

Living Blessed under Suffering

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[0 : 00] If you would turn to 1 Peter chapter 3. 1 Peter chapter 3, and we're going to look at verse 13 through 17. Here's the word of the Lord.

Now who is there to harm you if you're zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.

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, having a good conscience, so that when you're slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. So let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word, and we thank you that you've given us your thoughts.

Now we pray you would help us to rightly divide the word, to understand it, to interpret it, to be illuminated by your spirit as we do, and then to be empowered by your spirit to live out the truths that are there.

[1 : 18] Help us. We need your help. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. So I had an interesting thing happen when I was 15. My parents, we had lived in a little 80 by 12?

80 by 12? I guess it was 12, maybe 14. I don't know. Mobile home. And we had bought some land about 200 yards down from our mobile home, and my parents had built this huge, huge house, big two-story house.

And the day came that we were going to move into this house, and it took us probably about, I don't know how long. It took a long time to build this thing because we cleared the land ourselves, and matter of fact, I like dug out stumps with my bare hands for this thing.

Anyway, that's not at all what I'm talking about. So we get through, and we've got this thing laid out, and we're about to move in. And as we do, we're packing up things in the house, and we go into my bedroom, and we grab the mattress, and we move the mattress, and out from underneath the mattress plops this Ziploc bag.

Bloop. I'm like, what is that? I reach down. I pick it up. It's got \$500 in it. I'm like, I forgot about this.

[2 : 31] I had been saving up all of this money, and I had stuck it in a Ziploc bag under my mattress five years ago. I had no idea.

I was so blessed. It was awesome. It was awesome. And that's what I think of this passage this morning. That's what I think about this particular subject matter, is that oftentimes we do not understand how blessed we are.

And as we face the suffering and persecution of life, as we face the difficulties and the trials, the troubles, Peter's writing to these Christians to help them know how to live under this suffering.

And really, this passage is all about how to live the blessed life under suffering. And he gives us three things that we need to do in that regard.

And the first of those things is to understand the actual blessing. To understand what it is that we are blessed. And I want to just lay out a couple of things for you.

[3 : 44] Number one, the blessing that he's talking about in this passage is a blessing that is a conditional blessing. It's a conditional blessing, and it's conditioned in this way.

He talks about that when we suffer, the difference between suffering for what is right and suffering for what is wrong. If you suffer because you've done something wrong, that is not a blessed life.

If you break the law, and you suffer because you break the law, and you get through it really well, and you find yourself on the other side going like, wow, okay, that was not so bad.

That's not because God has blessed you. The blessing is because we're suffering for what is good, verse 13, and we're suffering for righteousness' sake, verse 14, and verse 17, for it's better to suffer

for doing good than doing evil.

So we are going to suffer. There will be persecution, but it ought to be because we're doing what's right, because we're doing the right thing, because we're following God's law.

[4 : 59] We're doing that which pleases Him. We're doing that which lines up with the rightness of God. We're doing that that He's commanded in His law. The second thing about this blessing is that this blessing is a protection.

He says in verse 13, He says, Now who is there to harm you if you're zealous for what is good? In other words, you turn that around, it's like if you do good, who can harm you? Well, now that's a little different.

I mean, is it right that if you do everything the right way, the way God wants, then nobody will ever harm you? Okay, so we got to understand this. How does Peter understand this?

Because obviously, think about Jesus, right? Jesus did everything God's way, and yet was harmed. So Peter cannot mean that in this life, you won't face harm, because he's already talking about persecution from other people.

The harm that he's talking about here is looking forward in an ultimate sense, speaking of a more fundamental thing about our relationship with God. In other words, in other words, suffering that comes to us cannot get in between the relationship between us and God.

[6 : 16] In an ultimate sense, as we face suffering, it cannot harm us because we belong to him.

In other words, there's not going to be a time when someone does something to us that in the end of our life makes us reject him, walk away, and say we don't want to have anything to do with him. Why? Because those he saves, he keeps saved.

And one day we will walk in through the gates of glory, knowing that he kept us safe our whole life. And if you find someone who does walk away from him, well then, it's because they were never one of his to begin with.

But this blessing is not only a protection, but this blessing is a happiness. It's a happiness. And again, we've got this idea here that we need to deal with, because there's a lot of unhappy things in this world.

