

Series: **Living Under Pressure** – week 13

CDOBC – beginning on 2/7/16

Today's Title: **"The Best Defense Against Suffering"** Part 1

April 15, 2016 ~ 1 Peter 3:13-22

OBJECTIVE: To encourage believers to remain faithful and confident in suffering.

Opening Prayer

As you read through the Bible, it's an obvious fact that many men and women written about in the pages of Scripture...virtually all of them who followed God faced some sort of trial and difficulty in life. In fact, many suffered as a result of their faith in God.

In the United States, we idolize comfort and pleasure.

Every day we are bombarded with advertisements about a pillow which will help us sleep better...

inserts for your shoes to help with pain and discomfort in your feet, legs and back...

medicines which will alleviate all sorts of physical and mental ailments...

restaurants to enjoy a wonderful meal...

hotels which will pamper you.

We love creature comforts.

Then you come to church and listen to me talk about 'suffering for your faith' – not a very popular or exciting topic for us Americans – or one which aligns with the culture's occupation with comfort and pleasure.

For the record...I love comfort and pleasure. Like the writer of Ecclesiastes...I enjoy good food and drink, entertainment and the love of my wife spending time with family and friends. So what I'm saying here is not a statement against comfort and pleasure in life – it's a statement warning us from making an idol of comfort and pleasure – of living our life for the purpose of increasing this in our life.

This pre-occupation - some may say 'obsession' with comfort and pleasure...and God's call for us to suffer for our faith...these conflicting values are a growing challenge for the Modern-North American church. Society is becoming more obsessed with creature comforts...and society is becoming increasingly biased against Biblical Christianity...and legislation is beginning to come into force which is not favorable to those who live according to the truth and grace of Christ.

Western society is relativistic regarding 'truth' and 'ethics' – and more and more people are listening to the arguments for atheistic thinking.

Books by the leading atheists of our day, known as “*The Four Horsemen*” - Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris - have sold millions of books which promote an atheistic view of life.

The point is not to discourage you – but to make sure you’re aware of life outside of the walls of this church...or the walls of your own home.

The bible is clear we are to live as “salt” and “light” in the world – to not only live our faith in the marketplace...but to share our faith when we have opportunity.

Yet the world is becoming more resistant and hostile to Christians.

So what are we to do about this?

How do we respond to the clear command of Jesus to fulfill our mission to “make disciples of all nations” when our nation is becoming more set in their disinterest and opposition to the Gospel of Christ?

Like all other questions in life, we look to Scripture to find out the answer...and specifically we look to **1 Peter 3:13-22**

“The Best Defense Against Suffering”

Peter is writing to believers who have been scattered due to the persecution of Christians. They have been living under persecution...and the persecution we know from history – was about to get more intense and brutal.

So, Peter is helping them understand how to live as followers of Christ in a world...in a society which was biased against those who were followers of Christ.

“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, **15** 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, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 18 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, 19 in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him.”

Our blessing in suffering vs. 13-17

Normally, if you are busy doing good things and helping others, you aren't going to have trouble.

If you are busy maintaining unity with others, express sympathy, act in brotherly love, you have a tender heart toward others, and a humble mind as you interact with others. If you do not return evil for evil or insult others when they insult you, but instead you bless them, most likely you will make friends, not enemies.

But this is not always the case.

You may do all these things, but either the reality of living in a sin-damaged world – or a reaction of

unbelievers toward Christ – you may still suffer in doing good.

Peter's words in **vs. 13** “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?” is not a statement of utopian ignorance. He is taking a ‘big-picture’ view and for the Christian, nothing in this world can harm our eternal place with God.

David said in **Psalm 56:4**

“...in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?”

In **Romans 8:31, 35, 39** Paul said:

“...if God is for us, who can be against us?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?...nothing “...will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Philippians 1:21

“For to me, to live is Christ, to die is gain.”

In **vs. 14** Peter is giving a practical view...along with an eternal view for believers who are “zealous” to do good in life. In light of the reality of suffering “for righteousness’ sake”, he comforts us with the reality of the blessing we have in Christ. Even if you suffer for doing good, as a Christian, you are blessed. Your eternal life and blessings in Christ cannot be taken away through human suffering. A martyr's death only increases the blessing! **vs. 17** follows this train of thought – and elevates the righteous persons suffering. The difficult thing for us to

wrap our mind around is our suffering for righteousness might “be God’s will”.

Remember, God isn’t responsible for evil or for our suffering. Sin is what causes evil and suffering – but God always uses suffering to accomplish His perfect will. Just read your bible and you’ll see this truth over and over again.

I’ll come back to vs. 15-16...but let’s move to vs. 18 where we see:

The suffering and sacrifice of Christ vs. 18

“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...”

Do you ever wish you had a simple, clear statement about the sacrifice of Jesus which would help you understand why it is so important? Well...here it is!

This is the doctrine of the atonement. (in vs. 1!)

Jesus not only “suffered” for us...but he was “put to death in the flesh”. He was “the righteous” One who died “for the unrighteous”. Notice also, Peter says He did this “once for sins”. Unlike the repeated sacrifices required in Judaism and other religions, Jesus’ suffering and sacrifice was only needed “once” because He was the perfect sacrifice – the “righteous” sacrifice.

John the baptizer said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” **John 1:29**

Hebrews 10:10-14

“...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God...by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”

The Greek word which is translated in **vs. 18**: “bring us to God” gives us a great word-picture. In the Greek translation of the O.T. – the Septuagint (300-200 B.C. in Alexandria - 70 scholars) – this word is used to describe a sacrifice brought before God. In the context of **1 Peter 3**, this means Jesus is ushering us into the presence of God. Jesus introduces us to God the Father.

He died on the cross – but through His obedience, His spirit (not a reference to the Holy Spirit) was made alive.

