

Sunday Morning Message

November 8, 2020

1 Peter 3:13 – 22 – Having a Proper Perspective of Persecution by the Grace of God
Series – 1st and 2nd Peter - *Experiencing God's Grace In the Midst of Suffering*

Text – 1 Peter 3:13 - 22

Congregational Reading – 1 Peter 3:13 - 16

Introduction

We have been taking our time examining this first epistle of Peter, which was originally written to “strangers” in what was known in Bible days as “Asia,” but today is within the borders of present-day Turkey. These believers were called strangers because they were believers who knew that their home was in Heaven, and that they were only sojourning here on the earth for a short time. They were suffering intense persecution, and often were living “on the run” trying to escape from their civil and religious tormenters. This was the time of Emperor Nero, and under his reign Christians were being slaughtered by the thousands.

Peter’s letter was intended to comfort these afflicted saints of the Lord and encourage them to remain faithful, even as they were going through extraordinary trials and great affliction.

We, too, are going through difficult times. People are suffering, though our trials seem to pale in comparison to what we know happened to the Christians in the first century. It is, however, the times are becoming increasingly difficult for believers in our culture; and, unless a national revival is sent from heaven, things likely will only get worse.

Though this epistle specifically addresses the unique difficulties of these persecuted Christians within the Roman Empire in the first century, the Holy Spirit of God intended that the timeless principles contained within this portion of Scripture be applicable to believers today as we *Experience God's Grace in the Midst of Our Own Suffering*.

So far in these series of messages from 1 Peter, we have learned:

- We can trust in God’s grace in the midst of our suffering (1 Peter 1:1 – 5).
- Our faith can be strengthened through seasons of suffering (1 Peter 1:6 – 12).
- What we can do when we are going through periods of suffering (1 Peter 1:13 – 25).
- We are a purchased possession by the grace of God (1 Peter 2:1 – 12).
- We can follow in Christ’s steps by the grace of God (1 Peter 2:11 – 25).

- Maintaining Good Relationships by the Grace of God (1 Peter 3:1 – 12)

Transition (v. 13)

Verse thirteen is a transitional verse that brings us back into the overall discussion of suffering, which is the main theme throughout these letters.

"And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" (1 Peter 3:13)

Verse twelve reminded us that God is watching over and listening to the prayers of his children; and it also states that He is against those that want to hurt us. Now God states a general principle in verse: who will harm you, if you do right? There are two ways that we can apply the truth of this verse:

1. Generally speaking, people who do right have fewer problems. People who disregard God's words often suffer the consequences of their own actions. People who sin against others, create enemies, and enemies will often retaliate.
2. Nobody can harm you in any way unless God allows them to.

"And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Colossians 1:17)

Satan needed God's permission before he could afflict Job. God set boundaries on how far Satan could go.

David encouraged Solomon with this principle regarding Solomon fulfilling God's will in building the Temple:

"And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD." (1 Chronicles 28:20)

Paul said:

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

However, as we will see in the remainder of this chapter, God will often allow His children to go through trials and periods of suffering. Paul also guarantees that persecution will be the norm for the obedient Christian who is wholly yielded to the will of God:

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12)

I. A Permitted Persecution (vs. 14 – 17)

"But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;" (1 Peter 3:14)

The first thing that I would like to point out from verse fourteen is that the context here specifically speaks of suffering for righteousness sake. This has to do with persecution. It does not necessarily apply to all types of suffering. People suffer for a variety of reasons: health problems, financial worries, family trials. Some of these problems are self-inflicted; others may have been caused by somebody else. However, the context here speaks of the type of suffering you may have to endure at the hands of others because of what you are doing for the Lord.

These first century believers were suffering; they were being slaughtered by the thousands under the murderous reign of Nero.

The verb "suffer" in verse fourteen is in the Optative Mood, which indicates a doubtful condition. Peter is saying that most of the time, you will not have to go through suffering most of the time as a Christian; but you may have to at one point in your life. It is doubtful in the sense that it may happen eventually, but it not necessarily today.

