

Why Suffer for Doing Good?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 April 2021

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Saviour and my God is he. Now, can you turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 3? And we're going to read from verse 17 to the end of the chapter. The words will also be up on the screen. And just to say, as we read, at the end of verse 18 and into verse 19, I'm going to use a footnote, sort of an alternative translation, which I think will be more helpful as we come to think about our text.

Well, let's hear God's word together. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits, to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it, only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water. And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also, not the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a clear conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to him. Amen.

So our question today is this one. Why suffer for doing good? Or to frame it another way, what is worth suffering for? Now, I don't know about others, but I have what I would describe as an uneasy relationship with exercise. I have listened to enough physical trainers to know that the agony is supposedly worth it, that it has mental health benefits, that it has many physical benefits. And I have also heard them encourage me to use my inner dialogue when I feel like giving up. But see, here's the problem with that idea of the inner dialogue. What if all I can hear in my head is, it hurts and I'm tired, and I just want to sit and have a piece of cake. There is that battle, and perhaps we feel it, maybe not with exercise, but with something else, where we're doing something and it's difficult, and we find ourselves asking, is the pain, is the struggle worth it? What about, in the most important question of all, is following Jesus worth it? Verse 17 gave us a principle. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. It is God's will that Christians would remain faithful and obedient, even if that means suffering indeed, even if that means dying. That's better than denying, dishonoring, turning our back on Jesus. That's the principle, but I imagine that we recognize that's a hard principle to apply to our lives. Peter's audience certainly knew this was a hard principle.

In chapter 1, verse 6, we discover their faith has already been tested. In all this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. The last time we were in 1 Peter 3, we were recognizing the reality that Christians will suffer for doing good. And when we think about who Peter's first readers were, we recognize this was their reality. Every time they would have gone to the marketplace, the fact that they were Christians would have made them stand out. Their worship was so very different to the surrounding society. Perhaps for many of them, they had already found themselves being excluded or losing their job, or being rejected by their own family for honoring Jesus as Lord.

Perhaps you know the Japanese proverb that says, the nail that sticks out will get hammered in. Will these early young Christians were finding that they were being hammered by a society that would have them to blend in and to leave Christianity behind.

[5 : 19] And so Peter's purpose is to supply for them an inner dialogue, that they would know how to talk to themselves when suffering for God, suffering for doing good became hard.

And in essence, what he says to us in this section is, in lots of different ways, God keeps and God saves his people so God can be trusted and you should keep trusting this God. Peter takes their attention and our attention to the gospel through four different events that we'll look at today. He takes them and takes us first of all to the cross, and then to the story of Noah, and then to the story of their own baptism, and then to the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus to the glory of

heaven, so that we might understand that suffering for Jesus is worth it.

I hope this is something that we'll all find helpful, but perhaps today this is especially for you if you are the only Christian in your family, and you love to share your faith, but you know that your family don't want to hear. Perhaps this is especially for you if you're living for Jesus at school, or at university, or even in a workplace where you are the only Christian, and being a minority is difficult. This is for you if you are praying for the people that you love, and you long for opportunities to share your faith, but the people in your life still seem hard to the gospel, and you perhaps find yourself discouraged. This is for you particularly if today, even today, you are tempted to go back to old ways to blend in, because that life then seems much easier than following Jesus now.

And it's also for you, if you're here in church or listening at home, because you're searching, you're wondering, who is Jesus? Is following Jesus worth it? Is the cost that the Bible talks about a cost worth paying to be a friend, a follower of Jesus? So let's look together at these four events.

First of all, let's go to the cross and verse 18. Notice that verse 18 begins with the word for. What is that therefore? Peter is wanting to immediately connect the suffering of Jesus to the suffering that God's people experience. To say, since Jesus has done this for you, gone to the cross for you, Christian, you can keep going. He will hold you. He has grace for you. That the love of God poured out of the cross might be our motivation. What does it say in verse 18? For Christ also suffered once for sins. Using their word once there to speak of this unique act of Jesus when he gave his life as a sin offering, becoming the sin bearer of the world, so that by faith in Jesus we might be forgiven.

