

## Hope PCA Sermon: March 10, 2024

### *Blessing Received and Hope Offered" (1 Peter 3:13–17)*

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This morning we're back in 1 Peter, in chapter 3, and we'll be looking at verses 13 to 17 of chapter 3. And if you would, if you're able, please stand in honor of the reading of God's Word. This is indeed His very living, abiding, infallible, inerrant Word given to us through His servant Peter. Again, 1 Peter 3 verses 13 through 17.

<sup>13</sup> Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, <sup>15</sup> 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, <sup>16</sup> having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord indeed endures forever. Please be seated. Let me briefly pray for us again as we come before the Word.

Oh Lord God, plant this word deep in our hearts, we ask this morning. May it bear fruit in our lives. Help us to see and understand those things that you would desire us to see and understand this morning. Give us eyes to see, ears to hear, we ask in the precious name of Jesus, amen.

Well, we've been going through all these different relationship rules or household codes, if you want to call them that, with Peter, beginning back in chapter 2 verse 13: submit to authority, submit to masters, submit in marriage, and then wrapping it up last time in verses 8 through 12 about being called not just to suffer, but to bless those who do evil to us, those who insult us. Along the way, Peter has assumed, made reference to, some kind of suffering that might occur along the way. Maybe corrupt rulers, maybe an unjust master, an unbelieving or even frightening husband. Do not fear them, he says to wives. Quite a call. Those who might do evil to us or insult us.

But now we come to a part of Peter's letter that's kind of a turning point, a pivot, and maybe the heart of the letter. In these verses, he lays down some fundamental principles that are going to inform his more detailed discussion of suffering in chapter 4. Maybe you thought we've had enough of suffering in 1 Peter. Well, there's more to come. This is an important subject for him. Within these verses, 13 to 17, he calls upon Christians to be ready to give an answer for, or to make a defense of, the hope that is in us. And I believe Peter gives us an example of that that we'll look at, God willing, next week in verses 18 through 22. So this is an important little section that lays a foundation for what is to follow.

And instead of going through it verse by verse or section by section, I want to cover it this morning a little bit more thematically. Three themes or ideas in this passage. The first is that situation of suffering while we're being zealous to do what is good. What's going on there? Peter talks about it in verses 13 and 17 primarily. The second theme or idea is an exhortation that Peter gives us in verses 14 through 16. And then the third theme or idea relates to two realities that he points to that are part of our salvation. Blessing in verse 14 and hope in verse 15. So three ideas, three themes.

Let's talk first about doing good and suffering. or more precisely, suffering even though we're doing good. Peter begins in verse 13 with a rhetorical question: *"Who is there to harm you if you're zealous for doing what is good?"* He ends the section with a statement or an evaluation of things: *"It's better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil."* An interesting pairing of ideas, I think, from Peter. On the one hand, the rhetorical question's answer is, well, no one. Who is there to harm you if you're zealous for doing what is good? Well, no one. Why would anybody do that? Why would anybody go out of their way to hurt those who are zealous for doing good? Doing that doesn't make sense. It's illogical. It wouldn't be normal in a normal world. We see a similar idea expressed in Proverbs 16 verse 7. When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes ..."

... a more common way of putting it today. They're fans. They're fans of something. We recognize fans. We know what fans look like, whether it's of a sports team or a musician or an actor or a celebrity. Maybe they're fans of a TV series or a movie series. Certain writers or artists that they're fans of. Nowadays we seem to be even fans of politicians, which seems weird to me. But thinking on those terms, can we say, as believers, can we say, as followers of Christ, that we are fans of good works? Am I a fan of doing good works? Are we zealous, are we eager, are we enthusiastic to know what good works are? And are we zealous, are we eager, are we enthusiastic to do those good works? Or do we engage in them only when we have to, or only when someone is paying attention? We recognize fans. Would others recognize us as people who are zealous for good works? Again, who would harm people who are zealous for good works? Typically? Normally? No one. Because they're doing good things.

But a second thought. Peter's question, especially in light of Proverbs 16 verse 7, puts this issue in the realm of biblical wisdom. Biblical wisdom teaches us about things that are generally true, and are therefore wise. "Bring up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." That's generally true, but it's not a promise. It's not a guarantee. Those of us who have older children maybe know the painful truth of that. So there's wisdom being expressed here. Generally speaking, people aren't going to harm others who are zealous for doing what is good. And I think this fits in with verse 17, and we'll peek a little bit into the first part of verse 14. Peter says it's better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

The first thing we can note about this is that it's a "better than" statement. Common in biblical wisdom literature. One thing is better than another. Frequently we see that in the Proverbs, and as we've been going through Ecclesiastes occasionally, we've seen it there as well. Better this than this. This is the Bible's wisdom teaching for us. So it's truly better to suffer for doing good than to suffer for doing evil. And that kind of makes sense, doesn't it? Because one doing

evil deserves the suffering or the punishment that he or she gets. But also because the one doing good while being punished, while suffering for that good, has a clear conscience. I know I'm doing what is right, and I can do it with a clear conscience. It doesn't take away the difficulty or the pain of the suffering, but it can, and I think does, give us a kind of inner peace or an inner comfort.