Illustrate – We all have insurance on our cars, but it is doubtful that any of us will be in an accident today. However, it very well may happen someday.

However, when and if the time comes that you are called upon to suffer, God gives us three imperatives:

1. **Be happy** – this is the same word translated "blessed" in the Beatitudes:

"10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." (Matthew 5:10-11)

James said:

"2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." (James 1:2-3)

After Peter and John were beaten by the religious leadership at the Temple:

"41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." (Acts 5:41)

2. **Don't be afraid (terrified or startled) of their terror.**
3. **Don't be troubled** – agitated or stressed

"28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28)

Before we leave verse fourteen, let's consider for a moment why God allows His children to suffer at all. Why wouldn't He stop it?

1. He allowed Jesus to suffer and die for the ultimate joy of redeeming you and I so that we could be with Him in Heaven.

*"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; **who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.**" (Hebrews 12:2)*

2. Sometimes, He allows us to suffer because it will teach us something. The Bible calls it chastening:

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." (Hebrews 12:6)

3. Sometimes, it is because it brings Him glory. (as was the case with Job.)

Persecution will also present unique opportunities for us to defend our faith.

A. Providing an Opportunity to Speak Boldly (v. 15)

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope (expectation) that is in you with meekness and fear:" (1 Peter 3:15)

Peter is once again referencing an Old Testament story from the Book of Isaiah here and uses it to illustrate his argument:

"12 Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. 13 Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. 14 And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone

of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." (Isaiah 8:12-14)

The context of the passage from Isaiah was when Judah was being threatened by the northern kingdom and Syria. King Ahaz was considering an alliance with Assyria in order to be strong enough to defend Judah. God warned him to trust in Him and not in any foreign alliance.

The word, sanctify, means to separate, or to make hallow. The idea here is that we are to make our hearts the sanctuary for the Lord Jesus, and He is to be on that throne. MacArthur said: "The heart is the sanctuary in which He prefers to be worshiped."¹ His will and His glory are more important than any comfort we may desire.

John Phillips added:

"When called upon to suffer, we are to face it, not only with the Lord enthroned in our hearts but also *with the Word enthroned in our minds.*"²

If the Lord is on the throne, then you will be ready or prepared at all times to give an answer (ἀπολογία – *apologia* - a defense; a reasoned argument). This Greek word is where we get the term Apologetics.

We need to learn to defend our faith in Christ to the lost world around us. Can you present a reasonable and logical argument for the doctrine of salvation, and for the other foundational truths of Christianity. And, we need to present those arguments with meekness (or gentleness) - without being argumentative.

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:" (Ephesians 4:15)

Chuck Swindoll said this about having a testimony that causes people to be interested in our answers:

Every believer is called to be an apologist. We are to be always ready to make a defense for the hope we have in Christ. Yet presupposing this explanation, Peter describes a particular kind of consistent lifestyle of virtue that draws the attention of unbelievers. So,

¹ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1945.

² John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of Peter: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), 1 Pe 3:15.

Apologetics 101 begins not with having the right answers to others' skeptical challenges, but with having the right lifestyle to raise the right questions!³

Which brings us to verses 16 and 17:

B. Providing an Opportunity to Shine Brightly (vs. 16 – 17)

"Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you (καταλαλῶσιν - incriminate; speak against), as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse (ἐπηρέαζοντες – to insult or treat abusively; to threaten) your good conversation (ἐπηρέαζοντες – conduct; manner of life) in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing." (1 Peter 3:16-17)

The conscience is that part of a man's soul that makes determinations between what is morally good or right, and what is morally evil. Peter states here that these suffering believers in the first century could have a clear conscience, knowing that the persecution they were experiencing was due to the fact that they were doing well; they were standing true to the Lord in their faith.

