

Suffering for Doing Right

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[0 : 0 0] This is the AM service on the 10th of May 1998. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled Suffering for Doing Right and is from 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 8 to 22. Turn in the Bibles to page 985 to the passage that was read from 1 Peter.

Do you think your friends and acquaintances can tell that you're a Christian?

Not through the things you say or because they know that you go to church, but through the quality of your life. Do you think there's something about your Christian faith that marks you out as a different sort of person to the other friends and acquaintances around about?

Often Christian character in our world today is really just a mirror of the world's character, maybe with a slightly different hue. But Peter's letter, as we've seen in recent weeks, has been stressing the importance of living markedly and noticeably lives of Christian character.

[1 : 2 1] Remember what he said in the passage we saw two weeks ago. Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles so that though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

Does your Christian character and behaviour lead others to glorify God? The first example that Peter gave of the Christian character that we are meant to live, as we saw last week, was the issue of submission to various authorities in this world that are God-given.

Now he lists at the beginning of today's passage a few other things. Finally, all of you, he says in 3 verse 8, have unity of spirit. That is, like-mindedness.

The word is to do with the mind rather than the spirit. Have the same attitudes, the same aims. Earlier in the letter he has said, set your minds or prepare your minds for action, set your hope on Jesus who is coming again, bringing grace to his people.

That's to be the common mind, the common attitude that Christians are to have. We're to have minds that are set, ready for Jesus' return and the action that follows from that and is consistent with it.

[2 : 4 3] Peter reminds us here again how important it is to have right minds. Our thinking is as important as is our attitude and action. The second thing in this list is sympathy.

Not something that's shallow, empty words, but rather sincere. To suffer with somebody. To express in action a selfless concern for somebody in need.

Now this list of five things in this verse, of which sympathy is the second, they're not random things. Rather like fingers on a hand, the five things here stem from the same centre or the same source, Jesus Christ.

So have a like mind set on Jesus Christ. To be sympathetic is to be like Jesus, who we're told in, say, the letter to the Hebrews, is the perfect sympathiser, knowing our weakness and what it's like to live in this world.

The third thing is the love of fellow Christians, something Peter's already addressed in this letter. Not love for one another, meaning any relationship in the world, but rather love within Christian fellowship, as preeminently important for Christian people.

[3 : 58] And again that stems from Jesus, the model of love. For example, John's first letter tells us that. The fourth in the list is to be tender-hearted. Literally it means a very intense word.

It's to do with compassion. Moved in your inner being. Indeed the Greek word suggests moved in your bowels, but we tend to talk about the heart rather than the bowels for such compassion, I think.

But it's an intense emotion. And Jesus many times in the Gospels we're told was moved with compassion, same word, for various people in need. The fifth in this list is to have a humble mind.

To think of others more importantly than yourself. It doesn't mean an absence of self-esteem. It doesn't mean a self-put-down. But rather it's to think of others highly.

That's what proper humility is. Again, Jesus is the model for that. The one who is meek and lowly. The one who rode on the donkey. The one who invites us to come to him because he's meek and lowly and humble of spirit.

[5 : 02] All of those things are modeled on Jesus Christ. And none of them is easy. We kid ourselves if we think it's easy to go about living lives described thus way.

It's easy to be hardened in our world against the needy, the poor, the people for whom we should express sympathy and compassion and love. It's easy to become immune because every night on our TV screens, in the papers, in our mail, there are stories upon stories of people in need.

It's easy to become hard and shut ourselves off from that. Jesus is the model for us in each of these things. As he is in the next as well in verse 9.

Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse. But on the contrary, repay with a blessing. Jesus, we saw last week, is the one who did not repay evil with evil.

He did not revile when he was reviled. He did not threaten when he was suffering. Rather, he said in the Sermon on the Mount, bless those who persecute you.

[6 : 09] That's what Peter has in mind here. Repay evil with a blessing. I think probably the idea behind blessing is to do something about the gospel for people who revile you.

Because ultimately the blessings of God are blessings that stem from the gospel of Jesus' death. Each of these things, six things in this little list, is modelled on Jesus Christ.

We ought not to be surprised by that. Because if we are to live lives that lead non-Christian people to glorify God, then the character of lives that will do that is the character of God's own Son.

So if we express and live out the character and behaviour of Jesus Christ, God's Son, then the world which is not Christian ought to come to glorify that same God.

These are illustrations of what it means to live righteously. The end of the last chapter, as we saw last week, the reason for Jesus' death is that we might live to righteousness.

[7 : 18] And this is a little bit of a description of righteousness. But in the end, righteousness is modelled by Jesus Christ. We are to live righteous lives as he lived a righteous life. Later in this chapter, we'll talk about Jesus being the righteous one who dies for the unrighteous.

