

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

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ON

PETER AND THE FIRST EPISTLE THAT BEARS HIS NAME

CONVERSATION STUDY PLAN #10 for Thursday –January 15, 2015

“Suffering & Doing Good: The Example & Victory of Christ”

1 Peter 3:13-22

AN OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER

THE MUTUAL SHARING OF PEACE BETWEEN GOD’S PEOPLE

AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE DIFFICULTY AWAITING US TODAY: – Martin Luther, when considering a portion of the text that we are studying today, wrote the following as commentary: *“This is as curious a text and as obscure a passage as you will find anywhere in the New Testament; to the point that I’m still not sure what St. Peter meant.”* (If Martin Luther wasn’t sure, “Dear Lord, have pity on us!”)

A LOOK AT OUR OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION:

1. To see how one should prepare for persecution, motivated by the example of Christ;
2. To consider our duties as sufferers for Righteousness’ sake;
3. To note how and in what way Baptism now saves us

FACILITATOR’S INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS – SECTION I:

In the preceding section of the 1st Epistle, Peter had addressed the church in terms of specific groups: citizens and governors, slaves and masters, wives and husbands. He goes on to address the church as a whole entity. He believes that his readers are about to face persecution that threatens the very survival of the church. The general thrust of his remarks is to urge readers to maintain the highest standards of Christian living and to look for every opportunity to present a faithful witness to the Gospel of Christ. Specifically, he turns to the theme of suffering for righteousness’ sake. We, who read 1st Peter today, do so in a country where there is official religious toleration; but, rapid developments in our contemporary world may bring about

change. For the present, however, we are much more likely to be ignored than to be persecuted. Even so, I believe that the message of this section applies to us. Holding the highest standards of Christian living and looking for an opportunity to witness effectively in our world is what we also need to do. In most circumstances, no one will harm someone else for doing good. In fact, if one suffers for doing good, they are blessed!

At the time of Peter's writing (63-64 C.E.), religious persecution was an overriding fact of life. To adequately prepare for the sure and impending persecution, Peter teaches that one should sanctify the Lord God in her/his heart and be ready to meekly provide the reason for his/her hope. With clear conscience and good conduct, those who defame and revile 1st century Christians will likely be ashamed. If it is God's will that they suffer, let it be for doing good and not evil (*1 Peter 3:13-17*).

A COMPARISON OF TEXTUAL VERSIONS: 1 Peter 3:13-17

(COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE)

Who will harm you if you are zealous for good? ¹⁴ But happy are you, even if you suffer because of righteousness! Don't be terrified or upset by them. ¹⁵ Instead, regard Christ as holy in your hearts. Whenever anyone asks you to speak of your hope, be ready to defend it. ¹⁶ Yet do this with respectful humility, maintaining a good conscience. Act in this way so that those who malign your good lifestyle in Christ may be ashamed when they slander you. ¹⁷ It is better to suffer for doing good (*if this could possibly be God's will*) than for doing evil. (CEB)

(NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION)

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. (NRSV)

(THE MESSAGE)

If with heart and soul you're doing good, do you think you can be stopped? Even if you suffer for it, you're still better off. Don't give the opposition a second thought. Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy. Keep a clear conscience before God so that when people throw mud at you, none of it will stick. They'll end up realizing that they're the ones who need a bath. It's better to suffer for doing good, if that's what God wants, than to be punished for doing bad. That's what Christ did definitively: suffered because of others' sins, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones. He went through it all—was put to death and then made alive—to bring us to God. (MSG)

(THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE VERSION)

Now who is there to hurt you if you are zealous followers of that which is good? 14 But even in case you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, [you are] blessed (happy, to be envied). Do not dread or be afraid of their threats, nor be disturbed [by their opposition]. 15 But in your hearts set Christ apart as holy [and acknowledge Him] as Lord. Always be ready to give a logical defense to anyone who asks you to account for the hope that is in you, but do it courteously and respectfully. 16 [And see to it that] your conscience is entirely clear (unimpaired), so that, when you are falsely accused as evildoers, those who threaten you abusively and revile your right behavior in Christ may come to be ashamed [of slandering your good lives]. 17 For [it is] better to suffer [unjustly] for doing right, if that should be God's will, than to suffer [justly] for doing wrong. (AMP)

IN OUTLINE FORM THE PASSAGE LOOKS LIKE THIS: (Remember how magnificently this letter is structured!)

