

Called to Suffer

1 Peter 3:13-17

This morning we come to the subject that will be Peter's chief concern for the rest of this letter. The subject of suffering. Since our best estimate for the date when Peter wrote this letter is just prior to the suffering inflicted by the Emperor Nero upon the Christians of the Roman Empire, it is obvious why the Holy Spirit inspired these particular words. Peter is preparing the Christians for the suffering they were about to endure. That, of course, makes his instructions on submission to civil governments all the more striking, for the Roman government proved themselves to be very cruel. Yet Peter writes,

1 Peter 2:13 "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good."

That "praise of those who do good" continues to be Peter's expectation in,
v.13

Ordinarily, of course, the answer is "no one!" Yet, because of sin, there may be suffering. Unjust suffering. That subject was specifically mentioned in the section about slaves submitting to masters and "suffering wrongfully."

1 Peter 2:20 "For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps."

So even though the goodness of your life ought to insulate you from unjust suffering, it doesn't. In fact, Peter says, "to this you were called." And, therefore, he adds in verse 14, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed."

And as we studied in chapter 3, verse 9, we are called to inherit such a blessing. And that is the specific subject today—the blessings of suffering, the blessing of suffering wrongfully.

How, then, in the midst of suffering, does that blessing become ours? First, I believe Peter tells us that we need to,

I. LOSE THE FEAR OF MEN.

Look at,

v.14

Peter is quoting from Isaiah, and turn please to Isaiah 8. God is prophesying the invasion of Israel by the nation of Assyria, which was his judgment upon Israel for their unfaithfulness to him.

Is. 8:3 Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz; 4 "for before the child shall have knowledge to cry 'My father' and 'My mother,' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria."

Is. 8:5 The LORD also spoke to me again, saying: 6 "Inasmuch as these people refused The waters of Shiloah that flow softly, And rejoice in Rezin and in Remaliah's son; 7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them The waters of the River, strong and mighty-- The king of Assyria and all his glory; He will go up over all his channels And go over all his banks. 8 He will pass through Judah, He will overflow and pass over, He will reach up to the neck; And the stretching out of his wings Will fill

the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel. 9 “Be shattered, O you peoples, and be broken in pieces! Give ear, all you from far countries. Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces; Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces.”

Despite all that, God is merciful in his own covenant faithfulness,

Is. 8:10 “Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; Speak the word, but it will not stand, For God is with us.” 11 For the LORD spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying: 12 “Do not say, ‘A conspiracy,’ Concerning all that this people call a conspiracy, Nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”

Verse 12 is the verse Peter quotes, and somewhat literally, that verse translates, “do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it.” As God speaks to his people Israel through Isaiah, he calls his true disciples not to share the fears of the people. They see only the armed power of the enemy! They see only the danger and trouble of the nation of Assyria.

And God says, “Do not fear.” Do not fear the power of men!

So Peter writes, “Even if you suffer, do not fear.” “Do not fear men!” For,

A. God will put away your fear!

Jesus teaches this too, doesn't he?

Mat. 8:28 “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. 30 “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 “Do

not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Do not fear, for God will take care of you. That's a familiar theme in the Bible, isn't it?

Josh. 1:9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

And what happened when Assyria actually invaded, under King Sennacherib? We read about the wisdom of the Israelite King Hezekiah in,

2 Chron. 32:6 Then he set military captains over the people, gathered them together to him in the open square of the city gate, and gave them encouragement, saying, 7 “Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him. 8 “With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people were strengthened by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

Do not fear men, nor what they can do to you? Instead,

B. God will give you strength.

Consider,

Ps. 62:1 “Truly my soul silently waits for God; From Him comes my salvation. 2 He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved. 3 How long will you attack a man? You shall be slain, all of you, Like a leaning wall and a tottering fence. 4 They only consult to cast him down from his high position; They delight in lies; They bless with their mouth, But they curse inwardly. Selah 5 My soul, wait silently for God

alone, For my expectation is from Him. 6 He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved. 7 In God is my salvation and my glory; The rock of my strength, And my refuge, is in God. 8 Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.”

