

1 PETER CERTAINTY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Study 9 - 1 Peter 4:12-19

When you hurt you want some sympathy. A dad used to be told by his kids that 'pain was good' when he hit his thumb with a hammer. Why? Because he wrote a book called *The gift of pain*. Pain tells you something is wrong. The question is, 'when it hurts, how can you tell what's wrong?' People often strive for or expect a pain free existence. Peter continues his exploration of suffering and how we should think about it.

Read 1 Peter 4:12-19

Why is it good to know about suffering ahead of time? How do we assess the reason for the suffering? What is your default expectation of life? How do you react when that doesn't happen? How is Peter asking you to react?

What kind of Judgment does the world place on Christians? What is their standard? (note also 4:4 4:6 Matt 5:10-12; 10:16-33).)

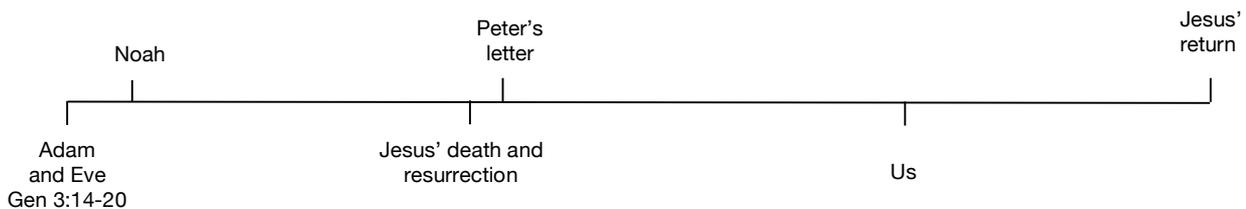
What kind of judgment will God bring upon the world and what is his standard? (4:6 4:17 4:18)

Why did Christ suffer and how are the sufferings of believers linked to him? (4:1-2 4:12-14)

Thinking through Judgement and the household of God (v.17).

What is happening in the world and how are God's people assessing it?	Malachi 2:17-4:6 2:17	1 Peter 4-5:11 4:12-19
What will happen when the Lord appears?	3:3-4	4:12-18
What will happen to those who do not fear God?	3:5-6	4:5-6
What is the problem with God's people?	3:6-9	(Are there some clues in 4:1-3, 12 and below)
How does God solve it?	3:16-18	4:1-2; 1:13-23; 2:9-10; 3:3:18
What does this mean now for judgment and order?		4:3, 7-11; 5:1-11; 1 Cor 5:9-13; 6:1-8
What does the future hold for God's faithful and how will they approach the wicked?	4:1-3	4:17; 5:4, 6; 1 Cor 6:2-3

On the line¹ below plot how God has judged the world, is judging the world and will judge the world? How does Jesus fit into the picture (see also John 5:22-29)?



What parts of our suffering come from the world, sin or from owning Jesus? How do you assess the impact each has on your life? How do you respond to each? How could each inform your prayers?

For pray:

- for courage and endurance in the faith.
- for our persecuted brothers in Australian and around the world

Suffering

'Surprised' and 'strange' are the same word in verse 12. It links back to what Peter was speaking of earlier in chapter one verse six (trials may be a part of the Christian walk). Peter's concern is to help people to reconcile the blessings we have in Jesus with the treatment they might be receiving. It is a caring encouragement that we have not received the full blessings of salvation. However we need to work out why it is that we are experiencing what we are experiencing. Hard pressed persecution is not mandatory but nor need it be missing. Why is it that we are suffering? Is it because of Jesus? Why is it that we are not suffering? Is it because we don't let people know that we belong to Jesus?

The word Christian occurs only three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28 1 Peter 4:16). It appears to be a description of followers of Jesus by others that did not and plays on the idea of noble adoption – that those who follow Jesus have taken on Christ's family name. It was probably sarcastic as there does not seem to be the material benefits of being adopted into a rich family. Yet, in Christ, the Christian has heavenly adoption and an inheritance that will never spoil nor fade. It also explains the treatment that Christians can receive from a world that despises Jesus.

Suffering predicted

Jesus predicted that his followers would be persecuted and he said it would be a blessing to be identified with him (Matt 5:10-12). He also stated that if the world treated him in a certain way we should not expect to be treated otherwise (Matt 10:16-33).

Suffering and judgement

Peter again asks us to reflect why suffering may come our way. Is it the world (a place under curse), is it our sin (we suffer directly as a result of doing the wrong thing) or is it because we identify with Jesus? John Lennon sang about being persecuted by the media and pointed to Jesus being crucified. People talk about the cross they have to bear which may have nothing to do with being seen as someone who follows Jesus... We need to focus in on the suffering that Peter is speaking of when he speaks of owning the name of Jesus. Peter wants to also make sure that suffering is not due to doing the wrong thing.

Peter also explores how judgement has already begun in the household of God. An allusion back to Malachi 2:17-4:6 where Israel is asking how is it that the wicked flourish but the righteous do not. It is an intriguing to and fro of dialogue to dig into the worldview that's driving their questioning of God and excuses for not following him and obeying him.

There are similar temptations for the Christian even though we have seen how God justifies us. We have received the judgment of not guilty when we responded to Jesus in faith. Jesus took the curse of the world and the judgment of the whole world upon himself and he is working at purifying his people from sin and he will return to judge the living and the dead. The gospel is being preached now in order to save people from the coming judgment. Yet, Satan will still make us question our status before God because we may suffer and the wicked prosper. We may also inappropriately think our suffering is because we are Christian but it may be because of sin.

Salvation and judgment

Peter links the difficulty of salvation with suffering. The righteous in v.18 – is it Jesus? Is it the Christian? Both kind of work – Jesus is the righteous one who swaps places with the unrighteous to make them righteous (3:18) This salvation is hard won. It was difficult beyond belief. It takes the full work of the trinity in order to bring back men and women from the destructive judgement that sin deserves. Those outside of Christ are so far from God's holiness. They will experience far more suffering than the righteous in this life.

Looking at the full biblical picture of salvation and judgement helps to understand the different forces at work on our mortal bodies now and how the Spirit of Christ is at work in us and the world. It also helps us to anticipate and stay faithful to Jesus as we look forward to his return where the world will be judged and those in Christ vindicated.