

1 Peter 3:13-17 | “Suffering for Doing Right”
Preached on May 30, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown

Good morning and welcome, I’m so glad that each of you are here today to hear from God’s Word.

Let’s turn in our Bibles to 1 Peter 3, verses 13 through 17.

In his letter, the Apostle Peter has talked about how we are to relate to others in our different relationships.

Now he is going to give an extended discourse on suffering. *[pause]*

Peter very briefly talked about suffering in last Sunday’s passage, as we saw how he told us not to return evil for evil, but to bless.

But now he is going to really get into talking about suffering, teaching us how we are to respond to suffering for doing good.

So with this background in our minds, let’s READ THE PASSAGE. *[pause]*

“A newspaper reporter phoned a story into his editor about an empty truck that rolled down a hill and smashed into a home.

The editor was unimpressed and told the reporter he didn't want to run the story.

Then the reporter responded by saying, ‘I'm glad you're taking this so calmly. It was your house.’”¹ *[pause]*

Suffering doesn’t always affect us until it becomes *our* suffering.

But when suffering becomes your suffering, how do you respond to it? *[pause]*

It’s somewhat easy to look at a distance at someone else’s suffering, and to tell them how to respond Biblically to it, but how do you respond to it personally?

When someone hurts you, what do you do?

When someone says something slanderous about you, what’s your reaction? *[pause]*

When these things happen, how’s your fear level?

What are some of your thoughts about God or yourself in those moments? *[pause]*

You see, suffering heats up our lives so that what’s underneath rises to the surface.

And sometimes what rises to the surface isn’t very pretty. *[pause]*

¹ Unknown source. Illustration found at <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/s/suffering.htm>.

What Peter wants to do in this section of his letter is that he wants to teach us how we can respond well to suffering.

His writing in this passage digs deep so that it makes you answer the questions...

“What is it that drives me in how I respond to suffering?”

And, “Do I respond rightly to it?” *[pauseeee]*

Now before we go further, let’s first understand what type of suffering Peter is speaking about.

He’s not talking about suffering in general.

So he’s not talking about losing a loved one, getting sick, or anything of that nature.

Those things are certainly suffering, but that’s not exactly what Peter is talking about.

He’s specifically talking about suffering for doing right. *[pause]*

Verses 13 and 14 give us the key, just notice what he says...

“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.” *[pause]*

This is suffering for righteousness; suffering for being zealous for what is good.

So this is what we would call persecution for your faith. *[pause]*

Let’s say that at your job, you stand up to your boss and tell him that you won’t do the unethical thing that he is requiring you to do because of your Christian beliefs, and you lose your job.

That’s the sort of thing he’s talking about. *[pause]*

This could be disdain from others, name-calling, accusing you of evil when you did nothing wrong, public mockery, and scorn.

All of these things happen in our country, whether we believe it or not. *[pause]*

As Christians, we are increasingly facing these sorts of things, as many Christian views are seen as hateful and bigoted in America.

And this isn’t some imaginary suffering, for specific Christians have faced these things...

In 2018, a high-ranking employee of the company “Crossfit” was fired.

What was he fired for?

He tweeted that celebrating homosexuality was a sin.² *[pause]*

That's not all, a high school football coach was placed on leave for praying after a football game³, and a teacher fired for giving a Bible to a student.⁴

Even an InterVarsity organization was kicked off of a university campus for requiring its leaders to be Christian.⁵ *[pause]*

Many non-profit, Christian ministries are facing difficulty when it comes to homosexuality and transgender issues.

Christians have faced fines and lawsuits.

The typical Christian in America can be hated, ostracized, spoken against, and slandered.

And there is a general disdain culturally for some Christian beliefs. *[pause]*

All of this isn't to complain, for that goes against the very thing that Peter is telling us to do, but it's to say that what Peter is talking about is real.

It's not made up, but any one of us could face this or have faced this sort of thing in our lives. *[pause]*

If you have ever been made fun of or looked down upon for something you do or believe that is because of your faith, then those are some things that this passage is talking about. *[pause]*

Now we have to admit that the suffering that we face as Americans for doing right isn't as bad as other countries, for Christians around the world are facing violence and death for their faith.

We should weep for those who weep, and sympathize for our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world.

