

Restoration Revisited (7): Do We Think It Strange?

(1 Peter 4)

I. Introduction

- A. You probably have heard the name Eric Liddell, the Flying Scotsman
1. Liddell is the British sprinter immortalized in the film *Chariots of Fire*
 - a. He favored to win gold in the 100 meters in the 1924 Olympics
 - b. But he dropped that event to switch to the 400m, his worst event
 - c. Why? One of the races was on Sunday; he would not run on Sabbath
 - 1) Though pressured, he remained true and won the gold in 400m
 - 2) In one of the classic lines in the film, Liddell says to his sister
*I believe God made me for a purpose, but He also made me fast.
And when I run, I feel His pleasure.*
 2. Liddell sought God's pleasure in a different way the very next year
 - a. In 1925, He left Scotland for China where he served as missionary
 - 1) He preached and served the Chinese people for next 30 years
 - 2) It was often hard; it got harder with Japanese invasion in 1941
 - b. He was arrested in 1943, and he died in a prison camp in 1945
- B. Did Liddell waste his life and talents? All the work in China was destroyed
1. When Mao came to power in 1949, he banned the Christian Church
 - a. Foreign missions were expelled; church property was confiscated
 - b. Chinese Christians were imprisoned; many were tortured and killed
 2. I once heard the testimony of one of the persecuted Chinese leaders
 - a. He was forced to stand and shovel human waste for hours each day
 - b. He said that this was his favorite time—he could sing hymns to God
 - c. His favorite song, "*I Come to the Garden.*" Cesspool was his chapel!
 3. How well did Mao's attempt work? *Like a screen door on a submarine!*
 - a. When China was opened after Mao, the wasn't gone by a long shot
 - b. The house church movement had exploded throughout the country
 - 1) No church buildings, well-known leaders, or government cover
 - 2) Just millions of Chinese people seeking to follow Jesus Christ
 - c. By 2030, China will have 250 million believers, the most in world

- C. We've been looking at "*Restoration Revisited: On Being a NT Church*"
1. Our focus on restoration was always on church forms and formats
 - a. We can't sing using instruments because the NT never says to
 - b. NT also never says to meet church buildings with inside plumbing
 2. What if we looked at the things stressed about the church in NT?
 - a. What things seem to be characteristic of the life of the first church
 - b. How does the power and passion and life of that church apply to us?
- D. Francis Chan tells of talking with unnamed Chinese house church leader
1. He said there was a time when government gave them more freedom
 - a. They built a building, and grew to more than 2000 members
 - b. **Old Saying:** "*The nail that is sticking up always gets hammered*"
 - c. They got hammered! Building confiscated and their leaders jailed
 2. This Chinese pastor said a return to persecution was a "restoration"
 - a. Why? It had gotten too easy; people came to church to sit and listen
 - b. People weren't serving or growing in faith; they sat and listened
 - c. The persecution led them to a restoration of their roots as a church
 3. He said there were FIVE basic pillars of house churches in China
 - a. **First**, a deep commitment to power of prayer (*about God's power*)
 - b. **Second**, a commitment to reading, knowing and living scripture
 - c. **Third**, a commitment to sharing the gospel (*everyone, not just few*)
 - d. **Fourth**, expect the power of God (*God works in mysterious ways*)
 - e. **Fifth**, embracing suffering to the glory of God (*OK, but... what?*)
 - 1) We were with him until this last one (*little shaky on miracles*)
 - 2) But seeing glorifying God in persecution as a pillar (pattern)?
 4. Could you make a case the NT expects the church to be persecuted?
 - a. What if we looked at what Jesus's said on disciples & suffering?
 - 1) What if we looked at the example of the first century church?
 - 2) What if we looked at the instructions in the epistles on suffering?
 - b. NT calls us to stand up, but those who stand up might get hammered
 - c. Might opposition from the world be a characteristic of NT church?

II. The New Testament and Suffering

A. **First**, Jesus warns us that we must follow him in the way of the cross

1. In **Matthew 16**, Peter makes what we call the “*good confession*”
 - a. He confidently confesses Jesus as Messiah, the Son of God (**16:16**)
 - b. Peter is, of course, 100% right...and he is completely wrong.
 - 1) He thought that “Messiah” meant Jesus was Caesar’s successor
 - 2) Jesus assures them that it meant something very different (**16:21**)
 - 3) Peter takes issue; that stands opposed to what he just confessed
 - c. Jesus then tell them what being Christ means for them (**16:24-25**)
 - 1) Jesus as Christ means that he doesn’t go to the cross alone
 - 2) We all must put our lives on the line, literally and figuratively
2. Prosperity is more popular today, but following Jesus means a cross
 - a. He says we’re blessed when people speak evil of us (**Luke 6:22**)
 - 1) On the other hand, what if everyone likes us? (**Luke 6:26**)
 - 2) What does Jesus expect to happen to his followers (**Matt 24:9**)
 - b. Jesus promises that in the world, we will have trouble (**John 16:33**)
 - c. Many today promised wealth and prosperity; Jesus promises a cross

