

1Peter 3:13-17

## The Witness of Suffering Unjustly

Let's set the context. Verse 13 immediately follows the section we looked at last week, in which our calling as foreigners, living on temporary assignment here in this world, is to return blessing, to those who are evil toward us, to pay back prayer for the forgiveness and salvation of those who persecute us, and to likewise bless those who revile us with slander, insults, mocking, seeking to destroy our reputation with lies.

Then verses 10-12, which are the backdrop for today's text, are a quote from Psalm 34:12-16. Several times in this letter Peter quotes from, or alludes to, Psalm 34, which was written by David when he was forced leave his wife and home, and flee for his life from jealous King Saul who was trying to kill him, though David had done no wrong, but had faithfully served his king.

David initially fled to the Philistines, but they recognized him as the champion warrior of the Israelites, their enemy, and turned him in to the Philistine king.

To save his neck David pretended to be insane before the king and was thrown out of his presence, and fled into the wilderness and hid in a cave.

All alone, and a fugitive hiding in a cave, unjustly separated from those he loved, David cried out to the Lord the words that are recorded in **Psalm 142**,

*"I cry out to the LORD with my voice; With my voice to the LORD I make my supplication. <sup>2</sup> I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble... <sup>6</sup> Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low; Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I. <sup>7</sup> Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name; The righteous shall surround me, for You shall deal bountifully with me."*

It is believed that in response to that cry of David, the Lord filled David's heart with the words of Psalm 34.

As we read the opening lines of Psalm 34, keep in mind that these are the words the Lord gave David at the very beginning of his time of persecution—this was the beginning of what would be several years of fleeing from Saul and forced living in hiding, often underground in caves.

**Psalm 34:1-10**, Look at the description of the Psalm: *"A Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed."*

David has just fled from a life of fame and popularity, from living luxuriously as the son-in-law of the king, to now living alone in a cave. He has lost everything because of unjust persecution. And this is the song that he writes to the Lord.

His circumstances had not changed, but his focus had changed.

<sup>1</sup> *I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.* <sup>2</sup> *My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear of it and be glad.* <sup>3</sup> *Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together.* <sup>4</sup> *I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.*

[Note again, God hasn't delivered him from his circumstances, but has given David a right focus—that change of focus removed the fears.]

<sup>5</sup> *They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed.* <sup>6</sup> *This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.* <sup>7</sup> *The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, [This is the change of focus—to fear God not man], and delivers them.* <sup>8</sup> *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!*

<sup>9</sup> *Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want [no lack, no unmet need] to those who fear Him.* <sup>10</sup> *The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing."*

Now it is significant that this Psalm is quoted several times by Peter as he is being led by the Lord to write his letter to prepare churches that are just beginning to experience what will be many years of persecution at the hand of the wicked Roman Emperor, Nero—a psalm that God had given David at the beginning of his time of persecution.

***1Peter 3:13, "And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?"***

This question, asked by Peter, could be mis-interpreted to mean that, on the whole, Christians who do good, can rest confident that they will not suffer trials and hardship.

If that were the meaning of the text it would soon be proven wrong.

In just a few more years, as the Roman persecution against Christians became intense, if Peter asked this question, "*Who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?*" The resounding answer of the church would be, "Nero will harm you!"

Peter's teaching here is meant to prepare the church for coming persecution. This teaching is timely because there are so many signs all around that the church in Canada, and indeed the church around the world, is rapidly moving into a time of greatly increased persecution.

Peter is not encouraging Christians to suppose that their chances are better than average for escaping persecution. (*Clowney, p. 143*)

He is assuring believers that, under God's watchful eye and attentive ear (vs. 12), no evil can overcome them—you will suffer evil, but it will not harm you.

Verse 13, (*And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?*), is another way of saying what Paul said in **Romans 8:31**,

*"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

The answer is not that if God is for you, no one will ever oppose you, but that no weapon formed against you will succeed—God's good purposes for your benefit will always prevail.

And this is what David also meant in **Psalms 56:4**, *"In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?"*

What Peter is teaching here in these verses is at the heart of Jesus' strange sounding words in Luke 21.