There's a second idea in these verses that is perhaps clearer to a Greek speaker than to us English speakers, but I think it's fairly well translated in the ESV that we use. There's a form used by Peter in both verse 17 and verse 14 that indicates kind of an expected, occasional occurrence of things, a sporadic reality related to what's being talked about. It's expressed in verse 14 this way: "... *even if you should suffer.*" If the atypical happens, in other words, even if you should suffer for doing good, what's different than the normal biblical wisdom. And it's expressed in verse 17 in a different way: "... *if it should be God's will*" that we suffer for doing good. God doesn't want us to constantly be suffering for doing good. But he may in his providence ordain that for a time. And though suffering in this letter is certainly a primary theme, Peter here I think is giving us a clue. He doesn't want us to be fatalists. He doesn't want us to expect constant suffering as Christians. It may be God's will for us to suffer for doing good, and it may happen that we are persecuted for being zealous for doing good works, but we're not to be pessimists. We're not to expect suffering around every corner. We're not to treat every negative response as, "Oh, I'm suffering." Peter's later going to tell us in chapter 4 not to be surprised when suffering comes our way, but he doesn't want us to see persecution everywhere we look. In fact, the other thing he'll tell us in chapter 4 is that that suffering might be coming as a form of discipline from God himself to his people. So the first idea in these verses is that suffering for being zealous for doing good works should be atypical. It should be not the norm. But if we do suffer, at least know that we're suffering for doing good rather than evil. This is wisdom. This is a right way of living.

Second theme or idea: an exhortation, a four-part exhortation from Peter to us in verses 14 and 15, and then kind of a consequence or end result of that in verse 16. To these exhortations in verse 14, "*Have no fear of them [those who cause us suffering] and do not be troubled.*" Have no fear of them. We heard that from Jesus in Matthew 10 earlier in this worship service. Do not be troubled. There are two in verse 15: "... *honor Christ the Lord as holy and always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.*" Two negative exhortations, two positive: do not fear, do not be troubled, do honor Christ, do be ready with an answer. Take these in turn.

First, "*Have no fear of them.*" A possible translation of this is: do not fear what they fear, which would be an echo of Isaiah 8 verse 12. And these first two exhortations do draw from that passage in Isaiah where God tells the prophet not to fear what the people fear. Do not be in dread. Do not be troubled. But the context of suffering here in Peter's letter, suffering caused by others, I think favors the translation that the ESV chooses. Have no fear of them. Have no fear of those who cause you suffering, who persecute you, who do evil to you, who revile you, who insult you. Maybe Peter here is drawing again on Psalm 34, which he's done before. Verse 19 of that Psalm says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all." Do not fear.

Peter had personally heard this. What we read earlier today, what we heard from Matthew 10, Peter heard personally. Peter knew failure, now he knows and teaches us God's grace. It's also recorded for us in Luke 12 verse 5. But Matthew 10:28, Jesus is very clear: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Peter's not encouraging some sort of dualistic, gnostic separation of body and soul, material and spiritual, but rather he's encouraging a sure knowledge that even though we might suffer physically, even possibly to the point of death, believers in Jesus Christ have the promise of rising to new life in the glorified body and soul, and that for all of eternity. Those who do not believe will die in their sins, suffering eternal torment in both body and soul. That's what Jesus is saying. "Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Whatever bodily suffering we Christians may endure in this life, those who reject Christ will suffer unimaginably worse in their bodies as well as their souls for all of eternity. Thou art to give us a picture of how serious our sins are and the consequences of them. Don't fear what they can do to you for being zealous to do good works. Fear God, which is evil and great torment for all of eternity.

