

Message Transcript

DON'T BE SURPRISED | WE STAND FIRM

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Traders Point, how are we doing? So good to be with you today, everyone at all of the campuses, watching online. Go ahead and grab a Bible and get to 1 Peter, chapter 4, starting in verse 12.

If this is your first time with us I want to give you a little context to this series that we are in. We are walking chapter by chapter, verse by verse through the book of 1 Peter. And Peter, the author of this, was an apostle one of the first followers of Jesus, the inner circle.

What I love about Peter is that what we get from Scripture is not just the highlight reel of Peter's life. Peter may be one of the most relatable people in all of the Bible because you have moments with Peter where he does something, I don't know, like walk on water. And you are like, "This is my guy." I want to follow after this guy. I want to do it like he did."

And then it's like the next page, and you are like, "Oh, no. I never want to be like Peter again. But I think there is so much there. Like we can see ourselves in Peter. But when he pens this letter he's at the end of his life and he's grown so much. Now he is a voice that is speaking into the church, a church that is just getting going. and he's speaking to them. This is a group that is experiencing persecution and alienation and suffering for their belief in Jesus.

And his encouragement is, "Hey, stand firm." He meets them right where they are and he says, "Hey, I know you're tempted to run and to isolate. I want you to stand firm. I know you may be tempted to kind of sync up with the culture and try to blend in." And he said, "No, no. I want you to stand firm for who you are in Jesus.

In 1 Peter, chapter 4, verse 12 he's going to circle back on a theme. And in this book, for the first four chapters he's been going over and over and over again on some really heavy topics that he just knows that the people are wrestling with and it's making it hard for them to stand firm.

So, each week we've just been going through each one as well. Pastor Aaron has been preaching the past seven tough weeks, topic after topic. Can we just take a moment and honor him for standing firm preaching the gospel with grace and truth. It's been incredible.



And today we're going to get to another fun topic that we've already hit before and it is suffering. You're pumped you made it to church today, huh? And you don't need to be a biblical scholar to understand this.

This theme, suffering, is something he talks about throughout this whole letter, at the beginning, in the middle, and now here at the end. So, to me, that communicates that, "Hey, this is important. We need to watch this. We need to understand what he is saying here."

In the latter half of chapter 4 he's going to give us the dos and don'ts of suffering. He's even going to give us a blessing that comes from suffering.

Here's what I know. Being a pastor for more than a decade now, I sit with people all of the time who go through suffering. And what's wild is how the same situation the same type of suffering can affect people very, very differently.

For some, when they experience suffering it causes them to walk away from God and the church. But for others it can be the same situation, the same diagnosis, whatever it is, but it actually is used to bring them closer to God and their faith increases.

And what we see from Scripture is that suffering isn't an if it is going to happen, it's when. And so we want to be equipped, we want to be prepared for what's coming.

And I just want to say if you're here today and you're in one of those seasons where you are suffering, where you are struggling, I just want you to know that we have been praying for you. And I pray that God's Word, today, brings you a level of peace and comfort that passes all understanding in the name of Jesus. So, we're going to start in verse 12. You guys ready? I almost believe you. Alright. Let's do this. It says:

"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you." (NLT)

And I just want to stop right there for a second. He says, "Don't be surprised. Don't be surprised." When something happens that is unexpected, that's when we are surprised. Right? A surprise birthday party. "Oh, my gosh. It's not even the day of my birthday. I didn't expect everyone to be here I am surprised."



Something unexpected just happened in a moment. That's when we are surprised. But there are somethings in our life that shouldn't surprise us. We should be prepared and ready when they come.

For example, you guys are here today and you know what, you came to church, you're serving. And maybe tonight, after everything is done you're having this thought, "I deserve a sweet treat. What I'm going to do is I'm going to take myself to McDonalds and I'm going to get a McFlurry."

But I can tell you what is going to happen. You are going to go there. You are going to the menu board and they are going to say, "Thanks for stopping at McDonalds. What can I get for you?" And you're going to say, "Hey, can I get an Oreo McFlurry?" And there is going to be no hesitation. They are going to say, "Oh, my goodness I am so sorry. The ice cream machine is actually down right now."

Do you know why everyone laughed? Because we've all experienced that moment. It shouldn't be surprising. That's why they put Culvers right next door. You're going to be okay.