Peter is saying all of that, and more, to his readers. God will give you strength, even as he did for his Old Testament people Israel. And go back with me to Isaiah 8, to see how fully Peter is referring to this passage, for Isaiah mentions the source of that strength,

Is. 8:12 “Do not say, ‘A conspiracy,’ Concerning all that this people call a conspiracy, Nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. 13 The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; Let Him be your fear, And let Him be your dread. 14 He will be as a sanctuary, But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense To both the houses of Israel, As a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 And many among them shall stumble; They shall fall and be broken, Be snared and taken.” 16 Bind up the testimony, Seal the law among my disciples. 17 And I will wait on the LORD, Who hides His face from the house of Jacob; And I will hope in Him. 18 Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel From the LORD of hosts, Who dwells in Mount Zion.”

You know whom Isaiah is talking about. Peter has already quoted this verse before in 1 Peter 2. He is speaking about Jesus, “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.” But that is only to those who don’t believe! For Isaiah also tells us that,

1 Peter 2:6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”

So what shall we do to gain strength in the face of oppression and suffering? How is that we are able “not to fear what they fear?” What is the secret of such boldness and such strength of courage? Peter tells us. Isaiah tells us.

Is. 8:13 “The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; Let Him be your fear, And let Him be your dread.”

You see, you have exchange the fear of men for the fear of God! To lose the fear of men you must...

II. GAIN THE FEAR OF GOD.

In order to be able to live without the fear of men, you have to learn to live with the fear of God. “The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; Let Him be your fear, And let Him be your dread.”

Hallow means to set apart. To hallow God means to live for his honor and glory, preeminently. It is that for which Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name.” Our children’s catechism explains that we are praying “that God’s name may be honored by us and all men.” Our Shorter Catechism teaches us that “we pray that God would enable us, and others, to glorify him in all that whereby he makes himself known; and that he would dispose all things to his own glory.”

That’s the fear of God. “The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; Let Him be your fear, And let Him be your dread.”

Edmund Clowney, the past President of Westminster Seminary, puts it this way, “To break the throttling grip of fear we must confess God’s lordship with more than mental assent. We must confess it with our heart’s devotion. Setting him apart as Lord means bowing before him in the adoration of praise. A

praising heart is immune to the fear of other people. Fear of another sort takes possession of our hearts and minds: a fear that does not flee in terror, but draws near in awe and worship.”

But Peter makes it even better. Peter takes Isaiah’s words about the fear of God and applies them to Jesus.

v.14b “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”
15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.”

And actually, though this gets rather technical, I believe that the best and most reliable manuscripts, namely the oldest ones, actually have Christ written in that verse, not merely God.

So the NIV reads: “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.” The NASB reads, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.” The ESV reads, “But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy.”

Peter is referring to Jesus! He is explicitly referring to Jesus as the eternal God.

A. Acknowledging the glory of Jesus as God.

And what better man to teach us how the fear of men can be replaced by the fear of the risen Lord Jesus. To quote Clowney again, “Peter knew the meaning of fear. He remembered the panic that unmanned him when, by the fire in the courtyard, he was recognized as a Galilean.” Remember, Peter was the one who disowned Jesus, not once but three times as he was being led away to be crucified.

Yet Peter also knew what it meant to be transformed by the power of the risen Lord! It was Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, who declared to the Jewish rulers of the Sanhedrin and elders of

Israel,

Acts 4:9 “If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, 10 “let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 “This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ 12 “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

And when commanded not to preach any longer in Jesus’ name it was Peter who declared,

Acts 4:19 “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

It was Peter who prayed,

Acts 4:29 “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 “by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”

That’s what happens when the fear of men is replaced by the fear of God.

And so Peter writes to those enduring suffering at the hands of men, “Don’t fear men.” “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.”

And in doing that, Peter continues, bear witness to the power the gospel. Gaining the fear of God is directly connected with,

B. Proclaiming your sure and certain hope.

Look how Peter connects those two things.

v.15

The fear of God gives you hope, for if you honor and exalt the transcendent glory of the eternal God, then you will join the writer of Hebrews and boldly say, “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

You will be able to proclaim with the Psalmist,

Ps. 56:10 “In God (I will praise His word), In the LORD (I will praise His word), 11 In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

There is your sure and certain hope! No matter what man might do to you.

Please keep in mind Peter’s context--suffering.

v.14 “Even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”

v.15 “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.”

Those two things go hand in hand. The fear of God in your hearts means that you are ready to,

III. GIVE A DEFENSE.

“Always be ready.” “To give a defense.” To give an answer.

Certainly in the Bible not everyone is called to do that which is prescribed as a qualification for the Elders of the church, “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

Not every Christian is called to do the work of an evangelist. But every Christian is called to do this, “always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.”