THINGS TO REMEMBER IN TIMES OF PERSECUTION

1. Who will harm you if you do what is good?
 - a. Even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed
 - b. So don't be afraid of threats, nor be troubled
2. Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts
3. Always be ready to give a defense
 - a. To everyone who asks
 - b. For a reason for the hope that is in your heart
 - c. With meekness and fear
4. Maintain a good conscience
 - a. That when others may defame you as evildoers
 - b. Those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed
5. It is better, if it is the will of God...
 - a. To suffer for doing good
 - b. Than to suffer for doing evil

COMMENTARY ON SPECIFIC TEXTUAL VERSES:

Verse 13 – it all begins with a rhetorical question. The question is asked in such a way that the implied answer is, “No One!” But, Peter has already pointed to the very real possibility of unjust suffering. So, he proceeds to.....

Verse 14 – this passage deals with *unjust suffering*. Some biblical scholars feel that Peter was speaking of inward harm at this point. In other words, though outward persecution might come even when one does what is right, no spiritual harm can befall the one who trusts in Christ. Whether the harm is internal or external, Peter’s point is that in any suffering the real reason must be Christ, not their failure to uphold all the standards of civil behavior. Saying that those who suffer will be blessed is not Peter’s endorsement of suffering, but it is an echo of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:10) ***“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.”***

Interestingly, the original word that Peter uses for suffering, (*paschoite*) does not refer to official governmental persecutions. Rather it describes the abuse and verbal violence that comes from non-Christian masters, husbands, and neighbors. This pattern of insults and mockery is more like the rejection of Christianity that we are likely to face today. Rejection of the Gospel we represent often feels like a personal denial.

St. Augustine in commenting on this verse says: ***“If ye should suffer”; if it should so happen; “suffer,” is a milder word than harm....for righteousness--“not the suffering, but the cause for which one suffers, makes the martyr.”***

Verse 15 – three (3) commands are given: (*these commands actually start @ end of vs. 14*)

- a. **DO NOT FEAR WHAT THEY FEAR.**
- b. **DO NOT BE INTIMIDATED.** (cf. Isaiah 8:12 – “Don’t call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy. Don’t fear what they fear, and don’t be terrified..”)
- c. **SANCTIFY CHRIST AS LORD** in your hearts. (the use of “**holy**” does not mean to make holy – since there is no question of Christ’s holiness – but it includes the idea of a continued response to Christ’s Lordship and holiness. “**Reverence Christ as Lord**” might be the best of all translations!

Peter’s conclusion to verse 15 is all important! He commands us to be:

- a. “**READY**” – readiness includes being prepared for explaining the faith to those who ask; it requires knowledge and thought; the Christian who has no interest in coming to some theological understanding of the faith has little potential as an effective witness.
- b. “**REASON**” – Peter was thinking about those who could give logical responses to faith challenges. Contemporary culture tends to be anti-theological and anti-logical, and many believers are caught “off guard” when skeptics bring challenges and questions designed to undermine faith.
- c. “**DEFENSE**” – the Greek word is “**apologia.**” The word was often used for legal defense in a courtroom; more often we need to make a defense of the faith in the midst of insults and abuse from unbelievers.
- d. “**HOPE**” – in the final analysis our ability to cope with abuse and suffering does not come from doctrinal “head” knowledge; or from logic; or from our ability to provide an adequate defense. Ability to endure unjust suffering ultimately comes through the faith that we serve a Risen Savior!

Verses 16 & 17 – It is not enough to give a correct logical and theological answer to those who oppose the faith. We must also live out the life of Christ before others. Vs. 16 points out that “**with meekness and fear**” we are “**to have a good conscience.**” The result that Peter hopes will be accomplished will be that the accusers will be ashamed of their slander. He then concludes by returning to his original premise that “**it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**”

FACILITATOR'S INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS on – SECTION II

To appreciate how suffering for righteousness' sake can be for good, Peter relates how Jesus suffered for our sins. Though put to death in the flesh, Jesus was made alive by the Spirit (*cf. Paul's testimony in Romans 1:4 "He was publicly identified as God's Son with power through his resurrection from the dead, which was based on the Spirit of holiness. This Son is Jesus Christ our Lord."*). He preached to spirits in prison who were disobedient in the days of Noah, and ultimately exalted at the right hand of God with angels, authorities and powers made subject to Him. Alluding to the example of Noah's salvation, Peter says baptism now saves us as an appeal for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

A COMPARISON OF TEXTUAL VERSIONS: 1 Peter 3:18-22

(COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE)

Christ himself suffered on account of sins, once for all, the righteous one on behalf of the unrighteous. He did this in order to bring you into the presence of God. Christ was put to death as a human, but made alive by the Spirit. 19 And it was by the Spirit that he went to preach to the spirits in prison. 20 In the past, these spirits were disobedient—when God patiently waited during the time of Noah. Noah built an ark in which a few (that is, eight) lives were rescued through water. 21 Baptism is like that. It saves you now—not because it removes dirt from your body but because it is the mark of a good conscience toward God. Your salvation comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at God's right side. Now that he has gone into heaven, he rules over all angels, authorities, and powers.

(NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION)

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, 20 who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. 21 And baptism, which this prefigured, 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 made subject to him.

(THE MESSAGE)

If with heart and soul you're doing good, do you think you can be stopped? Even if you suffer for it, you're still better off. Don't give the opposition a second thought. Through thick and thin, keep your

hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy. Keep a clear conscience before God so that when people throw mud at you, none of it will stick. They'll end up realizing that they're the ones who need a bath. It's better to suffer for doing good, if that's what God wants, than to be punished for doing bad. That's what Christ did definitively: suffered because of others' sins, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones. He went through it all—was put to death and then made alive—to bring us to God.

(THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE VERSION)

For Christ [the Messiah Himself] **died for sins once for all, the Righteous for the unrighteous** (the Just for the unjust, the Innocent for the guilty), **that He might bring us to God. In His human body He was put to death, but He was made alive in the spirit, 19 In which He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20** [The souls of those] **who long before in the days of Noah had been disobedient, when God's patience waited during the building of the ark in which a few** [people], **actually eight in number, were saved through water. 21 And baptism, which is a figure** [of their deliverance], **does now also save you** [from inward questionings and fears], **not by the removing of outward body filth** [bathing], **but by** [providing you with] **the answer of a good and clear conscience** (inward cleanness and peace) **before God** [because you are demonstrating what you believe to be yours] **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 22** [And He] **has now entered into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with** [all] **angels and authorities and powers made subservient to Him.**

IN OUTLINE FORM THE PASSAGE LOOKS LIKE THIS:

REASONS TO REMEMBER – THE EXAMPLE AND VICTORY OF CHRIST

1. Christ also suffered once for sins
 - a. The just for the unjust
 - b. That He might bring us to God
2. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit
 - a. By whom He went and preached to the spirits in prison who were formerly disobedient
 - i. During God's longsuffering
 - ii. In the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared
 - In which eight souls were saved through water
 - Which was a type of baptism like which now saves us

- ✓ Not the removal of the filth of the flesh
 - ✓ But the answer of a good conscience toward God
 - ✓ Through the resurrection of Christ
- b. Who has now gone in to heaven
- i. And is now at the right hand of God
 - ii. Where angels, authorities, and powers have been made subject to Him

COMMENTARY ON SPECIFIC TEXTUAL VERSES:

Verse 18 – Some biblical scholars believe that Peter was here using an early Christian hymn as the source for his remarks. There is here a close resemblance to what is found @ **1st Timothy 3:16** – ***“Without question, the mystery of godliness is great: he was revealed as a human, declared righteous by the Spirit, seen by angels, preached throughout the nations, believed in around the world, and taken up in glory.”*** Others believe that Peter was using words and phrases that were in the theological language of early Christians. In any case, this section constitutes a creedal statement of beliefs held in the early church.

Notice in the biblical versions printed above that two (2) phrases are used: ***“Christ died for sins on our behalf;”*** and ***“Christ suffered for sins.”*** There is no clear choice in ancient manuscripts. More important is the fact that Christ’s suffering/death was ***“for the sins of all.”*** No further sacrifice for sin is needed; Christ has accomplished all that we need to be saved!

At the conclusion of this verse Peter states of Christ: ***“In His human body He was put to death, but He was made alive in the spirit.”*** Some have interpreted this statement in terms of ancient Greek philosophy and conclude that Peter was referring to Jesus body and soul. Across many centuries this has led to heretical teachings which claim that Jesus died in a physical sense only, but continued to live in a spiritual body. More recent theological study takes the position that Jesus died totally in the fleshy or human way of all earthly existence. By the Resurrection he was made alive with respect to the Spirit, which is the mode of existence of God and of those who are raised from the dead.

