

Letters From A Fisherman
Week 14
1 Peter 3:13-17
“Suffering (Part 1)”

Introduction

After they called in the apostles and had them flogged, they ordered them not to speak in the Name of Jesus and released them. Then they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of The Name. **Acts 5:40-41**

Simon Peter knew a thing or two about suffering. By the time he had written his two epistles to the persecuted church, he had been imprisoned twice and flogged for his preaching. And shortly after writing these letters he was crucified. Church tradition says that he was crucified upside down, for he felt unworthy to die in the same manner as His LORD. So if anyone was qualified to instruct Believers on the proper way to suffer for the sake of Christ, it was Peter. And in his first epistle to the church that was being mercilessly hunted down in Nero's Rome, he does exactly that.

Not many preachers these days like to talk about submission, sacrifice, and suffering for the sake of the cross, but these are crucial elements to the faith which we have been chosen to partake. Simply put, if you are to become an ardent follower of Christ, many in this wicked world aren't going to like you very much. In fact, you will be despised by some. I once heard a preacher say, *“If you are not meeting the devil head on in your walk with The LORD, it's because you are walking in the same direction as he.”* Sobering thought, is it not?

Now, this doesn't mean that everyone who follows Christ will be subject to intense suffering. However, many Believers will. This world has persecuted Christians from the fledgling days of the faith up until now. Around the world today, many are being martyred every day simply because they have professed their belief in Christ. And if current trends are allowed to continue, the violent persecution of Christians will soon be coming to America. No one seems to care if you follow Christ in secret, but when you become vocal about your convictions and take a stand for truth, you will know exactly what I mean.

So, if persecution is inevitable, just how do we handle it when it comes our way? We have already studied in Simon Peter's discussion of submission, that when we are presented with ugliness, then we are to respond in beauty (**1 Peter 2:12**). That same concept applies to suffering. When our LORD was nailed to the cross He prayed, **“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”** (**Luke 23:34**). It helps to understand that those who despise the people of God, do so because they are blinded to the truth. And therefore, it is vital for us to display godly character in the face of such hatred. For if not, then how will they ever see Christ *in us*?

We must always remember that in everything we say and do, the world is watching. And many of those “observers” are in most grave danger for their eternity. Those are the stakes. So when we are tempted to react in a way that defends ourselves, as our flesh is wont to do, then we run the risk of driving others away from the very grace and mercy that they so desperately need. I have been treated pretty badly by quite a few folks over the years, but I can honestly say that I do not want any of them to end up in hell. So I must control my tongue and my actions and rely on God's Spirit to enable me to return beauty for ugliness. And trust me, that is not always easy. This is why Christ has commanded us:

...If anyone wants to follow after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it. For what will it benefit someone if he gains the whole world yet loses his life? Or what will anyone give in exchange for his life?

Matthew 16:24-26

This Christian life here on earth is difficult. But it is worth every trial that we must face. So, as we study together, Simon Peter's own words in regards to suffering for the cause of Christ, let us remember that we must always be pleasing to The God Who has called us to Himself. We are His ambassadors to this lost and dying world. And how we conduct ourselves matters greatly. For you may very well be the only *Bible* some people will ever read (metaphorically speaking). So, let us look today at the suffering servant of Christ. We are called to be *Warriors for Good, Worshipers of God, and Witnesses to The Godless*. Please allow me to explain.

Warriors For Good (vs. 13)

Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good?

1 Peter 3:13

Peter starts out by reminding the scattered Believers that if they are champions for good, then fewer people will oppose them. The word he used translated “*devoted*” in the CSB is “*zelotes*” in the Greek, and it is the basis for which we derive the English word “*zealous*”. In short, the imperative is for Believers to become zealous for doing good. The thought being that those who go about doing good will be far less likely to be despised for it. This does not promise that we will not be persecuted, but it does suggest that far less people will strive against us, if we live our lives as a blessing to others.

I have met (and I'm sure that you have as well) many so-called Believers who are combative and obnoxious in regards to their faith. Peter himself will address this topic in later verses, but suffice to say, we are not called to be harsh or even judgmental, but rather, we are to go about our daily lives in such a way as to attract others to our faith, and not repel them. Much as the submissive wife is to win her lost husband over by her kindly ways (**vs. 3:1-2**), we are to do likewise.

Peter knew all too well of that which he spoke. For he and John had once been persecuted by the religious leaders in Jerusalem for their healing of a lame man who sat and begged at the gates of the temple (**Acts 3**). They were arrested, jailed, and ultimately beaten for this so-called “*crime*”, but in the end, they were released, for it proved to be difficult for the religious officials to prosecute them for doing such a good deed in plain sight of the people. For all their efforts to silence Peter and John, all they had really managed to do was cause others to be drawn to their message! Good always wins in the end.

We too, as Believers, need to be “*zealous warriors*” in doing good. For in spite of all who despise the message of the gospel, it is hard to criticize people who are continually reaching out to the less fortunate. Oh, a few hard cases will inevitably try, but they end up being in the minority, when people see the good we do for those around us. And believe me, when the critics see that they are vastly outnumbered, they will usually tuck tail and run for cover. Again, its hard to condemn someone whose life is dedicated to the service of others.

When Peter wrote these words, he knew full well that intense persecution of the church was on the horizon. For in truth, it had already begun. But nonetheless, he encouraged the church to return beauty for the ugliness they would receive, for in so doing, they would prove themselves as followers of Christ. We too are under this very same obligation. For it is virtually impossible to observe a fist-fight and determine which of the fighters is more “*spiritual*”. In the end, it is good that will triumph, whether it be in this life, or the life that is to come. And this we may count on, for:

We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28

Worshippers of God (vs. 14-15a)

But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear them or be intimidated (Is. 8:12), but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy...

