many bumps, and without too many surprises.

I often think about the Christian life, our daily walk through this world, like soldiers who are fighting in an intense and raging battle. There is a front line in this battle, where the enemy is met, and here the fighting and the conflict are the most intense, the most severe, and the most deadly. As a soldier for Christ, on this front line is where we are to be. As a soldier for Christ, on this front line is where I want to be, but oftentimes, I am not on the front line. I am ten miles back, fiddling around with my gear and equipment. My armor is spread out all over the place. My sword is dull and tarnished. I have been inactive for so long, my belt does not fit quite right, my breastplate is tight, and I cannot even find my shoes. I think that many Christians live their lives ten miles back from the front lines, some even farther. Far away from the immediate danger, far away from the hardships, and far enough back, so that they do not do a bit of harm to the enemy. Living that far back often ends up doing more harm, more harm to themselves, and more harm to their fellow soldiers, rather than more harm to the enemy.

One of my favorite seminary professors, Timothy Beougher, used to say that he desired his name to be known in hell. He wanted the enemies of the LORD God to know his name. In Acts 19, you may remember the account of the seven sons of one Sceva, who was a Jewish chief priest. In Acts 19, God was performing many great miracles at the hands of Paul. Handkerchiefs and aprons were being carried from his body to the sick, and many were being healed. So these seven sons were going from place to place and seeking to perform mighty works in the same way, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. These seven sons approached a man in whom was an evil spirit, saying "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." Do you remember the response? The evil spirit said, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" And he overpowered them and subdued them so that the seven sons ran away naked and wounded. Is your name known in hell? Is your name known by adversary and by the spiritual forces of darkness? Is your name known amongst the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ? I want my name to be known. I want your name to be known. I want the name of First Baptist Church to be known by the enemies of the cross, everywhere. I want our church to make a serious dent in the spiritual battle. I want our church to make a serious dent in the spiritual battle that is raging in central Massachusetts. As soldiers of the LORD Jesus Christ, I want to lock shields with you and advance the battle lines for the Kingdom of God, for the glory of God. But make no mistake, this sort of vision will bring about persecution, the enemies of our LORD will not easily give away ground without a fight.

Point #2, Rejoice in Suffering.

As you evangelize and as you engage the culture with the truth of the Scriptures, expect to suffer. But do not just expect suffering, rejoice in suffering.

1 Peter 4:13-14, But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be

glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

The phrase that should characterize Christians, amidst trials, persecution, and rejection is "rejoice and be glad." This is the correct attitude that all Christians must possess. Whatever attacks that you may face, no matter the pain, no matter the difficulty, no matter the duration, "keep on rejoicing." Recognize that you are sharing in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as he suffered at the hands of sinful men, just as he suffered for doing what was right, just as he suffered for speaking the truth, so his children, we who bear his name, must also suffer. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed are those, Matthew 5:10-12, who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Why rejoice? Why be glad? The kingdom is heaven. Beloved, the kingdom of heaven is yours. If you are being persecuted for the sake of righteousness, that is evidence that you belong, that is evidence of your union with Christ. So be glad and keep on rejoicing. Paul understood this truth very well. He considered it a privilege to suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ. He considered it a privilege to suffer for the sake of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:29-30, For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

And again in,

Philippians 3:10, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

Paul saw a camaraderie, a close-knit bond, between himself and the suffering of the LORD Jesus Christ. Some of the deepest moments of spiritual intimacy, that you will have with the LORD God, will come during the times of the most intense suffering, difficulty, and persecution. Suffering drives the children of God back into the arms of their loving heavenly Father. Suffering drives the children of God back to their merciful High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, who sympathizes with us because he has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Suffering is a privilege, and suffering will drive you back into the arms of the LORD God, so rejoice and be glad.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10, But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

The problem with many churches today is they are not weak enough. Many churches today do not rely upon the strength of the Lord. They do not rely upon the truth of the Scriptures. But rather they are self-reliant, they rely upon their programs, their methods, and own earthly wisdom. It is when we are weakest that we are the most strong; power is made perfect in weakness.

Point #3, Evaluate Your Suffering.

As you evangelize and as you engage the culture with the truth of God expect suffering, and rejoice in suffering, but also evaluate your suffering.

1 Peter 4:15-16, But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

In the midst of suffering, amid persecution, take a good hard look at your life, take a good hard look at your circumstances and ask the question, Why? Why am I suffering? Why am I being persecuted? Is my suffering for the sake of righteousness? Is my suffering for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I suffering as a Christian according to the will of God? Or is there another reason?

I can remember a very difficult time in my life when I suffered greatly. It was 1991, I was in my junior year of high school, and my suffering came at the hands of my school administrators who were persecuting me. The vice-principal moved my locker from the basement, which was the most desirable locker room, to the fourth floor, where I was all alone. Every day I was made to eat my lunch in the principal's office, separate from all my friends. I had to spend my study hall in the principal's office as well. I was banned from driving my car on the campus, I had to park down the street, out of sight from the school's property. For a time, I wasn't allowed to attend any school sporting events. And what had I done to deserve such unjust treatment? None of your business. My point is that I was not suffering for the cause of Christ. I was not suffering because of my righteousness. I was suffering for my unrighteousness. I was suffering for my own sinful actions.

