

This morning, 1 Peter 3, we'll be looking at verses 13-18. 1 Peter 3, verses 13-18. As you're turning there, let me remind us where we have most recently been in this epistle written by the Apostle Peter.

Peter has been showing us in the last several weeks how all of our social relationships are transformed by following Jesus Christ. So he has shown how the Christian's relationship to civil authorities is transformed by following Jesus Christ. He has shown how the Christian slave's relationship to his master is transformed by following Jesus Christ. He has shown how the relationship of a husband and a wife in marriage is transformed by following Jesus Christ. And last week, as he sort of finished off or rounded off that section dealing with these various social relationships, he showed that all of our relationships with one another transformed by following Jesus Christ.

This morning, starting in verse 13, there is something of a shift in this epistle. From this verse down through the rest of the book, he is going to help us think about how we should suffer. How should we suffer under persecution? How should we undergo trials and hardships in this life? Now, this theme has not been absent from the epistle up to this point. He's dealt with this, but he's going to more head on, more directly focus on this theme of how to undergo persecution and suffering in this life from chapter three, verse 13, really down through the rest of the book.

Well, with this in mind, let us pray and ask God to bless the reading and preaching of his word. Dear Heavenly Father, unless you send forth your spirit, the reading and preaching of your word is in vain. But if you should be pleased to send forth your spirit effectually to our souls today, to our hearts today, even if the words of the minister are lacking eloquence, even if, O Lord, the reading is not as well done as it could be, it really doesn't matter because the Spirit has come and He takes crooked sticks and He makes straight blows with them. He does the work. And we pray that He would come and do a work effectually to our souls today, that the saints would grow in love and in knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, that the lost would be saved and brought to him. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Hear now the word of God, 1 Peter 3, beginning in verse 13. Now, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

Well, this ends the reading of God's holy word. May he bless now the reading and now the proclamation of it. to our lives.

As we come to this passage this morning, we see three secrets from God to you. Three secrets from God. Through the Apostle Peter, writing by divine inspiration, God gives you sort of three secrets, if you will, three insights into different areas of your life. He gives you the secret to invincibility. Second, he gives you the secret to apologetics. And third, he gives you the secret to suffering well. So three secrets, the secret to invincibility, the secret to apologetics, and the secret to suffering well.

So first this morning, the secret to invincibility. You see this in verses 13 and 14. Look at verse 13 again, now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? He asks this rhetorical question, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for doing what is good? And that might at first glance seem to be a silly question. There are plenty of people who can harm you for doing good. In fact, oftentimes we learn in scripture that there are more people who will be ready to harm you when you are doing good than when you are doing evil. And oftentimes you will be harmed by others for the very reason that you are doing good.

So how can Peter ask this question, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? Didn't Christ do good and wasn't he harmed for it? You can think again of Acts 7. Wasn't Stephen doing good in Acts 7 when he preached that sermon? He was stoned, killed, martyred for doing good. So what does he mean when he says, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for doing what is good? What does he mean by this?

Let me give you an illustration. Some of you know Reverend Dennis. He plays for us sometimes in evening worship or maybe even sometimes in morning worship on the piano when Sherry's unavailable. Well, I was speaking with Reverend Dennis recently and he used this phrase. He said, you know, there is good trouble, good trouble, and there is bad trouble. There is good trouble and there is bad trouble.

And what you're reading about in verse 13 and 14 is what we might call good trouble. It's when you get in trouble because you're doing the right thing. When you get in trouble for doing the right thing, that's what we might call good trouble. And when you experience good trouble, you can't ultimately be harmed. Why can't you ultimately be harmed when you experience good trouble? Because you are experiencing difficulty for doing what God wants you to do.

That ultimately in your soul, in the very core of your being, you cannot be harmed when you're doing the right thing. When a martyr goes to the flames, He cannot be harmed if he's going to those flames for doing the right thing. When somebody loses their job because they won't make a shady business deal, they cannot be harmed ultimately because they're doing the right thing. Their soul is safe and secure. They're doing what God wants them to do.