This is difficult to fully understand, but as He was crucified, for the first time in eternity, Jesus experienced separation from the Father as Jesus bore the sins of the world. This is clear from Jesus’ cry on the cross of “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

However, upon His death, He was no longer forsaken by God – and Peter says He was “made alive in the spirit”, which brings us to **vs. 19-22**:

The triumphant Christ vs. 19-22

These verses have been a source of confusion for centuries. In commenting on these verses, Martin Luther said: *“A wonderful test is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the Testament, so that I do not know for a certainty just what Peter means...I cannot understand and I cannot explain it. And there has been no one who has explained it.”* (Preaching the Word, Sharing Christ’s Sufferings, 1 & 2 Peter and Jude, by David R. Helm, p. 119)

Martin Luther didn’t have the internet...or the past 500 years of biblical scholarship to read from.

Fortunately for us, we do have a pretty good idea of what Peter was writing about.

I’ll do my best to give a brief explanation of these verses, but I don’t want us to get so distracted by what’s right in front of us that we lose sight of the larger idea Peter is sharing with us.

The big idea is this:

- We may suffer in this life – even if we do good to others. (vs. 13-14)
- If we do suffer, know we are blessed beyond this life and no amount of suffering can ever take that away. (vs. 15-17)
- Jesus suffered...and He was perfectly righteous in every way! (vs. 18)

- Through His suffering and death, Jesus triumphed over death and sin and He declared His victory to the demonic spirits who are imprisoned. (vs. 19-20)
- Jesus submitted to the suffering of the cross, and now His enemies must submit to Him! (vs. 21-22)

A few key points to help explain vs. 19-21.

The “spirits in prison” are a unique case – most likely the demonic beings who intermarried with women in Noah’s day (**Gen. 6:1-5; Jude 6**) and the result was a human race which was demonically opposed to God so that even after 120 years of Noah preaching repentance and salvation, only Noah and his family were saved.

These demons pushed God beyond His level of tolerance and He has imprisoned them so they can never perpetrate their evil on human beings ever again.

When Jesus was crucified, Satan and his demonic forces probably thought they had achieved a great victory and a great blow to God’s plan to redeem the world.

However, as Jesus’ body lay in the grave, He was “made alive in the spirit”, and He “went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison”. This was not Jesus preaching a message of salvation. These are demons who are forever sealed and condemned in their evil. Jesus went there to announce His victory over death and sin – His victory over them – His victory over Satan!

Colossians 2:15

“He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them...”

Jesus went to the spirits in prison...declared His ultimate and eternal victory...dropped the mic and walked away!!!

- Mission Accomplished!
- Salvation Secured!
- Humanity Redeemed!
- Satan Defeated!
- Sin Defeated!
- Death Defeated!
- Jesus Victorious!
- Eden Rescued!
- The Law Fulfilled!

Here’s the point: Jesus is victorious!

Jesus submitted to suffering and death and now, He has risen – He has defeated sin and death – and now all...everyone...everything submits to Him!

Phil. 2:10-11

“...so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth *and under the earth*, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Are you prepared to talk about Christ? vs. 15-16

15 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, 16

having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”

“In your hearts” – Your faith is a reasonable faith...Biblical Christianity is an intellectual faith...but it’s not limited to intellectual thought and cognitive understanding.

Your faith must also be an issue of your heart!

Romans 10:10

“For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

“prepared (*ready*) to make a defense” – *apologia* is the Greek word translated “make a defense” and it’s unfortunate that this word reminds us of the English word ‘apology’.

We don’t apologize for our faith – I’m sorry for those who don’t have faith in Christ!

Apologia means to defend – to make a defense – for your hope in Christ. This is a daunting task for many Christians – quite often because many Christians don’t have a heart passionate for Christ - and they don’t really know their bible.

Many Christians have made sharing their faith overly complicated – and as a result they are overwhelmed and intimidated – and afraid they won’t be able to answer someone’s question.

Our fear of: *“I don’t know”* – Many believe if I say, *“I don’t know”* we will lose respect or authority in the discussion.

John Wallace said he never knew of anyone who lost respect or authority by saying “*I don’t know*”, but he has seen way too many people lose respect and authority when they tried to answer a question when they clearly didn’t know the answer!

“*I don’t know*” is one of the greatest answers you can give!

1) It’s honest

2) It gives you the chance to talk again about Christ!

“That’s a good question – something I haven’t thought about...can I look into that and get back to you? Would that be OK with you?”

“*I don’t know*” is a glorious answer!

Pray the unbeliever will ask you a question where you have to answer “*I don’t know*” – so you can have a second conversation!!!

“hope” – are you hopeful...or full of misery and worry?

Are you miserable...angry...afraid...because of the culture’s move away from and against Christ?

Are you worried about the election this year...or the signs on the bathroom door – and your daily life is not described as ‘hopeful’ but discouraged and pessimistic?

You know why so many Christians don’t have “hope” but they are discouraged and pessimistic?

Because their hearts are not focused on “Christ as Lord”.

They are focused on the temporal – not on the eternal.
They are focused on the suffering...not on the victory!
Keep your heart...and your mind focused on
Jesus...victorious Jesus who suffered and has now been
glorified at the right hand of God.

When we live each day in the comfort of the victory of
Christ – we are better equipped to be gentle and
respectful as we talk and discuss the “reason for the hope”
we have in Christ.

Once again, we see our doing good (vs. 8, 11, 13) not only
helps give credibility to our witnessing, but it will
disarm our critics. A “good conscience” before God goes a
long way to having a confidence in your faith.

Apply it...

You will be blessed...so remain faithful in suffering.

Be encouraged in Christ’s victory

Read your bible

Be ready to share your hope in Christ!

Circles!

Close in prayer