But you've got to prepare for these moments. That's what he is saying. He says, "Don't be surprised when fiery trials come your way." But aren't we usually so surprised, flabbergasted, when something goes wrong? "I can't believe this is happening." It's like, are you new here? This place is almost always on fire or in a complete blaze. There is always craziness just right around the corner.

But here's what is kind of profound about what Peter is saying and it really gets to something deeper. If I'm surprised, as a Christian, by trials and suffering, that means that my theology, my worldview, the way I see things, tell me that I'm not supposed to be experiencing trials.

And I just want to say today: Where did we get that? Did a snake tell you that? Because it wasn't Jesus. This is what Jesus said in John, chapter 16, verse 33. He said:

"Here on earth," which I think that's where we all are, "you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." (NLT)

Jesus never made a promise, "If you say yes to me I'm going to remove you from every fiery trial." He said, "I'm going to give you one better. I'm going to be in the fire with you."



It shouldn't surprise us. If there really is evil and darkness, if there really is opposition, if there is so much going through our broken world, we should expect fiery trials. If it is strange to us, then that means that there must be something wrong, there must be a problem with either me or with God. And that can lead to a whole host of problems.

I just want to speak to one of them. A lot of times when we are not prepared to suffer, when fiery trials come, we get disoriented, we get confused, and we begin to think things that aren't really true but we believe that they are.

Maybe you're in that season now where suffering has come and struggling is coming and this is what you feel is real, "God must be punishing me. He must be upset with me. He must have abandoned me. He must be done with me."

We begin to believe that lie. I want to expose that lie here today with one question that I want you to answer.

How much of your sin did Jesus pay for?

All of it. Right? When Jesus went to the cross He didn't say, "Hey, I'm taking 95 percent, but I'm going to leave the last five with you. And if you missed it, I'm coming back for My five." No, when Jesus went to the cross all of your sin was nailed there with Him. By His blood, the full penalty of your sin was done and paid for. End.

If that is true it would be unjust for God to punish Jesus and you for the same thing. He wouldn't do it. So, what we are left with then is, "Why would God allow fiery trials?"

What is a fiery trial? Here it is:

A fiery trial is a purifying experience God uses to shape Christians into the image of Christ.

A fiery trial is a purifying experience, not one of punishment, a purifying experience that God uses to shape Christians into the image of Jesus. So, do you hear that?

I expect fiery trials to come my way.



I expect, as a follower of Jesus, as a son or a daughter of God, I'm going to expect fiery trials to come. I'm going to be prepared for them. Because if we are not prepared for trials, as the next generation would say, "We're cooked." It's already to late.

But if we can stand at the ready, prepared, knowing that, "My God is with me no matter what comes, He has already overcome the world, I'm going to be alright. I am bracing myself. I am going to stand firm."

And in those moments... A lot of times we can't see it until we look back on what God was doing and how He was using it. I know for me, one of the darkest, heaviest trials was when I was in college. I didn't grow up as a Christian but I grew up in a good family who loved me, encouraged me.

And I was going after the one thing that I knew was going to make me happy and it was a whole bunch of money. And college is where you get it. That's what I knew, "I'm going to go to college. I'm going to work hard, get the good job. I'm going to sail off into the sunset. Nothing is going to stop me."

Until financial aid did. I couldn't figure out the situation. So, I get a letter that said, "We have not received your tuition. Please have your stuff out of the dorm by December 16. And now this thing that I've been working on for my whole life was gone and I didn't know how to get it back.

I tried. I called and I said, "Hey, what can we do? How can we figure this thing out." They said, "No problem. All you have to do is pay us the ten thousand dollars you owe us." And I said, "Well, hypothetically, what if I don't have it." And they said, "We can put you on a payment plan." There was some good news. So, I sit back and I'm watching my friends continue to move forward and I'm working and I'm trying to pay this back. I'm in this low spot. I moved back in with my old roommates, my parents, and I'm in my old bedroom—just low. Everything I thought I wanted, I couldn't get.

And it was in that moment I got set up on a blind date that went unbelievably well. It's still going if you wanted to know. We got married. That kind of good, you know what I mean?