So again, the exhortation to us is to model our lives on the Lord Jesus Christ. And the reason Peter gives us in verse 9, for living lives of such righteousness and repaying evil with blessing is because we are to inherit a blessing.

It is for this that you are called, that you might inherit a blessing. The inheritance which has been already described for us in chapter 1 includes things which are imperishable, undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for you.

There will be hours on the final day when Jesus returns to extend his grace towards us finally. We have been told that we are to set our hope on that inheritance.

To expect it and anticipate it confidently because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. So what we find now, you see, is to set our hope means to live righteously now.

[8 : 33] It's practical setting our hope. It's not just a mindset but a mindset that is reflected in righteous living as we wait for Jesus' return and our promised inheritance.

Peter confirms this idea with a quote from the Old Testament from Psalm 34. The quote shows that God promises blessing to those who live righteous lives.

So Psalm 34 says, and he quotes it from verse 10 onwards, those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit.

Let them turn away from evil and do good. Just like Jesus described in the previous chapter. No sin, no deceit found in his mouth.

His deeds and his actions match together. They are impeccable. So must be the righteous person. Their deeds and their actions, their words, they must match each other and reflect righteousness.

[9 : 39] But more than that, they also are to be people who seek peace and pursue it. Peter here probably has in mind one of the Beatitudes, Jesus, when he said, blessed are the peacemakers.

This is talking about relations rather than politics. In our relationships with people be people who seek peace.

I wonder whether this microphone could be turned down a bit, Harry, because it's echoing back. Thank you. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. The eyes of the Lord being on the righteous doesn't just mean that he looks over them and sees them, but that he extends his favour towards them.

He hears their prayer. Remember last week that the husbands who do not live righteous lives with their wives, their prayers would be hindered by God. But now for those, any, who live righteous lives, God hears their prayer.

[10 : 43] A reminder to us, if we're finding our prayers are not being answered, then maybe we need to assess our lives and see how, to what extent we're living righteous lives. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

The unrighteous, they stand under God's judgement is what that means. The obligation to each and every Christian to live righteous lives is clear here.

we are to set our hope on the grace that is coming and that means that necessitates living righteous lives now. For the sake of that future, we must be righteous now.

But also for the sake of non-Christian people, we are to live righteous lives now so that they will come to glorify God. The model of Jesus commands us and commends us to live righteous lives now.

and his death is to bring about that purpose that we might live for righteousness. Some people are attracted to Christian faith because of the quality of life they see in Christian friends and acquaintances.

[11 : 57] I can think of a few people for whom that is the case. One friend in particular at university found it was the Christians who loved him and cared for him and befriended him and over a course of time he placed his faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

And it may well be for some of you that you have come in the past to Christian faith for the same reasons. Your family members, your friends, acquaintances, the impeccability and righteousness of their life have made you think there is something different here which I want.

And so you follow the God your friends follow and place your faith in their Lord and Saviour. But I wonder how many people have come to Christian faith through your lives?

Have your lives matched up to this incredible ideal so that others may come to glorify God? Well that should be one of the motivations in living righteous lives that other people will see will ponder will ask will come to glorify God at the final day.

Peter's exhortation has a sharper focus than this. It's not just about living righteous lives in the midst of a pagan world.

[13 : 18] It has more of a cut and thrust because it's about living righteous lives in the midst of opposition even persecution and that's much harder.

Peter goes on to ask a rhetorical question. Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? We expect an answer no to this sort of question. Well nobody's going to harm you if you do good.

It's an unlikely possibility. Well it is still a possibility. Peter raises it in the next verse. But even if you do suffer for doing what is right and the sense is well it probably won't happen but it might then you are blessed.

Peter here I think is sounding a little warning to some of these Christians who are facing persecution. You see it's easy to be persecuted or opposed because of some wrongdoing that you do but to confuse that with thinking you're being opposed for being a Christian.

I think he's sounding an alarm here. It is unlikely that people will oppose you for doing right. It does happen. But make sure that any opposition and persecution which you attract is opposition and persecution for Christ not for your mistakes.

[14 : 37] Make sure that any opposition and persecution is for Christ's sake but not because you're being silly or stupid or unrighteous or evil doing. There's no virtue in suffering for our own mistakes.

but if the case does happen and you do suffer unfairly for doing good then Peter says you'll be blessed in verse 14.

See in the end blessing. Persecution is transitory. Blessing from God comes at the end.

Peter here I think again is a thinking back to Jesus' sermon on the mount. Some of Jesus' first teaching that he would have been there first hand to hear. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

[15 : 48] That's what Peter is saying here. Same sort of thing. If you suffer persecuted opposed for righteousness' sake then blessing from God will come.

You see in the end the answer to that rhetorical question is a definite no. nobody can harm you ultimately for doing good.

They may harm you now it is a possibility but in the end blessing. Nothing that people can do to you now for doing good will last forever if you are suffering for Christ's sake.

