

## Transformation, Suffering, and Sacrifice

### 1 Peter 3:13-22

Greetings from Orlando, Tampa, Ft. Myers, Avon Park, Florida and Los Angeles, California. Yes, I've been busy since you last saw me. God has led me through **many experiences of seeing his kingdom**, as well as some of those **good works he prepared for me** ahead of time. More about that in the weeks to come...

**This series** is going through the book of 1 Peter. This is a **letter Peter**, one of Jesus' closest followers, writes to a group of churches in Asia Minor or what would be **Turkey** now. They are people who are poor, resident aliens who are **marginalized, and even persecuted**, because of their outcast status and because of their faith.

**How does one live as a Christ follower in those circumstances?** That is what Peter is helping them with and it's not exactly what you would think.

He's been telling them to **live holy lives that seem strange, because they should be fighting back. He's not telling them to fight for their rights.** They are holy because that means **set apart** for God's use. **It's not perfection**, but rather reflecting Jesus in the way we live.

He has looked at this way of living **in relationship to the government, our employers or bosses, our spouses**, and those who are in the church.

Today we are looking **at 3:13-22**, but we will focus on verses **13-18** which **are the heart of what Peter is trying to teach** these resident aliens.

**If you haven't picked up a journal yet**, there are still some in the back on the table that you can grab

- o There are also **study guides** that give suggestions for how to approach each section that we read each week
  - **Not everyone knows how to truly study Scripture.**
  - The journals and the study guides are tools to use to help teach one way to study.
  
- o **For this section of 1 Peter, the study guide suggests circling words that repeat.** If you haven't already done that, **you can do it as I read the verses.**

- Now let's get to the **meat of the message** for today and read verses 13-18—. Let me preface this by telling you that **a revival is happening** at several different colleges right now. Taking the revival to those **outside the church**, this passage is vital.

13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 14 **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...**

- o What word did you circle? (**Suffer/suffering**)
  - When you have a chance, go back to **the last half of chapter 2 and count** how many times Peter uses that word.
  - We will also see it again and again in **chapters 4 and 5.**
- o **Once again, Peter brings up suffering for righteousness' sake.**
  - He is referencing the **persecution** that comes specifically from believers living in a society that directly and, at times, violently opposes the truth of the gospel.
  - **The United States is not there.**
    - Yet—Maybe we will someday be in that position.
    - Right now, we are not experiencing the type of persecution that believers in **North Korea, Yemen, Somalia, India** are.
    - Check out [www.opendoorsus.org](http://www.opendoorsus.org) for stories and updates.
    - We do not regularly hear of believers in America **being beaten, abducted, imprisoned, or killed** because of their faith in Jesus.
    - **Churches and pastor's homes** are not regularly targeted by vandals or burned to the ground.
    - We do not have to meet in secret on Sunday mornings.

However, that does not mean that this passage of scripture is not useful to instruct us in how to live in our society...

A **post-Christian society** where many people are indifferent toward God or have no experience with what it means to be loved by Him. Some people in our society **are hostile toward believers**. But as of today, we **do not need to hide our faith** in order to keep our families safe.

We need to look at these verses **through the lens** of answering the question: **What is Peter saying to us in a post-Christian, consumer driven, pleasure seeking, politically divisive, society through these verses?**

Throughout this series, we **haven't said a lot about the writer of this letter, Peter**. If you aren't really familiar with the Bible, here's what we can see about Peter.

- The Peter we meet in the gospels seems to always **get a bad rap for being impulsive**.
  - He's the one **who jumped out of the boat** to walk on the water to Jesus.
  - In one breath, **Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah**; in the next, he **reprimands Jesus** for talking about His upcoming sacrifice.
  - When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain with Moses and Elijah, Peter speaks up and says, **"we should build shelters for each of you"**...
    - And make it into some kind of carnival attraction???
  - When Jesus **washed His disciples' feet**, Peter initially refused to let Jesus do it for him.
    - Once Jesus explained, Peter said, "then wash my head and hands, too!"
  - **Peter promised Jesus he would follow Him anywhere**, even if it meant death, then Peter denied Jesus three times and ran away.
  - When Jesus is being arrested by a bunch of soldiers, **Peter cuts off a man's ear with a sword**. Peter, the fisherman, pulling a sword in front of a **squad of trained soldiers**. Not the smartest move in the world...

And yet... **here is this same Peter urging these resident aliens/exiles that are scattered throughout Asia Minor (Turkey) to be sober-minded, respectful, honorable, to submit to authorities and honor other people, especially spouses.**

- These are **not the words of a rash, impulsive man**.