When somebody mistreats you because you won't waver on the biblical definition of marriage, you cannot be harmed. Why? Because you're doing the right thing. You're holding humbly, Lord willing, and faithfully to the truth. When you do the right thing and you experience trouble, like Reverend Dennis said, that's good trouble. You're not really able to be harmed.

He uses this word zealous, though, to describe the good which you are longing to do. He says in verse 13, if you are zealous for what is good. The text doesn't just say that you should do good. Notice, it says you should be zealous for what is good. So what is zeal? What is zeal? We could say zeal is a passionate pursuit for something. You are enthusiastic about it in your soul. Now, some of us might by nature be a bit more reserved, so the way our enthusiasm shows itself may not be as externally obvious to another. But in your hearts, all of us should be zealous for what is good. For someone, that might be very obvious in a bubbly personality, and that's very okay. For

someone else, they might still look a bit more blank on their face. But are you zealous in your heart? Do you want to do what is good from the core of your being as a follower of Jesus Christ?

Everyone is to be zealous for doing what is good. You should have a passionate pursuit, but it needs to be for what is good. Zeal in and of itself is not a virtue. Having passionate pursuit of something is not inherently a virtue. The apostle Peter, before he was the apostle, or rather the apostle Paul, before he was the apostle Paul, when he was not an apostle yet, he was zealous. Galatians 1.15, I believe it is, refers to his zeal to persecute the church. He didn't lack zeal, what he lacked was right knowledge. He had plenty of passionate pursuit, but it was for evil, the persecution of the church. So zeal, passionate pursuit for something, is only good when the object which you are pursuing with that zeal is a good object. When you're pursuing the glory of God, your zeal is good. When you are pursuing evil, your zeal is bad.

Well, as you go about pursuing good in your life, you are invincible to ultimate harm, is the point of verse 13. And as it goes on to develop it, it continues into verse 14. Look what he says in verse 14. But even if you should suffer, verse 14, for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. These words, verse 14, are almost identical to the ones of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. The Lord Jesus Christ there in Matthew 5 said, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Now, in what sense does Peter state that you are blessed when others persecute you? How is it that when others are sinning against you and you are pursuing righteousness, even amidst their treating you wrongly, how and what sense does God bless you? And I actually believe that Peter answers the sense in which he is saying you are blessed when you are persecuted by looking at chapter four, verse 14. Look at chapter four, verse 14. Look what Peter says there. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed. Why? Because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

So in what sense does Peter mean that you are blessed when you suffer for righteousness' sake in chapter three, verse 14? In what sense does he mean you're blessed by God in the midst of that suffering? He means that there is a way, a special way, in which, in the midst of grueling suffering, God draws near to you. And in that sense, you are blessed. Because his presence is more intimately often known to you in the midst of your suffering. And that, indeed, is truly a blessing. Even though you might have the frowns of the world, you have the smiles of heaven, and so you are blessed in that suffering.

Now in life, this is just a truism if you will, you're willing to suffer if you believe you have a good reason to endure it. You are willing to endure pain if you think there's a good reason for you to endure pain. So for example, a bunch of athletes get on a football field and they beat each other up. They would never willingly subject themselves to that sort of pain unless they thought that there was a good reason to endure it. And the reason is they want to win the game. And so they subject themselves to a certain level of pain because they believe they have a good reason to endure the pain.

A patient at a hospital subjects themselves to a lot of pain underneath some surgery. They wouldn't ordinarily subject themselves to such pain, but they do it in that moment because they are certain that there is a good reason that they should endure that pain. They are convinced that it will ultimately be better for their health that they endure that pain, and so they do.

What Peter is telling you really in verses 14 and 15 is that you, Christian, have a good reason to endure pain when you're doing good. The reason is this, you're doing it for the glory of God. If you're living for the glory of God and you are suffering pain as a result, it's worth it because you're living for the glory of God. You have a good reason to endure that pain.

You know, Peter doesn't ask them to have their circumstances changed. He simply asks that they would endure suffering in the midst of their circumstances.