But similarly, do not be troubled. Or again from Isaiah 8:12, "... do not be in dread." It goes with the first exhortation. These things might happen. They may happen according to God's will, but don't expect them. Don't be pessimistic. Don't be in dread. Don't worry. Similar idea from Paul in Philippians 4 verse 6: "Do not be anxious about anything. But in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." Are you suffering? Does persecution seem near? Take it to God in prayer. There's an old hymn about that. Take it to God in prayer. Don't be anxious about anything, anything, the occasional things. But in everything, all things, make your requests known to God. Later in chapter 5 of this letter, Peter will encourage us to cast all of our anxieties on God, who cares for us. Cast all your anxieties on God, for He cares for you. Cast them. Throw them. Chuck them. Whatever language you want to use, get rid of them. Throw them out there on God, because He cares for you. Or again, think of Psalm 23, the very familiar psalm. We do not walk through the valley of the shadow of death alone, but God goes with us. "Thou art with me." That is the hope and the promise. So do not be troubled. Do not be in dread.

Thirdly, a positive encouragement or exhortation: "... *in your hearts, honor Christ as the Lord, as holy.*" Other translations say things like, sanctify Christ the Lord in your hearts, set him apart in your hearts, give the Lord a place of honor, recognize him and serve him as Lord. Peter gives this honorific title to Jesus, the Lord, because he is God. He rules, he's in control, he's king of kings, he's lord of lords over everything, over everyone, even those who don't recognize it or admit it. We don't revile or take vengeance against those who persecute us because we entrust ourselves to the Lord of all, the one who judges all things and all people justly, as Peter told us back in chapter 2 verse 23, the one who will avenge his people, as we've seen in our Tuesday study in Revelation. Scholar Daryl Charles puts it in an interesting way. He says, "A mindset rooted in Christ's lordship produces boldness, both to resist those who persecute us, but also to be ready with an answer."

And that's the fourth exhortation, positive exhortation: "... *always be 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.*" There's a lot there. I could probably preach a whole sermon on it. I won't. But

think of the words that he's using. Always. Not occasionally. Not sometimes. Always be prepared. Peter's the first Boy Scout. Be ready. Always be ready. Don't wait to get ready. Be ready. Be ready now. Be prepared. To make a defense or to give an answer. The idea is a formal legal defense. That's how it's typically used elsewhere in the New Testament. But we're not called to be spiritual lawyers arguing in a spiritual courtroom. The setting is more informal. People who ask us. But nevertheless, we're to be ready. To be ready to give an answer, to make a defense. And it's comprehensive, anytime, anywhere, to anyone, to anyone who asks you, be ready to give an answer for the hope that you have, to give a reason for your hope.

I think what this boils down to really is simply being ready and able to tell people why you are a Christian. And I know you can do it. Why do I know you can do it? Because when we meet with you as elders, to become new members, we ask for your testimony, and every single one of you can tell that story. I've heard it. I know you can do it. If you can do it to us, you can do it to anybody. How did you come to faith in Christ Jesus? Another old hymn, "We have a story to tell to the nations that will turn their hearts to the right." The story of salvation. You have a personal story that you can share. It's our testimony on the witness stand, so to speak. Witnesses in trials are often told, just speak the truth. Just tell your story. I think that applies to us as well. Just tell your story. Be ready to tell your story. Be ready to share your story. And quite honestly, who knows your story better than you do? So don't fear. Don't be troubled that you're not an expert in theology or you don't know formal apologetics. You can't explain every heresy that came along and what's wrong with it. That's not your call. But you are an expert in why you believe, each and every one of you. Tell that story.

And then finally he says, "... *do it with gentleness and respect.*" With gentleness and respect. Too many apologists for Christianity, in my opinion. Often they are self-appointed experts. They're jerks. They're cruel. They're mean. They tend to think of themselves as modern-day Martin Luthers with witty bon mots at the ready to humble their opponents. Martin Luther was clever. He was also a jerk. I say that as someone named after him and who likes him a lot. I'm not Martin Luther. Neither are you. Be gentle, says Peter. Be respectful. And for the most part, even our elder brother, the monk Martin, was gentle and respectful as well.

And there's a consequence that Peter shares with us in verse 16: so that you can have a clear conscience before God. "*Having a good conscience so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.*" It's true whether it's defending our faith, or more generally, in suffering for being Christians. Our zeal for good works. Let that — our gentle, respectful dialogue with others, our zeal for good works — let that put to shame those who do evil, who revile us, who insult us, who persecute us. Not our ready response to cut them down. They'll be put to shame. And the kind of shame Peter's talking about is not an emotional state, "Oh, I feel shameful." For him and for that time period, it's public disgrace before others. It's a harm. It's a deficit in their social standing. It's a defeat of kinds. Goes back to that first idea in verse 13. Those who cause suffering for those who are zealous for good works will under normal circumstances be judged for it. What do you do in treating that person so poorly? They do good things. You're an idiot. Stop it. They're cut down by society. They'll be disgraced. Again, under normal circumstances. But that's biblical wisdom. Peter also means this, I think, though ultimately in a spiritual and eternal sense. God is going to

judge. And his enemies and our enemies will be shamed, disgraced and defeated, judged and punished for all of eternity.

