

Scripture: I Peter 4:12-19. (For second Sunday after Christmas)

Topic: Fiery Ordeal.

Text: I Peter 4:12 -- "...do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you,...2

Proposition: The "fieryx ordeal" because of our faith can and should serve to purify and strengthen our christian experience and conviction.

Date written: January 26, 1964.

Dates and places used:

Feb. 2, 1964 - Montrose, Colo., 9 & 11 am

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Introduction:

1. A summer-time ride into the high country of our mountainous west is almost bound to reveal to curious eyes evidence of widespread efforts by thousands of people at some time thirty or more years ago to find precious metals. "Thar's gold in them thar hills" was a cry of this part of the west from 1860 on through until nearly World War I, a cry which brought uncounted numbers of people "thisaway". Many a spot that now is but a few tumbled, rotting buildings, perhaps with an old mine tipple and slag heap nearby, is said by historians of the west to have had several thousand people living in it. Such a town boomed for perhaps a year, or three, five or more. Then when the vein of precious metals played out the people disappeared to hunt treasure and find jobs elsewhere, and the bustling place became a "ghost town".

2. Some of the highest back country in these hills is almost pock-marked with pits and piles of rock, ~~where~~ marking hundreds, even thousands, of spots, at each of which a

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2. 2. Some of the highest back country in these hills is almost blank, marked with pits and piles of rock, where marking hundreds, even thousands, of spots, at each of which a

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a hopeful prospector, or perhaps several prospectors, spent a great deal of time, effort, hope and money to "strike it rich". Only a few found anything worth taking to the assayers.

3. At the assay office the samples brought in by the miners were put through a process of chemical reaction which involved the use of high degrees of heat to help bring about the union of non-precious metals in the ore with other substances mixed with it. The heat also was used to melt the ^{metals from the} worthless rock slag, which was then ^{separated} drained off. Finally a "button" of pure gold, silver, or whatever the precious metal might be, was removed. By weighing the pure metal and figuring what percentage ^{it was} of the representative ^{it was} raw ore sample ~~was made of the valuable metal~~, the assayer could determine with some accuracy the value of a ton of ore. This ~~same~~ true valuation could be found only after the fiery ordeal through which the metal was put.

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4. We can think of the fiery ordeal of assaying which results in

an accurate determination of the purity and value of a metal as being symbolic of a truth about humans.

I. The trials, tests, sufferings and other hardships which people experience do serve to purify them and help determine their true character.

L. In romantic stories of medieval days Griselda was a lady whose husband was about all that a husband could be to test the patience, virtue and wisdom of a woman. A modern-day comic illustration of such a husband might well be Andy Capp. Occasionally his wife steps out of line and either nails him good for his irresponsibility, or else joins him in it. Not so with Griselda. In all of her husband's misdoings she behaved so well that her name is proverbial. The phrase "patience of Griselda" refers to anyone who is especially good, tolerant and patient when they have plenty of reason to protest, "blow up", or abandon the trouble maker. I'm sure that there are some Griseldas in this congregation! Perhaps there are even a few husbands who are tested pretty

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severely by their wives, too, who might qualify as male versions of the patient and virtuous Griselda!

2. Here we are talking about the biggest, most common trial that each and every person has to put up with. As somebody said, it would be a pretty nice world if it weren't for people! Each of us at times has trouble in getting along harmoniously and amicably with somebody else. There may be a personality clash, where you simply don't like each other, and you're not real sure why. There may be differences of opinion, of outlook, of ways of doing things, which cause people to be critical of each other. Competition between them for the same offices or goals can cause people to dislike each other tremendously; or even result in one trying to harm the other. Jealousy often is closely associated with the dislike of one person for another. Whatever the causes, we are aware that dislikes and antagonisms are aspects of interrelationships between people which can not be allowed to go too far. We know that these things happen, but we also know that when

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enemities can be turned into friendships, competitiveness into cooperation, jealousy into admiration, and disagreements into tolerant acceptance of each other, the individuals involved and the society in which they live are both better off. Sometimes it seems that the clashes, the testing between people, have to come before the more desirable human relationships can develop.

3. In the larger groupings of society in which we are all involved, the fiery test is sometimes a real thing. We live in family groups, for the most part. Many a house has burned, to leave a family faced with the necessity of starting all over again. Yet, often a family who has had such an experience later has said that the necessity to pitch in and work together has been good for them. Family ties have grown more dear. Individuals in the family have learned new skills and developed greater self-confidence. Through fire has come rescue from the character-weakening comfort and leisure^{at} which we have so much ~~of~~ in our society.

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4. War and other great disasters and tragedies have demonstrated again and again that people will drop and forget petty, small, aimless goals, diversions and differences in order to work together to overcome or relieve the threatening situation. Once involved in a war, practically everybody in a nation pitches in to win it. If a tornado, an explosion, a drought, or some other disaster strikes an area, governmental agencies move in to help, with the approval of everybody. In addition, church, Red Cross and other charities pitch in to assist; and lots ~~are~~ of unsolicited gifts are sent from many parts of the country. Sometimes it seems that it takes a striking disaster to bring out the good and kind that is in people.