[8 : 48] And who does Jesus do that for? It says he did it the righteous for the unrighteous. And that's important in so many ways. When it says Jesus was righteous, it means he is the one person who did not deserve death. It is important because in the Old Testament we discover the sacrifices that God accepted were righteous, clean, pure, righteous, clean, pure sacrifices. Jesus had to be perfectly righteous so that he could die in our place and deal with our sin problem.

And that Jesus is righteous is important because it means he's a perfect substitute, because who does Jesus die for? The righteous for the unrighteous. That's all of us. That's all of us. That's everyone who's ever lived. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God.

And without Jesus we could never know God. We could never be in fellowship with God and receiving his love. And so Jesus suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous. Why? Look at our text. He did it to bring you, to bring us to God. Here's what it's all about. Here's the goal of the gospel.

Jesus comes and Jesus forgives our sins so that we who are far away from God by nature might be brought home to enjoy life with God. Forgiveness of sin is the means to that great end that you and I might enjoy life in God's presence and be part of his family. That forgiveness deals with a sin that separates us from God.

[10 : 30] That forgiveness deals with our unrighteousness as the perfect record of Jesus is credited to our account. It's really significant that it's Peter who's writing about the goodness of the death of Jesus.

Jesus. Because Peter in his past had formerly seen no good in a suffering Savior. Remember when Jesus began to teach his disciples the Son of Man must suffer many things. He must be rejected. He must be killed. And after three days he must rise again. Peter said, Never, Lord. Far be it from you, Lord.

Even the night of Jesus' arrest, the night before the cross, Peter drew his sword. He wanted to fight to stop Jesus from having to go to the cross. But now, after the cross, after the resurrection, he understands Jesus is our only hope in life and death. And he encourages the people of God to see that truth. Why suffer for doing good? Is following Jesus worth it? First place Peter takes us is to the foot of the cross. To see the love of God as Jesus suffers and dies for sinners. That we might, as God's people, remember that with gratitude and love, that we might keep trusting the one who has loved us and gave himself for us. Today, if we feel isolated as a Christian, feel as a minority, remember Jesus left home for you, left the glory of heaven to become one of us, to die, as it were, in exile for us, to bring you and I, by faith, home to God. We remember that we have that relationship with God that's secure and fixed. What about today if you feel tempted, tempted to give up on Jesus?

Well, we already said there's nothing more important than what we do with Jesus. So, I think it's important that we give real weight to considering that question. Should I follow, continue follow, or

should I reject Jesus? I don't know about in your own life or in your family how you make important decisions. Sometimes we do the pros and cons list to weigh up the relative merits of a decision. Let's do that here in a few very specific categories to consider is following Jesus worth it. Let's think about, first of all, the reality of sin. If we choose to follow Jesus, then we know our sin is forgiven and we have peace with God and there's no condemnation. But if we turn our back on Jesus and refuse that forgiveness, then we have to take our own sin and we have to face the punishment for sin ourselves. What about when we think about the reality of God? If we choose to follow Jesus, then we are united to God by faith that we have life with God, that we enjoy him now and forever. But if we say no to Jesus, then we will only ever know God as our judge, not our Father. What about as we think about security for our life? Something that's so important? If we are in Jesus, then we have security. We are kept secure by the God of the universe who loves us and approves of us and welcomes us and will keep us for now and eternity. But if we don't have Jesus, then we have to try and find security in the stuff of life, the stuff that is temporary, that does not last, that will not keep us beyond day.

[14:29] And what about when it comes to the reality of eternity? If we choose Jesus, we know that we will be home with him in glory forever, enjoying God's love and peace and life to the full, but without Jesus. The reality is eternity in hell. So we need to weigh up so carefully what we will do with Jesus.

If you are wondering today, is it worth following or is it worth persevering in following Jesus, recognize that all of us, we are wired towards seeking our own happiness. We are pleasure seekers.

And the Bible would say to us, seek your greatest happiness, which is eternal. Take the long-term view. Choose to follow Jesus to receive the love of God.