So we aren't saying that what we face is anywhere near what they face.

But we need to also realize that suffering for doing right may be ramped up even more in the future, so we need to be ready by looking at passages like this one. *[pauseeee]*

So what does our passage teach us about suffering for righteousness? First...

² Will Maule. "Christian CrossFit Spokesperson Fired for Saying Celebrating Pride Is 'Sin'." *Faithwire*, 7 June 2018, www.faithwire.com/2018/06/07/christian-crossfit-spokesperson-fired-for-saying-celebrating-pride-is-sin/.

³ Hanna, Jason, and Steve Almasy. "Washington High School Coach Placed on Leave for Praying on Field." *CNN*, 30 Oct. 2015, www.cnn.com/2015/10/29/us/washington-football-coach-joe-kennedy-prays/index.html.

⁴ Steve Novak. "Teacher Fired for Giving Student a Bible Is Back in Classroom." *Lehighvalleylive*, 17 May 2017, www.lehighvalleylive.com/warren-county/2017/05/teacher_who_gave_student_a_bib.html.

⁵ "University Kicks InterVarsity Off Campus for Requiring Its Leaders to Be Christian." *RELEVANT*, 8 Mar. 2018, www.relevantmagazine.com/current/nation/university-kicks-intervarsity-off-campus-requiring-leaders-christian/.

I. When you suffer for doing right, you are blessed. (13-14a)

Peter begins this passage by asking, “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?”

This question can be taken two different ways.

First, it can be seen in a broad, spiritual sense.

Who can ultimately harm a Christian when they are secure in God?

Reflecting back to what he just said in verse 12, if God’s eyes are on the righteous and his ears are open to them, what harm can others *ultimately* do to a Christian?

They may harm the body, but they can’t touch the soul.

There is blessing for those in Christ, and no harm can be done to that blessing, for God has promised and secured it for us. *[pause]*

This is all true, and something that we can rest upon...

...But the question that Peter raises seems to be focused more on literal, physical harm since he goes on to talk about physical suffering right after this. *[pause]*

His question is: who will harm you if you are zealous to do good?

This is a general statement.

Generally, those who zealously do good in society aren’t harmed for the good that they do.

And generally, those who do wrong suffer most at the hands of others. *[pause]*

If you go around and do evil to others, you can expect harm in return.

You go up and yell at someone, you can expect to be yelled at back.

If you are continuously kind to someone else, then it’s less likely that you will be yelled at.

People who are mean and nasty typically have more enemies, it’s just a matter of fact.

Again, remember that this is a general statement, as Peter will even share that this isn’t always the case right after this...

Generally, people return evil for evil, and good for good - *but not always!*

That’s why Peter admits, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed.” *[pause]*

Peter is realistic, as he knows that just because you zealously do good, that doesn't mean you won't face suffering.

He knows that Christians are hated, and spoken against, even if they follow Christ faithfully.

But the key thing is that even if you suffer for doing good, you are still blessed. *[pause]*

What exactly does it mean that we are "blessed"?

It means that your status is that you have God's divine favor and approval.

You are essentially a person in a very good state spiritually. *[pause]*

So Peter is saying, "If you face suffering for doing good, remember that this doesn't change your blessedness, for you are blessed." *[pause]*

This is important for us to remember for two reasons...

First, if people harm you in some way, it doesn't change your status.

Your suffering for righteousness doesn't change the fact that you are blessed by God!

Though they say hurtful things, they can't change anything foundational about your relationship with God.

They are powerless against the blessing of God. *[pause]*

They may try their hardest to shame you, to revile you, to speak against you, but they can't change anything about what God says about you!

If God declares you blessed in Christ, then no contrary word changes that! *[pause]*

They may say you do evil, but if you are following God, then you are not doing evil.

They may say you are not blessed in this life, but God says, "No, you are infinitely blessed by Me." *[pause]*

Jesus tells us this in the Sermon on the Mount.

He says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."⁶ *[pause]*

⁶ See Matthew 5:10-12.

This is such an encouraging and motivating truth!

It helps you persevere in suffering for doing right because you know that nothing your persecutors say changes anything.

Their words are like a small twig trying to stop a freight train, they can't do anything to God's favor!

If God says you are blessed, then you are blessed.