- These are the **words of a man who has been transformed** by being with Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit working in him and through him.
- **The definition of what it means to be a disciple** is on the walls of the sanctuary in Beaverton and the Family Life Center in Midland. A disciple is someone who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and is committed to His mission.
  - Peter followed Jesus in real life.
  - Peter was committed to Jesus' mission to "go and make disciples."
  - And in the **Acts of the Apostles** and these letters he's written, I believe we see proof that Peter was being changed by Jesus.

**This can happen for those people to whom Peter originally wrote these words and to those who are reading them now.**

[Eph 5:1-2 NLT] **1 Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. 2 Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.**

**Peter is still passionate about following Jesus, but instead of speaking and acting recklessly or hastily, he is focused on and driven to love the people around him. He is passionate, focused, and driven on behalf of those to whom this letter is addressed.**

**Peter is urging everyone who reads his letter to live a life that glorifies God through our words, our actions, and our thoughts.**

- In verse 15 of today's passage, Peter once again brings up "our hope."
  - **Throughout the Bible**, the word "hope" comes up a lot.
    - **Sometimes it's used in the sense of "I hope I haven't locked my keys in the car."**
    - But it is also used in a greater sense, as we've already seen Peter do in chapter 1:

[1Pe 1:3 ESV] **3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**

**So what is our hope?** It is often linked with the words "**inheritance**" and "**salvation**."

[Eph 1:18 NLT] 18 I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident **hope** he has given to those he called--his holy people who are his rich and glorious **inheritance**.

[Rom 5:4 NLT] 4 And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident **hope of salvation**.

The hope we have, the hope Peter speaks of in this passage, is so much bigger than what we normally think of.

- "I hope I **get a raise** this year."
- "I hope my kid/grandkid **gets into a good school** or gets a good job."
- "I hope we're **having pizza for dinner** tonight."

That type of hope is so weak and pathetic when compared to the hope we have in our salvation and as God's holy people who are His inheritance.

- Hope is "to be understood comprehensively, as all that drives the present history toward its destined future." NIV Commentary pg 214
  - The hope we have is **eternal**.
  - It is the hope that comes from knowing that **Jesus has already won eternal victory over death** and that is where our salvation comes from.
  - *That's* our destined future.

Think about how that kind of hope would feel to these persecuted outcasts!

When you are being transformed (like Peter was), you gain a better perspective on how to...**See the hope through the suffering**...Write that on the right side of your journal across from vs 13-14.

Peter is a bit of an **optimistic realist**.

In verse 13, Peter asks a (somewhat) rhetorical question...**13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?**

**I think that's me.** I believe that crazy ideas, like **starting a coffee shop in the mall** or a small church, like Eagle Ridge, opening a second campus, will work. But when it comes to stuff like **home projects**, I can see a million ways this can go wrong and I can end up in the ER.

**This is the optimistic part of Peter's personality:**

- In essence, **he's encouraging the people reading his letter (including us) to do good things for the people around them.**
- Aside from the fact that Jesus said to **love your neighbor, love your enemy, and pray for those who persecute you...**
- **...People will be less likely to want to hurt a kind, nice, helpful person.**

Here's some solid advice that Peter would agree with I'm sure: **Be nice to people touching your food!**

**But on the other hand...**If someone really is out to get you, being kind to him or her isn't going to make a difference.

- There's the realist in Peter.

**14 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**

**There's a story in the OT**, which is the "before Jesus" part of the Bible where this idea comes up. The fiery furnace... **But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."**  
Daniel 3:18

**Be kind, nice, and helpful, but not just so that you might avoid persecution. If you are honoring Jesus with your life and you end up suffering persecution, it's okay. We know that we will experience suffering of some sort, at some time, for following Jesus—**

**[Luk 9:23 NIV] 23 Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.**

**[Rom 8:17 NLT] 17 And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.**

**If your heart is right before God, you have nothing to fear from someone who is out to get you.**

**We may not be experiencing suffering** in the same way Peter's original audience does...Or the same way believers in other parts of our world today do.

But we do face troubles, and trials as a result of following Jesus.

- People being **passed over for promotions** or even fired for being honest.
- **Kids being socially isolated** at school and in social situations.
- Dismissed as **foolish and hopelessly** out of touch.
- Labeled bigots.

**As our prayer focus** during this series says, "sometimes following You in this culture makes me feel like a resident alien, somehow not belonging, out of step in this life.

