

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)*

A Right Response to Suffering

December 2nd, 2018

1 Peter 3:13-17

Assistant Pastor Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter, chapter 3. You'll find that right near the end of your New Testament.

This morning we will begin to unpack the heart of this letter. This is a book about righteous suffering. Peter is preparing his church to stand up for the truth of the gospel even when it hurts. Because sometimes it does hurt. Sometimes, the same world that crucified Jesus turns its attention to his followers. Many of our brothers and sisters around the world are living in this dangerous reality even as we speak.

But that's not our reality right now. Right? At least, that's not yet our reality. The same was true for this church Peter was writing to. They were not yet living in the thick of the storm – but it was becoming increasingly clear that the storm was brewing over the horizon.

Are you willing and ready to suffer for the gospel of Jesus Christ? What does that even look like? How are we supposed to respond when the world presses hard against our faith?

Those are important questions, and this is an important text. Look with me now at 1 Peter 3:13-17. Hear now God's holy, inspired and inerrant word to us:

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:13-17 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

In today's text, Peter would have us wrestle through this difficult truth:

Suffering is a Temporary yet Mandatory Path on the Road to Blessing

Now, each of those words is important.

Suffering is temporary. It doesn't last forever. And yet, the Bible promises us that we will inevitably endure a season of suffering at one time or another in this life. Look with me at verse 14:

¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. (1 Peter 3:14a ESV)

Not only will we suffer in this life, but there may be times when we suffer precisely *because of* our righteousness! Peter has just been talking about how we are called to love one another. He told us to be humble, and to be united in our thinking. He told us to be sympathetic and compassionate. He told us to respond to the mistreatment and the cursing that the world throws our way with blessing.

We expect him to conclude: "And after you've done all of that, the world is going to come to its senses and it's going to start treating you nicer."

But that's not what he says, is it? No. In fact, our righteous response to suffering will often make our circumstances worse! Edmund Clowney rightfully warns us:

Indeed, the spectacle of moral beauty does not disarm all the wicked; they are often even irritated by the radiance of a virtue that condemns them.¹

Sometimes your holiness is simply going to annoy the world. The darkness hates the light.

I suspect that most of you have heard the story of John Allen Chau. He was a 27-year-old missionary that felt a call to share the gospel with the people living on North Sentinel Island. This island in India is restricted, and they have a long history of responding to any foreign intruders with violence.

The young man paid some local fishermen to bring him there in the night, and his first encounter went about as well as one would expect. He walked toward them holding gifts and shouting: "My name is John! I love you and Jesus loves you!" They responded by firing an arrow at him. It pierced his water-proof Bible and he fled.

When he got back to the fishing boat, he wrote in his journal:

You guys might think I'm crazy in all this but I think it's worthwhile to declare Jesus to these people²

He then went on to write that, should he be killed, he hopes that his family will forgive his murderers. The next day he returned to the island. There, he was shot dead by the people he came to save. The fishermen watched as John's body was dragged across the beach and buried in the sand. Upon hearing the news, his family released a statement which said:

¹ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*. (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 144.

² Taken from: <https://people.com/human-interest/american-missionary-journaled-before-death-allegedly-killed-indian-tribe/> on Nov. 27, 2018.

He loved God, life, helping those in need, and had nothing but love for the Sentinelese people. We forgive those reportedly responsible for his death.³

It almost sounds like a story you'd read from the 1800's doesn't it? This happened a week and a half ago. This young man responded to arrows with forgiveness. In the face of danger, he hopped in a fishing boat to share the love of Jesus with strangers. So, how does the world respond to a story like that?

Not very well. The overwhelming majority expressed delight that the young missionary had "gotten what he deserved". He had the nerve to try and share his faith with people who weren't interested. He had the audacity to believe that the Bible is true – and to act on that ridiculous belief!

The vitriol that the Chau family has received is horrific. The world hates John Allen Chau, not because of his moral failings but *because of his righteousness*.

I want to make sure you hear this loud and clear this morning: If Jesus is your Lord – if you are going to put your allegiance to him over and above every other allegiance in your life – then you *will* experience persecution in your life.

That's the second important word in this point: Suffering is temporary yet *mandatory* path on the road to blessing.