Verse 19 – is one of the most difficult verses to interpret in the entire New Testament. In the Spirit mode of existence ***Christ went and preached to the spirits in prison.*** Here is where Martin Luther was stumped! Scholars are divided in their opinions: Did the preaching take place between Christ’s death and resurrection? Or. did it take place after his ascension?

The question of the identity of the spirits in prison has led to many theories. Some identify them as the souls of obedient people of the Old Testament who were waiting for Messiah to proclaim the message of salvation. Others argue that these were the souls of the people who died in Noah’s flood. Still others take the position that these were offspring of the fallen angels described in Genesis 6:1-4. ***“When the number of people started to increase throughout the fertile land, daughters were born to them. 2 The divine beings saw how beautiful these human women were, so they married the ones they chose. 3 The Lord said, “My breath will not remain in humans forever,***

because they are flesh. They will live one hundred twenty years.” 4 In those days, giants lived on the earth and also afterward, when divine beings and human daughters had sexual relations and gave birth to children. These were the ancient heroes, famous men.”

This description is very similar to material found in the inter-testament **Book of Enoch**, which had wide circulation during this period in history. That book speaks about evil spirits or fallen angels from the time of Enoch and Noah being imprisoned in (or on) the earth. It is entirely possible that Peter, being fully aware of the claim made in the **Book of Enoch**, was making the point that Christ is the Victor over all evil and we can claim His victory to our lives.

Verses 20-21 – Peter here provides a comment that God did save eight (8) people in the days of Noah by means of water. Then he connects the water that saved Noah’s family to baptism. The words ***“baptism saves you”*** are clarified in two ways: (1) Baptism does not save ***“as a removal of dirt from the body.”*** That is, the outward action; the cleansing of the body; the ritual; the baptismal water – none of these things save. There is no magic in either the water or the ritual. Rather, (2) Baptism saves ***“as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*** The basis of our salvation is the resurrection of Christ. Baptism is a reaching out to God to apply the saving benefits of the resurrection to the one being baptized.

The New Testament church believed that in baptism the believer was united to both Christ’s death and resurrection. (cf. Romans 6:1-5 – ***“So what are we going to say? Should we continue sinning so grace will multiply? 2 Absolutely not! All of us died to sin. How can we still live in it? 3 Or don’t you know that all who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore, we were buried together with him through baptism into his death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too can walk in newness of life. 5 If we were united together in a death like his, we will also be united together in a resurrection like his.”***

The reference to ***“good conscience”*** is a reminder that a person could go through the external actions of baptism and not be saved.

Verse 22 – is part of an early church creedal statement. Remember that the entire Epistle is thought to have first been a sermon that was read during baptismal services in the outlying congregations of Asia Minor. In baptism we are united with Christ. Christ suffered unjustly but obediently fulfilled his God-given mission in the world. Therefore, we must obediently fulfill the task God has placed before us regardless of whether suffering, even unjust suffering, comes our way. To do any less is an indication that the union with Christ that was to be accomplished in baptism did not take hold!

FOR GENERAL DISCUSSION:

1. Identify any new insights that seem important to you as a result of studying this portion of Peter’s First Epistle.

2. In the U.S.A., today, we rarely think about people being persecuted because of their religious beliefs. Is this really a true observation, or are we oblivious to what is going on around us?
3. In 2012, a young Pakistani teenager was critically wounded on her way to school by a young Taliban terrorist. Miraculously, she survived. On July 12, 2013, **Malala Yousafzai** went to the United Nations and said, **"I am Malala. The terrorists thought they could change my aims ... I am not against anyone ... or have personal revenge against the Taliban ... I'm here to speak up for the right of education for every child."** She is recipient of the 2014 Nobel Prize for Peace! Is your daughter/granddaughter/niece capable of making the same kind of witness regarding her Christian beliefs? Are You?
4. In every corner of our contemporary world, especially in places like Syria, Central African Republic, Iraq, Pakistan, and even in our own communities, people of faith are standing up for their convictions. Our sisters and brothers are suffering for doing what is right. At times the struggle may seem futile. It would be if it were not that **"Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God."** Is all we can say, **"Thanks be to God!"**, or are there other significant ways in which we can assist them?

UNISON CONCLUDING PRAYER:

Suffering God, sustain your daughters and sons who today carry heavy burdens which never seem to end. Give us compassionate hands and feet as we walk with them. Amen.

DISMISSAL

NEXT WEEK: January 22, 2015 Thursday, 1 Peter 4:1-11

"Abstaining from Evil; the Demands of Mutual Love"

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