B. **Second**, the church in Acts gives us an example of opposition & struggle

1. **Acts 2** ends with church growing, having “*favor of all the people*”
 - a. **Acts 4** begins with Peter and John getting themselves thrown in jail
 - b. Church didn’t have much of a honeymoon where they were liked
 - c. They followed One who said, “Watch out if everyone likes you”
2. The “pattern” for the church in Acts is one of constant opposition
 - a. In **Acts 5**, the apostles are beaten... and rejoice they are worthy
 - b. In **Acts 6**, Stephen is dragged to court and false accused
 - c. In **Acts 7**, Stephen preaches and is murdered by a mob
 - d. In **Acts 8**, Saul breathes our murderous threats; church scatters
 - e. In **Acts 9**, Saul’s threat spreads to Damascus until Jesus call time
 - f. In **Acts 12**, James is killed and Peter is thrown into prison
3. For the rest of Acts, Paul is the nail sticking up and is hammered

C. **Third**, the epistles clearly tell the church to expect difficulty/opposition

1. Peter sees physical suffering in terms of spiritual growth (**1 Pet 4:1**)
 - a. Well, maybe not just spiritual grow, but actually spiritual warfare
 - 1) We “*arm ourselves*” with the attitude of Christ toward suffering
 - 2) Christ’s suffering for us sets the stage for our suffering for him
 - b. That is a common theme for Peter (**1 Pet 2:20-21; 3:17-18**)
 - 1) To suffer for doing the right is to declare solidarity with Jesus
 - 2) We follow One who went to the cross; did we think it’s be easy?
 - 3) Did we think he’d make us all healthy, wealthy & prosperous?
2. Peter says not don’t be surprised by opposition we received (**4:12-13**)
 - a. Should we be shocked when the world opposes us? So... are we?
 - b. Is Jesus breaking his promise if we are opposed? (**2 Tim 3:12**)

III. Conclusion

A. What’s the point? Well, it’s not to redefine persecution so we suffer it

1. We don’t suffer persecution; we don’t suffer a lot of opposition
 - a. Once in Ukraine a government official tried to shut us down
 - b. I thought, “Are we being persecuted?” Beaten & thrown in jail?
2. But there’s a war on Christianity in our country, right? *Some examples*
 - a. You can’t pray in public settings (*Daniel couldn’t pray in private*)
 - b. Political leaders often reject faith (*Nero killed Christians for sport*)
 - c. Movies portray church unflatteringly (*in NT, we’re entertainment*)
 - d. We can’t display 10 Commandments in public (*NT, Zeus displayed*)
 - e. Get sued if you live faith in public square (*in NT, you got dead*)
 - f. Can’t say “*Merry Christmas*” and those Starbucks cups (*good grief*)
3. When did we stop being disciples and become wimps and snowflakes?
 - a. Are we really suffering persecution when world hurt our feelings?
 - 1) It’s persecution to say “*Happy Holidays*” not “*Merry Christmas*”
 - 2) It’s persecution when our godless world acts like godless world?
 - 3) Persecution to not post Ten Commandments on gov’t buildings (*If we enforced no adultery, false witness and coveting, we need a new gov’t*)
 - b. Where’s the church that marched in coliseum singing songs of praise?

- B. Is Christianity less accepted and acceptable than a generation ago? *Yes*
1. Are some believers treated unfairly in business/public life? *Absolutely*
 - a. Is there less respect for churches today? *Yes, and whose fault is it?*
 - b. Is it harder to live the Christian life today? *Well compared to what?*
 - 1) NT Rome? Chinese Christians? Coptic Christians in Egypt?
 - 2) It may be harder now than for the neighbors of the Cleavers
 - 3) If you're African-American, it may be a bit easier today
 2. Monte Cox has a quote in *Significant Others* that I find... significant
 - a. Muslim scholar makes a contrast between Christianity and Islam

I find nothing in the New Testament that tells Christians how to live when in a majority. I find nothing in the Qur'an that tells Muslims how to live when in the minority.

 - 1) Islam was founded to be the dominant belief system of culture
 - 2) What why Islam is often both the religious and secular law
 - b. The church was a counter-culture in the NT—strangers in the world
 - 1) Any time Christianity is a state religion, it stops being Christian
 - 2) Kierkegaard: *“If everyone is Christian, then no one is Christian”*
 - c. There were times when it was easier to be Christian. *Was that good?*
- C. In 1st century Rome, unwanted babies were “exposed,” left to die in woods
1. Culture practiced this as routine; church saw it as murder most foul
 - a. What did they do? Didn't protest or demand a change in the law.
 - b. They went in the woods, found the babies and raised them in Christ
 - 1) Why? Not because the culture agreed that killing babies was bad
 - 2) Not because a Bible verse suggested that exposing babies is sin
 2. The love of Christ compelled them; they became known for that love
 - a. The culture didn't agree, but they admired the nobility of that love
 - b. Constantine outlawed the practice; it later became a capital offense
 - 1) Church didn't expect the culture to change to make things easier
 - 2) Church stood out from culture... and gradually culture changed
 3. Living by faith means we are out of step with the culture (**Heb 11:13**)
 - a. Sometimes the culture doesn't like that difference, and it lashes out
 - b. Brother and sister, don't be surprised... just keep following Christ