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Sermon 436 - 1 Peter 4:12-19

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE IN PERSECUTION

And so welcome to Amazing Love on this Veterans Day weekend. And I was hoping that we might pause and celebrate some people. If you have ever served in the Armed Forces, if you are currently serving, or if your children are serving could you stand? We thank you for this work and for going before us so we could enjoy the safety and the freedoms that are ours in this country. And you consider the sacrifice of a Veteran. They leave the comfort of their homes, and the companionship of their family. They face many times brutal conditions living in shipping boxes and bunks, kicked off by basic training. Plush, cushy, and gourmet are probably not words used to describe where they live or what they eat. And they risk their lives. Some have paid the ultimate sacrifice giving their lives for us. So you and I can again be here worshipping God in this beautiful space, living in this country where I do believe these lyrics God has shed his grace on thee. So we can enjoy things that are plush, cushy, and gourmet because they gave them up. Thank you Veterans.

And as we gather to consider Jesus at Amazing Love. It's hard not to see a correlation between his work and our Veterans. He left the comfort of his home, and the companionship of his Father, the angels to come to here. And he arrived to some brutal conditions, not a bunk but a barn. Among the animals he lived. And he didn't come for the plush, cushy, or gourmet - though he was entitled to it all. No he came to fight for us, and to win. And he paid the ultimate sacrifice on the cross. And as it says in 2 Corinthians, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (8:9) And because of his ultimate sacrifice made once for all, you and I are rich. You're entitled to the plush - knowing that someday you will live in heaven. You're entitled to the gourmet - the heavenly feast he is preparing for us and all who believe. And you get to live right now cushy - knowing that you have a untouchable peace as forgiven children of God. Praise God for this ultimate sacrifice. Praise God for that country he won for us.

But as we consider Vets on this Veterans Day. I want you to imagine a scenario. Imagine a soldier going off to war. He's fulfilled basic and now going on to the front lines for war. Got his helmet, his gun, his gear. He's going into the fray. Does this soldier come back from the front lines and report to this to his captain. "Cap, you wouldn't believe what the enemy was doing! They were shooting at me! It seemed like they actually wanted to take my life! Cap, I had no idea!" No. A soldier doesn't give that report, and he isn't surprised that the enemy wants to take his life. That's what he's trained so hard for. The attack in war is inevitable.

So we have some Christians who are gathered here today. Do you know what the church fathers have called Christians still on earth "The Church Militant." That's what you are. This means that you are at war and here is the first point of the day. *Christians shouldn't be surprised by suffering, persecution, or demonic attacks.* They are inevitable. It happens because we are in spiritual war. Consider what it says in Ephesians, "For our struggle is not against flesh and

blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12)

And yet let me ask you when you heard the news that came out of Texas were you surprised? 26 people who were murdered inside of First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs. And it is good for us to remember others in prayer - we'll do that today. But though it is new and I'm not saying we should get used to it. If you do studies of persecution across the world for Christians you will find the last decade has been particularly perilous. Confirming that we are at war. I was listening to Pastor Craig Groeschel who we draw this series from, and he said in an average month. 300 Christians are killed, 200 churches are burned, and 800 Christians are beaten or physically persecuted in some way. Yes, followers of Christ we are at war.

But today we're going to try to gain a different perspective on persecution. We're in this series called Different taking a look at the book of 1 Peter. And the situation then was similar to what we just discussed. Caesar Nero was persecuting Christians. It's said that he would dip Christians in hot wax and tie them to trees. And during parties he was through would use these Christians who were then set on fire as candles to light up his parties. And with persecution going on Peter writes these words. Could you turn to the person next to you and say, “He is strong in you.”

I'm going to assume many of you have had some experience playing some type of a sport. But do you ever remember playing an opponent, and you knew who their best player was. Maybe you watched video, maybe it became clear as you were playing them. And so because of you knew they were the best player the coach naturally prepped for it. Like in basketball there would always be a double team and helper, or in baseball for a hitter you would pitch around such a player. 'Cause you knew! Now compare that with your knowledge of the other teams benchwarmers. They might have looked cute in their spotless uniforms, but you didn't know their names nor did you prep for them. What could they do anyway they road the pine. Just curious how many of you were starters, and how many of you were benchwarmers?

