



RESIDENT ALIENS | WEEK FIVE SERMON NOTES

Week Five: Grace Means Suffering

1 Peter 3:8 *Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. 10 For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. 11 They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

These are the marks of a follower of Christ in the face of a world that does not agree with you. Peter’s list has a large amount of intended overlap and interconnectedness. This list is very much a reiteration of the same kind of idea with many different expressions of that idea.

1. **Christian Unity** - As we have already discussed, one of the crucial elements of restoration is the renewed bond with other people. We were made to live, work, play, and journey through this life together. Jesus restored the hope of unity by conquering the sin that had long since divided us. Remember, Peter had heard Jesus’ prayer in the garden just before Christ was betrayed. He had heard Jesus plead with His Father that we would be one. Peter had also seen the culmination of that oneness when the Holy Spirit drove people together at Pentecost and the church was born. The very fact that the people of Asia Minor had heard the name of Jesus was in part due to the unity of

those who had shared the gospel. The people of God are a growing family and the charge here is for that family to grow in unity and not just in number.

2. **Sympathy** - Sympathy is the ability to see someone else's situation and a willingness to encounter it. We are called to 'rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep'. The New Testament is clear that we are not a family that minds its own business. We are invested in one another at a deep level.
3. **Love one another** - the exact translation is brotherly love. Again, this is a reiteration to be intentionally invested in one another. And here we start to build a little bit more realistic view of how this family works. Brothers fight sometimes. Brothers disagree sometimes. I have two kids, a boy and a girl. Some of our closest friends have 4 boys. My son is always taken aback by their fights. These boys go at it... but what really took him for a loop is when someone from the outside picked on one of the brothers. It was like brothers assembling to protect the brother being attacked. Peter is painting a very accurate and very important picture of this family. We are not always going to agree... we may argue... but we are committed to one another no matter what.
4. **Compassion** - Compassion is a willingness to let your heartbreak for what breaks God. This is simply a pledge that you will not become numb. We can't become numb towards injustice... hunger... abuse. As a society, we encounter so much brokenness that we can easily become used to brokenness. Compassion is the charge to never grow comfortable with the brokenness of this world.
5. **Humility** - I think the priest that advises Daniel Ruttiger in the film Rudy said it best... "I know two things for certain: there is a God and I am not Him." Humility is what holds this entire calling together. The ability to relinquish the worship of self, focus on worship on Christ, and allow that to drive us toward one another.

These marks work together to form one of the most counter-culture pillars of the people of Jesus and that is our calling and grace-fueled ability to forgive. The rest of the world, throughout time, has lived by the axiom that evil gets repaid with evil. This is a pervasive belief that has spread like wildfire since the fall. Civilizations are built on it. Lives are shaped by it. And Jesus has called us

to the exact opposite of it. Our mission is to surprise a restless, frustrated world that tends to rage against us with the same level of grace that we have been shown by our savior.

To close this thought Peter quotes Psalm 34. A powerful Psalm that reminds us that we have seen the light of Jesus... we need to respond to it and move towards it. Peter is challenging these Gentile believers to remember the hope they responded to... remember the example of grace they were shown. Grace isn't something you store away to pull out on a rainy day. Grace is something you respond to here and now and that response requires action. To summarize that action: be different... be like Jesus.

But let's remember...these are believers standing in the face of persecution... where being different is likely to welcome more problems than it may initially seem to solve.

1 Peter 3:13 *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." 15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.*

As he often does, Peter points back to the book of Isaiah to make his points. As he begins to focus more and more of his attention to the particular persecution the Christians of Asia Minor are facing he offers three powerful reminders:

1. **We are called to be eager to do good.** The translation of Peter's specific language here is being zealous to do good. Zealots were extreme patriots. People are willing to do absolutely anything and sacrifice absolutely anything on behalf of their native land. Peter is using the extreme dedication of the Zealots to illustrate our extreme call to being a light. Become obsessed with doing good and bringing good.
2. **Even in suffering, we are blessed.** First of all, if you are obsessed with doing good, very few people are going to have a problem with it. Yet, as we all know some people still will. In fact, every life experience some level of persecution. It's important here to note that there are two types of suffering and oppression common in the New Testament. First, the fall-driven suffering to which we are all victims. Aging, pain, sickness, death all fit into this category. This is universal suffering and we all fall

victim to it. The other type of suffering is that brought about by your commitment to Christ. This is what we typically refer to as persecution. In this one, you have a choice. Don't associate with Christ, and you will get to skip this brand of suffering. You'll still age but life will be a little bit cushier... however, you will have to deal with that whole eternal judgment thing. The point Peter is making is that temporary suffering is worth it in the long run. However, even in this temporary suffering God has woven seeds of hope. Even in their persecution believers are blessed. The word blessed is very hard to translate as we do not have a word that fully captures it. Happy is sometimes used but our definition of happy is conditional. Fortune is sometimes used but that steers our minds toward money. Favor is sometimes used but that too falls short. To be blessed is to be completely overwhelmed with joy. What Peter is professing... from experience, is that the believer, committed to Christ will face certain suffering in the form of persecution but even in that tension will be consumed by mind-blowing joy. How?