Questions for you to ask yourself this morning is, am I willing to endure pain? As a Christian, am I willing to undergo the loss of perhaps friendships because I'm willing to endure the pain that comes perhaps? at being faithful to my Savior. Maybe there will be friends who will not like me. Maybe I will be laughed at by others because I'm willing to endure the pain of following Christ. Maybe I will have to have a level of ease in life that isn't as, I might have to have a more difficult life. I might have to give up some level of ease in my life, some level of daily comfort in my life because I'm enduring some level of pain for the sake of seeking Jesus, for the sake of pursuing righteousness. And so my life's a bit harder than my neighbor's or than someone else over here or over there. Am I willing to endure pain in this life for following Christ? And to do it with a joyful attitude, knowing that it's worth it because I'm indeed living for the glory of God.

You should endure pain when you know that you have a good reason to do it. And as a follower of Jesus, you do have a good reason.

Well, secondly, the secret to apologetics in verse 15 and 16. Apologetics, if you're not familiar with the term, just simply refers to defending and commending the true faith. Defending Christianity and commending it to others. It's closely tied to witnessing for Christ. It's closely tied to what we talk about when we talk about evangelism. telling people about the Lord Jesus Christ. It's tied to these things. Apologetics is defending and commending the true faith.

But oftentimes we find apologetics very intimidating. We find witnessing for Christ to be intimidating. And Peter knows that as he's writing to these suffering Christians, these Christians who are undergoing persecution. He is giving them some insights, the secret, to apologetics. How are you going to defend and commend the faith well, persecuted church? And he essentially tells them to fear the Lord and do good. To fear the Lord and do good.

Look what he says at the end of verse 14 into verse 15. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy. Now in these words, he is alluding very clearly to Isaiah chapter eight. He's alluding to Isaiah chapter eight verses 11 through 13. And in those verses, the prophet Isaiah, writing by divine inspiration, contrasts fearing man with fearing the Lord. It's not unlike Isaiah 2.22, stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account are they?

And so, What Peter is pressing to his readers at this point, what he's pressing to you all this morning is this. Ask yourself the question in your apologetics, in your witnessing for Christ, whom am I going to fear most? Am I going to

fear man? or am I going to fear God? Because at the heart of it, that will free you up tremendously in your apologetics.

If your fear, if the one you are most desiring to honor is Christ and not man, how will that help you in your apologetics? Well, man will think that he is more reasonable than God. He will think he's more rational than God. And man will often think that you, the Christian believer, are kind of silly and perhaps even dumb. You're kind of backwards. You believe that old book. That's kind of silly of you. That book is outdated.

Man will think that he's more reasonable than God, but And that can be intimidating for you, making you want to close your mouth and not speak on behalf of Christ because you're scared of the opinions of these other people. But what do you think is more reasonable? To listen to what God says in his word or to listen to what man says? What is more rational? What is more reasonable? to listen to the God who knows all things and has told you what you're supposed to think in his Bible, his word, or to listen to what man thinks.

The truth is, not in arrogance and not in a boastful pride, but when you have those conversations with people, they're irrational, they're unreasonable, because they are placing themselves at the throne of what is truth. And the reality is God has spoken clearly in his word. And so as long as you stick to this book, you are the one who has the upper hand. Again, not in a prideful way, but you have the truth on your side. This is reasonable. Listening to God and his word is reasonable.

So you might not be able to answer all of this person's questions. They may have lots of questions that you don't know how to answer, and that's okay. They may have a PhD and you don't have a college degree. That's fine. You have God's word. And so you simply stick to that. You're fearful of God and saying anything that would be against him. And so you are operating in a very solid and reasonable and rational way. And it is actually they who are not doing that.

Additionally, Fearing the Lord means that you can have hope. Look what he goes on to say in verse 15. Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. So you actually get to have hope in the midst of your life because you believe that Jesus is Lord. You believe that he's sovereign over all things. You fear God. And since you have this hope, you can suffer differently than the one to whom you are trying to witness about Christ. And as they see that hope, it itself will be a defense for the truth that what you are saying is in fact true. They see the hope in you and they wonder, well, I might think that guy's backwards and from the Stone Ages, some sort of prehistoric creature, but I'll tell you what, their hope is certainly different than anything that I know. So maybe there's something to what they believe. And then he adds this part, yet do it with gentleness and respect at the end of verse 15. You know the goal of apologetics is not winning arguments. The goal of defending and committing to the faith is not winning arguments. It's winning souls to the Lord Jesus Christ. It's being an instrument in the hands of God that you would be used to, as an instrument, convict people of their sins and convince them of the righteousness of Christ, that they might confess their sins, repent of their sins, and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