So keep on being faithful to the Lord, being zealous for good. *[pause]*

Secondly, this truth is important to remember because it reminds us that suffering for doing good is not punishment from God.

So many times, Christians face suffering for doing good, and then they think, "God, why would you do this to me when I'm serving you? Am I being punished for something?"

No, suffering for doing good is never punishment from God, but it actually *reveals* that you are blessed. *[pause]*

Suffering for doing right is an indicator of blessing, not punishment.

Your suffering doesn't take away your blessedness, but it is revealing it even more so! *[pause]*

So often we think that suffering is the opposite of blessing, but God shows us that suffering for righteousness *is* blessing. *[pause]*

In Acts 5:41, the disciples are beaten and let go, and they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for Christ's name. *[pause]*

Suffering for doing right equals blessing - it does not equal punishment. *[pause]*

Now we don't wish for the pain and seek out suffering, but in suffering for righteousness, we rejoice that we are doing it for the Lord, and it's revealing that we are doing the right thing. *[pauseeee]*

Charles Spurgeon once said, "We are too prone to engrave our trials in marble and write our blessings in sand."

In God's eyes, he sees it as the opposite of what we tend to do...

...Our status of being blessed is written in marble, and our trials are written in sand. *[pause]*

Even if you suffer for doing right, you are blessed. *[pauseeee]*

How do you view the times that you suffer for doing right?

Maybe you stepped up at work and did the right thing, and now your boss or co-worker keeps saying mean things about you.

Maybe your friend or family member found out your views of homosexuality or transgenderism, and now they keep putting you down in front of others.

Don't let these things discourage you, or change your mind about doing good, for you are blessed.

Keep doing good, keep living for Christ, keep being faithful to His Word - don't give in.

That's where Peter is leading us, he's leading us to suffer *rightly* based on the fact that we are blessed.

So since you are blessed, even in suffering for doing right, therefore...

II. When you suffer for doing right, suffer rightly. (14b-17)

What can happen so easily is that when you suffer for doing good, you end up responding to it in the wrong way.

So you did good, but now you're suffering for it, and you respond sinfully. *[pause]*

Let's say that you stuck up for someone who was getting bullied.

You did the right thing, but now you have become the object of their bullying.

So you did good, and now you are suffering for doing good.

But the question remains: how will you respond to it? *[pause]*

When you are bullied, are you going to say mean and nasty words back to them and sinfully respond to it?

Or are you going to have a godly response? *[pause]*

Peter doesn't want us to ruin these moments, but he wants us to live for God through it all, for as Christians, we do good no matter what.

So even if we suffer for doing right, we ought to respond to it rightly. *[pauseeee]*

As I said, Peter has already said that we are blessed, even if we suffer for doing right.

So therefore, "Have no fear of them, nor be troubled."

Literally, Peter says, "Have no fear of their terror." *[pause]*

What can they do to you if you are declared, "blessed by God"?

Time and time again, the Bible calls us to not fear man.

They may act big and tough.

They may threaten, try to intimidate, or try to terrorize you, but they cannot touch the most important things about you.

They can't change your identity in Christ, nor your eternity with God. [pauseeee]

Why fear man?

As Jesus says, "do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul."⁷ [pause]

So we don't fear them, nor are we to be troubled. [pause]

To be troubled is to be distressed, and overcome with agitation about them. [pauseeee]

Imagine the peace you could have if you lived this way!

Think of the freedom from distress and anxiety!

It would make a significant impact on your daily, inner life.

You could get to the place where even those who revile you have no power over you.

No matter how hard they try, they can't intimidate you, or cause you to be troubled. [pause]

Sometimes when we face reviling, we fear future reviling from them.

But God is telling us not to fear that, instead, what should we do?

In our hearts, we honor Christ the Lord as holy. [pause]

Peter is actually using Isaiah 8 here for his purposes.

In Isaiah 8, it says, "do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread.

But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread."⁸

So now Peter is using that to say the same sort of thing: do not fear man, but fear God, and honor him as holy. [pauseeee]

There are different translations of the verse here, which give different emphasis, but the closest to the Greek is the NASB.

It says, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts."

⁷ Matthew 10:28.

⁸ Isaiah 8:12b-13.

The idea is that we set apart Christ as Lord, or revere him as Lord in our hearts.

