



# LOCKINGCASTLECHURCH

Life Group Notes – 13<sup>th</sup> February 2022

Coping with Persecution. 1 Peter 4

Please visit the LCC website to listen to the talk or read the transcript if available.

## 1 Peter 4:12-19

<sup>12</sup>Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup>But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup>If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. <sup>15</sup>If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. <sup>16</sup>However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. <sup>17</sup>For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup>And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" <sup>19</sup>So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

### Comment

*'Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success.'* Ernest Shackleton, famed Antarctic explorer, was looking to build a team for his dangerous and daring polar expedition at the start of the twentieth century. 5000 replied. They didn't ask about fringe benefits, or whether there would be good coffee. It was going to be arduous. It was going to be lonely. And it could well be fatal.

In today's passage the Apostle Peter adopts this 'Shackleton' approach to discipleship instead of a more tempting 'Come to Jesus - he'll sort you out and give you a smooth ride through this life' approach. For followers of Jesus a safety is ultimately guaranteed – but perhaps only in the next life. It could be rocky 'til then! The Open Doors' *World Watch List* details the 50 nations where it's hardest to be a Christian. Our brothers and sisters in some places face imprisonment, torture, rape, even execution. In many countries Christians risk being thrown out of jobs and families. It can seem like a world away from our experience.

But who was Peter writing to in about 50AD? These weren't Christians being thrown to the lions (yet!) but Christians on the dodgy side of a culture war, where the hardships were more subtle. A bit like where we are today as we head into a post-Christian society. Instead of an open forum of old religious ideas, a new religion is being blasted from the social media mountain-tops. It values individual autonomy, and 'be true to yourself' personal authenticity at any cost. It promotes personal freedoms over traditional institutions, with user-defined love as life's ultimate meaning. A direct counter to the Christian gospel that finds ultimate meaning in God and in the self-sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

British Christian Dr. David Mackereth recently lost an employment tribunal case because the panel concluded his biblical understanding of what it is to be male and female and his "lack of belief in transgenderism... are incompatible with human dignity". As traditional Judeo-Christian ethical interpretations are increasingly viewed as harmful, more and more Christians may find themselves being seen as 'the bad guys' instead of moral standard bearers. But Peter helps us to respond to this type of ordeal (v14-16):

1. Don't be surprised, but be glad. The Spirit of glory and of God rests on you when you suffer for him.
2. Rejoice - don't respond negatively. (eg victim mentality, anger and retaliation, eg retire to our holy huddles and wait for eternity and the world's comeuppance) No! Let's live out the Jesus life with warmth and compassion.
3. Don't be meddlesome or judgmental.
4. Expect a hard time, but through this we're being refined, becoming more like Jesus.

Don't despair, don't deny, don't blend, but get used to life influencing from the margins. As we forgive in a recriminating culture, are generous in an every-person-for-themselves culture, and esteem others as greater than ourselves in a self-promotion culture, these are powerful signals for Christ!

### Questions

1. What do you find most encouraging about this passage? What do you find most challenging?
2. Have you experienced challenges because of your Christian beliefs? How did you cope?
3. Is it possible to be non-judgmental whilst holding to particular ethical standards?
4. How can we ensure expressing our biblical understanding or opinion doesn't harm others?
5. What can you do if you find your biblical understanding is at odds with a) society or b) other Christians?

*Pls pray for unity with each other and the church as we navigate these complex issues together.*