Suffering comes for every Christian. Each of us will be forced to pass through it at one time or another on our way to God's ultimate, eternal blessing. Jesus said that:

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12 ESV)

When you are persecuted because of your love for Jesus – when your faith results in a season of suffering and oppression – you are blessed! Now, that doesn't mean that we go actively chasing after persecution. We're not called to be gluttons for punishment.

But we are called to be faithful. And sometimes, God uses periods of suffering to refine our faith.

There is purpose in our pain.

Suffering forces us to come face to face with eternal realities. It reminds us that this life is short. It reminds us that this world is a hard place. It brings our hidden sins and insecurities up to the surface. It forces us to declare.

Are you living for the praises of the world? Or are you living for the glory of God? Because you can't do both. According to the Bible, our response to suffering functions as something of a litmus test for the reality of our faith. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 8:

³ Ibid.

¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **provided we suffer with him** in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:16-17 ESV)

Suffering is one of the tools that God uses to test His church. If you love the praises of the world more than you love God, then you'll twist the Scriptures and compromise in every which way to try and fit in with the culture. Suffering tends to weed the compromisers out of the church. Peter used the analogy in chapter 1 of gold being purified in the fire. As God turns up the heat, the faithful press in for the blessing and the worldly make excuses to avoid the wrath of the culture.

Narrow is the road that leads to life. It is the road that follows in Jesus' steps. We must suffer with him *in order that* we may also be glorified with him. Thom Schreiner writes:

Suffering, in other words, is not a detour by which believers receive the inheritance to which they were called. It is God's appointed means for receiving the inheritance.⁴

So, how do we do this? How do we endure the temporary yet mandatory season of suffering in a way that leads to blessing? We'll spend the remainder of our time this morning answering that question:

How Do I Respond to Suffering in a Way that Leads to Blessing?

First of all:

1. Don't be afraid of the world and its weapons

That's what Peter says at the end of verse 14. Look there with me:

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy (1 Peter 3:14b-15a ESV)

Have no fear of them! When the world turns up the heat on our faith, we face a very real temptation to compromise. The world frightens us! Peter knows exactly what that's like. I suspect that, as he wrote this instruction, he was remembering his own failure on the night that Jesus was crucified. Do you remember that? A little servant girl accused Peter of being a follower of Jesus three times, and after three denials Peter was cursing as he fled the scene. It was a frightening experience, and he had failed the test.

But something changed in Peter, and he puts it before us in this short verse.

He is quoting here a passage from Isaiah 8. In Isaiah 8, the southern tribe of Judah is being threatened by the northern tribe of Israel and the nation of Aram. This little political alliance is preparing to attack Judah and to overthrow King Ahaz. Ahaz was understandably frightened, and he was wondering what kind of alliances he would need to protect himself. In this crisis, the prophet Isaiah approached him with a word from the Lord. God said through Isaiah:

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude, The New American Commentary*, vol. 37, 38 vols. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 141.

¹² “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. ¹³ But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. (Isaiah 8:12-13 ESV)

Stop worrying about the nations and start worrying about your Maker. God will deliver you from these foreign kings, so fix your hope and your trust on Him.

That’s the passage Peter is quoting, but he makes a small yet hugely important alteration. Marianne, can you please leave Isaiah 8 up on the screen for us? Now, let’s look down at our Bibles at verse 15 of today’s text. Do you see the change that Peter has made? “But in your hearts honor **Christ the Lord** as holy.”

The Isaiah passage was about Yahweh. It was about God.

Here, Peter is saying unambiguously: “Jesus is GOD! Fear Him!”

This realization made all of the difference in Peter’s heart. It is the reason why the same man who fled from a servant girl was later able to stand his ground before a Roman tribunal. Edmund Clowney says it so well:

Peter had lost the fear of men by gaining the fear of the risen Lord. He had set apart *Christ as Lord* in his heart.⁵

That’s the secret.

Are you afraid of the world? Are you afraid that they might tease you? Mock you? Throw you in prison? Protest outside your church? Shoot arrows at you? The solution to that fear is not to think less of the world, but to think MORE of GOD! Too many of us have too small a view of our King.

Don’t fear the world and its weapons. They can’t touch your inheritance. They can’t take away your blessing. That’s what Peter said in verse 13:

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? (1 Peter 3:13 ESV)

Answer: No one. They can’t touch your treasure. They can’t steal your prize. Paul says the same thing:

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31 ESV)

Some of you have been living in fear for too long. That fear is holding you back from God’s blessing. Christ is worthy of fear. People are not. Don’t be afraid of the world and its weapons.