**Luke 21:16-18**, *"You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. <sup>17</sup> And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. <sup>18</sup> But not a hair of your head shall be lost."*

There is nothing they can do to reduce you, to cheapen you, to diminish your value—even if they kill you, they will have taken nothing away from you, but as verse 14 will reveal, all the evil they may direct toward you actually enhances your situation.

The next verse in our text, 1Peter 3:14, is not an exception clause to verse 13. Verse 14 gives the sense and the meaning of verse 13.

**1Peter 3:14**, *"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."*

As pilgrims and foreigners living on assignment in this foreign world that is not our home, we have been equipped by our Master with a supernatural protection.

It does not deliver us from suffering or feeling pain, but it protects us from being harmed by those things we suffer, and more than that, it causes the suffering we feel to produce blessing.

**Genesis 50:20**, That which the enemy means for evil, to harm me, God means it for good

**Romans 8:28**, *"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."*

**What has Peter taught is God's purpose that we are called to?**

**1Peter 2:20-21**, “*But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. <sup>21</sup> For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps*”.

Jesus prayed that the Father would protect His followers from the evil one, but He did not pray that we would be kept from experiencing the hatred of the world.

In fact, Jesus promised that we would be hated by the world because of our relationship with Christ.

**John 17:14-15**, “*...the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>15</sup> I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.*

**John 16:33**, “*In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*”

**1Peter 3:14**, says, “*...if you suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed.*”

We need to learn that suffering is not the opposite of blessing. Suffering for the sake of Christ is blessing.

**Matthew 5:10-12**, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”

These words of Jesus are more than a promise, they are pronouncing a blessing that cannot be prevented from happening.

By His spoken word Jesus has ensured that all suffering for righteousness sake produces blessing for the child of God, both here while we are on assignment, and in even greater measure suffering here generates reward for us in heaven.

**2Corinthians 4:16-18**, “*Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, <sup>18</sup> while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*”

**2Corinthians 12:9-10**, “*And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*”

God is using Peter to prepare the church, not simply to endure persecution, but to find in persecution an opportunity for great blessing and great witness.

***1Peter 3:14b, “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”***

How do we escape that fear?

I confess that there are days fear creeps into my heart when I think about the trouble that is coming upon our land.

As I watch our own government each month coming more inescapably under the dominance of a global totalitarian control, and I think about the implications that will have on the church, it is easy to become afraid.

But I have taken great encouragement from God’s word that comes to us through Peter.

How do we escape that fear of suffering? How do we escape the fear of persecution and all that could involve? How do we escape that fear of being denied employment, or basic services or securities, or the fear of being rejected by others, because we stand on the word of God?

God gave Peter the answer.

***1Peter 3:14b-15a, “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”<sup>15</sup> But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts...***

The boldness to overcome fear comes about through a fundamental exchange. Christians must exchange the fear of men for the fear of the Lord.

Do not be afraid of the threats of people, but instead sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.

Back in 1Peter 1:15-16 we studied what it means to sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.

To sanctify the Lord God in your hearts is when you recognize that God alone is everything that you need and when you look to and trust exclusively in Him alone to meet every need that you have.

God is your provider and you are to single Him out exclusively as the only one you will trust to provide for your needs. He may deliver the things you need by human messengers, but the provision comes from Him alone.

God alone knows the way that is best for you, and you trust Him alone to lead you, and you follow His voice only.

Persecution and trials in life is God allowing us to discover that all other sources that we have trusted in can’t satisfy. They will all let us down, because there is only one God and only God is holy—only God is totally devoted to us and will never fail us.

And persecution and trials in life are also God's way of demonstrating to a watching world that though they deprive us of everything they believe to be essential for quality of life, we can still rejoice and be at peace with Christ alone as our source of life—having Him, there is nothing else that we need.

They can take away everything else but as long as we have Christ we have abundant life, and there is nothing they can do to take Him away from us.

Our devotion to Him is not to provide Him with anything, but to trust in Him alone for everything.