5. In the area of belief, or faith, it is also true that an ordeal, a testing, brings out and develops the best, real, most-lasting aspects of character. This is the message of the apostle Peter in the Scripture which has inspired us today. The point of the passage, I Peter 4:12-19, is that

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II. Any ordeal which a christian has to face because of his faith can help him to be a better christian.

1. Peter was not writing theoretically, about something that might possibly happen, but probably would not. He was writing to people who in all probability would be persecuted, or were then being persecuted, because they were christians. It was not improbable that they might even be burned at the stake, or placed on fiery crosses to die, if they persisted in their belief. To people who were naturally concerned at such threats to their lives, Peter wrote, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you". If we were to tempt people today to become christians by telling them that possibly turning to our faith would cause them ~~to~~ to be burned to death, how many would be attracted? In a day when we don't join churches because "they expect too mach" money or time, the usual response to an appeal of danger seems obvious.

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2. Why did Peter indicate that the "fiery ordeal" was not strange to christians? He tells his readers, "rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." That is, the burden and mystery of suffering is lightened because it is shared with Christ, and because there is the hope of the joy that shall be the christian's when God in Christ is fully revealed in eternity.

3. The early christians were reproached and made fun of because they bore Christ's name. Sometimes it is harder to take cruel words than it is hard knocks. Peter points out the spirit of a Beatitude in which Jesus said "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you...for my sake". If you accept without resentment name-calling because of your faith, you are surely nearer the spirit of Christ, is the thought.

4. There is no virtue, no real good, simply in suffering, Peter insists. "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, ~~axthe~~ or a thief, or

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as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters", he writes. Boy, the temptation those words offer for preaching! I can't resist! The "busybody" part strikes home. The meddler, the gossip, the news peddler, the obnoxious christian, all could be included here! Anyone who interferes with the business of others, who pronounces glibly and authoritatively about things in which he is not an expert, who tactlessly criticizes existing customs and institutions and thereby arouses tempers, could be termed "a busybody". A good many people with fine intentions but mistaken zeal bring upon themselves disfavor from others because of their "bysybodyness". ~~Usually~~ Usually they regard themselves as martyrs when badly treated. There are militant christians who are always straining at gnats in matters of doctrine as they argue with others; zealous, evangelistic christians who do not exercise love in dealing with non-christians; moralistic christians who make faith a matter of rules and regulations and seek to impose them upon others; dogmatic christians who will not listen to the conviction

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of other christians just as sincere. These are busybodies, and if they suffer criticism and unpopularity from their fellow christians, they have no right to regard their sufferings as blessed. They may have faith so as to remove mountains, but if they lack love, they are nothing. It is easy to be a martyr; it is less easy to know when martyrdom partakes of the sufferings of Christ. (Material in this point is taken nearly verbatim from page 145, Vol.12, "The Interpreter's Bible").

5. Peter ends his message about the trials of faith in verse 19 with these words, "therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful creator". It might be said this way: Suffering is a part of God's discipline, and is to be borne with stanch faith in God the creator, and to be accompanied by actively doing good.

Conclusion:

1. The total message of today's Scripture might be this: Any suffering you may have to face because of

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Conclusion:

1. The total message of today's Scripture might be this: Any suffering you may have to face because of

your faith should not surprise you who know that Christ had to suffer. As you share his suffering, rejoice, assured of future glory. No christian must get into trouble for such crimes as murder and theft; but if anyone suffers because he is a christian, let him glorify God for it. The judgment which is beginning will touch God's christian family first. What the fate of unbelievers will be, who knows? Our duty is plain to do right and to trust the creator. (p. 142, Vol. 12, The Interpreter's Bible).

2. Today it seems that such christians as we who worship in this church are in little danger of being reviled or persecuted, of suffering, for our faith. Yet, we are aware of a world movement, communism, based on atheism, which is rapidly expanding in the world, while the percentage of christians is diminishing. Other non-christian religions are expanding, too. Maybe some day sooner than we think it will be unpopular and dangerous to be a ~~ch~~ christian. Then what? Where will you and I stand if the "fiery

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3. We know that though their numbers are greatly reduced, there are still christians in communist lands, in China, Russia, in other places where our faith is frowned upon, discouraged and made difficult. We have from events of our own day evidence that christianity can not be stamped out; that you can be a christian under any form of government. This was true from the first: Jesus himself lived under one of the most cruel, most totalitarian governments ever known!

4. All of this should lead us to determine that if and when the "fiery ordeal" tests us because of our faith, we will emerge "true-hearted, whole-hearted, faithful and loyal", ending up with a purified and strengthened christian faith.

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