But it wasn't just meeting a beautiful woman. At the end of the date, our first date, I said, "I'd love to see you again." And she said, "Yeah. I'm going to church on Sunday. Do you want to go with me?" And I said, "Oh, no. Hey, listen. I'm a good person but church really isn't my thing."



And I thought she would get out of the car but she said, "I don't go to church because I'm a good person. I go to church because of Jesus." And in this moment, with one conversation, she shared the gospel with me, that there is a God who loves me, who left heaven for me, wrapped Himself in skin and bones, goes to a cross, dies for me, that's what all of those crosses are about. But He didn't remain dead. He resurrected three days later defeating sin and death.

And she just layered this amount of love on me that I'd never heard or could believe or comprehend. But I thought, "If there is a God who thought I'm worth dying for, I want to know about that God." So, before she got out of the car I changed my answer. I said, "I'll go to church with you on Sunday."

And the church she went to is this one, Traders Point. And I came in and I sat right over here [to the right of the platform] and Pastor Aaron was preaching the same message about who Jesus is.

And now I look back on that dark time in my life and I see that God met me right there. I didn't get to do the thing I wanted, but at the same time He gave me a life that I could have never dreamt of. He has given me more than I could have ever asked for, dreamed, or imagined.

I love the way Charles Spurgeon said it. Once again, he said, "I have learned to kiss the wave that strikes me against the Rock of Ages"

And I know that we just clapped through a big story there, but they all don't end that way, do they? Not even. Right now in this present moment I remember another trial that I went through when I found out that one of the closest men in my life, my grandpa, was diagnosed with cancer and it was pretty rapid, it was quick moving.

And I felt God telling me to give him my Bible. And I responded with, "I'm not going to do that." He didn't let up though, "Give him your Bible. Send him your Bible." I mailed this man my Bible not even knowing what to do or how it was going to go. But I sent it to him and it just sparked a conversation which led to so many more beautiful conversations.

We sat down and I asked him, "What do you think about that, that God told me to give you my Bible?" And he said, "I don't know. What do you think?" And I said, "I don't know for sure, but what I think is that there is a God over all of this. And even in your last moments here on earth, He's reaching out to you and saying, "Hey, I want you to know that I love you and I'm for you and I want to be with you for all eternity."



And I remember praying for him, believing that, he had cancer, and I believed, in the name of Jesus, that when I prayed it felt so real, so right that the cancer was going to be gone.

He stood, and he was a big man, and I placed my hand onto his chest and it was engulfed into all of his chest hair, swallowed up. And I prayed and I prayed and I prayed like fire was falling from heaven. But then a few months later he passed away.

But I look back on that season, and of course I miss him, of course it hurt, all of those things are still true. But God used that in a way that... In most seasons of my life I never would have grown in that kind of faith, I never would have had the courage to have a conversation like that. And I believe what God did, He showed favor to my grandpa in the last days, and that completely changed my view of Jesus. Do you hear what I am saying?

So, when we come to this spot, I just want to encourage you with this: Don't be surprised.

I expect fiery trials to come my way. I expect them. And here's the thing. Peter is going to move from, "Don't just expect fiery trials," he's going to add another adjective to it that almost seems surprising in its own right. He says, "As you go through this, don't be surprised. Expect fiery trials. God is using them to purify you, to sanctify you, to make you into the image of Jesus." And then he takes it a step further, and he says:

"Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world." (NLT)

So, just to recap, not just expect it but I want you to be glad when you get to experience this. And Peter is not just talking about this theoretically. This is something that Peter experienced himself. We have this account in the book of Acts where Peter and the apostles are facing some persecution for speaking and preaching in the name of Jesus.

And the high council came to them, to the apostles and to Peter and said, "Hey, we want to tell you something. Never, ever by any circumstance preach in the name of Jesus. Guys, are we clear?" And look at Peter and the apostles' response.

"But Peter and the apostles replied, 'We must obey God rather than any human authority.'" (NLT)



The council gets so mad after this, they want to literally kill them in the moment. But cooler heads prevailed, actually this wise man began to speak to the council and he said, "Hey listen. There have been a lot of groups like this that have started. But none of them made it. They all fizzled out because they were man made. And so, if they are doing this on their own, it will fail. Or, here's what he said in verse 39:

"But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!" (NLT)

And I just want to stand here 2,000 years after this was written, to say, "I think we can say with confidence that this was not man made. That God was behind it. And any and everyone who has tried to extinguish the name of Christians around the world has found that it only creates an uprising, that only more and more people begin to be birthed out of persecution.