And that I think leads into the third theme or idea from this passage. Two realities of salvation: blessing and hope. Verse 14 tells us that even if we suffer for righteousness' sake, we are blessed. Again, a lesson Peter learned directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. And remember, Peter was not willing to suffer for righteousness' sake at that trial. Jesus told him flat out, "You're gonna deny me three times." "Oh, no, no, no, I won't!" And he did it. Peter had to learn his lesson, and he's learned it, and he's passing it on to us. Here's what he learned from Jesus. Here's what we learned from Jesus. Matthew chapter 5 verse 10: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." Why? "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." We cannot and must not forget this glorious promise. This amazing reality. This is our inheritance in Christ Jesus, kept and guarded for us by God himself, said Peter back in chapter 1 verse 4. Whatever else happens to us in this life under the sun — this vain life under the sun, as the preacher puts it — we inherit a kingdom in heaven. "The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." The heavenly Jerusalem. We haven't got to this part in Revelation yet, but the heavenly Jerusalem descends from heaven to earth, and all the righteous stream into the heavenly city. The new reality, the new heavens, the new earth, where God is with us, and we are with God. Every tear wiped away, No more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain. All these former things are gone is the promise of Revelation 21 verse 4. So even if we suffer for righteousness' sake, we are blessed now because we have Christ Jesus. And we are blessed forever because we have Christ Jesus.

And in a strange sense, suffering for righteousness' sake is a blessing. Because it identifies us, it shows us as being among those who get to inherit those eternal blessings. And therefore, we have hope. As we talked about this morning, not the hope of wishful thinking, but a hope that looks to the certainty of the reality of what we know is coming. Jesus promised to come again. He is coming again. So our hope is anchored in Jesus Christ. Because of that hope, we must be ready to defend our hope, this hope in salvation in Christ Jesus. It's a certain knowledge (again, not wishful thinking) that my sins have been completely dealt with, completely paid for when Jesus went to the cross in my place. The guilt that I had, the guilt that I deserved before God as judge, that deserves to be punished, it's gone. It is gone because Jesus was punished in my place, because Jesus suffered in my place. The one, the only one, who was perfectly zealous to do his Father's will, who lived perfectly in every single way, instead was punished. so that I would not have to pay that price.

This, my friends, is God's gift to His people. It's ours when we come to Him by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, admitting our sins, turning away from them to follow Christ. Here's how Isaiah puts it in chapter 50 verse 9. I love this short little passage. "Behold, the Lord God helps me. Who will declare me guilty?" The Lord God helps me. Who will declare me guilty? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? Who indeed? If God is for us, who could be against us? What can they do? What can they do to us? Nothing. Nothing. Even if you suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. They can do nothing to you. They can do nothing to take away that eternal inheritance.

And so I think if we think about it, suffering for doing good is a pitifully small price to pay compared to what my sins deserve, and for what your sins deserve. Because in our sins we're guilty, and we know it. If we're honest with ourselves, we know it. Maybe you're here, maybe you're listening. 'I know that truth of guilt this morning, but don't yet know hope.' Well, this is hope: that Jesus took that guilt away. And now with Isaiah, all who have come to him in repentance and faith can ask our own rhetorical question, "Who will declare me guilty?" And it's rhetorical because the answer is no one. No one can declare me guilty before God's throne of justice. What a hope is ours in Christ Jesus, our Savior. Can't help but think of Paul's words to the Ephesians: "Oh, the breadth and the length and the height and depth of the love of Jesus Christ for sinners". Blessing and hope. May you know it. May you know it deeply.

Let me pray for us.

Lord God, hear our prayer that we make to you this morning. We praise you and give you thanks for the blessings that you have given to us in Christ Jesus, our Savior, for the hope that we have. And may that blessing and may that hope bear us up even in the midst of suffering. We look around the world today and we think we see a period of trial and suffering coming upon the church here in our country, in our area. We see evidences of it, but do not let us fear. Do not let us be anxious. Give us bold confidence as we set apart Christ as holy in our hearts. And do, O Lord, help us, help us to be ready with an answer for the hope that we have in Christ Jesus, a true hope, a sure hope, because you are a faithful God. He has been a faithful Savior. And you have given us a powerful Spirit to guide us and to lead us. Our thanks is deep. Our gratitude is profound. We offer it up to you in Christ Jesus' name. Amen.

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