Certainly Jesus *is* Lord, but we should treat him *as* Lord in our hearts. *[pause]*

The heart is the very core of you, the center by which everything you think, feel, or do flows out of.

So setting apart Christ as Lord in your heart means that you recognize that He is Lord over all, revere him as Lord, and your allegiance is to Him.

You place your trust and confidence in him, knowing that he is the ruler, and he deserves all reverence and obedience.

It's this mindset where you want to honor him in every situation. *[pause]*

At the very core of you, your thinking, your feeling, and your actions - you know that Christ is the sovereign Lord, and you treat him as such.

He is the Holy One, whom you fear. *[pauseeee]*

You see, when you truly believe and honor Christ as Lord, this belief defeats fear of man every single time.

Who can compare to the Lord?

Who can question his authority? Who can compete? Who can stand against Him? *[pause]*

When you honor and revere and worship Christ *as* Lord, then that means everyone else is under his dominion. *[pause]*

As Isaiah 8 says when it talks about our enemies, "Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us."⁹

When Christ is our Lord, then he becomes unto us a sanctuary that we can find refuge in.¹⁰
[pauseeee]

Here's the thing: suffering rightly involves your inner life.

It confronts you with the question: who do you revere above all? Man or God?

If man, I will fear every word, every action, everything that they do.

But if God, then I don't fear man, but I live confidently and boldly, knowing Christ is Lord.

And when this happens, then you're free to do right, even in suffering, because *Christ is all*.
[pauseeee]

⁹ Isaiah 8:10.

¹⁰ See Isaiah 8:14.

Peter shows us that suffering rightly involves our inner life, so that in those moments, we aren't fearing man, but revering Christ as Lord.

But he also shows us that suffering rightly involves our outward witness. *[pause]*

After the statement about setting apart Christ as Lord in our hearts, Peter says, "always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is in you." *[pause]*

Peter tells us that suffering for doing right can lead to opportunities for evangelism.

They can lead to the explanation and defense of your faith.

Attacks can lead to apologetics!

They will mock you, make fun of you, and revile you - but through this, your hope will shine brightly.

They will see that you are different.

You don't return evil for evil, but you bless.

You don't give in and do wrong, but you do right, no matter how much they pressure you to fight back.

So Peter tells us not to waste those moments.

We need to always be prepared to give an answer when they ask about our hope. *[pauseeee]*

You should have reasons for your hope and faith.

Do you have reasons for your hope and can you explain your reasons if someone asked you?

If someone asked you why you don't retaliate, what would you say?

If someone asked you why you don't fear them, how would you respond?

If someone asked you how you could have such hope in the midst of suffering, what's your answer?

Don't squander those opportunities, but be prepared to answer them with the truth.

You never know - these times could lead them to believe in Christ! [pause]

So maybe you need to study a little more, or think a little more about why, really, you have hope.

There are a ton of resources to help you in Apologetics.

We are even planning another Apologetics Conference this September, so use that as a way to help you prepare, on top of your own study and thinking.

Let's do the work necessary so that we are prepared to give answers.

You don't need a Ph.D. to do this, but you can confidently answer with the basic truths of your faith. *[pauseee]*

Yet Peter doesn't stop there, he gives some necessary qualities we must have when we answer those who ask questions...

We shouldn't be brash, harsh, or disrespectful when we answer, but we need to answer with gentleness and respect. *[pause]*

It can be extremely easy to say things in a mean way to those who make fun of your faith.

It can be easy to be unkind or rude to those who are antagonistic to the faith.

But Peter reminds us to be gentle and respectful. *[pause]*

This is important to remember...

If you are rude, mean, or unkind to those who attack your faith and ask questions about it, then you are not responding rightly.

We are to be different and respond gently.

This again reflects what Peter said about how we bless, even when we are reviled. *[pause]*

A Christian must respond to aggression with gentleness.

A Christian must respond to evil with good.

Yet this is so rare amongst modern-day Christians!

What do we do instead to those who attack our faith?

We complain, we try to get them back, we speak harshly to them, and we are utterly disrespectful in our attitude.

God says that that ought not to be so, but we answer gently, respectfully, and as Peter continues, with a good conscience.

We need to keep a good conscience as we encounter these situations.