We are standing on His side. The reason why we can have comfort in our suffering is to know that when someone comes against us, when we face suffering, they are not just wrestling against us, they are wrestling against the very God of this universe and He's on our side.

So they let them go. And I want you to see the response of the apostles as they leave that high council meeting. It says:

"The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus." (NLT)

It was worth it. It was worth it because they were following in the footsteps of Jesus. It was worth it because they knew what they were giving themselves to was a partnership with Jesus to restore and to reclaim all that was lost and broken. They knew that if God could use the cross and if it had meaning and significance then suffering could as well. It is a part of following Jesus. They just knew suffering was coming.

And I just want to ask you today:

Are you suffering for Jesus?

And I'm not saying persecution or being arrested. What I'm saying is, is there tension you are feeling? Is there a strain at work? Is there mocking that you are receiving? Are there opportunities you are being held back from because of your faith in Jesus? If not, I would circle around that. I would have some questions.



Maybe you're like, "I don't know. I feel like I'm doing the right thing. I think maybe I might just be blessed and highly favored. Maybe God has a different plan for me. Maybe suffering is for you. I don't know if it's for me."

Maybe. But maybe it's this. The question that I would ask you is: Do people know that you're a Christian? And if not, why not? Because how do you spend so much time with a group of people, whether it's at work or with your friends or at school—how do they know so much about you but they don't know the most important thing. Why are you holding that back?

How do they know that you take Oat Milk in your latte, but they don't know you took communion on Sunday? The thing that I would wrestle with this week is: What are you afraid of?

Because I can say that on this side of eternity all of the things that we want: significance, joy, meaning, purpose are all wrapped in suffering, just like Jesus modeled for us. In Hebrews it says that for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross.

What I was wrestling with this week, was: What was the joy that was set before Him? Was it getting back to heaven? I think a lot of times I have read it and that's what I thought that the joy that was set before Him was knowing that He was going to be back with God the Father in heaven.

And I think that is a part of the equation, but I don't think that was all of it. I don't think that was really the joy that awaited Him. Because you think about this. Before He came to earth He already had all of that. He already had heaven. He already had the perfect relationship with God. The only thing He didn't have in heaven was you and me.

So the joy set before our God as He was painfully executed and murdered was the idea, "When I go back, I'm not going back alone. What I'm doing right now through My suffering is going to offer an invitation for everyone to be saved. And because of this suffering they will be able to experience love and joy and a life that they never could have gotten on their own. And to Me, that's worth it."

Do you have that? That same perspective, "I'm going through it and it's hard and it's a struggle and I know that I'm going to give up some things on this side of eternity, but I know what's at stake. And I know I'm going to live in such a way for eternity, for things that matter for eternity, I'm willing to lay it all down now."



That's what 1 Peter, chapter 4 is calling us to. It's saying, "Hey, your suffering is not a mistake. One didn't get by God. He's using it and as you walk through it what you are doing is building a testimony that is going to reveal the strength and power of a good God. It is going to be an invitation to those around you to find Christ and to hear the gospel.

He's saying, "Your suffering can have meaning and significance. But he's going to add a qualifier to it in verse 14. It's not just any suffering, he says:

"If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs."
(NLT)

So, two categories here. He says, "If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed." And then he moves on and he says, "But if you suffer for one of these other things—you know, murder, stealing, all that, you will not be blessed." That is not the same thing.

What he's doing here is that at this time the word Christian was almost synonymous with criminal. People were looking for a reason to out Christians and to persecute them to get them out of the way. And he's saying, "Hey, Jesus is going to bring on enough suffering in His name, don't add to it." And then he goes through this list.

I love the way both Peter and Paul make a list because they start with these extremes that you almost feel good about and then you get to the end and you say, "Not so much."

He's like, "Okay, listen. Don't be insulted. As you suffer it must not be for murder." You are like, "I wasn't even planning killing anybody. Probably not going to be in that situation. Check." "Don't steal." Once again, "I didn't think about it until right now and probably wouldn't unless the situation was just right—those shampoo bottles or something."