Let me just say that winning arguments is frankly very easy. And maybe it's just me, but it's not hard. If I could say this, Lord willing, with humility, I've spoken with a lot of atheists, a lot of agnostics, handful of Mormons and some

Jehovah's Witness. Winning arguments is not the problem. It's being used to actually help people see that Christ Jesus is the only savior of sinners and they need to repent and trust in him alone or they will perish.

Verse 16 goes on, having a good conscience so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. So, in other words, in verse 16, when you continue to be mistreated by others, but you don't stop doing good, you don't stop living for the Lord, it's also a very powerful apologetic. So that's why, at the start of this second point, I said the secret to apologetics is to fear the Lord and do good. You know, it's not really about how smart you are. It's really not about how much you've studied.

Let me just give a brief example. I was reading this past week about, or listening to something this past week about a man who was in a prison in Romania during communist Romanian regimes, and this man who was a peasant was in prison because he was a Christian. So here he is, this peasant in prison. He's probably never read a single other book other than the Bible. He'd read the Bible, but he hadn't read any other books.

And there was this professor of science who was also in the prison cell. So you have a peasant and a professor of science. And the peasant made it his goal to win the professor to Christ. So the peasant begins to talk with the scientist. And the scientist asks him all these questions and the peasant doesn't know how to answer the questions. But what he tells the scientist is this, he says, I walk with Jesus and I talk with Jesus.

And the professor says, laughs at him, that's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. You walk with Jesus, you talk with Jesus, he's been dead for 2,000 years, what are you talking about? Then he says, all I can tell you is I walk with Jesus, I talk with Jesus, and I see Jesus. And the professor laughs, he says, you tell me you see Jesus. And he looks around at the other people in the prison cell and he laughs and he mocks the man. Do you see how ridiculous this man is? He says he sees Jesus.

He says, how does Jesus look at you? Does he look at you with indifference? Does he look at you with annoyance? Does he look at you with anger? Does he smile? And he said, how did you guess? He smiles. And he says, he smiles at you? And he said, oh, he smiles at me. And he said, well, What does that smile look like? And here this peasant was, unimaginably ugly, hadn't eaten in days, weeks, months, barely alive, beaten regularly, just an unbelievably dirty, ugly man. And he smiles the most gorgeous smile that anyone had ever seen. It was as if heaven itself was in this man's smile.

And the professor bowed his head and said, sir, you have seen Jesus. That was a peasant. There's no doubt that that professor could run circles around him in some sort of academy. But the goodness of that peasant and the clear hope that he had to the Lord Jesus Christ was at least used to humble the man. And I don't know if the man was ever converted, but he did, this professor of science, acknowledge that this man indeed had seen Jesus,

well, I wanna ask you this question this morning, especially around the holidays, but in general in your life, do you have people in your life where you can exercise these sorts of principles of witnessing, these sorts of principles of simply fearing the Lord and doing good? Of course, speaking a word, words are necessary, that's not at all what I'm suggesting, but trying to be a sincere witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, you may not know all the answers, it may be

intimidating, But there may be people in your family, there may be friends, there may be people in this community where you could be witnessing for Christ and be taking some of these principles into that pursuit.

Well thirdly this morning, the secret to suffering well, verses 17 and 18. How can you suffer well according to these verses? Well, in verses 17 and 18, Peter begins by saying, for it is better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will rather than for doing evil. Verse 17. The principle, we've seen it already in 1 Peter, but it's simply this. It's better to suffer than to sin. It's better to suffer than to sin. What Peter is saying is that if you could have more ease and sin or more suffering and obey, then you obey and you experience more suffering and that's simply God's infinite wisdom and you trust him in it.

