

Sunday, August 7, 2022 pm

## **Studies in 1 Peter 23**

### **They Think it Strange**

#### **1 Peter 4:4-6**

Tonight, we continue our monthly study through the book of 1 Peter. We have noted that this book addressing suffering Christians. That is the primary theme of this letter. Peter has appealed to them to remain faithful and continually appealed to the example of Jesus in this.

In our last lesson we discussed how we have spent enough of our past lifetime doing the will of the Gentiles (living by the ways of the world) – walking in immorality and drunkenness and idolatries. But we no longer live that way. We have to live sanctified lives, another continued theme of this book. Tonight, we continue our study by nothing how others will respond and how God will deal with them.

#### **I. In regard to these, they think it strange...**

- a. We do not run with them as we used to
  - i. We have been converted. Things that we used to take pleasure in, now we do not. And those we struggle with that are wrong, we are striving to overcome those too. We approach life from a totally different perspective. Vs. 3 reminds us of this.
  - ii. We live our lives now with the understanding that we are “strangers and pilgrims”. Recall this language of 1 Peter – we are alien residents on this earth (1 Peter 1:1 describes us as “pilgrims of the Dispersion”; 1:17 – he challenges us to conduct ourselves throughout the time of our stay here; 2:11- sojourners and pilgrims).
  - iii. Consider what it means to be an alien in a foreign country.
    1. The culture is different, rules are different, and it requires adaptation. It also requires CAUTION to do what you can to avoid being trapped or taken advantage of.
    2. Furthermore, as we have previously noted – you still represent your homeland – you do not want to do anything to bring shame on your home country – ESPECIALLY if you are in hostile territory. Recall 1 Peter 1:17 again – you conduct yourself throughout your time here with fear.
- b. They look at us strangely –
  - i. We have already addressed our need to be different. Being different causes others to look at you strangely. Consider also how we recognize strangers and foreigners by various attributes – their appearance, their language, and perhaps their habits. If we are not used to their culture, we might even view what they do and how they talk as ‘strange’.
  - ii. Consider Acts 17:18-20 – Paul is in Athens. He is definitely different and teaching different things. The philosophers call Paul a babbler and a proclaimer of foreign gods. NOTE: To their credit, they were at least willing to give him a chance to explain himself, UNLIKE so many today.
  - iii. The world of today looks at Christians as strange. They do not understand why we believe like we do (sadly, they don’t want to). BTW, we often look at them the same way (e.g., We cannot fathom atheism (and that is not necessarily a bad thing)). We have to remember we are living in a society that for more than a generation has attacked the concept of God, the inspiration of the Bible, and the reality of Jesus as our Savior. And to a degree, WE (believers) have some complicity in this because we have flippantly disregarded their advances, not adequately defended Him or prepared this younger generation for the verbal assaults and other possible reactions they might face.

- c. They speak evil of us –
- i. One of the classes at my recent preacher studies was a 4-part lesson on 1 Peter. It was addressing the conditions in Peter’s audience – the various regions described in 1 Peter 1:1 – Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. As Peter was writing this letter (likely early 60s AD) he was facing troubles for his faith. The Christian faith had become very unpopular, and hostilities were intensifying. But even as this letter was being written reactions against Christianity were varied and often localized. Not all Christians at that time were suffering for their faith. But as time progressed, that would both expand and intensify. A study of the history of the Roman Empire shows the gradual progression of increased persecutions throughout their existence. As the letters of Peter are being written the process that would become empire wide persecutions was in its infancy. (NOTE: If 1 Peter was written in the early 60s, we find the rise of Nero, who was the first emperor to persecute Christians, but it was local – mainly Rome.)
  - ii. Interestingly, the Roman empire was very tolerant of ecumenicalism (i.e. You believe what you want) AS LONG AS they viewed other religions as equally valid, especially those imposed and mandated by Rome (or local authorities), including emperor worship. Christians could and would not bow to idols of any sort and that is why they paid the price. It wasn’t just about their faith in Christ Jesus, but their atheism toward other gods and refusal to bow down and worship them. That is why they were despised. Think of Paul in Ephesus, where Diana was the prominent goddess (and a substantial tourist attraction – meaning a revenue stream) – Acts 19:21-41 records the near riot that ensued because Paul’s miracles was harming the trade of Demetrius and others.
  - iii. Typically, persecutions would begin with verbal abuse and the shaming of those who espoused Christian values. They would be viewed with suspicion. The goal would be to shame them into conformity with societal norms.
  - iv. For the most part, this is where 1 Peter is – consider our text, they were “speaking evil of you” (1 Peter 4:4). We have noted other passages about verbal abuse – 1 Peter 2:12, 15, 3:9, 16, our text, 4:14 – reproached for the name of Christ, etc.
  - v. Some things already happening as Peter is writing this letter and scattered throughout the empire (consider what we read about in the book of Acts) would include
    1. A lack of tolerance while condemning Christians for failing to be tolerant (redefining it). Because Christians were mono-theistic (worshipping only one God) – see previous point.
    2. The mocking of true Christian values (see our text). They were accused by some of practicing cannibalism (because of the Lord’s supper) and incest (because they called each other brothers and sisters).
    3. They were overly inclusive – accepting all as equal in Christ – see Galatians 3:28. This caused conflict within the Roman empire which was very socially exclusive.
    4. Thus making the Christian life “politically incorrect”.
  - vi. In some instances, there might be social rejection – the severing of ties and we start seeing economic and social consequences. Eventually this will lead to laws being passed making the true Christian life more difficult or even illegal.
  - vii. There are documented persecutions of Christians who refused to renounce their faith. In time, these would escalate to physical persecutions and economic difficulties (loss of jobs, homes, families, etc.). Eventually Christians would be driven underground, assembling at the risk of their lives. Some would be executed for their faith. We often hear of the persecutions of Nero and Domitian. After them, far worse persecutions came in waves depending on the emperor.