And so what are we speaking of here when we talk about this? It's interesting that the word for blessed right here in verse 14 is different from the word in verses 8 through 12.

[7 : 29] Verses 8 through 12, you know, we talked about being a blessing to people and blessing people. And that word there is this eulogy word. It's this word of speaking well or speaking well on someone's behalf.

It's the idea of praying and asking for God's divine favor to be on someone. The word here, though, in verse 14 is the same word that's from the Sermon on the Mount.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. That word blessed means something about a favored state, and it traces back into the Old Testament, and it shows that it's this state of being, and a state of being that is in divine favor, and it's a state of being that has a happiness to it because of the blessings that it receives from the Lord.

One example is in Deuteronomy 33, where Moses tells the children of Israel, he says, Happy are you. Happy are you, O Israel. Blessed are you, O Israel, who is like you, a people saved by the Lord.

Okay, so they've been saved by God, so therefore they are blessed and happy. And then he goes on to tell them, because here's the benefit you get. He's the shield of your help, the sword of your triumph.

[8 : 52] Your enemies shall come fawning to you, and you shall tread upon their backs. In other words, they're protected and saved, and safe, and because of their relationship with God, because of their salvation, they are in a blessed, happy state.

But now our text tells us, you will be blessed. Did you notice that, verse 14?

Living a life that's blessed under suffering recognizes that the blessing that we're talking about is yet to come.

It's looking to the future. It's eyes on eternity, knowing that the fullness of the blessing that we feel in this life with the Lord is only just a part of what we're thinking about.

And I know that it's probably going to be hard for some people to think to themselves as I'm talking about this, that a blessed life is this life that's protected and happy because we encounter suffering all the time, and it hurts.

[10:00] And it's unpleasant. And we fear. And we become anxious. And we have all of these things that we can begin to think about, and we kind of say, well, wait a minute.

If I'm to have this blessed, protected, happy life, then why am I not experiencing it perfectly right here, right now? After all, I am a Christian.

I do trust the Lord. So why am I not experiencing it more fully? Why is it that I feel it sometimes, see it sometimes, and sort of see it at a distance sometimes, but also at the same time, I feel the dread in my stomach.

And I get the news about this thing that just knocks me to my feet, that takes the breath out of my lungs. Why is that the case? And it's because the relationship that we have with God right now is not the full final relationship we will have with Him one day.

The relationship you have with the Lord right now is a partial. Look at Ephesians chapter 1.

[11:12] It says that in Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee.

That word is earnest money. He's the earnest money. He's the down payment of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of His glory.

Beloved, living a blessed life under suffering means recognizing that we're not going to feel it here, but it's waiting for us there, and we keep our eyes on eternity.

Knowing that one day, because He's still working on me and keeps me safe, I will walk full into that blessing. So we've got to trust what God says about this here rather than feeling the weight of the suffering and saying that that's more real than what is to come.

And there are some people who are not Christians. Maybe there are some here today who are not Christians listening to what I'm saying. One of the things from this that you need to get as an application is to recognize that as we preach the gospel and as we call on you to come to be saved, we're calling you to a life of suffering.

[12:46] Becoming a Christian is signing up for suffering because living for God is going to involve suffering. But no one who's ever been truly saved would say it's not worth it.

It's worth every bit of it. And so maybe today will be the day for you to come. Well, let's take a look at the second thing that we need to do.

The first thing is understand the blessing. Secondly, we need to not fear. Do not fear. Verse 14 says this. Matter of fact, it's a command. The command is have no fear of them.

It's negative, right? So we're not adding something to ourselves at this moment, but we're taking something away. Have no fear of them. Here's a question.

Who's the them? Instruments of damage. That's who the them are. It's someone who, for whatever reason, sins against us and causes us harm.

[13:55] Maybe it is in that area of persecution where someone would come to us and threaten our lives if we don't say, I reject Christ.

That's that sort of picture of persecution most of us sort of think about. But the truth of the matter is that we go through persecution in a more slightly subtle way in our lives because when someone close to us, someone that we love, sins against us, Satan is tempting us to respond as though we reject God's way.

You understand what I'm saying? I mean, I'm sinned against. I'm tempted to sin back. You sin against me, it's very likely I might sin back. Why? Because I'm being tempted to do so.