Wiersbe states this regarding the conscience:

The conscience is that internal judge that witnesses to us, that enables us to "know with," either approving our actions or accusing (see Rom. 2:14–15). Conscience may be compared to a window that lets in the light of God's truth. If we persist in disobeying, the window gets dirtier and dirtier, until the light cannot enter. This leads to a "defiled conscience" (Titus 1:15). A "seared conscience" is one that has been so sinned against that it no longer is sensitive to what is right and wrong (1 Tim. 4:2). It is even possible for the conscience to be so poisoned that it approves things that are bad and accuses when the person does good! This the Bible calls "an evil conscience" (Heb. 10:22). A criminal feels guilty if he "squeals" on his friends, but happy if he succeeds in his crime!⁴

Peter tells these first-century believers, and us, that we should have a "good conscience." He is basically saying that if you are going to be persecuted, let it not be because you are actually doing something wrong. He developed this thought back in chapter two:

³ Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter*, Swindoll's New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 200.

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 414.

"11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." (1 Peter 2:11-12)

Next – Peter reminds us that Jesus is our example.

II. A Previous Pattern (v. 18)

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened (ζωοποιηθεῖς – to produce alive; to give life to) by the Spirit:" (1 Peter 3:18)

Christ also suffered, not for anything that he did. He was falsely accused and condemned to death, which ultimately provided the means for our redemption.

Some thoughts from this verse:

- If Jesus suffered for us, why shouldn't we be willing to suffer for Him.
- Jesus is no longer suffering. His suffering is over. Whatever suffering a believer will be forced to endure here on earth is also temporary. It may even end while here on the earth, but it will certainly end when we are with Christ in Heaven.
- Notice that we were the "unjust" from verse 18; it was our sins that Jesus suffered for. Not that we are "just," or justified in Christ, let us be willing to suffer a little for the benefit of the unjust – the lost world – who is watching us.

Notice also that Jesus "was quickened," which means that He was brought back to life by the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that before we were saved that we were dead spiritually:

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;" (Ephesians 2:1)

"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;" (Colossians 2:13)

God gave life to our dead spirits when He saved us, and someday through our own resurrection from the dead, He will give our bodies new life:

"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." (Romans 8:11)

Keeping in mind, the overall context of this passage and really the entire letter is suffering, let us now consider one of the most problematic and misinterpreted passages in the entire Scripture:

III. A Problem Passage (vs. 19 – 22)

"19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; 20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. 21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: 22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." (1 Peter 3:19-22)

Let's break these four verses down:

"By which also" – the antecedent is the Holy Spirit. In the preceding verse, the discussion was about Jesus being put to death, and then quickened by the Spirit.

"he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;" – There is a lot that we do not yet know about this verse. More will become clear as we read. What we do know is that it is Jesus who is speaking, and He is speaking "by the Holy Spirit." We also know that the word preached (ἐκήρυξεν – to herald or proclaim) used here is not the same word as was used in 1 Peter 1:12 (εὐαγγελίζω – evangelize) used in reference to preaching the gospel. So, He was not preaching the gospel down there, but He was proclaiming something.

We don't yet know who these "spirits" are, or what the "prison" is referring to.

The word "spirits" (plural) in the Bible is used three ways:

- In reference to the part of man that communicate with God.
- Angels
- Mostly – fallen angels

Regarding the prison – I will refer you to the Apostles Creed, which has been the declaration of faith and doctrine for believers in one form or another for almost two millennia:

The Apostles Creed

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
The Creator of heaven and earth,
And in Jesus Christ,
His only Son, our Lord:*

*Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit,
Born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and was buried.*

He descended into hell.

The third day he arose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

*And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The holy church,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body,
And life everlasting.*

Amen

Notice the order of events listed in the Creed, from “Was crucified” to “ascended into Heaven.” Notice that, according to the creed, after He died, and before He resurrected, He descended into hell.

Why? – He did not suffer in Hell as some believe would have been necessary in order to completely pay for man’s sins. On the Cross, before He died, He said: “It is finished” (Τετέλεσται), meaning the sin debt was paid in full.

So why did He go down into Hell? Let’s read on in our text and look for more clues:

Verse 20 – “*Which (the spirits) sometime were disobedient,...*” - this eliminates the good angels. So, then are the “spirit” fallen angels, or “the spirits of men.” Let’s continue:

“...when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.”