**And we should feel like we are out of step in our culture!** We are supposed to **keep our focus on Jesus** and how He would have us live. That likely means we will be **swimming upstream/moving against the current of society.**

- **We will feel pressure to conform, to fit in, to belong...to consumerism, fear, anger, self-absorbed...**

"[Peter] knows how difficult it is to fight off pressures for acceptance and conformity; he knows that Christians seek to live holy and good lives and so refrain from sinful behaviors; and he knows that you will need to have special faith and courage to endure." NIV Commentary pg 221

As you are being transformed, not only is it easier to see the hope through the suffering. You also gain a clearer perspective on how to...**Respond in hope with gentleness and respect.**

- o Write that in your journal across from vs. 15.

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.

"Instead of brash defensiveness (which is frequently nothing more than an expression of insecurity), Christians ought to defend the Lord in a humble and respectful manner. Such a manner can lead both to conversions and to leniency when persecution strikes. Moreover, if they live a good life before their opponents, they can have a clear conscience." NIV Application Commentary, pg 214

Christians are trying to change people's minds by shouting, getting "the right people" elected, or the right laws put into place. It's easy to fall into this way of behaving, but this is not what Peter is teaching us.

- o Guess how many hearts have changed as a result of those tactics? **Zero.**

**"You cannot attain Jesus-like goals with non-Jesus-like methods and behaviors."** The end does not justify the means.

**But guess what does make an impact on people???** Treating them with gentleness and respect.

- o Peter has already addressed this in this letter.
  - He's done it using words and phrases like
    - "Exercise self-control."
    - "Be holy."
    - "Show sincere love to one another."
    - "Show others the goodness of God."
    - "Respect and honor each other."

Listen to what Paul writes to Titus. [Tit 3:2 NLT] **2 They [believers] must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone.**

- o Look at every encounter Jesus had with a "sinner."
  - He treated each and every one with **gentleness and respect**
  - **While still speaking the truth to them.**

On my way back from LA, Dietrich and I weren't seated together and there was a seat open between me and the young man by the window. Danny was his name. He asked me what I was reading, so we talked about my book and what we both liked to read. Then he asked me **what I do for a living**. This is usually when the situation becomes awkward. That didn't happen. **He leaned in and told me his story** of taking theology classes at a university and being in a family where mom was Jewish and dad was Protestant.

Danny is a **person of peace** and I even told him he was.



**I didn't try to prove that Christianity was better than Judaism or what the culture is offering, I just focused on Jesus.**

**I didn't try to convince him to go to church, but instead, talked about how when Jesus transforms a person, they will naturally be drawn to fellowship. Maybe that's why being a part of a fellowship isn't important to a lot of people.**

**Peter is teaching us that as we are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus, it's easier to—**

- o See our hope through the suffering.
- o Explain our hope with gentleness and respect.
- And we are more willing to...**Offer yourself up for the sake of others.**

**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...**

**This is what Jesus did for us...[Rom 5:8 NLT] 8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.**

**Shouldn't we be willing to do the same for others???**

- We cannot do what Jesus did.
- We can't take on another person's sins and die for them so that they are holy before God.

**But we can sacrifice our personal preferences, our comfort, our time, our pride, our biases and prejudices, and our desire to be "right" all for the sake of others.**

- So that we can be a part of making the Kingdom present for others. And then they can see Jesus in us and through us
- And they can wonder why we are so different from the rest of our culture.
- Then they just might ask us why we aren't angry, fearful, defensive, and arrogant...Like other Christians they've met.

**And we just might have the chance to show them the God who loves them beyond all they can imagine. Wouldn't that be absolutely amazing???**

- **Steps of obedience**
  - o Answer these questions for yourself:

- Where do I need to show others more gentleness and respect than I am right now?
- How can I offer myself to someone else as a way to show them who Jesus is?

Let's pray our focus prayer again. **I'm leaving out two of the facts** this week, so we are praying specifically for the things we've talked about today—**Suffering, transformation, and making the Kingdom present** for others.

Father, sometimes following you in this culture makes me feel like a resident alien, somehow not belonging, out of step in this life. Remind me of my true identity as someone chosen by God. Help me to focus my mind on these facts: Stop right there. If you don't feel this way then ask yourself, "**Am I really following Jesus?**"

- I have hope that no matter what struggles this world brings, you are with me through them and ultimately you will provide a place for me in an eternity without pain, suffering, and struggle.
- Your holiness is what you want for me. You have set me apart to be transformed into your image. I was made new when you saved me, and I am being made new through your spirit.
- As I keep my eyes on Jesus, I will be able to make His Kingdom present for those around me.

Amen