

SAINTS UNDER PRESSURE

1 Peter 1:3-9; 4:12-16, 19; and Matthew 5:10-15

Sermon in a sentence: When saints (Christians who are moving in the direction of holiness) are squeezed by the pressure of persecution, the following should come out: love for and bolder faith in Christ; imitation of Christ in suffering; rejoicing in persecution; salt; and light.

How's your stress level these days?

Talk about teabags... their worth is what's inside, and it's not drawn out until they're in hot water.

What comes out of us when we are steeped in hot water, or when we are pressed by pressure says a lot about the genuineness of our faith, and our maturity as Christians. Trouble for the Christians is as certain as death and taxes were for Benjamin Franklin. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble." (John 16:33) It was a guarantee for Jesus' disciples, standing before Him in the hours immediately prior to His arrest and it's a guarantee for us today, standing in our own days of fear and uncertainty.

1. **Love for Christ and Bolder Faith in Him (faith that is fueled by the joy of salvation).**

- **Even though we do not see Him.**
- In 1 Peter 1:8, the Apostle Peter says we love Him even though we haven't seen Him, and believe in Him even though we don't see Him now. Our experience with Jesus Christ is beyond our senses, because that is where faith makes the unseen real in our lives.
- Love and faith fill us up with joy as we see them work together in our suffering to bring us the fullness of our salvation. And salvation was the reason we believed in the first place (1 Peter 1:9).
- **This is direction that one day will result in perfection.**
 - i. Direction is a result of partnership with God.
 - ii. He credits our faith as righteousness, and we keep love and faith alive within us through prioritizing our connection with Him. That connection directs our lives because Jesus is our Center - our Ultimate Boss, our Lord, our King. Connection can be individual, but it is incomplete until it is pursued in the context of community. That's why staying connected through worship and small groups and other ways are as important as daily prayer, reading the Word and meditating on God-thoughts.
 - iii. This love and faith is what makes the tea delicious and fragrant. It's what gives the tea healing properties. It's what separates Christianity from Christiosity.
- Love for Christ and bolder faith in Him should be the first thing that anyone knows about us.

2. **Imitation of Christ in suffering.**

- Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
- The Apostle Peter had a front row, center section seat to witness the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He knew firsthand what Jesus suffered, and the way He responded, and He writes this in 1 Peter 2, beginning at v. 21, "To this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps, 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth' [Isaiah 53:9] When they hurled their insults at Him, He did

not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly.”

- i. I am quick to assert my rights, especially when I am in pain. “This needs to happen this way right now for me.” Yet I do not see this in the Example of Christ.
 - ii. NO RETALIATION. Jesus did not assert His rights, did not seek to retaliate, and instead put Himself in God’s hands. Listen to Jesus in anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane just before He is to be betrayed. “Father,” He prayed, “If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me! NEVERTHELESS not My will, but Yours, be done!”
 - iii. LOVING ENEMIES. Jesus not only did not seek retaliation, but to the end He loved His enemies. It was for the soldiers who stood guard around His cross... the vile men who nailed His wrists and feet to a cross and then pushed it upright, who took His Father’s Name in vain and gambled for His own clothes while He hung there naked and exposed, that He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
 - iv. LOVING ALL. When He lived on earth, Jesus constantly went to the outcasts and marginalized, seeking to bring them into the Kingdom as well. Today, the marginalized include people of different ethnicities and skin colors, and may speak a different language than mine. When was the last time I went beyond my comfort zone to even wave to someone like that? To say, “Good morning!”, to engage them in a conversation just so I can find a way to encourage them and bring them a smile, let alone to find out a need that I can help meet? When was the last time I prayed for someone whom I knew was outside the Kingdom of God, or was outside of my circle within the Kingdom? Jesus calls us to get outside our circles, outside our comfort zones, outside obvious ethnic, educational, and socioeconomic boundaries to share His love.
 - v. TRUE TO OUR CALLING. Peter says that persecution is part of our calling (1 Peter 2:21, “To this you were called”). As Christ was true to His calling no matter the suffering, rejection, mockery, and torture it entailed; as Christians around the world are true to their callings, no matter the fact that they have been forced into homelessness and hunger, and worse; how can we, with God’s calling placed on our lives, retreat to comfort and ease when God desires that through suffering, or taking on the suffering of others as our own, the Gospel might get under our skin that Christ may be formed in us.
- May love for Christ and bolder faith in Him, and following the Example of Christ be evident in our lives.