Second, if you want to respond to suffering in a way that leads to blessing:

2. Don’t shrink back from sharing the gospel

We find this in verse 15:

⁵ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*. (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 146.

¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15 ESV)

Here's the thing: The darker this world gets, the stranger our lives will look. We feel that already, and I can only imagine how strange our kids will look in the culture that they inherit.

Obviously, there are a number of things that make us look strange to the world. Take, for instance, our worship services. Who sings anymore? Honestly? Pastor Paul and I were just discussing this the other day. The church is one of the few places in Canadian culture outside of the theater where people still sing together. Imagine visiting a church for the first time as a 19-year-old. The only song you've ever sang out loud in public is the national anthem, but now you're standing here with all of these strangers, partaking in a 20-minute-long sing-along! We are a weird group.

But Peter is referring to one particular weird characteristic in Christians: hope.

Now, Peter is not using the word "hope" here in the same way that we use it. We say things like: "I sure hope this weather will clear up." Hope carries the idea of wishful thinking in our culture. But in Peter's vocabulary, hope is the equivalent of faith. To have hope is to be settled in your mind that God will do what He has promised to do.

God will reward us with an eternal treasure.

God will carry us through to the end.

God will bring justice for all of the wrongs that we have endured.

God will raise us from the grave.

In the very opening of Peter's letter, he said:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3 ESV)

And this living hope, Peter says, will naturally produce in us a supernatural joy! He goes on to say in verse 8:

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory (1 Peter 1:8 ESV)

This is the particular "weirdness" that the world is supposed to see in us. This is the weirdness that leads us to put out coffee and donuts for the protesters picketing outside the church. This is the weirdness that leads us to forgive the people who shoot at us and to row back to the island where the archers are waiting for us.

The world will have questions about that kind of hope. And our job is to be ready to speak up with gentleness and respect. By the way, that qualifier is important. It's easy to say the right thing the wrong way, isn't it? There are too many Christians who have convinced themselves that arrogant, angry, keyboard-

warrior debating is the equivalent to sharing the gospel. It's not.

Peter doesn't tell us to make a defense for our faith with smarmy arrogance. He doesn't tell us to draw attention to the stupidity of our accusers. He calls us to make a defense for the hope that we have with gentleness and respect. The content of our message needs to be supported by the tone of our message and the conduct of the messenger.

As we think this through, I want to ask you to subject yourself to two probing questions:

First, when people look at your life, do they see this strange hope that Peter is referring to?

Sit in that for a moment. Peter is referring specifically to the way that we respond to suffering, persecution and injustice. We are supposed to be a people who respond in a gloriously strange way.

So, how do you respond to trials? Do you become overwhelmed by stress and anxiety? Do you pout and complain? How do you respond when the world challenges your faith? Do you compromise? Do you strike back in anger? I was convicted by this quote by a Christian author and I have never forgotten it:

Anxiety is a heart confessing that Christ is not Lord.⁶

The Bible says that, if you are a Christian, you have a living hope! Therefore, people ought to see that hope in your life. You should be known as someone who responds to insults with kindness. You should be known as someone who responds to despairing situations with hope and peace. You should manage your finances differently than the world because your treasure is in heaven, not in retirement. Your living hope should make you look weird to the world!

If that hope is not evident in your life, then you need to get on your knees and do business with the Lord.

That's the first question, and the second is this: Are you ready to give a defense for your faith?

I fear that we overcomplicate this. I have heard too many Christians use this verse to suggest that every Christian needs to have a master's degree in apologetics. They suggest that you need to be able to explain how the early manuscripts of the Bible were preserved and passed down and that you need to have memorized five solid evidences for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Obviously, all of that information is important, and I thank God that we have Christians who are devoted to researching and defending those important issues. We even have a small group at our church devoted to answering those questions. Awesome!

But, all of that goes beyond the simplicity of what Peter is calling for in today's text: Can you explain why the gospel gives you hope?

Let's simplify that even more: Can you explain the gospel?

The answer to that question needs to be yes. "Gospel" is simply a word that means "good news". We need to be able to tell the world about the good news of Jesus Christ. We need to be prepared to tell them that

⁶ Oliphint, K. Scott. *Covenantal Apologetics – Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2013. 204.

the God of the universe came to the earth as a baby, Jesus Christ, and that he lived a sinless life. He was perfectly obedient. He loved God and he loved others like no one ever has or ever will.