Nothing we do in how we respond should violate our conscience, but we seek to respond in godly ways. *[pause]*

And what's the result of this kind of godly response to attacks? They are put to shame. *[pause]*

So let's say at work you share your faith with others, and you refuse to do anything unethical because you know it's wrong.

Because of this, your co-workers make fun of you, and say slanderous things about you and your character.

Yet through all of this, you keep doing right, you respond in godly ways, and you even give answers whenever they ask you questions. *[pause]*

They may feel some shame in this life, as the truth is continually evident to them that what they're saying is wrong.

But that won't always be the case, so what then of this shame?

It's speaking of the last day, the day of judgment.

On the last day, they will be put to shame for how they treated you and slandered you.

The truth will be affirmed, and they will be utterly humiliated and put to shame for what they did.

They will be shamed because you didn't do anything wrong.

They will be shamed because even your answers to them were godly, gentle, and respectful.

And they will be shamed because they wrongly accused you.

On that day, what else can they do but be put to shame when the Judge reveals and upholds the truth? *[pause]*

So keep being faithful!

Keep doing right, even when it's hard and others revile you!

Keep speaking the truth in love, even when you face antagonism from others.

Remember that one day God will bring the truth to light and your character and actions will be vindicated.

Remember that one day, though they boast and rejoice in their slanderous attacks, they will be put to shame.

This is a big reason why we can persevere in doing right because we know that one day God will make all things right. *[pauseeeee]*

And then Peter concludes this section by reiterating to us that it's better to suffer for doing right than to suffer for doing wrong.

If we are to suffer, it is way better to suffer for good, not evil.

There is no commendation from God for deserved suffering, but for undeserved suffering.

So we don't categorize all suffering as equally the same, for sometimes the suffering is self-inflicted.

If you lose your job because you stole money, you can't say, "Look, I'm suffering for righteousness!" *[pause]*

And Peter adds an interesting statement here at the end of this passage.

He says, "For it is better to suffer for doing good, *if that should be God's will*, than for doing evil." *[pause]*

Peter understands that not all will suffer the same amount or extent.

And he also explains that if you do suffer for doing good, it is God's will. *[pause]*

At first, this may surprise you, but in essence, this is a good thing.

It means that even your suffering is in His control and it has a purpose. *[pause]*

Imagine if your suffering was purposeless - that's not very comforting.

But also, imagine if your suffering caught God off guard, that, too, isn't very comforting.

But when I know that even when I suffer for righteousness, He is in control and it has a purpose, then I can persevere, knowing that God is doing something here.

And I can rest in the fact that it's in His hands and under his purview. *[pauseeee]*

So what this passage shows us is that...

There will be times when you will suffer for doing right, so let's respond to it by doing right!

Christian brother or sister, I don't know what your future beholds.

I don't know what suffering awaits you for doing good.

But I know this - even if you suffer for doing right, you are blessed.

No one can take that away from you, for in Christ, you are blessed with every spiritual blessing.¹¹

Though they may try their hardest, they can't touch the fact that like Jeremiah says, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord."¹² *[pause]*

So if we are blessed, even if we suffer for righteousness, then let's respond rightly in our suffering.

¹¹ See Ephesians 1:3.

¹² Jeremiah 17:7.

Let's respond to it, not with sinfully retaliating or cowering in fear, but with goodness and hope.

Let's respond rightly because Christ is truly set apart as Lord in our hearts.

Let's not waste our suffering, but use it to be beacons of hope in a hopeless world, answering every question with gentleness and respect.

And we do all this, knowing that Christ is Lord, God is sovereign, and God is just. *[pauseeeee]*

If you think about it, we can only be blessed when we suffer for doing right because Jesus Christ suffered for doing right.

He, who did absolutely no sin, suffered for righteousness' sake, so that we could be declared righteous and called blessed. *[pause]*

There is no sin that they could accurately ascribe to him, yet he was killed on the Cross, and it was all for *our* sin.

He died to provide the way for our sin to be atoned for and God's wrath to be satisfied.

He treated us with gentleness when we didn't deserve it.

So now those who trust in Him are forgiven, declared righteous, and given a home in Heaven. *[pause]*

Christ is Lord and he is our hope, even if we suffer for doing right.