Evaluate your suffering. Do not suffer as a murderer. If you are a murderer, and you go to jail, and there you experience difficulty, do not grumble and do not complain, because you are reaping what you have sown. The same thing goes for thieves, the same thing goes for evildoers, the same thing goes for meddlers. Now here is a word that you do not hear every day, meddlers. A murderer is someone who has killed another person. A thief is someone who has stolen another person's property. An evildoer, is a general word that describes someone who commits every other crime not covered by murder or theft, but who is the meddler? It is an interesting word that is found only once in the New Testament and it is right here in this passage. It is a combination of two Greek words meaning stranger, and meaning overseer. A meddler is someone who looks over or intrudes into things that belong to someone else. A meddler is a busybody who unnecessarily involves themselves in someone else's affairs. Someone who sticks their big nose where it should not be – a pot stirrer, or a rabble-rouser.

What I find interesting about this word is its associated company. It is right up there with murderers, with thieves, and with evildoers. Why is that? Sometimes, in our passion to evangelize, in our zeal to engage the culture, I think Christians can be meddlers, well-intentioned, but meddlers nonetheless. Christians often stick their noses where they do not belong, majoring on minor issues, taking a stand on secondary or tertiary doctrines, or just going about things in the wrong way. Troublesome meddling, and interfering in others people's affairs is completely out of place for Christians. It is destructive, it is shameful, and it can bring reproach upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and his church. Do not suffer as a murderer. Do not suffer as a thief. Do not suffer as an evildoer. Do not suffer as a troublesome meddler. Suffer for the right reasons, suffer as a Christian, and do not be ashamed of it, live righteously, and suffer to the glory of God.

Do you want to know another reason why we should endure suffering as a Christian?

1 Peter 4:17-18, 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? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

While you may today face intense suffering and difficulties, the agony and outcome of those who do not obey the gospel of God will be far, far greater. Endure suffering now, which will test, refine, and chasten you, because the alternative is condemnation. Always remember that for the Christian, for the child of God, suffering is for your good. Jerry Bridges remarked, "God uses adversity to loosen our grip on those things that are not true fruit. The loss of material substance, the tarnishing of our reputation, the turning aside of friends, or the dashing of our cherished dreams on the rocks of failure, cause us to think about what is important in life. We begin to relinquish our desires and expectation, even the good ones, to the sovereign

will of God. We come more and more to depend on God and to desire only that which will count for eternity.”

The suffering of the unbeliever is entirely another matter. Not only will unbelievers needlessly suffer in this life, but they will also suffer in the life to come.

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

To those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ, not only will their earthly suffering serve no purpose, but they will also suffer the eternal fires of destruction, away from the presence of the Lord. But for the Christian, our time of fiery trial is now, and the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. So we must direct our gaze not on the temporal but the eternal.

#4, Entrust Your Suffering to the LORD God.

As you evangelize and as you engage the culture with the truth of the Scriptures, expect suffering, rejoice in suffering, evaluate your suffering, and lastly, entrust yourself and your suffering to God.

1 Peter 4:19, Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Jeremiah Burroughs remarked, "A gracious heart is contented by the melting of his will and desires into God's will and desires. That is the excellence of grace: grace does not only subject the will to God, but it melts the will into God's will, so that they are now but one will. What a sweet satisfaction the soul must have in this condition, when all is made over to God."

In your suffering, melt your will to God's will. Commit your circumstances, commit your life to LORD God, even amid great hostility. We are called to suffer according to the will of God, and we are called to entrust our souls into his capable control. Literally, we are to deposit our souls to the LORD God, for protection and safekeeping because God is our faithful Creator. Peter uses the phrase, faithful Creator, to remind us that we are simply giving back to God what he has created. As our creator, God knows what is best for us, and God has ordained our circumstances, and he knows how to meet our every need.

1 Peter 2:21-23, For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

In proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, in confronting sin, in exposing hypocrisy and error, the Lord Jesus Christ knew his actions would bring about suffering and persecution. And it is his life, his attitudes, his actions, and his motives, that serve as the example that we must follow. Christians are to follow Christ. Sheep are to follow the Shepherd. The body is to follow the head. Christ is our example, and we must follow in his steps.

The Greek word for steps literally means footprints or tracks. The picture that comes to mind is a child attempting to walk in the footprints made by his father in the snow or sand. In a similar manner, we are to follow, with extreme diligence and effort, the same footprints, and the same path that our Lord Jesus Christ walked. In our suffering and in our persecution there should be no sin committed, no deceit should be found in our mouths, we should not revile when we are reviled, we should not utter back any threats, but rather, we must wholly entrust our lives to the LORD God, just as the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

As you evangelize and as you engage the culture with the truth of the Scriptures:

Expect suffering. All who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, so do not be surprised when it happens, prepare yourselves for this, and expect to suffer.

Rejoice in your suffering. Rejoice and be glad, because your suffering is not in vain. God is doing something in your life. He is sanctifying you by enhancing your relationship with him, by helping you experience the sufferings of Christ, by exposing your remaining sin, and by reminding you of your utter helplessness apart from him.

Evaluate your suffering. Make sure that you are suffering for the right reasons, make sure that your suffering is righteous. Do not suffer for unrighteousness, do not suffer for your sin, but suffer for righteousness sake, according to the will of God.

In all these things, in persecution, in sufferings, in difficulty, in hardships, in temptation, entrust yourself, and your circumstances, into the hands of the LORD God, for he is faithful. He is the faithful Creator, he is your faithful Creator, so trust in him.

Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. Let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Suffer as a Christian, and do not be ashamed, but glorify God. Entrust your souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

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