

Session 9

SUFFERING WITH HOPE

1 Peter 3:13–4:6

Memory Verse

But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear them, or be intimidated, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

— 1 PETER 3:14-15, CSB



Suffering with Hope

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Even when we suffer for our faith, we can have hope because an eternity with God awaits us, and nothing can take us out of His hand.

CALL TO ACTION: No matter what we face, we live with hope because of Christ.

Our history, both as Christians and as Americans, is fraught with struggle and suffering. We could point to many people and circumstances that tell a story of great suffering for having the courage to do the right thing.

Sojourner Truth (born Isabella Baumfree) was born into slavery in 1797 in Ulster County, New York. She was enslaved by four different people. She endured cruel mistreatment and abuse and was forced to marry outside her will.

In 1927, when her master failed to uphold his promise to grant her freedom (in alignment with the New York Anti-Slavery Law of 1827), she escaped. When her young son Peter was illegally sold to an Alabama slaver, she sued and regained custody of her son, becoming the first African American in the United States courts to win a legal case against a white man in the process.

She later found faith and went on to become a gospel advocate, changing her name in 1843 to Sojourner Truth. She traveled across the Eastern and Midwestern United States advocating human and women's rights in a time when this was risky and, to many, unpopular (her famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech was delivered at a Women's Right Convention in 1851).¹

She is now known as one of the nineteenth century's most powerful advocates for human rights. Despite hardship and suffering, she courageously didn't give up. She had hope that things could change, and that drove her to act. She did hard (and, to many, unpopular) things because it was right.

We'll explore a similar idea in our passage today—speaking out for the gospel with hope, even when it's unpopular or brings suffering.

② When have you (or someone you know) stood up for the sake of the gospel, when it was unpopular or hard?

② Where are some places we see people stand up for the right (but hard) things in Scripture?

Session Summary

In today's reading, Peter wrote about suffering, an eventuality Jesus also warned His followers about. While the world may look at suffering as the absence of blessing, Peter (and Jesus!) called the one who suffers for their faith blessed. Living obediently for God is better than taking the easy (and sometimes evil) way out (the road of disobedience).

Christ lived obediently and suffered for it. Jesus's death on the cross made payment for our sins. The wonder of His willingness to suffer for us leads us to suffer for Him. Still, we can have hope in suffering because an eternity with God awaits us.

1. Suffering for Doing Good (1 Peter 3:13-17)

② What does it mean to suffer for righteousness? (v. 14)

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What does it mean to regard Christ as holy in our hearts?
Why is that important? (v. 15) How does that impact our willingness to suffer?

In this passage, Peter addresses a central issue: suffering. This is something Christ warned His followers about also:

“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.” —John 16:33

“If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. Remember the word I spoke to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they don’t know the one who sent me.” —John 15:18-21

This prediction of suffering is relevant in different ways for believers in different parts of the world and throughout history. This was especially relevant to Peter’s original audience, who was facing a kind of suffering we can hardly imagine living through in the United States today. They were literally attacked and rejected for their faith, as many around the world are today.

Peter’s message, though, was clear: Keep pursuing the faith, no matter what.

If we know suffering is commonplace in the Christian life, what did Peter mean in verse 13? When we suffer for our faith, we are blessed (Jesus said the same in the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:10). How contrary this is to the ideas of our society! It is righteous to live obediently by Jesus’s teachings and commands. When we suffer, we don’t have to be afraid (Psalm 23:4).

Paul taught similarly in Philippians 1:21 and other places. He knew there was no reason to be afraid or intimidated. His priority was obedience to Christ, and

if his hardship ended in death, it would be the ultimate gain to go and be with God. Humans may be able to affect us now, but they have no control of the eternal. They can't take away our salvation. This eternal perspective can help us fight fear and intimidation daily.

When we regard Christ as holy in our hearts, that drives our actions. Such correct heart alignment bolsters us for doing the right thing, speaking out for the gospel and living obediently to God no matter how unpopular that makes us.

Peter advised to always be ready to defend the faith. We should do this: “with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience” (v. 16). Being abrasive and defensive shuts doors, while a gentle and reverent approach can point people to Christ. It also helps the believer stay above reproach, “keeping a clear conscience” (v. 16). In this scenario, the believer’s good conduct results only in the shame of those disparaging them.

② **What is the difference between suffering for good rather than suffering for evil?**

Our passage ends with more wisdom from Peter: it’s better to do the right thing and suffer for it than to do evil (disobeying God’s will).

2. Christ Also Suffered (1 Peter 3:18-22)

② **Why is it important that Jesus is our example in suffering?**

② **How has Christ suffered similarly to His people? How has He suffered differently?**

Peter went on to describe Christ’s suffering. Jesus hasn’t asked us to endure anything He didn’t first endure to a greater degree. Further, since Christ was willing to suffer for us, we should be willing to suffer for Him, too.

