

Sermon: Life in the Fire
Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19

Discussion Questions:

Let's begin today by thinking a bit about what it means to be surprised.

The definition of "surprised" is: ***To be struck with a sudden feeling of wonder or astonishment because something happened to you that you did not expect.***

- When you think about being surprised—what story or experience comes to your mind? Describe a time in your life when you were surprised. Why was it so shocking? Was there an effort made on the part of others to TRY to surprise you? What lengths did they go to make it a surprise?
- Are you the kind of person who likes surprises—or hates them? Why or why not?

The Greek word for "surprise" is the word "**Xenizo**" (pronounced: Zeen-id-zo)—which comes from the root word "**Xenos**"—which means "foreigner" or "stranger." At first glance, it's not entirely clear why the word for "surprise" would come from the word "stranger." But when you dig a little deeper, it actually makes perfect sense. How do you feel when a stranger shows up at your door? Imagine this stranger pounding on your door unexpectedly, and when you go to the door, he barges into your home expecting you to welcome him. How does this make you feel? Are you shocked? Are you disturbed? Are you a bit frightened? Does it rattle you to your core?

That's exactly what we experience when we're surprised by something (a situation, or a loud noise, or an unexpected thought). It's as if a stranger is pounding on the door of your mind expecting to come in. It shocks, disturbs and frightens us!

As we study 1 Peter chapter 4—we find Peter using the word "Xenizo" twice! The first is in verse 4. When the Holy Spirit enters into a person by faith (becoming a Christian!), they are changed from the inside out. They no longer DO the kinds of things they used to do. As a result, this change in lifestyle **surprises** everyone around you. You're like a "foreigner" to them—and they find it disturbing.

The second time Peter uses "Xenizo" in chapter 4 is in verse 12: "*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.*" The fact that, as a new-born child of God, you are experiencing trials shouldn't surprise you. This new reality shouldn't shock or disturb you—as if a stranger were pounding on your door. In fact, we ought to WELCOME the suffering! Verse 13 tells us that we should **rejoice** when suffering comes our way!

- Why? Why should suffering and trials be completely expected for a follower of Christ? What happened to Jesus that, as His followers, we should expect ourselves?
- Why do you think we ARE shocked and disturbed when we face suffering and persecution as a Christian?
- What are some things that might be said to a person when leading them to faith in Christ that might mislead them, causing them to be shocked when they DO suffer?

Examination:

- Read **1 Peter 4:12-19**
 - Peter describes the “fiery ordeal” that the recipients of his letter were experiencing. Think back to some of the earlier sermons and lessons on 1 Peter—and get clear again on what Peter is referring to here. Where was Peter writing this letter from? What was the political situation that existed in the world at that time? Why was Emperor Nero so vehemently opposed to people who called themselves Christians?
 - We’ve been thinking a lot lately about the persecuted church around the world. What have you learned about the “fiery ordeal” that millions and millions of Christians are facing today? How might this passage speak and minister to them in the midst of their trials and persecution?
 - Peter adds an important word in verse 12 that speaks to a key reason as to why God allows suffering. It’s the word **test**. In what way do trials test us? Discuss the ways that God has used trials and tests in your own life to grow you in your faith.
 - What does Jesus tell us about bearing insult for our faith in **Matthew 5:10-12**? Compare the words of Jesus in this passage with the words of Peter in verses 14-16.
 - Looking at verse 15—we know what a “murderer” is. What is a “meddler”?
 - Peter is writing this letter about 30 years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus (approx. 64AD). Don’t miss the fact in verse 16 that Christ-followers are already being called “Christians.” Peter describes the reason for this term in the second part of verse 16. What is that reason? Do you think this is what people think of today when they think of what it means to be a Christian?
 - Read **Romans 1:16**—and discuss what it means to be ashamed. What might cause a person to be ashamed of being a Christian? Why are we admonished NOT to be ashamed? What does it take to overcome this sense of shame?
 - Verse 17 is definitely a challenging verse! Talk about what you think Peter means when he says that “judgment” must “begin” with God’s household (the Church!). What does this judgment look like? What does this say about the standards we need to be holding to as people who are members of churches—and who have taken on the name of Christ? What are those standards?
 - Has it ever struck you that “it is hard for the righteous to be saved” (v. 18)? How many American Christians believe quite the opposite—that it is EASY for the righteous to be saved? “All you have to do is say this little prayer—and you’re set!” Is that true? What happens to these folks when suffering and persecution unsurprisingly comes their way?
 - What does verse 19 tell us about the mindset (or attitude!) of a faithful follower of Christ who undergoes trials, persecution, ridicule and suffering?
 - Peter speaks numerous times of “doing good” (2:12, 15, 20; 3:8, 11, 13, 17). What do you think he means by this? What does “doing good” look like in our lives?

Application:

Take to heart Peter’s admonition to **do good**. Make it a personal goal each and every day this coming week (and the rest of your life!) to “do good.” Understand that in doing so—you probably won’t receive any medals. In fact, you can expect ridicule. Keep Jesus in mind, and don’t give up! Commit yourself to your creator, remember whose name you bear, and expect the greater reward.