Now I consider our lives as Christians. Many who follow Christ here today, though we can be on different wavelengths when it comes to our faith life. But if you were the opponent, our enemy the devil. Who do you think you would be gunning for - the starters who are actively trying to live for the Lord and share the faith, or those riding the pine and not in the game. The active ones right. That's what I believe. So a takeaway. *When you become a threat you become a target.* And honestly, that might be convicting for some. It's possible that you don't feel this threat, because you're not really in the game. You're not trying to live for Christ. But for others do not be surprised, and do not consider it strange when again you face real obstacles as you try to stand up and go on the offense for the Lord.

It reminds me of an article I was reading this past week. It was entitled 5 Confessions of Pastor's from the trenches. And confession 5 was this, “I feel like I am at the front lines of the attacks of the Enemy.” You ever felt that way too? God I was trying. I have to laugh at how many times when my wife or I are scheduled to serve or hold a small group and our kids get sick. On the way to teach Fusion, Nadia is throwing up. Why because my wife is a threat that day. How many things that have the potential to go wrong or disrupt on Sunday - why there's a threat. Why it's so hard for you to get here, and you come in with the kids from the literal battle ready to kiss the carpet because getting here would make you a threat. So the enemy guns for us.

But may I take this time to remind you. You do not fight alone, and you and I don't have to fight with our own strength. In one of the greatest battles of David vs Goliath where the enemy was a literal 10 foot giant what did David say. I come to you and will win 'cause I am David the scrawny, teenage, shepherd boy? No. As he was preparing to fight he said this to Goliath, "I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands." (1 Samuel 17:45-46) And so we may be threatened by a strong power and dark forces, but I need to declare to you to me we are strengthened by a stronger power still in the name of the Lord.

So we go into the fray saying, "I face this obstacle in the name of the Lord." The pastor who was at the helm of the persecution and the shooting in Texas, he was able to forgive. Why? His strength, no it was the Lord leading him. You and I who face obstacles to follow Jesus, or friends do understand our priorities, our families are not supporting us and we feel alone. But don't you know. You come in the name of the Lord. He is the one who fights for you and strengthens you and can get you through!! I get that you feel like a target, so do I. But guess what we are still here. And we will be supported by the Almighty God, the God of all power, the God of angel armies, the God who defeated our enemy death, and defeated our enemy the devil. The God who lives inside of us as our bodies are his temple will strengthen you!! Yes, *we are threatened by an enemy, but strengthened by a stronger Savior*. And I don't if you know how the story goes - He wins against the devil, and so we win.

I need to remind you once again it's not about us. See if it were up to us, we would fail, we'd lose. We consider this because if we're honest sometimes we have been on the sidelines as followers of Christ. We haven't looked or acted so different than the rest of the world, but we've blended in. And we've done what everyone else is doing. Greed, lust, drunkenness, lies, gossip. Blended right in. And if the battle of salvation were up to us, we'd lose. Because we haven't been good enough, haven't been strong enough.

But there is a strong man whose name is Jesus. Who at that very name every demon flees and cries mercy. Jesus who is also known as the head-crusher, because upon the cross he crushed the head of the devil. Jesus who has won this fight of salvation for us. Jesus our Savior who declares forgiveness and peace to us and all who call upon his name. If you're new to Christ or this message. I want you to know. You don't have to win the battle for salvation, you couldn't anyway. But Jesus has. And this peace and forgiveness it is for you. And this Jesus who won that battle, is still fighting today. Fighting for us and through us!

To back up this point, I wanted to share with you one of my favorite songs. It's called "Not Today" by Hillsong and I want you to pay attention to some of the lyrics there. "Fear must have thought I was faithless when it came for my heart. Tell me did the enemy panic as you took up that cross. I'll sing the night into the morning, I'll sing the fear into your praise. Tell the devil no not today." Yes we have a God who is on our side, in the midst of the battle, so we can go into the fray.

But there's more here to guide us. Have you ever witnessed someone doing something not so smart, and you were thinking it's just a matter of time until someone got hurt? I consider the example of a recent phenomenon called parkour. Have you heard of this? You jump over things, on to things, down from things. It's like life without stairs, ladders, or elevators. Now some things are meant to parkour - like goats. I don't know if you've seen goat parkour. But

people are not meant to do the same. And eventually you are going to have parkour fails. Here are some of those. You parkour this is inevitable - you can see it coming, because it is not so safe to do.

