

1 Peter 4:12-19

We began a new series 3 weeks ago called “Essentials.” Here is why...

70% of churches are declining or plateauing.

1. When you consider that the majority of the 30% who are not plateaued or declining are “growing” by transfer growth, it is even more disturbing.
2. According to a map developed by Operation World and their research, North America is one of the few places in the world where Christianity is growing at a slower rate than the birth rate!
3. Times are a changing....and they are changing fast.
4. As these times are changing, we must understand that the way we are viewed, received, and treated will change as well...please do not blow this off today, but essential 4 is “Expect Suffering.”

We have started each one of these Essential Sermons off with a question.

1. As we considered Global Missions: Have I embrace the mission, personally, as my own?
2. As we considered Local Missions: Am I personally embracing Christ’s command to make disciples?
3. As we considered the Gospel Message: Do I personally understand and embrace this message?

This morning, as we consider the essential importance of suffering well, I want us to ask ourselves this question: **What if everything changed?**

1. Right now there is apathy towards the gospel. What happens if that apathy turns to animosity and hatred?
2. Right now there is passivity. What happens if that passivity turns to persecution?
3. What happens if everything changes and it becomes not just slightly risky to meet publicly, but foolish to do so.

This is the trajectory we are on...and I do not believe we notice it.

1. We are so busy trying to save our nation politically through a corrupt government that is 1000’s of miles away, that we are missing the tenor and temperature of society right around us...and I fear we may be taken by surprise.
2. Many who are facing persecution say things changed overnight.
3. People we worked with in China had grown their church and were meeting in a store front to overnight fleeing into homes.
4. Missionaries who are gone for 5-10 years come home and are absolutely shell-shocked at how quickly and dramatically things have changed.
5. The frog in the pot of water.
 - a. We are not just like a frog in the boiling pot.
 - b. We are a distracted frog in the boiling pot.
 - c. My concern is that if/when suffering comes upon us we will all be taken by surprise.

That is Peter’s concern as well: that these early believers are surprised to be suffering and persecuted. It has caught them off guard.

READ/PRAY

Peter is concerned that these early believers have been surprised and caught off guard by suffering and persecution. This is the theme of his entire letter. Notice with me....

1. 1 Peter 1:6, 2:12, 2:19-20, 3:6, 3:9, 3:14, 3:16, 5:8-10
2. And then read this text again: 1 Peter 4:12-19

Peter was simply trying to do for the early church, what I am trying to do for this church today: prepare them for the inevitable...suffering and persecution.

I. Persecution and Suffering are normal v12-13

12 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.

Persecution is not incidental to faithful Christian living but is certain evidence of it.

1. 2 Timothy 3:12 *Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*
2. The experience that we have had in this nation is not normal Christianity
3. It is abnormal!
 - a. It is abnormal for Christians to be wealthy and prosperous. It is normal for Christians to be poor and needy.
 - b. It is abnormal for Christians to be characterized by comfort. It is normal for Christians to be characterized by suffering.
 - c. It is abnormal for Christians to be characterized by physical and material security. It is normal for Christians to be characterized by vulnerability.
 - d. It is abnormal for Christians to be characterized by popularity. It is normal for Christians to be characterized by persecution.

4. John 15:18-21 *If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet 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 keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me*

Persecution is normal!

II. Persecution and Suffering are a Blessing v14-16

14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

Matthew 5:10-12 *Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

1. Notice that it does not say, blessed are those who are persecuted because they are

- a. Objectionable, difficult, Foolish, Political
 - b. It is not even for being “good.”
 - c. Look back in 1 Peter 4:15-16.
2. It is blessed are those who are persecuted because they are righteous: like Christ.
 - a. I want you to notice something unique about this beatitude. In this beatitude blessed is mentioned twice.
 - b. Double-blessed are those who are persecuted.
 1. They have a double blessing because they inherit eternal life and a martyr's crown
 2. Rev 2:10 *Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life*
3. Be glad literally means to exult, to rejoice greatly, to be overjoyed because your reward in heaven is great!
 - a. The literal meaning is to skip and jump with happy excitement.
 - b. The crown of martyrdom has been thought to be the brightest that an of the redeemed shall wear; and hence many of the early Christians sought to become martyrs, and threw themselves in the way of their persecutors, that they might be put to death.
 - c. They literally rejoiced, and leaped for joy, at the prospect of death for the sake of Christ.
 - d. Jesus uses the imperative mood.
 - e. In other words, we are commanded to be glad when we are persecuted

III. Persecution and Suffering are upon us v17-18

17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?