But then he gets to making trouble or prying into other people's affairs. He's basically saying, he's getting down to the nitty gritty of it, "Hey, don't stop there. Don't bring hatred into something. Don't respond in an ungodly way. Do what Scripture says. Do your best to live in harmony with all people."

Some of us are suffering because of the name of Jesus. Others of us, right now, across all of our campuses, are suffering because you're a jerk. And we have to separate the two.



What he is calling us to and he's saying is, "Hey, the name of Jesus is so good and there is so much power in it, we don't want to do anything that would taint that name. We don't want to give anyone an excuse not to believe in Jesus. So, if there is anything in you that is causing other people to stumble you've got to repent of it."

And Aaron has been preaching on this so I just want to give us a clean line, if this is your first time here:

We rejoice in the suffering that comes because of Jesus; we repent of the suffering that comes from us.

So, if you are here today I just want to ask you where do you need to rejoice? Because you stepped into and you started living a life of faith and it has not been all rainbows and butterflies. I don't know why that's what you were looking for, but it's not coming. It's been hard with struggles and pain. And you need to take a moment this week and to rejoice that you are being counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus.

But there are others of us... We all have those little things or big things in our lives. We are holding on to the name of Jesus but we are also holding onto all of these other things, what we're doing and saying and living, and it's costing us our testimony. What you need to be able to do in this moment is to repent, to lay it down before God and say, "I've been living like this. I don't want it anymore. I offer it back to You." Jesus died so that you could do that both rejoice and repent.

And then he added in another benefit. I don't know if you caught it but I want to circle back to it because I think it's really important. And it's going to give you hope to move forward. He said:

"If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you." (NLT)

Now, this is a really big thing within Scripture. It comes all over the place. Psalm 34 says God is close to the brokenhearted. 2 Corinthians says for when I am weak then I am strong. And here in 1 Peter he says there is blessing. You will experience a greater measure of the Holy Spirit's powerful presence whenever you find yourself in over your head.



Whenever you find yourself in a fiery trial or a furnace. Whenever you are on the verge or maybe you're there right now and you are feeling that. You feel like, "I don't have enough. I know what I need to do. I feel the conviction. But I know what the consequences will bring. I believe I know how hard it's going to be." And that is stopping you.

What Peter is saying here, right now is, "Don't let it stop you. If you have a conviction by faith move in this moment." And you are right. You don't have the strength and the power alone. But when you move and as you step in by faith to live and to spread the gospel the very Spirit of God will rest upon you and He will give you a strength. It is at the end of ourselves, a lot of times, when we begin to experience the power of Jesus.

And I just want to encourage you today if you are on the verge and you are wondering, "Will God meet me in this moment?" Scripture says over and over again there is a blessing for you.

Matthew, chapter 5, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who suffer for me who are mocked and persecuted. Yours will be the Kingdom of God." Rejoice if it comes from Jesus no matter what. He's going to double down on that in verse 16. He wants to be very clear that we should not be afraid or ashamed. Look at this:

"But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian."

I highlight this one verse because I think we read it and it doesn't really do anything to us because the word Christian gets used all of the time. We use it amongst one another. There has never been a time in any of our lives where that wasn't used within the church.

But that wasn't true when this was written. The word Christian is actually only used three times in all of Scripture. And I believe that this is the first time that it's used internally and not externally. You see, Christian wasn't a name or a title or a label we gave ourselves. No. It was a title that was placed on us. It was a derogatory term that was used by Rome to separate Christians from the rest of the Greco Roman world. It was created to bring shame in an honor and shame culture where that was the thing to avoid at all costs.



You had Herodians, which was a political party and, "Herod is our ruler. We pledge allegiance to him. And we are all in this together. All of us. Right? Right? Except for them."

There was this other group over here that are Christians and they don't follow our king, they don't follow our Caesar, they have their own. And they call Him Jesus Christ. And they are counter to everything that we want to do. And we should be done with them.

This title was given to them. They were supposed to stick out like a sore thumb. It was supposed to break them. And Peter is probably writing to them saying, "Hey, I know it would be easier to let go of it. I know it would be easier to try to relate and to blend in." But he begins to use the word and now everyone is using the word. They took the name that was supposed to bring shame and now they were wearing it as a badge of honor.