Jesus “suffered for sins once for all” (v. 18) through His death on the cross:

“For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” —John 3:16

He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world. —1 John 2:2

We are unrighteous sinners, incapable of saving ourselves, so God sent Jesus to die on the cross in payment for our sins (past, present, and future). He suffered once so all our sins could be forgiven and we could be made right (or atoned) with God. Following His death on the cross, the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead, the ultimate defeat over death.

There are several ways scholars interpret verse 19. One view is that Peter meant Jesus descended to hell to preach to the spirits of those who perished during the flood during Noah’s time, possibly offering them an opportunity to accept the gospel. A second view is that the pre-incarnate Christ preached in the Spirit through Noah’s calls for repentance. A third view is that the “spirits” in view here are principalities and powers to whom Jesus made a proclamation of victory after His death and resurrection.² No matter the interpretation, it is clear that only Christ has the power that brings life through death.

Peter went on to compare Noah’s salvation through the ark to baptism. Peter was not saying baptism by water saves us (“not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God,” v. 21). We are saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and baptism is an outward sign of an inward change.

② **How might a person put too much stock in their baptism? How might a person put too little stock in this practice?**

Though we may suffer now for our faithfulness to Christ, in the end, we will be vindicated because we will spend our eternity with God, just as Christ was vindicated. This would have instilled Peter’s initial readers with hope as they faced an uncertain earthly future.

3. Following Christ (1 Peter 4:1-6)

?) The header of this section in the CSB Study Bible is “Following Christ.” What did Peter teach about following Christ in this passage?

?) How did Peter describe those who do not follow Christ? How can this help us assess our own hearts and lives?

Jesus was humble and obedient in suffering, even when His circumstances were outside what He would have chosen (Mark 14:36). Jesus knew the road before Him when He prayed in the garden. Physical suffering was in His future, and He prayed that God would take it away, but ultimately that God’s will would be done, and then submitted to it. Whatever suffering is in store for us in this life, we should approach it with humble obedience.

?) How does living obediently for Jesus lead us to live differently with others around us?

As we live in obedience, we also turn away from sin in our lives, as Jesus taught. This demonstrates the transformation of following Jesus. We were once ruled by the desires of the flesh, which Peter outlined in verse 3. When we are committed to following Jesus, that may mean changing connections with those who don’t follow Jesus. The unbelievers around us don’t always relate to our desire to live holy lives, and that will sometimes cause them to slander us. Peter notes that they will one day give an account for this.

The people in view in verse 6 seem to be deceased people who believe in Jesus. The gospel was preached to them during their earthly life, and at the time, they were “judged in the flesh according to human standards” (v. 6), but now they “live in the spirit according to God’s standards.”

Conclusion

Peter gave hope for suffering believers. Suffering is likely, but not a guarantee, and when it does come, Scripture tells us it is a blessing. Peter urged believers to do the right thing, live obediently as God wants, even when it's hard or there is suffering ahead. We can do the right thing without fear, knowing that we are in God's hand, and nothing can snatch us away. This style of living is made easier when we are rooted with Christ as the Lord of our lives.

Peter wrote that we should always be ready to explain our faith with gentleness and reverence, thus glorifying God and pointing people to Him. Suffering while doing the right thing is better than doing the easy, disobedient (and sometimes evil) thing.

To give further hope to his readers, Peter highlighted that Christ suffered, too. His death on the cross made payment for our sins. The wonder of His willingness to suffer for us should make us willing to suffer for Him, if required, too. Just as Christ was vindicated after His suffering, believers can endure present trials with hope, knowing that faithfulness to Him leads to eternal vindication and life with God.

Peter also called believers to adopt Christ's attitude toward suffering: humble obedience to God's will, even when it is difficult. Jesus modeled this humble obedience in the garden of Gethsemane, submitting to the Father's will despite His desire for the cup of suffering ahead of Him to pass.

Christians are called to live transformed lives, turning away from sin and former behavior that is not in alignment with God's commands and will for us. This sometimes means changing relationships to live faithfully, and others won't always understand (in fact, sometimes this will cause them to slander us).

Ultimately, Peter gives us hope. Jesus is worth any suffering we face, and nothing can take us out of His hand.

② If you were asked to explain your faith today, what would you say? How does regarding Christ as holy affect the way we live each day?

② How can we support one another as we face suffering for Jesus's sake?

② How might faithfully suffering for Jesus give us opportunity to tell others about Him?

Memorize

But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear them, or be intimidated, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

- 1 Peter 3:14-15, CSB

References

¹nps.gov/articles/sojourner-truth.htm; <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/key-figures-abolitionist-movement/>

²Terry L. Wilder, “1 Peter,” in CSB Study Bible: Notes, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1979.;

Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 157–158.