This is strange – He brings Noah into the discussion. These “spirits” had something to do with Noah. (Briefly explain the story of Noah.) Peter also mentions Noah again in 2 Peter 2:4 – 5:

"4 For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; 5 And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;" (2 Peter 2:4-5)

Jude also mentions fallen angels who are bound in a prison:

"6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." (Jude 1:6)

By the way – both Jude and Peter’s reference to chained fallen angels from Noah’s day may be a direct reference to an account from Genesis 6:1 – 6, which immediately preceded God’s decision to destroy the earth with a flood.

It seems that these “spirit” were fallen angels. Why would Jesus preach to them. He was “proclaiming His victory over sin and death.”

But, He was also down there for another reason. He was delivering the Old Testament saints from Abraham’s bosom into Heaven. (See Luke 16:23 – 26)

"23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. 25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. 26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." (Luke 16:23-26)

Paul also alludes to this:

"8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. 9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)" (Ephesians 4:8-10)

Jesus went into Abraham’s Bosom to deliver the Old Testament saints into Heaven.

When Jesus died on the Cross, He told one of the thieves next to Him:

"43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)

At that time, Paradise was Abraham's Bosom, a place of comfort for Old Testament believers. But after the atonement was made for man's sins, Jesus brought all of those who were there into Heaven.

Paul would later refer to Paradise as being in the third Heaven. (see 2 Corinthians 12:2 – 4)

Let's go the next verse where it gets a little more confusing:

Verse 21 - *"The like figure (ἀντίτυπον – antitype – a resemblance; a picture – referring to the water from verse 20) whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:*

Water baptism does not save us from our sins; but it is a type or picture of salvation. Notice that Peter clarifies that with the parenthetical phrase. He emphasizes that baptism is necessary in order to have a good conscience toward God.

The idea here is that the water – the Flood - meant death to all of those in Noah's day. Baptism is also a picture of death. Baptism by immersion pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

"1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? 2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? 3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:1-4)

These Christians from the first century were making a bold statement by being baptized. They were completely identifying with Christ's death and burial, and they were also expressing their faith in a future resurrection.

Swindoll explained it this way:

How, then, does the water of the flood in Noah's day correspond to the way baptism "saves" believers in the New Testament? The waters of the flood were the

means of judging a sinful human race, allowing Noah and his family to escape from that wicked world to begin a new life after the floodwaters receded. In the same way, the water of baptism represents a break from the old, sinful lifestyle and a new beginning as a believer in Christ. In the Bible, water baptism provides a vivid picture of our response to the gospel and the salvation it brings. The water of baptism, like the floodwaters, portrays death, the penalty for sin. It is a magnificent object lesson—a sermon without words. The believer’s descent into the water represents death and burial with Christ. The believer’s ascent from the water illustrates the resurrection into a new kind of life (see Rom. 6:1–4).⁵

Notice verse 22: *“Who (Christ) is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.”*

All angels and authorities and powers are subject to Him. Jesus won. All those who belong to Jesus share in that victory. Jesus went into Hell and declared His triumph over these angels that followed Satan and rebelled against God.

(Note - see also Ephesians 6:12 – “principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.”)

Conclusion

Don’t lose sight of the main theme of this passage – the suffering of believers. The point of all of this is that believers will suffer at times because of their faith. In the time that we are living in, it is becoming increasingly unpopular to be a true believer in Christ. The world doesn’t mind if you just go to church now and then, or if you throw around God’s name once in a while; but if you truly believe and stand for the principles found in this Book, you will soon be a marked man, and the world will come after you with ferocity.

The people in Noah’s day hated him and mocked him; but Noah was right, he was vindicated, and all of those that hated him and rejected his message are now in Hell. This world will hate you also if you stand for Christ, but just as Noah was vindicated; just as Christ is vindicated, you will be also.

Stay faithful – don’t let this evil and godless world silence you. Speak boldly and shine brightly for the Lord.

⁵ Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on James and 1 & 2 Peter*, Swindoll’s New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 207–208.