I'm being tempted to walk away from this. And this fear here, though, is not just a typical fear we'll talk about in a second, but this fear here is allowing this person, allowing this situation to live rent-free in my mind so that I think about it, I worry over it, I twist it around in my mind, I even begin to imagine the worst thing that could possibly happen.

He says, don't let those who would do you harm live in your mind in a rent-free way because there's nothing they can do to harm you.

[15:27] Right? The second part of the command, though, comes when he says that we're not to be troubled. So have no fear of them and do not be troubled. Now here's the interesting thing.

That is out of Isaiah 8 that we saw in the Scripture video just a while ago. Isaiah 8, 12 and 13 really is the focus of the text. The context of Isaiah 8 is that there's the northern, so when the Jewish people came out of Egypt, they developed one nation, Israel.

After Solomon died, the nation split into two nations, the southern kingdom, Judah, two tribes, the northern kingdom, Israel, ten tribes.

Is everybody with me? Okay. At some point at this time in Isaiah's life at the writing of chapter 8, Israel is joining forces with Assyria trying to depose the king of Judah and put a puppet king on the throne so that they could control Judah.

And the people are afraid of Israel, they're afraid of Assyria, and God gives a message to Isaiah and says to them in verse 12, do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy and do not fear what they fear nor be in dread.

[16:58] There's the part that he's making reference to in 1 Peter. Do not fear what they fear nor be in dread. He goes on in verse 13 to say, but the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy.

Let him be your fear. Let him be your dread. You see, in Isaiah, what he's saying is he's saying that instead of being afraid of those who can do you harm, take and stack them up next to God.

Take and look at the worst thing that this person could ever do to you and then take and look at God and compare them together and say, listen, no, don't be afraid of them, but let God be your fear.

Don't be in dread of them, but let God be your dread. He is a holy, righteous, glorious God and we're to compare that moment, that fear and realize that we have nothing to fear here because we fear God.

Don't be troubled by them. Instead, look at the weightiness and the splendor of God and how it outweighs and outshines and outdoes all that is happening to us.

[18:12] And so, here's where we need to go with this then as we try to make application of this.

We as believers, we as Christians, need to reckon with the fact that God has commanded us to not fear those who would do us harm.

He's commanded us to not fear those who would persecute us. He's commanded us to not fear the suffering that would happen in our lives. And he's not calling us to live cavalier.

He's not calling us to live with a devil-may-care kind of approach to life. There is a good right use of fear. Last week, Dr. Russo was talking to us about fear and he used the illustration of an 18-wheeler.

That if you're driving down the road and an 18-wheeler comes out of its lane and is careening at you, that moment of fear that grabs the wheel and turns it and does whatever it needs to do, that fear is protecting you and that's what fear is supposed to do.

Our problem is that we happen to be driving down a road that no 18-wheeler can go down but we're still afraid of the 18-wheeler. We let it live rent-free in our head.

[19:22] It's okay to use fear the way it's supposed to be used but we, we have a tendency to let fear be a false prophet predicting a future to us that may and may not happen.

And that's what he's telling us. He's telling us don't have that kind of fear. Don't have that kind of worry, that kind of anxiousness because it, that future looking of anxiety robs present joys and realities.

So what do we need to do to not fear? Let me give you four words, let me give you four words about this fear. Command, power, sin, and forgiveness.

Command. Number one, to not fear is a command of God. That means he's going to hold you accountable to doing what he says.

Power. God never commands us to do anything that he doesn't also provide the power to do. A lot of times people will look in the scriptures and see God commanding something and they just assume that that means we have the power to do it.

[20:34] We never have the power to obey God. on our own. We always must have the power of the Holy Spirit helping us to do that. And so God has given his Holy Spirit to help us.

If he tells us to not fear then he's provided the Holy Spirit to empower us to not fear. The third word is the word sin. But if we do fear then we're living in sin.

Just stop there for a second. If we're living in that anxious worry and fear then we are sinning against God.

Because it's as though we're taking this fear that we think might happen and saying no that's scarier than God. I think I will think about this and try to figure a way out rather than look to God.

But the fourth word is the word forgiveness. That's why Jesus died on the cross. That's why Jesus died on the cross. Because we have a tendency to worry and fret and be anxious and fear things that are not even realities.