3. Rejoicing in persecution.

- Rejoice? Why should we rejoice when people insult, persecute, and malign us with lies?
 - i. Isn’t it interesting that Jesus said this would happen to His followers? [**Jesus said there would be days like this!**] Just so they’re lying when they malign you.
 - ii. 1 Peter says a lot about persecution. Kim read much of it earlier, from chapter 4: “¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”
 - iii. The view taught in Scripture is **not** that we should commit crime in Jesus’ Name. If we do that, then we deserve our punishment and there’s no cause for us to rejoice. [**No crime = clear conscience even if you are “framed”. Crime = not done in Jesus’ Name,**

punishment deserved!] But if living for Christ becomes a crime, then it is a good thing to suffer, and in that case, you are suffering for Jesus' sake and you have reason to rejoice. Your conscience is clean!

- iv. As Pastor Richard reminded us last week, our faith is ultimate, not our political views or even our favorite college football teams! Not even our national citizenship is as important as our faith and we must follow the mandates of our faith before we follow what any human or human institution tells us to do.
- **Jesus' reason to rejoice: great will be your reward in heaven!**
1 Peter 1:4 talks about an inheritance kept in heaven for us that will never perish, spoil, or fade. It can't expire; it can't go rotten; it won't even diminish in value... it is eternal, incorruptible, unchanging. So, REJOICE IN ALL THINGS, in joy or pain, and even if you are persecuted for Jesus' sake!

4. **Salt for seasoning and preservation.**

- Salt brings out the best in the food it seasons.
- Salt replenishes sodium in your body which is necessary for several critical systems including brain function, and salt creates a thirst which was designed to get you to drink more water. Spiritually, it creates a thirst for righteousness and truth that are satisfied in Jesus Christ.
- Salt preserves. Preservation not of institutions or governments or cultures, but preservation of the authority of Scripture, and preservation of the dignity of every person, preservation of the Gospel of peace that is for everyone, and moral preservation for the good of every soul.

5. **Light to shine in dark places.**

- Light shines to give people direction, and to protect them from being hurt by their inability to see in the dark.
- Light gets less obvious as we move farther away from the light source. Salt can lose its flavor, but it never ceases to be salt, and light never ceases to be light. Neither element can compromise and become something else, it can only cease to be effective through distance or lack of care.

Now, of course, if the Holy Spirit is alive in you, He is bearing the fruit of the Spirit in your life, which will be evident at all times. But let's see how many we remember: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So, to recap quickly, we have:

1. Love and bolder faith. What's the direction in your life?
2. Imitation of Christ.
3. Rejoicing in the midst of the suffering.
4. Salt that seasons, replenishes, causes thirst, and preserves.
5. Light that gives direction in the darkness.
6. The fruit of the Spirit.

Now for the tough question: what if I don't see any of these five - actually six - characteristics in my life when I am under pressure? What if what I see is something like instead of a deeper love and bolder faith, I'm seeking my own comfort first; instead of imitating Christ I'm relying on myself; instead of rejoicing I'm

declaring my victim status; instead of being salt I'm trying to blend in; instead of being light, I'm trying to isolate myself; and instead of praying to bear the fruit of the Spirit I'm withdrawing from God spiritually?

I wish I could offer you something new: pray these five words ten times a day, send in your check to the make-my-problems-go-away fund, wear this new fruits d' sprit cologne, and everything will be fine. But I guess that's the good news! We know the formula: (1) Repent and turn toward God, (2) Ask God for help, (3) Give Him His rightful place as Center and King in your heart, and (4) in the power of the Holy Spirit, do the next right thing, you will begin to move in that holiness direction. The Gospel gets under your skin and you begin to look and act like Christ.

When we are in the midst of uncertainty it feels dark. Darkness and confusion, fear and hatred are not reflective of God's character. And, as the gospel gets under our skin; darkness and hatred are banished and confusion and fear begin to melt away. If you are on this road to holiness, then you are becoming more and more like God's One and Only Son who lived a perfect life and now is seated at the right hand of the Father, who dwells in resplendent, dazzling light. He is called Faithful and True. He will return riding on a white horse, wounds in His hands and side evident for any to see, and a royal sash around Him that says, "King of kings and Lord of lords." The Word which spoke creation into existence; the Word that gave Moses the Law on Sinai and spoke the Words of the New Covenant in an upper room in Jerusalem, will now speak an end to all evil and a beginning of a new world of righteousness, peace, love, and joy. And this One, the Lamb of God slain from the foundations of the earth for you and me, this One will be the source of light in this new world. There will be no need of the sun by day nor the moon by night.

As we sang earlier today, Jesus is the Wayaker and Promise Keeper, and here is the ultimate keeping of His promises in the Sermon on the Mount: the meek inheriting the earth; the satisfaction of those hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and the poor in spirit and the persecuted being given the Kingdom of heaven. Those who faithfully lived for Him, including many who died because of their unbending faith in Him, including those who were insulted, mocked, and persecuted because they humbly pursued a direction of holiness in their lives - may God grant that will describe us - those also shall reign with Him in His kingdom for which we pray when we say, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

"In this world you will have trouble," Jesus promised us, **"But take heart! I have overcome the world!"**
Amen.