Just as you parkour and you may get hurt, so also our lesson warns us, there is suffering for the sake of Christ. But then there is suffering for doing what shouldn't be done, doing what inevitably leads to pain. v.15 "If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler." So what Peter is warning us is from obvious danger. *See to it that you're not suffering because of your sin.* Because that is possible. And just as you maybe should not jump from roof to roof, because you could get hurt. So you also should be aware of sinful activities that lead to pain and hurt. This type of suffering is not God pleasing.

So gut check time. *Is there any suffering you're dealing with as a direct result of sin?* Are your relationships a mess because you're dealing with the sin of unforgiveness? Is your financial household in disarray because of the sin of greed? Is your reputation in question because of the sin of gossip? Is our health in question because of the sin of substance abuse? Only we know the answers to this. But a loving God would warn us through Peter - big sins like murder, little sins like meddling they can all lead to pain.

So what is our solution there, if suffering occurs like this? Repentance. This idea that we come to God and say I'm sorry. Where we ask that forgiveness would be ours through the cross of Christ. Where we say Lord root it out of my life, get rid of it. If that sin has established roots in my life as complex and deep as the root system of a tree, let your Spirit pull up every last root. And it is my privilege to say to you - there is forgiveness through the cross. And there is help through the Spirit. He can work in your life to refine your faith and your character and to no longer be a slave to sin, but a slave to righteousness.

It's always funny to me the things that draw people together. For example you can have this sticker on your car 26.2, and it can signal that you for some odd reason ran a marathon. I prefer the 0.0 sticker. That's good. Who's in that club? Or I consider the Crossfit craze. Many of these Crossfit boxes popping up across the states. And there is a camaraderie established by Crossfitters. I was stalking someone on Facebook who is a Crossfitter traveling, and another guy is like you should come to my box. And there was this instant link. With whom have you ever shared a sense of camaraderie? For me I would say our college baseball team. We spent half the year together it seemed, playing catch, pepper, some bp. And so when I see the guys on the team there is this instant link. I know you. What's up friend.

It's hard not to see it with our Veterans right. Those who gather at the VFW or American Legion. And why shouldn't there be? They went to war together, were in the same branch of the service together, and so there's going to be the head nod of approval. The instant acceptance because of that tight bond. The street cred because we served together.

Well as we consider our lesson. I believe there is a camaraderie spoken of and one that we should be about. I believe we should *Seek camaraderie with Christ.* And if you look at our lesson it shows us how to get the head nod, how our Savior says, "welcome to the club." v.13 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." And that camaraderie comes when you and I go through the same trials, and persecution.

So next time you don't get asked on a 2nd date because you had boundaries lines of purity. It may not be easy, or feel good, but you need to know you have a head nod from our Lord. Next time the neighbors don't invite you because your priorities are a wee bit different and you tend to talk about your faith. The Facebook post about everyone else but you might sting, but you need to know you have a head nod from the Lord. If the people at work turn their back in conversation on you because you spoke about Jesus. You have a head nod from our Lord. If you lose your job, lose respect, or even as it has happened lose your life. There is no stronger link than to be tied to the one who was persecuted out of love for us. This is our perspective. That when we suffering on account of Christ is our Medal of Honor, our purple heart, that we war and links us like no other to our Savior.

So may we have a different perspective on persecution remember how it links us with Christ, remembering that though we might be a target we are strengthened by one stronger than those threatening. May our God be glorified.

You know as we look at the persecution that happened in Texas I am struck by the words of the pastor of that church, Pastor Pomeroy. His 14 year old daughter was one of those killed in the shooting. In the Fox News report it said that he has forgiven the shooter, and then he said something that I believe informs our discussion. He said, "He was used by a dark power to accomplish something that was beyond him," said Pomeroy. "We need to stay strong to try to reach those others that may be in that same position before they are used by that dark power and can be used by God." There are dark powers, and there are the powers of God aren't there. By the grace of God we are here to be on the front lines, to be used by God's power. Let us do the same calling people away from those dark powers, to be used by God. And if we face some flack along the way may God strengthen us. Amen.