Jim Ellif gave 9 reasons he believes the momentum towards persecution is upon us.

1. God said, that godly people will be persecuted.
2. Man's natural depraved inclination is to despise God and to hate his followers.
3. Our enemy, Satan is a murderer and is bent on our destruction.
4. Society as a whole is becoming less biblically literate, therefore susceptible to characterization of Christianity (haters) as opposed to true Christianity.
5. Socialism, which historically marginalizes and persecutes Christians is increasing in the millennial generation. It is baby communism.
6. Cultural Christianity in most churches seeks to characterize true Christianity as radical and to be rejected.
7. Planned Islamization by radical muslims infiltrating western civilization threatens Christianity.
8. Political correctness jeprodizes the Christian worldview, especially in the realm of sexuality.
9. Social media give a persistent voice to hatred and polarization... Wizard of Oz syndrome.

Things are clearly getting worse.

1. Things are worse today than they were a year ago.
2. And they were worse one year ago than they were 3 years ago.
3. The trajectory we are on is leading us to difficult days.

IV. Persecution and Suffering are God's Will v19

19 Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

1. Don't think that Christians who are suffering and being persecuted are experiencing this because God's hands are tied.
2. It is not like God is passively and helplessly looking on saying, I wish someone would save my people.
3. He is not a helpless hopeless bystander, for nothing happens outside of His jurisdiction
4. He is sovereign, even over suffering!

Rev 6:9-11 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. 10 They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" 11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

If it takes a turn, we cannot blame it totally on the politicians, the media, the shifting of the culture etc.

1. Yes, they are responsible.
2. But we also have to recognize that this is part of the Sovereign plan and will of God to test us! To prove us! To see...will we pass the test or fail when
 - a. We can no longer gather in our big, pretty buildings
 - b. We can no longer publicize events..or even have big events.
 - c. We can no longer sit and listen to a sermon preached by a seminary trained, fully supported pastor.
 - d. Will we compromise to hang on to our traditions? Or will we willingly become poor, weak, and despised to be real followers of Christ.
3. People, it is coming to this...unless we are willing to compromise to appease the anti-Christ culture we are entering into.

Conclusion:

So, why did I include this topic in the list of "Essential Sermons?"

1. I don't want you to be surprised or disillusioned if/when suffering and persecution come.
2. I want you to decide right now that You will follow Jesus if/when things change dramatically.
3. Decide ahead of time to follow Jesus!

Music...*I Have Decided to Follow Jesus* is a Christian hymn that originated in Assam, India.

1. The lyrics are based on the last words of an Indian man, who along with his family decided to follow Jesus Christ in the middle of the 19th century due to the efforts of an American Baptist missionary.
2. Called to renounce his faith by the village chief, the convert declared, "I have decided to follow Jesus." His two children were killed before him.
3. In response to threats to his wife, he continued, "Though no one join me, still I will follow." His wife was killed.
4. He was executed while singing, "The world behind me, The cross before me."

This display of faith is reported to have led to the conversion of the chief and others in the village.

1. The formation of these words into a hymn is attributed to an Indian missionary.
2. The melody is also Indian, and entitled "Assam" after the region where the text originated.
3. And the meaning of these words is a far cry from how we generally think of this hymn today.
 - a. I want to invite you to sing it this morning...not with the idea that it means praying a prayer, walking down an aisle, and signing a card
 - b. Sing it this morning with that Indian man, his wife, and his children in mind.
 - c. And determine today, that come what may, you will follow Jesus!