



12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. 16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. 17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? 18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? 19 Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. (1 Peter 4:12-19)

I am very careful when crossing busy boulevards. The reason for this care began at my first conscious learning from the lips of my mother - Do not go out in the street! Watch for traffic when crossing the highway! etc. I was forewarned of the dangers in love. Therefore, heeding the warning, I apply the wisdom of my mother (passed into glory many years ago) even until now. Wisdom is never outdated. God has warned us and foretold to us the great trials and tribulations coming upon the world - not after some imagined prior rapture - but to the church that shall surely pass through that tribulation according to Holy Scripture.

The Old Testament prophets tirelessly warned us of those things to come upon the earth, not for our discomfort, but for the opposite relief that foreknowledge provides those who are warned prior to the event. Those who bear the yoke of Christ will bear greater hardship than those who are of the world. To quote the prophet, Zephaniah: *That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. (Zeph 1:15-17)* If there ever was a nation with secure cities (from the enemy abroad) with proud *high towers*, it is the United States. But the security is illusory without the protecting Hand of God outstretched over our alabaster cities, our fertile plains and templed hills. Sin blinds us!

I believe this warning of Zephaniah applies more to America than any other nation: *they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD*. Do we not walk today in America as blind men who have lost our way? We have called the murder of the most innocent among us as a CHOICE. We have given the abominable and filthy sin of homosexuality the respectability of marriage - a union that God has condemned in the most serious and gravest of terms. America has lost her way and deserted the Old Paths wherein her fathers walked.

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.

Not So Strange

Think it not strange! Because our minds and hearts are attuned to the justice of God, we often believe it strange that the wicked seem to always bathe in the sun of the sunny side while His favored people suffer in persecution and the cold winds of injustice. But knowing the justice of God and the depravity of the world, the truth begins to come into better focus.

I. The World Is In Revolt Against Its Creator.

The world is not our Home. Rather we are strangers and pilgrims in the world bearing only those possessions we can carry on our persons - and we seek after a city not made with hands. The world is at enmity with our Sovereign, therefore, we are traveling through enemy territory. So why strange that the belligerents of the land are at odds with the sons and daughters of the King whom they despise?

II. Along This Way The Master Went.

As we travel the road of righteous endeavor, we must recall that our own King was brutally treated by the same inhabitants of the hostile land. If they were so presumptive and disrespectful to our King, why should we believe that those same enemies would love His people and treat them kindly?

III. This Is The Way Home.

Suppose the enemies of our Lord were very accepting of us and treated us with favor and deference? What would be wrong with that picture? It must mean that the wicked can identify with us and find that they are comfortable with our ways and language. We cannot have a soldier in a combat situation who gives aid and comfort to the enemy. Perhaps we are really too much like the world if we gain its favor. We make our homes with whom we feel most comfortable. Lot, Abraham's nephew, got into trouble by choosing the verdant meadows *over against Sodom* and finally became a gatesman and resident of that filthy city.

IV. There Is An Object In Such Suffering. If a clay jar could speak, it would tire your ears with stories of its great suffering at the hands of the Potter in marring and reshaping its visage into a useful vessel, and of the horror of the fires of the kiln to harden and strengthen its walls. The gold of the King's Crown might also complain of the seven fires of the Refiner by which it was purified in order to make it of worth to the King. Ask poor Job if there was a purpose and a plan by the Potter and the Refiner. All he had, including his health, was taken from him; but it was to the glory of God that he withstood the ill-winds of fortune and persevered with God to the end. Recall that at Job's end, he received exactly TWICE all that was taken from him.

V. We Suffer A Like Cross As Our Lord:

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ,

happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. Doubt it not, we bear a yoke that belongs to Christ, but it is Christ that does the labor of its weight. In the old days (when I was a child), the Bible had not yet become a dangerous Book to read in public school. One day, a teacher read to her class *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* Matt 11:30 (KJV) Who can tell me what a yoke is? asked the teacher. One boy said, A yoke is something they put on the necks of animals. Then the teacher asked, What is the yoke God puts on us? A little girl responded, It is God putting His arms around our necks. True, it is not a burden of the Lord, but His carrying our burdens for us.

But our sufferings must not be for unrighteousness for then is it deserved. His suffering was completely without justice that we might be made righteous by His imputed righteousness. *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.* Woe to those whose souls are not enshrined by the Grace and Mercy of God. *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?* As the great English and Continental reformers went forth willingly to the burning stake, surely we today can withstand the disdain and ridicule of society for our position in Christ. Before God purifies this old world with burning fires, He will first purify His Church for the sake of justice. If judgments are stinging at the House of the Lord, how much more intense will the fires be without!

VI. Look On To The End.

And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? We already know that God will abide no sin in His Heaven. So where will those whose sins are yet scarlet at His coming stand? There is only one other destiny for souls - the interminable fires of Hell. Our long home should be of greater concern to us than this temporary sojourn on earth. Our hope in things to come should enable and embolden us to stand up to the discordant winds of injustice and soldier on to victory.

VII. We Are Compensated For Such Suffering By The Presence Of The Spirit Of Glory.

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. Do you suppose that God will allow any soul that suffers in His Name to be accounted a defeated soul in the least? That hurt and pain which is outwardly born by the worker of righteousness, for His sake, is rewarded a double portion of riches in the inner man. No treasures stored in Heaven's Vault shall perish! The Wilderness Tabernacle serves as illustration. Without it is covered with unbecoming goat hair - truly not appealing. but inside one finds the walls covered with beaten gold and fine curtains - a thing of beauty. That reflects the state of the Godly sufferer. So be it with us.