So the first event that Peter takes us to is the cross. The second event is the story of Noah. Now it is without a doubt one of the most debated texts in the New Testament, difficult to translate, difficult to understand, verses 18 to 20. But I think to help us, we need to ask the question, why does Peter jump from the cross to the story of Noah? And why does he bring the story of Noah to a group of Christians who are feeling isolated for their faith and who are beginning to suffer for doing good? And I think if we can understand this or the reason why, then it will help us to understand our text. Now, let's do a basic review of the story. And boys and girls, I am sure, like many of us, we are familiar with this story and we read it again. So let's just go back in our minds. The world is wicked in Noah's day, we're told, but Noah finds favor, finds grace from God. And then we hear that the flood is announced, judgment is coming. But there's also the promise of salvation because that ark is built. And we discover that as the flood comes, so Noah and his family are saved beyond that judgment by God's grace. Now, how does Peter use that story? Well, let's look at our text to see if we can understand why. In the end of verse 18, Peter says that Jesus was put to death in the body, but made alive in the Spirit, in which also he went and made proclamation. So the first key thing to recognize is that Peter is saying that Jesus, by the Spirit, preaches through Noah. Okay, the story of

Noah, the words of Noah, are Jesus by the Spirit preaching to Noah's day. Who does he preach to? Who does he proclaim to? He went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits, to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah. Who's he proclaiming to? He's proclaiming to the people of Noah's day, who were disobedient, who rejected the message of judgment and the offer of salvation. They are the imprisoned spirits. They are imprisoned, anticipating final judgment, because they rejected the message of Noah's day, which we know came from Jesus. And all this is happening, we're told, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, while the ark was being built. So there is patience. God says judgment is coming, but the judgment doesn't come until the ark is built. And also in that time, as Noah is building the ark, he's also proclaiming a message. He is proclaiming that judgment is coming, but here in this boat he is building, there is a way of building. Now who received that salvation? Back to our text, in it, in the ark, only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water. So in the end, just eight people, Noah's immediate family, are saved through the flood of God's judgment by God's grace by getting in the ark. They trusted in God's way of salvation and God saved them. Now I hope that the logic is clear, and if it's not, please do speak to me, get in touch with me afterwards, because it is a difficult passage. But I think what's important for us to think about as well is, why does Peter include the story of Noah? And hopefully as we see these reasons, it'll maybe become a little clearer. First of

all, Noah, as we've just seen, was a minority surrounded by hostile unbelievers. That's a situation Peter's readers could absolutely identify with, and maybe we can too.

[20 : 03] He also includes the story because Noah was righteous in the midst of a wicked, unbelieving world.

And Peter writes to encourage his readers, so must you be, and by extension, so must we as the church be. Noah is an example of bold faith that trusts God, recognizing coming judgment and God's way of salvation. And Peter says, so must you be, so must we be. And here's the big point. I think the main reason why includes it is simply to remind us that Noah and his family were finally saved. God was faithful to his promises. God saved his own, so that they might have faith, that we might be encouraged to recognize that in Christ, so will we be saved, because God keeps his promises. Why keep going in faith? Because God, in the end, saves his people from judgment to give life. So here is an invitation for us, for Peter's readers, to learn from history. So we feel isolated. We feel like a minority, and it's difficult. We can learn from Noah's experience. He was laughed at. He was mocked for building a giant boat in the middle of a desert with no sign of a storm coming. But what did Noah do? Noah kept faith. Noah kept the reality of judgment and salvation in view, and so he continued trusting in God. That's an encouragement to us to do likewise.

If we feel tempted to turn away from following Jesus because it just seems too hard, consider not just Noah, but consider Noah's unbelieving generation, because what happened to them?

They were judged by God. And their judgment is a reminder that sin is real, and the judgment of God is real, and we need to be prepared. So again, as we ask our question, why would I follow Jesus? Is following Jesus worth it? Let's think about Noah's ark one last time. Let's think about Noah's ark being like a rescue boat. So imagine being in a storm, being overwhelmed by the waves, and the coast guard comes.

Noah and his ark are preaching a message to the world of his day, and indeed to our own world. Get in the boat, believe, and be saved was the message of the ark, and the ark is a picture of the cross.

[22 : 53] And what's the message of the gospel? What's the message of the boat? It's believe in Jesus. Get into Jesus and be saved. He's on a rescue mission. He has done everything to save us. And Peter says to us, don't reject the offer of God's rescue. Don't reject Jesus as Savior, but rather follow and keep following.

Now, from that ancient story, Old Testament story of Noah, he then takes them to a very recent personal story in their experience. He takes us next to their own baptism. There's a few times where in Peter's letter, he reminds his readers that in the past, they were pagan. They didn't have a Christian background. They lived a wildlife, but God had saved them. And when God saved them, they were baptized.