Martin Luther knew that. One of his hymns said it. And though they take our life goods honour child and wife though we must let all go they will not profit so.

To us remains the kingdom. Same sort of idea. In the end they cannot take away our relationship with God the kingdom.

[17 : 03] Peter goes on to say then do not fear what they fear. Do not fear what people in this world fear. Probably what he is really saying here is do not fear those who persecute you.

Rather set apart or sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord. Fear Christ as Lord rather than fear your persecutors. Replace the fear of those who oppose you with the fear of God.

And if you do that then there will be no fear of your persecutors because you know at the last it is your relationship to God that matters not your fear of the persecutors. 750 or more years before Peter wrote these words the people of God then called the ancient nation of Israel were being threatened by the mighty Assyrian empire.

The nation was afraid. People were scared stiff of the Assyrians. And so in order to counter that fear they tried to make political alliances with other nations round about including the Syrians and so on.

They turned to other nations for help. And into that scene came one of God's prophets the prophet Isaiah. And he chastised them and told them off for their fear of the enemy the Assyrians.

[18 : 23] Isaiah said to them do not fear what it fears or be in dread but the Lord of hosts him you shall regard as holy let him be your fear and let him be your dread.

And he goes on to say if that is the case then your enemy will stumble and fall on the Lord. Peter is referring to that passage here.

Like the ancient people of God his readers are also facing enmity and opposition even persecution. Like the ancient people of God his readers are tempted to try and find security in something other than God.

But he's pointing them to where real security can be found in the fear of the Lord. For him the Lord Christ. In the ancient people of God just to fear God the Lord.

The fear of God banishes all other fear. Banishes the fear of persecution and opposition. It banishes all the other fears in our own life as well.

[19 : 33] When we fear the Lord. When we sanctify Christ in our hearts as God. That will mean that we are always ready to make our defense.

to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with reverence, with gentleness and reverence that is fear for God.

Such calm peace on the heart of the Christian when they're facing opposition or persecution stuns our world. They cannot cope with it.

such hope in the midst of bleak circumstances surprises our world. They do not expect it.

people and so when Christians suffer calmly, peacefully, setting apart Christ in their heart as Lord, opportunities arise.

[20 : 31] Why? Why do you suffer this way? Why cannot we break you? Is the cry of the persecutor. And opportunities arise for defending the hope that is within you.

For bearing testimony and witness that is to the Lord Jesus and his resurrection from the dead because it's the resurrection of Christ that gives us hope and hope to cling to even in the midst of persecution in this world.

This is not talking just about a legal court but it's talking about opportunities in general conversation. Why are you like that? Why are you different? Why do you have this hope?

Why do you have this peace that passes all understanding? Because Jesus rose from the dead and I've placed my faith and trust in him or words to such effect.

It's the obligation on all of us to be able to give an answer to that hope. To be able to explain our Christian faith and why we are Christians and the God in whom we place our faith and trust.

[21 : 34] Keep your conscience clear Peter says so that when you are maligned those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

That is make sure there's nothing else in your life to which mud aimed will stick. Make sure your behaviour is impeccable so that in the end those who persecute you will be put to shame.

I think Peter's ultimate goal is that having been put to shame they confess their sins, repent and turn back to God and glorify him on the day when he comes. Patient endurance under suffering is a powerful Christian witness.

Some 30 years ago there was a Russian KGB agent called Sergi Kordikov. He was working in Eastern Soviet Union and one of their jobs of his group of men, he was the leader of a group of KGB officers, was to break up Christian meetings that were surreptitious, held in people's homes quietly unannounced to go in, raid them, bash them, beat them, send them to prison, even kill them because they were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

On one raid there was a young girl called Natasha Donova. She had an impeccable work record, the best employee in the company but she was a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and she along with other Christians would secretly meet regularly to pray, read their Bibles, maybe to sing songs and hymns and to praise God.

[23 : 18] On the first raid when she was there, this Sergi, the leader of this group, noticed her. She was beaten badly, hurt, thrown across the room, others in the room were killed, others were taken away to camps and prison.

three days later, the same group of KGB officers again raided another place where Christians were gathering and there again was this young girl still bearing the scars of her first beating and this rattled the KGB.

Why is she back again? And this time Sergi, the boss of these KGB officers, himself personally beat her until his hand was aching.

A few days later, another raid, another place, another group of believers and there again was this young girl Natasha with a Bible, praying, praising God.

one of the other KGB agents was so incensed that she was back that he got a bludgeon stick and he was ready to bash her to death and one of his fellow officers jumped in front of him and said no.

[24 : 43] An argument ensued and Sergi, the boss of them, in the end backed up the person who protected her, who was saying, she has something we don't have and they let her go free.