Peter writes to them and to us, "There is no shame in the name of Jesus." There is no shame in the name of Jesus. And when we attach ourselves to Him, when we partner with Him, no matter what the world says, whatever it tries to bring, we can have confidence in knowing in the gospel, in the name of Jesus there is no shame.

And I want to ask you do:

Do you feel any shame for being a Christian?

Maybe you wouldn't say it out loud but you have those thoughts. That's probably one of the things that keeps you from telling people that you are a Christian. You feel like, "I don't want to offend anyone."

I know this is true of me. I can blame it on my personality or the fact that I was brought up in the Midwest. But there is this idea if I was going to do something that has the potential of offending you, I don't want to do it at all.

And I think we can get caught up in the cultural narrative right now, which is that the gospel, Jesus Christ, is controversial to the point that it's not just right or wrong, it's harmful and that we should feel shame for believing what we do.

And if we believe this, it's actually only going to make things worse. It's offensive. And not over night but little by little we just begin to believe that, "I don't want to rock the boat. I don't want to offend anyone. I don't want to upset anyone." And we begin to just be silent.



And I just want to stand up here with what I've been convicted of. And I want you to have this as well. Jesus is offensive. In this culture, anyway His claims of offering moral truth, absolute truth, are going to be offensive. We have to be okay with that. Jesus is okay with offending.

It reminds me of what He said in Matthew, chapter 15, verse 12. It says: "Then the disciples came to him," Jesus, "and asked, 'Do you realize you offended the Pharisees by what you just said?'"

I love adding commentary to Scripture because you get the idea that Jesus is going back and forth with the Pharisees, He says something pretty offensive and then just walks away. And the disciples are following Him and they are like, "Jesus, I don't know if we need to get you into an EQ class, some emotional intelligence, social intelligence, social awareness, but what You just said offended them."

And Jesus doesn't turn around and go, "Oh, My apologies." He keeps it moving. He says, "I'm not worried about offending them in this moment because there is something so much greater at stake. Every plant not planted by my Heavenly Father will be uprooted."

So, what He's saying is, "I'm willing to offend them. I'm willing to challenge their ideas. I'm willing to poke holes in what they believe if it means I can save them from greater suffering later. I'm willing to put Myself out there for that." Are you?

Church, are you believing the lie that the gospel should be silenced because it brings shame to those who don't believe? That's not the gospel. This is what the gospel is. Romans, chapter 1, verse 16. It says:

"For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile." (NLT)

I don't know what the headlines say. I don't know what culture is trying to make it into, but this is what the gospel is. It is the saving message for all humanity. So, I'm going to speak it.

But they say I shouldn't believe that there is only one God. Do you see how narrow that is? Do you know how offensive that is?



Unless it's true. Unless there really is one God and that there is only one way to that God. And His name is Jesus Christ. And it's the most loving thing that I can do. Don't believe the lie that the gospel is not big enough to bridge and to bring the divide together.

"You need to just lay it down. You need to just come together and lay all of that gospel and Christianity down."

I can't because the gospel is the only thing that will unite all people. So I'm going to lift it up every single way that I know.

They say that what I am doing is wrong. They say that it is doing more harm than good. They say it's even harmful.

I just want to encourage you today to stand firm. The Good News about Christ is that the power of God is at work and it has the ability to save everyone who believes and needs to hear the gospel. And God has chosen me and you as plan "A". We have to be willing to go first.

And now is the time. It is the final act. That's what he's going to reference here in verse 17. He says:

"For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God's household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God's Good News. And also, 'If the righteous are barely saved, what will happen to godless sinners?'" (NLT)

So, what he is saying here is... He's referencing Proverbs 11, what will happen. If believers are barely going to make it, what about everyone else? And the reason they make it, the reason Christians make it, isn't because they are better or smarter than anyone else. It's because the Spirit of God rests on them. It's because they have the thought of eternity as a hope that cannot be shaken. That's the only way that they are going to make it through.

So, he lays two options on the table, whether you believe or don't believe. Here are the two options.

Option one: judgement is coming to the house of God first, which means you are going to experience suffering now, but never again later. That's option one.

Option two is suffering now, you can't avoid suffering by avoiding God and you will experience worse suffering later in a Christless eternity.



"I don't want to stand up here and pretend to tell you that I know what hell and a Christless eternity looks like but I can only imagine how dark and painful it will be if it is a place where God is not.