Now, why does he go to their baptism? Well, let's read verse 21. This water, the water of the flood, this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also, not the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a clear conscience towards God.

Now, what's going on here? Maybe it'll be helpful for you to think about a baptism that you have seen, or perhaps your own baptism here or in another church of an infant or of a believer.

When we think about baptism, we think about what that means in the life of a church. It's always a really joyful sign. Now, why does baptism bring joy in the life of a church, in the life of a believer?

[24 : 43] How can it encourage us to persevere in our faith? Well, think about what's going on.

There is the symbolism, the symbol of washing. As Peter says, it's not about removing dirt. It's not a physical washing. The symbol is of washing from sin. It's a promise that in Christ, the judgment of God against sin will not consume us, but we will be saved. Baptism is joyful also because it reminds us that as Christians, by faith, we are united to the Lord Jesus. We think about the story of Jesus.

Jesus, in love for us, went under the flood of God's judgment. He died on the cross. He was buried. But then he rose again in new resurrection life, and baptism speaks to that reality. And by faith, we too have died to sin, and we are alive in Christ. When a person is baptized, they're baptized, aren't they, into Trinity, into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It's a sign of entering into relationship, into covenant with the Lord God. And when we think of covenant, it's then interesting that Peter talks about a pledge. Verse 21, not the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a clear conscience towards God. Now, if we shift from baptism to a wedding, think about a wedding that you've been to, or your own wedding, what does a pledge look like at a wedding?

It's the ring, isn't it? The ring stands as a pledge of a husband and a wife towards love and towards loyalty. Now, what does Peter say? Baptism is the pledge of a clear conscience towards God. Now, here is where I think we could go wrong. We could think principally that baptism is my pledge to God. This is all about my commitment to God. I will follow faithfully. God, I will do my best for you. And if we think about baptism and we think back to our baptism experience, well, that might encourage us. I remember I promised to do that, and today I'm doing that, but it may just add guilt and make us feel terrible if we feel that on any given day we're not living up to our best hopes and plans.

It's better to think that baptism isn't about our pledge to God. Baptism is God's pledge to His church, to His people, to say, I have chosen you. I have paid the price to redeem you. You are mine. I will be faithful to you. And here is my sign of that. Baptism. So, baptism is God's pledge to us, and we plead on the basis of that pledge of God's faithfulness. And we plead on the basis of what Jesus has done for us through His dying in our place and then rising. Baptism again says God acts to save His people.

[28 : 04] And since God has saved you and has committed Himself to you, keep following Him. If we feel isolated, you can look back on your own baptism. You can look back on what baptism points to and appeal to God's faithful love. Trust in that washing from sin that He has provided. Rest in that union and relationship that you have entered into because of God's faithfulness.

If you feel tempted to turn your back on Jesus, think about baptism and think about His pledge to love you and be loyal to you. And don't turn your back on Jesus.

Don't prove disloyal to Him. And again, if you're wondering, is following Jesus worth it? Think about the picture of baptism. Here is what Jesus in love would do for you. Jesus would wash you of your sin and your guilt. Jesus would face judgment to rescue you. Jesus would commit Himself to be with you forever.

forever. Take Jesus as your Savior and keep following. One last event, and that's the event of the resurrection and the ascension to glory, the return to glory of Jesus. In verse 22, Peter began, verse 18, with the suffering. It will be suffering of the church, but especially the suffering of Jesus.

And it's important for us when we suffer, when we feel discouraged, that we remember that. This is the pathway that Jesus Himself walked. Suffering first, glory to follow. But it's so important that Peter ends with the glory and the victory of Christ. The water saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand with angels authorities and powers in submission to Him. We need this message. The whole good news, the whole story of the good news, must include the resurrection, the return to glory, the rule and reign of the Lord Jesus. So here is the last event that Peter goes to, to try and encourage isolated Christians, perhaps Christians tempted to give up, perhaps for us wondering, is suffering for doing good worth it? Here is the final part of that inner dialogue. Here is how we are to talk the gospel to ourselves. We can remind ourselves, first of all, of the pattern of Jesus. We are saved, end of verse 21, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can look back to Easter Sunday, to the empty tomb, to recognize the resurrection is the proof of God's victory over Satan and sin and death, to recognize that death had no claim on Jesus, that by faith our salvation is secure in Him. In that sense, Jesus is our champion. He fights for us. The victory that He wins, we get to enjoy by virtue of being His.