Sergi, this boss of the KGB group, never met her again. He didn't know what happened to her but he couldn't forget her. He couldn't forget the quiet trust she seemed to have in her God, her willingness to endure suffering with grace and gentleness, some time later he was serving on a ship in the North Pacific.

He jumped overboard off the coast of Canada into freezing water. He swam ashore but was unconscious and found on the beach, taken in, recovered and came to Christ.

He knew that there was something about this Natasha that he didn't have, that he needed to have and he fled his own country because he couldn't find it there and found it through Christian people in Canada. The KGB didn't leave him alone though.

They tracked him down and assassinated him. He was 21 years old. The example of patient endurance under suffering is a powerful witness to the resurrection of Christ and Christians all around the world today are bearing that witness Pakistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Burma, Iran, Indonesia.

[26 : 29] We can list country after country where Christians are dying for their faith. There are reports in this week's newspaper. It has the same effect. How fortunate we are in our country that it's not us.

But our world in every country is a dark world. world and a dark world does not in the end tolerate the light of Christ. Maybe in our lifetimes or in mine, Australia will be different and maybe we will face much more overt persecution than we do now.

What sort of witness will we bear? Peter finishes the chapter by giving some robust encouragement to people who are facing persecution.

Martin Luther called this the most difficult part of the New Testament. In some ways the details are hard but the purpose is abundantly clear. It is to encourage Christians who are facing persecution by telling them that Jesus is victor over all.

Why suffer without revenge and retaliation? Because Jesus has already wrought the victory by rising from the dead. So Peter goes on to say in verse 18 for Christ also suffered for sins once for all.

[27 : 52] One sacrifice a unique sacrifice never needing to be repeated in any form or place. One sacrifice the righteous for the unrighteous in order to bring you to God and that is something that is effective and cannot be hinted by anything else.

He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. He's risen Peter says but what's more than that is that he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison.

He proclaimed his victory over his enemies. He proclaimed his triumph over all his spiritual foes and rulers and powers and authorities in this world. For that seems to be who's being referred to at the beginning of verse 19.

you see they are the true enemy not people in the end. Spiritual powers, rulers, princes and authorities they're called in different places in the New Testament.

Paul says in Ephesians 6 that we contend not with flesh and blood but with spiritual powers and rulers and authorities and that's who Peter's referring to here because in the end all opposition and persecution that Christians face from people is in the end a spiritual opposition from spiritual forces but Jesus has defeated them by rising from the dead and proclaiming his victory to them in prison.

[29 : 07] They are now defeated. They're at Jesus' feet verse 22 says for Jesus has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels authorities and powers made subject to him.

They're dead. They're defeated. So any persecution we face is really the persecution of something that is already defeated. Again Martin Luther expressed this in the same hymn.

And though the world were full of fiends all lurking to devour us, we tremble not nor fear their bands. They shall not overpower us. The prince of this world's ill may scowl upon us still.

He cannot do us harm. To judgment he has come. One word can swiftly fell him. What encouragement these verses are to persecuted Christians because they say that the enemy may look powerful but it's defeated.

The resurrection has brought it down. And even then Jesus came and proclaimed his victory to them and now they are at his feet in heaven subject to him. Peter's readers lived in a similar time to Noah thousands of years before at the beginning of the Old Testament.

[30 : 19] Noah faced opposition like Peter's readers do. Noah was a righteous man like Peter's readers are meant to be. Noah was a minority with his family in a pagan world just like Peter's readers are a minority in a pagan world.

And the enmity of Noah was expressed through people but in the end it was a spiritual enmity to God and it's the same with Peter's readers as well. The Roman Empire is really a subject of spiritual power opposed to God.

And God saved Noah through the waters of flood. And the parallel is made between God saving us through the waters of baptism. Not by an external right as though it's just water washing off dirt but rather through something in us, something to do with our conscience, our heart, pledged in faith in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what these verses are about, these verses that people ponder so often. For Jesus went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison who in former times did not obey when God waited patiently in the days of Noah during the building of the ark in which a few, that is eight persons, were saved through water, Noah, his wife, three sons and their wives.

And baptism which this prefigured now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body, the outward thing, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities and powers made subject to him.

[31 : 47] What encouragement to Christians under persecution that Jesus has triumphed over all. There is no enmity left so we can have confidence when we face opposition, even persecution, that Jesus has triumphed.

And so all the opposing powers against Christian people in this world, they may look strong and powerful, but in the end they're nothing because Jesus is the victor over all.

That's why we don't need to claim revenge or vindication now but to patiently endure. For on the day when Jesus returns, the day to which we are to set our hope on the grace that he's bringing us on that day, we know that he's triumphant, we know that he's coming and we know that he really will bring the grace that he promised because the victory is already to be won through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

He said to his disciples the night before he died, in the world you may face persecution but take courage, I have overcome the world. Alleluia for that.

Amen.