3. **Our joy is anchored in Christ and Christ is bigger.** So in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.

1 Peter 3:15b *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

Essentially what Peter is saying here is to allow your life to be a sermon. Let your life proclaim hope and be prepared to illuminate that hope with gentleness and respect, all the while maintaining a clear conscience by focusing on that good we discussed earlier. So what is happening here is Peter is beginning to shift the perspective of their persecution. He's beginning to turn this persecution from being a great trial and presenting it in a way that it's a great opportunity to proclaim the hope that is for everyone... even for their persecutors.

Now, we're going to dive into one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament and I'm just going to tell you upfront we're not going to do it justice.

1 Peter 3:17 *For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 19 After being made alive, he went and made a proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— 20 to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to him.*

Alright, there is a lot to deal with here. First of all, Peter locks the reader's focus on the reality that all persecution has the means to unite you with Jesus. As suffering followers, we must be reminded that we have a suffering savior who took on our pain, shame, and sin to the fullest extent.

Secondly, there's this bit about Jesus making a proclamation to the imprisoned spirits. This is where it gets tricky. Some translations state that Jesus "descended into hell" to do this proclaiming, however, the correct translation would be that Jesus descended into Hades. Hades and hell are two different concepts in scripture. Scripture teaches that hell is the location or realm of eternal punishment. Hades, on the other hand, is an Old Testament idea and speaks of the Jewish belief in the land of shadows. You have to remember the Old Testament is pre-savior and therefore pre-judgment and so the idea was that there was this vast, barren, gray space where the dead would go and just kind of wait. This is very much where the catholic doctrine of purgatory came from. The difference being that purgatory is a realm in which you and your loved ones still on earth can earn your way into heaven. That's not what Peter is talking about. What he is suggesting is that Jesus went to Hades, post-cross, and preached to imprisoned spirits and then he gives the example of those who were disobedient in the time of Noah. Now, scholars debate exactly what this means. Some hold that this did not happen post cross and instead is a reference to the fact that Jesus has always been a part of the trinity and was making his appeal to man, through man way back in the time of Noah. In my opinion, that's a weak argument. Most scholars believe in the more literal translation here. After the cross and before the resurrection Jesus quite

literally went to this land of shadows and preached the gospel to everyone there. This would bring light to the common question: what happened to people who died before Jesus? Well, he went and preached to them, and they too had the opportunity to be saved. Ultimately there is only one way to be sure of this: ask Jesus when you get there. However, if we hold to this belief that Jesus preached to the souls in Hades after the cross it does reveal a new depth to grace. If this is true, and I personally believe it is, there is absolutely no depth to which grace can't reach. This adds a whole new dimension to Paul's claim that neither life, nor *death*, nor anything else can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus.

Finally, Peter uses this as an opportunity to cast a vision for baptism. He reminds us that it is not to physically clean the body but to "pledge a good conscience to God." I love the way he phrases that because it reminds me that baptism, though it is a command, is not a magic trick. The physical act of getting wet does not save you, the spiritual act of submission, obedience, and dedication to the way of Jesus does. Baptism is a physical expression of a spiritual reality. That we have joined Jesus in death to sin and risen with Him in victory and life.

1 Peter 4:1 *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. 2 As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry. 4 They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. 5 But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body but live according to God in regard to the spirit.*

Press on. Peter is urging these believers to move forward and not to move backward. Move deeper into the presence of Christ even if the world around you is doing the exact opposite. Leave your old life behind and continue to grow in the new reality delivered to you by the grace and mercy of Jesus.

1 Peter 4:7 *The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. 8 Above all, love each other deeply*

because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Be the church. The church is not a building or a place, it's a people and those people are a family. This family has been redeemed and is not called to live out that restoration. So do that. Stay focused on the mission. Love each other. Be hospitable. Share. Use your gifts for the common good. When you speak, make it count. Serve diligently, pour yourself out the way Jesus poured himself out. You do this and God will be glorified. you do this, even in the face of persecution and you do justice to your calling. You'll make God famous, even amongst those who persecute you.

1 Peter 4:12 *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.*

This is very much a summary passage for Peter. Tying everything back together he says, for this, you have been called: suffer this life well. Don't be shocked that the road ahead of you is difficult but don't be discouraged either. When you suffer, you are participating with Jesus and Jesus never loses. Jesus wins. Keep your conduct above reproach. Continue to do good.