Verse 15 implies that this total dependence upon the Lord for everything is at the heart of our evangelistic witness.

***1Peter 3:14b-15, “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”<sup>15</sup> 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, with meekness and fear...***

Peter could speak from experience. Before, when he thought he had so much to offer to Jesus, and boasted that though all others might desert the Lord, he, Peter never would. He would fight to the death to protect Jesus.

But on the night when Jesus was betrayed, waiting in the courtyard of the high priest's house while Jesus was being put on trial, Peter had failed miserably, denying three times, even to a servant girl, that he even knew Jesus.

Contrast Peter, just a few months later, filled with the Spirit. Now, he is the one on trial, before the same high court that had sentenced Jesus to death.

He who had shrunk in fear from a servant girl, now confronts the high court accusing them of crucifying Jesus, proclaims the gospel to the court, and refuses their order to be silent about Jesus, (Acts 4:9-20)

Look at 1Peter 3:14b, the “before” condition, the condition we need to get out of: “...*afraid of their threats*” and “*troubled.*”

Then look at the “after” condition, where we should be, in verse 15b: “*always ready to give a defense* [implying you are facing accusers; you are being challenged; you are on the hot seat] *to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you* [meaning, you are proclaiming to them the gospel—the explanation of why you aren't devastated by the things you have suffered that would devastate them].”

What is the bridge that gets us from the crippling place of fear, to the bold place of always being ready to use that intimidating circumstance as an opportunity for gospel witness?

**Verve 15a**, “...sanctify the Lord God in your hearts”—fear God more than man, desire God’s favor more than man’s empty praise; revere God’s honor more than your own safety, depend upon God only for all that you need, be wholly yielded and set apart for God to use you.

Peter had lost the fear of man by no longer putting any confidence in what he could do for Christ, but by wholly depending upon the Lord to supply everything that he needed in any and every situation.

When our trust is in our abilities, or in natural resources, those things are very limited, prone to failure and easily destroyed.

But when our total dependence is on the Lord, He cannot fail.

But how did Peter get into that place of total dependance upon the Lord? How can we get into that place of total dependance upon the Lord?

God does it, but it involves us giving up on what we are trusting in.

Acts 4:13, tells us that, when the Jewish high court officials saw the boldness of Peter, they attributed it to the fact that he had been with Jesus.

But Peter had been with Jesus for three years before he, in fear, denied three times even knowing Jesus.

**Acts 4:8** clearly identifies what the change was attributed to, “*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit...*” gave a defense for the hope that was in him.

It wasn’t Peter filled with his talent and abilities. It wasn’t Peter equipped with knowledge he learned from Jesus.

It was Peter, filled with—governed by—dependent upon, the Holy Spirit...

This is what Jesus had promised in **Luke 12:11-12**, Jesus had said a very similar thing. “*Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry [don’t be fearful thinking] about how or what you should answer, or what you should say.<sup>12</sup> For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.*”

In other words, God will do it—trust in Him.

Isn’t this pattern that we see in 1Peter 3:14-15 the same pattern Jesus spoke of in Acts 1:8?

**Acts 1:8**, “*But you shall receive power [including power over fear] when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me [you shall give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you] ...*”

***1Peter 3:15b***, “...*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 is with a humble attitude—putting no confidence in yourself, but total dependence upon the Lord, and giving no credit to yourself.

With meekness and fear, meaning with fear of God instead of fear of man.

***1Peter 3:16***, “...*having a good conscience* [meaning you are walking the talk—your life is consistent with your testimony], ***that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.***”

That little phrase, “in Christ” is key to interpreting this verse. It refers to one whose righteous life is the fruit of abiding in Christ—it is Christ’s life being expressed through you as you totally depend on Him for everything.

Our witness, to be effective needs to be words spoken in the power of the Holy Spirit, and also backed up by the outward evidence of a life that is lived by the power of the Holy Spirit—a life yielded to God’s control.

***1Peter 3:17***, “*For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*”

This essentially summarizes this section by repeating what Peter had already said back in ***1Peter 2:20-21***, “*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.* <sup>21</sup> *For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps*”.

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