And that should be motivation for all of us to know that we have not just been saved and now wait to get into eternity, that should spark a compassion and an empathy within us to say, "I want to do everything that I can, there is no one I want to see in that space. I want to make sure everyone hears about who Jesus is and all that He has done. I want to know that I did everything that I could to extend that invitation so that they could know about the love of God and what God is going to do in this last act when judgment is upon us."

Testing is coming, fiery trials are coming but it's not in the sense of condemnation it's in the sense of testing and revealing and purifying. That's what is happening now. By the grace of God He's allowing things to happen in your life so that it reveals what you really believe.

We can say a lot of different things about a lot of different things. About what we believe. We are Christians and it's one thing to do that on the day we're baptized and our hands are in the air in victory. It's another thing when it comes down to it and our lives are on the line, our livelihood is on the line. We get tested to see if this is really what we believe. A test shows how committed you are. It's just a small example.

If I leave here today and I go to get gas in my truck and I pull up to the pump and I hop out to get it and there is a sign that says: The pump is out of order, please come inside to pay. I'm not going inside to pay. You have reached how much I believe is worth suffering for. There are 100 more of them right down the street. I'm going to test the gas light in my car. We're going to keep it moving until I find one. I've met resistance. I'm out. This is not for me.

But there are other levels of relationship that we have that we come to this space where we make vows and declarations to say, "No matter what comes: sickness or in health, rich or poor—no matter, I'm going to stay committed." That's the way it is with our relationship with God.

That's why Awaken over these past few years has been so powerful because a lot of us made this commitment at the front end of it. And we said, "God, I'm going to trust You with my finances. I'm going to send my treasure to You." And then we noticed really, really quickly that we couldn't do that without also following it—that where our treasure is, there our heart is also.



And over these two years, it started with money, but now God is doing a work in and through you. You are repenting. You are emptying yourself. God is doing more and more and it's bringing on all kinds of things, some really, really good some beautiful and powerful.

And others not so good—hard. Struggles within your family. Struggles at work. Dying to old ways. Giving up the things that you used to have to cope with them and trusting that your God will meet you there in the moment in your suffering.

And there are so many of us right now who are in that moment and you are growing weary if you're being honest. You trusted God. You put your faith in God. And now it feels like He's not meeting you where you are. It feels like He's not living up to His end of the bargain.

Can I just say this? Everything we know about Jesus, everything we know about God, is that He is right with you in this trial. I just want to end with this encouragement from verse 19. This is for you:

"So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you." (NLT)

You need to know that right now, no matter what situation that you are in, no matter how hot the trials get, there is a God who has already promised to never leave you nor forsake you. There is a God who has said, "I can take everything that is happening and I can use it for the good of all those who love me."

There is an invitation on the table right now to share in the work of Jesus, which will require suffering. But you can know without a shadow of doubt that everything that you are going through has meaning and significance and can be used for the gospel and the Kingdom of God.

And there will come a day when the suffering will end. There will come a day, because of your faith in Jesus, where there never be another tear that falls again. There will come a day where only joy remains. There will come a day where you and I are face to face with our God.

And the call right now is: Don't grow weary. Keep going for the joy set before you. Keep going. The gospel is the answer to evil. What we do in times like this is so important.



When it feels so heavy and it feels so dark and we feel so small like, "What can I really do with all of that out there?" I just want to encourage you that you can do a lot. The Spirit of God is resting on you. You are God's chosen instrument. He is ready. He is sovereign over this moment and is prepared to use you. And it's probably not going to start in a big way and it doesn't need to. The gospel is like a mustard seed. It starts really small and begins to grow.

I just want give you a few things that you can do this week. Alright? Here's the first one.

Identify with Jesus:

-Tell someone you are a Christian

For some of you this is going to take a lot of courage. You have people who you work with, that you are at school with. For some reason you have failed to share with them that this is what you believe, this is who you are.

You need to wear it like a badge of honor, "I don't know if I've ever said this but I just want you to know I'm a Christian," and see where the conversation goes. Trust that God is going to be with you.

The second thing is this:

Proclaim the gospel

-Share the good news with someone.