1 Peter 3:14-15a

Once more, Peter goes to the *Old Testament* for a quote to bolster his message. This time he quoted from the eighth chapter of Isaiah. For those who would argue that Christ is somewhat lesser than God, note the fact that it is Christ The LORD who is substituted in this quotation for The LORD of Hosts, in Isaiah! For The Son is just as much God as The Father (***Philippians 2:5-6***).

Peter's message here is simple. Even if you are persecuted, do not fear those who would oppose and condemn you, but rather, fear God and regard *Him* as holy. For it is far better to worship God than to bow to the whims of the godless. Peter's choice of Scripture is quite profound, as well as, appropriate in this instance. For at the time of Isaiah's writing there was a great crisis in the land of Judah. As the Assyrians were becoming a powerful threat in the region, Israel and Syria had allied themselves together to stand against the threat of war. The kings of Israel and Syria approached Ahaz, the king of Judah, and offered him an alliance as well, but the king refused.

As the threat grew larger, Ahaz foolishly decided to ally himself with the Assyrians. Which was akin to inviting the fox into the henhouse to watch over your chickens. Ahaz had taken this foolish course out of fear. This is when Isaiah warned the reckless monarch to fear God, rather than man. We would be wise to heed the warning as well, when we are tempted to "go along to get along" rather than stand for truth. So many churches are dying today, because they have compromised themselves with the world in order to be spared from its disdain.

We live in a time where so many have been compromised, their divine directive to be holy among a perverse and wicked generation has been forsaken in an attempt to appease the unappeasable. Now, more than ever, real Believers need to stand firm in their convictions. Not being obnoxious, mind you, but unwavering in regards to truth. And if we are to be persecuted for this, then so be it. For it is far better to stand for Christ than to fall for everything else. When Peter and John were commanded by the Sanhedrin (Jewish supreme court) to stop preaching in The Name of Jesus, listen to their response:

If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a disabled man, by what means he was healed, let it be known to all of you and to all of the people of Israel, that by The Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead — by Him this man is standing here before you healthy. This Jesus is the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved. ***Acts 4:9-12***

And as a final declaration they said:

...Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard. ***Acts 4:19b-20***

Now *THAT* is boldness! When the time comes for you to choose between the acquiescence to godless men or to the worship of God, choose worship! Fear God, rather than what man can do to you. For you will be rewarded accordingly based upon which of these paths you choose. Peter used the word "*blessed*" to describe those who would suffer for the faith. The word actually means "*honored*". So the choice is ours to make. We must choose wisely, for it is an honor to be persecuted for the Name of Jesus.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you. ***Matthew 5:10-12***

Witnesses to The Godless (vs. 15b-17)

...ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. **1 Peter 3:15b-17**

I love this verse! Peter says that when we are being accused or mistreated, we should always be at the ready to give a defense of our faith. That is exactly why churches ought to be teaching The Word from their pulpits. Believers need to be equipped with the truth, so they can properly defend all they claim to believe. Just this week, I read a great quote from J. Vernon McGee on this very subject.

"This means you ought to know more than a little about The Bible. The tragedy of the hour is that there are so many folk who say they are Christians, but the sceptic is able to tie them up into fourteen different knots like a little kitty caught up in a ball of yarn — they cannot extricate themselves at all. Why? Because they do not know The Word of God." J. Vernon McGee

Commentary of 1 Peter published 1983

Not a whole lot that needs to be added to that!

We have been called to be witnesses to Christ's teachings (**Acts 1:8**). So would it not stand to reason that we should actually be knowledgeable of what we are supposed to have actually *witnessed*? Therefore, it is incumbent upon each of us as Believers to have a firm grasp as to what we actually believe. We must be able to defend our faith to those who would come against us. I firmly believe that it is the church's fault that America has become so polluted with sin.

A recent survey showed that nearly half of so-called Christians do not actually believe that Jesus was God in the flesh! An even larger percentage do not believe that *The Bible* is the inerrant Word of God. No wonder churches are embracing sin in an ever-increasing measure. In an effort to "reach" more followers, the church has watered down the truth, and by and large, has become a social club as opposed to its calling to be salt and light in a sinful world.

If no one opposes what we have to say, then rest assured, we are saying it wrong! For Satan hates the true gospel of Christ. So he will fire up his followers when it is proclaimed. And now more than ever, my friends, it needs to be proclaimed. So we must be *"ready to give a defense to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is in us."*

And when we give this defense of our faith, we must do it in all sincerity and gentleness, for no one ever got saved as a result of getting pummeled in an argument. Everything that we do must be in done in love. This is why, in order to be a warrior of truth, one must start by becoming a warrior to doing good. As the old adage goes; *"People do not care how much you know, until they know how much you care."*

And lastly, Peter reminds us to live in such a way that when accusations are brought against us, they must be false accusations. For our lives are to be lived in purity, so that our consciences are clean. For it is difficult to stand for truth, while knowing we have something to hide! Pagans may well criticize us for our faith, but let us never give them a stick with which to beat us. When Peter and John were arrested for healing a lame man, the religious leaders weren't really sure how to accuse them. For how can you possibly accuse someone who just performed a miracle of healing in public view?! These men were able to face their accusers with a clean heart, knowing that all they had done was in obedience to The LORD's commands. And *that* is a good place to be, when persecution comes your way!

So, let us become *warriors* for doing good, *worshippers* of Christ, refusing to bow to the whims of the unbelieving, and finally to be His *witnesses*, standing firm in defense of our great faith with a clean conscience. And we are guaranteed to be blessed for it in the end.

And let the people of God all say in one accord... **TRUTH!!!**