The word for defense is literally translated “apology,” and we get the English word “apologetics” from that. Apologetics is the branch of theology that specifically addresses how we go about the process of answering those who contradict the truth of the word. It is the foundation of evangelism, and those two things go hand in hand.

But you don’t need a seminary education to give a defense of the hope that is within you. You simply need,

A. Bold courage to answer.

Don’t be afraid of men! Answer them! Answer them with a declaration of your blessed hope! Answer them with the proclamation of your confidence that in Jesus, through faith in Jesus, you have the promise of eternal life. In whatever words you choose to use, when some wants to know what is so different about your life, tell them! Tell them that you have been born again “to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Tell them that you have “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,” and that you “are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Tell them that you are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

And beloved, expect them to ask! “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

And do it a certain way, with,

B. The attitude of reverent gentleness.

Peter is so quick to add restraints to the sinful impulses of our hearts. Put away all self-righteous smugness, and any sense of moral superiority or hypocritical pride.

v.15 “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

Meekness and fear. Meekness, not arrogance. Gentleness, not strident aggressiveness. It is the same word in verse 4 used to define “the incorruptible beauty” of a godly woman-- “a gentle and quiet spirit.” It is a humble and gentle attitude that, for a woman, expresses itself in a patient submissiveness. It is an attitude that does not demand its own rights or pursue its own way. Such is the quality of a good apologist, one well prepared to give an answer for the hope that is within him.

And he must do it with fear. Godly reverence. Fear of the Lord. Clowney wisely remarks that, “The gentleness or humility that we are to show is far more than politeness of manner. It reflects the fear of the Lord in which the gospel is presented...Peter is teaching us that it is our fear of the Lord that enables us to bear witness in humility.”

So you are to be bold and courageous. But “humility of life is as important as boldness in word. This is the other result of glorifying Christ as Lord. We are unafraid to press his claims, but we do so as servants..”

Yet, “bold words [even with the attitude of reverent gentleness] will not honor the Lord if they are not supported by a consistent life.” And so Peter continues. We must,

C. Live with a clear conscience.

That is an absolutely essential aspect of giving a defense! It is an absolutely fundamental element of evangelism, and apologetics.

So how can you live with a clear conscience? Hebrews 13:18 gives us a good clue, “We are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably.”

Live honorably! We saw this when we studied,

1 Peter 2:11 “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

That is why elders are required to live lives “above reproach.” It doesn’t specify the impossible standard of sinless perfection, but it does identify the necessity of consistent faithfulness. If you are going to give an answer for the hope that is within you, if you are going to be a witness for Jesus Christ, then you cannot rely upon your words alone. Your life must bear witness to the genuine reality of your words!

You must keep a clear conscience, which means that when

you sin, you repent. It means that you retain the humility which acknowledges that you are still, indeed, wrestling with sin, but for consistency's sake, you must be winning the wrestling match! There must be evidences of sanctification, of sin actually being put to death.

Without hypocrisy. You cannot simply talk the talk. You must walk the walk! And that is, very much, what it means to "set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts."

And so, "when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed." Their foolish accusations will be shown for what they are. And your honor will be vindicated.

That's how you glorify Christ with your life!

There is no profit in suffering for doing evil. But, verse 17, "it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

And so Paul, when standing trial after his arrest on false charges of desecrating the temple, could say, "This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men."

I will end with two applications. One, intended to be penetrating and personal. The other, very encouraging.

First, consider your own life. Consider the relationships within your own life. And then consider this question, "Do you have a clear conscience with those around me?"

If there has been offense or conflict, have you done everything

within your power to live at peace? Is there anything that others have seen in you that would give them just cause cause to say to you, "How can you tell about your religious beliefs when you are doing that in your life?"

Beloved, pursue such a consistency and faithfulness of life, by the work of God's grace in you, that those who accuse you of wrong will be shamed by the actual virtue of your own life!

And secondly, for your encouragement, you who dreadfully fear any opportunity to have to give an answer for the hope that is within you, you who perhaps fear an evangelistic opportunity more than anything, let others see your life. Let others see Jesus in you. Let your life be your witness! Let your good conduct provoke the question. And when called to give an answer, simply say that God is at work in you.

And if, despite that good conduct, you must suffer for doing good, then you are blessed, for to this you were called.