And then we hung him up on a cross. And the Bible says that when he died, he took all of our sins with him. He literally became a curse so that we could be set from the curse.

He died, and was buried in a tomb, but three days later he rose from the grave proving that death has once and for all been conquered! The curse of sin is broken! Now, if we confess our sins and put our trust in Jesus Christ, we are set free! He takes all of our sins on his body on the cross, and we take on all of the blessings that he earned. Just like Jesus rose from the grave, so too will we, and we will live with Him in glory forever!

That is the reason for the hope that we have, and we need to know it! We need to be ready to share it! Because, if we are living the way that we were called to live, then the world will have some questions. Are you ready to give them an answer?

Finally, if you want to respond to suffering in a way that leads to blessing:

3. Don't ruin your witness

That's what we find in verses 16-17. Look with me there:

¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:16-17 ESV)

When I was studying Greek in bible college, I learned just how important repetition is for learning. We all had our Greek flash cards and we carried them with us everywhere we went, because we knew that the only way the information would ever sink in was if we reminded ourselves of it every day.

Peter is using repetition in this letter to reinforce important themes, and one of the themes that keeps arising again and again is this theme of holiness. It is a non-negotiable!

When our culture turns up the heat, we will be tempted to strike back. When people wrongfully accuse us, we will be tempted to respond to their lies with our own verbal attacks. When the system is corrupt, we'll be tempted to burn the house down.

But we can't do that. Because Jesus didn't do that.

As soon as we retaliate, we lose. It's just that simple. In fact, Peter spells it out for us in this verse. Look at what he says in verse 16:

having a good conscience, **so that**, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:16 ESV)

Continue to live a holy life – live in such a way that your conscience is clean – SO THAT none of the accusations thrown against you stick. SO THAT when one group slanders you and calls you a bigot, the watching world will step back and say: "I see nothing wrong with these people". SO THAT when we stand before the Lord on that day of judgement, all of the people who wrongfully accused you will see the

righteousness of your life and feel shame for their words.

Now I really want us to think about that this morning. And I want us to think corporately.

Your bad attitude hurts the church. Your online combativeness hurts the church. Your off-handed racist or sexist remarks hurt the church. Your mistreatment of your spouse. Your rivalry with your neighbour. Your episodes of road rage. Your lazy habits at work. Your gossiping and cattiness. All of our private sins collectively hurt our witness.

I want you to imagine that you were a member of the church in Oshawa. They're being picketed for believing the same stuff that we believe in this place, so it's not unfathomable to imagine that we might find ourselves in their shoes in the near future.

Imagine what it would be like to drive your kids through a crowd of protesters as you pulled into the parking lot. As you walk through the church doors you have to cover their ears as hateful profanity is shouted at your family.

Now imagine you go home and flip on the news and they're talking about your church again. They're interviewing a young woman who worked with one of our members and she tells the interviewer that the man from your church treated her like garbage and was often overheard making racist remarks. Then, the newsreel flips to a screenshot of a hateful Facebook comment made by another of your church members insulting the LGBTQ+ community. You go to the barbershop and you overhear some people talking about the drama, and they both mention that the people they know from your church are busybodies and gossips.

Peter is teaching us a valuable lesson. Persecution is going to come. Pushback is going to come. And when it does, your life will be held up under the microscope. The question then becomes: Will your suffering be a righteous suffering? Or will it be the result of sinful, foolish behaviour? Suffering for righteousness leads to blessing. Suffering for sinfulness is useless. It brings no glory to God. It brings no blessing to the world. It brings no benefit to the church.

We need this reminder. We need a firm kick in the tail. We've been comfortable for a long time, but the world is changing. And that's okay! God is still on His throne and suffering is part of His plan for us:

21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:21 ESV)

It's going to be difficult. It's going to be like a refining fire. Each of us will be forced to declare. There is blessing for those who press in! Don't be afraid of man and his weapons. Don't shrink back from sharing the gospel. Don't ruin your witness.

Jesus' response to suffering saved the world. And just like his suffering, ours too will eventually give way to blessing and glory. This is our calling as followers of Christ. This is temporary. This is mandatory. This is the place where our light will shine even brighter. And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.