But why should they suffer like this, even when they're doing good? Well, that brings us to verse 18. For, or this actually, this for in your text, it's fine to be translated for, but this particular for could also be translated because or since. There are different words for this, but because or for Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

What Peter is helping the reader and Lord willing us this morning see by looking at Christ now in verse 18, he's wanting us to see this. You know, Jesus is the only person who was ever righteous in and of himself. Jesus is the only person who ever lived who truly did not deserve to suffer at all. Everyone else since the fall has been unrighteous in and of themselves. Every person since the fall has deserved to suffer. Jesus Christ is the only exception to this. And what happened to Peter for the righteousness that he pursued, or to Jesus, for the righteousness that he pursued? Jesus, for the righteousness that he pursued, actually was the recipient of suffering. He was the recipient of suffering.

Therefore, do we who follow Christ expect to experience anything different? If Christ, the righteous one, suffered for us, we who strive to be righteous can anticipate that we, in like manner, will suffer. But Peter is not just telling you that Jesus is a great example of suffering. which he is, he is the example of suffering. He's telling you more than that. He isn't telling you less than that, he's telling you more than that. And the more than that is this, that Jesus is your suffering substitute. He is your suffering substitute. What do I mean? Well, look at the text and see with me why specifically Jesus suffered. Verse 18, for Christ also suffered once for sins. That word for, for sins, means on the behalf of or in the place of. He suffered for my sins on the cross. He suffered in my place and on my behalf on the cross.

You see, what man needs is righteousness and what man cannot achieve is righteousness because man is unrighteous. You know, people don't like to think that man is unrighteous, but do you remember what Jesus said of humankind? Jesus in Matthew chapter seven himself said this about humanity. If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly father, your father who is in heaven. Do you hear what Jesus said about humanity? He said, if you who are evil,

So the testimony of scripture is that humanity is unrighteous and humanity needs a righteousness. And what this verse is saying for you is Jesus took your unrighteousness upon himself and he achieved for you the righteousness that is necessary for you as your substitute. This is sometimes called the great exchange or double imputation. But what the doctrine is simply this, that you are not righteous, and you need to be righteous. Jesus Christ takes our unrighteousness on himself on the cross and experiences the penalty of our unrighteousness. And his perfect

righteousness is placed upon us such that all of our unrighteousness has been removed and all of his perfect righteousness has been imputed or granted or given to you.

This is what the text is teaching, that Jesus Christ is our substitute. And he did this once and for all, according to the text. He suffered once. It is finished. There is no more sacrifice in Christ. You cannot re-sacrifice Christ. This table, which we'll have the joy of having in a few minutes, is not a re-sacrifice of Christ. It is a remembering of the once for all finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is finished. His infinite nature gave to his finite sufferings infinite value. It's infinitely valuable. We can't add to it. It's done.

And why did he do this? That, our text says, he might bring us to God. It's not just that your sins have been taken from you. It's that you have been brought to God. He took your sins upon himself, but he also brought you to God himself. Don't remember this. Don't just focus and don't just remember, although you should, that Jesus Christ took your sins on himself. You also should remember that he brought you to God himself. Once we were far off, but now we have been brought near.

Well, this could be a great strengthening truth for you this morning if you're suffering. to remember that your sins have been atoned for, to remember that you have been brought near to God himself and the Lord Jesus Christ so that whatever you suffer, you can know this to be true, that you are immutably, unchangeably united to the Lord Jesus Christ and that you are safe even in the midst of your suffering. That's what Peter wanted them to understand so that they could suffer well.

Well, today we have seen the secrets, these three secrets from God. We've seen the secret of invincibility, the secret of apologetics, and the secret to suffering well. And ultimately, this all points us to our suffering servant, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we do thank you for Jesus Christ and his righteousness for us. And we praise you that he has taken upon himself the penalty that our sins deserve and achieve for us the righteousness that is needed that we might be found spotless and safe in your presence. Oh, Lord, help us to rejoice in these truths. Help us to revel in them, to find strength in them amidst suffering. And we pray that knowing the Lord of all, who is infinitely wise and powerful, would give us strength as we strive to be faithful witnesses for Jesus whatever answers we don't know to our friends' questions, whatever things we do sincerely lack because we've not perhaps studied your word enough or we don't have the eloquence that others have, we pray that you would more than make up for those by our humble and faithful witness for Christ and that you would use us in this way. We pray all these things in Jesus's name, amen.