[31 : 20] Think too of the position of Jesus. Look at verse 22. Where is Jesus now? Jesus has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand. Where is Jesus now? He's at God's right hand. He's in the place of power and authority. And speaking of the power and the honor of Jesus, look at the end of the section.

He has angels, authorities, and powers in submission to Him. How complete is the power of Jesus? It's absolute. Here is a picture of the total victory of Jesus. And this, this is the Jesus we need. This is the Jesus who is with us and for us. We talk about having friends in high places. Here is the one friend in the highest place who would be with us now and forever, who will keep us as we suffer.

He is in a position to keep His promises, to be faithful to us. So Peter has used these four events really to make one big point for us.

That God saves and God can be trusted. We can trust in His faithfulness, His love, His salvation through Jesus. He writes to say to us, suffering for doing good, suffering for following Jesus is absolutely worth it. I read a story this week of a man called Paul from Kenya, who was with a group of workmen traveling from Kenya to Somalia, where they were ambushed by a group known as

Al-Shabaab.

[33 : 10] And Paul's friends recorded his words as he was threatened by that terror organization. He said, if you kill me, I will remain with Jesus. If you let me live, I will still remain with Jesus.

That man was shot and killed for his faith. But he understood that suffering for Jesus absolutely is worth it because right now he's enjoying glory with Jesus forever. When we find it hard to exercise our faith, and there are times when it is hard and where we have to suffer for doing good, Peter says to us, let the gospel, let the good news of Jesus be your inner dialogue. Talk the gospel to yourself and keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. The Jesus who suffered for you, who has now risen and ascended into heaven for you. Christ who is our hope in life and day. Focus on the God who will never fail to keep his promises, who never fails to keep his people. Look at the story of Noah. Look at what baptism speaks to, so that we would recognize suffering for doing good is worth it. Now at this point we always pray, and what I want to do is to invite us all to stand and to use these words from 2 Corinthians chapter 4 as our prayer as our prayer as a way to affirm these truths that we've just been reflecting on. So will you stand with me and let's read these words together. And if you're at home, read them also. They are good for us to speak to ourselves. 2 Corinthians 4 at verse 16.

Therefore, we do not lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Please have a seat. And our closing hymn reminds us of the victory of Jesus. We'll sing together, crown him with many crowns.

[36 : 03] Amen. The Lamb upon his throne, while heaven's eternal anthem drowns all music but its own.

Awake, my soul, and sing of him who died to be your Savior and your matchless King through all eternity.

crown him the Lord of life, triumph from the grave, who rose victorious from the strife for those he gave to save.

His glories now we sing. Who died and reigns on high. Who died eternal life to bring and lives that death may die.

crown him the Lord of love, who shows his hands and sight.

[37 : 59] Those wounds yet visible above in beauty glorified. No angel in the sky can't fully bear the sight.

But downward bends his burning eye. That mystery so bright. That mystery so bright. Crowned him the Lord of peace.

His kingdom is at hand. From pole to pole let warfare cease. And Christ rule every land. A city stands on high. His glory it displays. And there the nations holy cry.

In joyful hymns of praise. His kingdom is at hand. From pole to pole let warfare cease. To pole to pole let warfare cease. To pole to pole let warfare cease. To pole to pole let warfare cease. And Christ rule every land. A city stands on high.

His glory it displays. And there the nations holy cry. In joyful hymns of praise. And there the nations holy cry.

[39 : 04] In joyful hymns of praise. Crowned in the Lord of fears. The bosend sate of time. Creator, the Lord of fear.

The bosend sate of time. Creator of the rolling spheres.

In majesty sublime. All hail, Redeemer, hail. For you have died for me.

Your praise shall never, never fail. Through all eternity. All hail, Redeemer, hail.

For you have died for me. Your praise shall never, never fail. Through all eternity.

[40 : 11] Let's stand to close our time in prayer. This prayer is based on the end of Psalm 33.

We wait in hope for you, Lord. You are our help and our shield. In you our hearts rejoice. For we trust in your holy name.

May your unfailing love be with us, Lord. Even as we put our hope in you. Amen. Amen. Amen.