It's not just enough to say that you are a Christian, it's when you are in these circles and you hear people just spewing all kinds of venom and hate or painting God in a very wrong way, instead of just nodding your head or shrinking back like, "I don't want to touch that," there needs to be a time this week when you say, in love, "Hey, that's not the God who I believe in. Can I tell you about the gospel?"

You have an opportunity to share who God really is and what it means for them. All of the things that they are going through, whatever suffering or experiences they have, how God is the answer. He will use you in that way. But you have to be willing.

The third one is this:

Practice love

-Respond to hate with love.



There is not a shortage right now of hatred going around. And left unchecked it's easy to just respond to hatred with more hatred, to get louder, to get violent. But that is not the way we fight. As we experience more hatred, as we see all of that coming our way, it's going to take a moment to stand firm and say, "I'm not going to take this on. I'm not going to let this overtake me. I'm going to respond to hate with love.

"And instead of just firing back another line or a statement, I'm going to reach out for reconciliation, I'm going to sit down for coffee, or lunch. I'm going to try my best to better understand why you are coming at this the way that you are.

"I'm going to ask a bunch of questions. And at the end of the day I'm going to have a brokenhearted boldness that allows me to share the gospel and to share with you the truth of who God is."

And that's the final one:

Stand on truth

-Declare God's truth, even when it offends.

Right now you are living with the conviction that you should say something but you are holding down, you are being silent because you know that this may not go well. And I just want to encourage you that there is never a wrong time to tell the truth, even if it offends. Remember what's at stake.

And we come to this moment when we know that when we are doing this it's not just for us, we are partnering in the work that Jesus started so long ago, the work that would mean suffering for Him. But it didn't stop Him. It actually caused Him to push forward through it.

As we close today I want to close with communion. And what this meal is, is it is a reminder of God's suffering, that He was willing to suffer for me and for you. And He meets us in our suffering as well.

So, if you take the bread which represents the body of Christ, I just want you to remember that His body was broken on your behalf. He was willing to suffer for you so that you could be made whole, so that you can have eternity with Him. We take this and we remember.

And we take the juice which represents the blood of God that was poured out on our behalf so that we can be reconciled to Him. He would pay the penalty of our sin. He would cover them with His very blood. We take this and we remember.



And right now, at all of our campuses, I just want create a moment to pray and to respond. So, wherever you are just bow your head and close your eyes and join me in prayer.

Father, we come to You right now and, God, we're probably feeling so many things. We see the lives that we want. We also know what it's going to take and there is fear there, there is anxiety there—what it's going to cost, what it's going to mean, what our reputation will become.

But, God, I pray in this moment, God, that You would lead us. Not in a moment of fear but a moment of courage. That, God, Your Spirit would fall in this moment. Rest on us, Lord.

God, if we will trust You, if we will take a step in faith, and if we will declare the gospel, God, if suffering comes, we know that we won't suffer alone. We know that You will be with us. We know that eternity waits. We know eternity is at stake as well.

So, God, I pray right now that if there is anything that we need to repent of, if there is anything that we are doing or saying or any way that we are behaving, if there is a false belief that we have about You, anything that is stopping us from getting closer to You or stopping others from seeing you clearly, God, I pray that this is a moment of repentance. Everyone in the room, whatever came to the surface of your mind right now, just offer it back to God. Repent of it. He is faithful to forgive.

And, God, I pray in this moment right now that You would lead us. God, I pray that You would meet us in this moment and You would strengthen us, You would empower us.

God, that You would give us an eternal perspective. God, I pray that You would bring together the promises that You have made, that You will never leave us and You will never forsake us and You are for us. We are Your chosen instruments. We are Your people. We are a royal priesthood.

And, God, we are the messengers. We are the ambassadors. We are the ones who have been entrusted with Your gospel. So, as we go from here, God, I pray that You would give us the confidence to proclaim in brokenhearted boldness to those who need to hear Your gospel.



God, as we leave from here let this be a week like never before where the gospel rings true, where our testimonies are shared, where the name of Jesus is lifted high, where we carry the name as a badge of honor.

And I pray in Your name right now, Father, that many will be saved. God, I pray in Your name right now that light would shine and darkness would be pushed back. God, I pray right now that in Your name all would be united. God, I pray right now that all would fall underneath the banner of the gospel. That all things would begin to be restored in the name of Jesus.

Father, it is in Your perfect and holy name we pray. And Your people said: Amen.