- viii. I mention these things because there is far too much similarity to what we are facing today, even in America. Slowly our religious freedoms are being eroded.
1. True Christianity is not politically correct.
  2. There are efforts to shame and guilt us into conformity with what society accepts as the norm. We are branded as intolerant (which they get to define). We are threatened if we do not change.
  3. There are outright attacks against our faith, and they are coming from every direction.
  4. Governments are passing more and more laws making it more difficult to proclaim the whole counsel of God. They are also enacting laws and rules so that they can gain greater control over churches, and in time this will lead to individuals.
  5. Up to this point, our “persecutions”, trials and tribulations are mostly verbal and maybe social. But what will happen in the future?
    - a. Will our ability to engage freely in commerce be hindered?
    - b. Could preaching and standing for truth on moral issues (homosexuality, gender identity, abortion, etc.) become illegal and result in arrests, loss of religious protections and other punitive actions?
    - c. Will these things eventually become so detestable that we see violence and physical persecutions?
    - d. Will we reach a point when standing for truth causes us to lose everything and maybe even put to death for His cause?
  6. These things take place gradually – in baby steps so that the unobservant fails to see what is happening until it is too late.
  7. Some of these things are happening right now, is it getting worse? 2 Timothy 3:1-5 – perilous times will come! Look at the list – we see this even today. 2 Timothy 3:12-13, *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecutions. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

## II. What can we do about this?

- a. Let us resolve that we are going to live faithful. God has to be first! That is the only way we will have the genuine fortitude to overcome whatever we face. This is where being holy comes in (1 Peter 1:15)
- b. We need to strengthen our faith. Similar to the previous point, here I mean we take steps to ensure our faith is what it ought to be – Hebrew 11:6. Surround yourself with the godly who will stand with you and strengthen you (we need each other).
- c. Live peaceably with all men – one thing we must NEVER forget is that we don’t need to seek out persecutions. They will come on their own if we are living right and without compromise. But that is different from provoking the enemy. Consider Romans 12:17 - *Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.* The bad behavior of so-called Christians (and even some of our brethren) often provokes and lends fuel to the cause of the enemy. DO NOT BE partakers with them – Ephesians 5:7 (this comes at the end of a list of ungodly behaviors we have no part in).
- d. Be serious and watchful in your prayers – 1 Peter 4:7 – prayer draws us closer to God. Matthew 26:41 – in the Garden Jesus told His disciples to watch and pray lest you enter into temptation.
- e. Let God take care of them. Note vs. 5 of our text, *“They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”* Romans 12:19-21 – give place to wrath and let God pour out His vengeance. That is the promise of 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. Peter in his letter is encouraging his audience, and likely future generations in that area, and God-forbid, even in our time to PREPARE for these trials and tribulations.
- f. Live with the hope of heaven – vs. 6 is another challenging verse.

- i. It speaks of the gospel being preached to the dead. This text seems to be pointing to some who had gone before and paid the ultimate price for their faith. They were judged by men in the flesh (condemned in the flesh by the ungodly). Like Stephen being stoned to death (Acts 7:57-60), or others including Paul who face persecutions. I think of Hebrews 11:32-40 – men who paid a great price for their faith. This is the “faith of our fathers” we sometimes sing about.
- ii. But they live according to God in the spirit - they live on according to God – they are resting from their labors. See Revelation 14:13.

Friends, that is what this is all about. Peter is continually reminding his audience that they could be paying a price for their faith. The question is, are they willing to pay that price. What about us? Are we willing to pay that price? When men speak evil of you, how are you going to respond? Think about it!