[21 : 55] because we worry they could happen. They might happen. It could be. And even the anxieties and worries you have yet to experience have already been covered in the blood of Christ.

Christ. But you know that's the problem for non-Christians is that of all the fears that they might have the one fear that they lack is the fear of God.

Someone who does not have a fear of God does not have true knowledge or wisdom. And if you are that kind of person then the thing is that you love to be the boss of your own life.

You want to do what you want to do regardless of what anybody else thinks. And that kind of life will never get you the wisdom that comes from the salvation that is given to us in Christ.

So I call on you. Turn from being the boss of your own life and turn to Christ. That leads us to this third part. Now I didn't really know how to say this because really if I were to say it the way I wanted to the handout has got one thing the screen has got another thing.

[23 : 24] Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart so that you can answer everybody that asks you. That's probably the way the point should be said. That's a little too long. So we'll just go with sanctify Christ in your heart.

I want you to go back to verse 15 and 16. And let's take a look at that. In verse 15 it says, 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, having a good conscience so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

Where we need to start with this is right there in verse 15 and we're just going to make a little comparison. Because I want you to go back to Isaiah chapter 8 verse 12 and you'll remember verse 12 says, Do not fear what they fear nor be in dread.

And then 1 Peter 3 14 says, Have no fear of them nor be troubled. Okay, that's the matching part. If you go back to Isaiah chapter 8 verse 13 you see, But the Lord of hosts him you shall honor as holy.

Now just that much, that's all we need, but the Lord of hosts him you shall honor as holy. Now look at verse 15 in 1 Peter, But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy. Now obviously Peter is leaning on Isaiah 8 but Peter under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gives us something more.

[24 : 55] He calls Jesus Christ Yahweh. There in verse 13 Isaiah 8 13 it's talking about Yahweh Jehovah He is the one.

He is the Jehovah Sabaoth Lord of hosts. In other words He is Yahweh He is Jehovah He is the great I am that I am.

And as Peter is going to tell you how do you live a blessed life under suffering one of the first things that he wants you to understand is that you're fearing Jesus Christ Jehovah He is God He's not a sub God He's not some sort of you know just a son He is Jehovah himself Now I understand this gets into the Trinity and most people on a Sunday morning we're not ready to deal with the Trinity I'm not going to go there just yet but the triune God is a glorious truth that if we could understand it God wouldn't be God so it's okay if you don't understand everything about it we just believe it by faith because we know that God's word teaches it and here what Peter is getting after is wanting these Christians to know who are going through a persecution your Jesus didn't just die and rise from the dead because of his father but your Jesus is Jehovah he is the one at the burning bush who said

I am that I am and he goes on to say then but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord is holy in other words what we're supposed to do as a command for every Christian is that our hearts our hearts are to hold Jesus Jehovah as large now we've got to deal with a couple of things there we need to deal with our hearts because in the Bible heart is not the same thing in America red Cupid bow right you know it's not emotion it's not just love it's not all cutesies and things like that that's that's what we think of when we think of heart as a symbol it's also not our blood pumping organ you know okay it's not that heart in the Bible is the center of the person heart in the Bible the Proverbs say to guard our hearts for from it flow the springs of life the Bible teaches us that we pray out of our hearts that we live out of our hearts that we worship and sing out of our hearts that we lust and sin out of our hearts that we think out of our hearts that we make decisions out of our hearts that we trust God out of our hearts in other words the heart is you it's the center of all that is the essence and core of who you are everything is right there in the heart does that make sense so just every time you read the Bible just go not Cupid not a red heart okay just mark it out okay this is the center of who you are and what he is saying here is that in our hearts

[28 : 28] Jesus Jehovah is to be honored as holy and righteous we're to have him living so large in our hearts that as we seek to take ownership of all that he has given to us he has ownership of all of us you try to buy a house because you want to own it you have to take out a mortgage which means the bank owns you we come to Christ because we want salvation and we want to own him and the result of that is that he owns us when we are in that state sanctifying Christ the Lord as holy in our hearts then we're ready to give an answer he goes on and he says always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you Peter expects that when these Christians are living fully trusting blessed full assurance that Jesus is Jehovah while suffering that people are going to ask them questions and the questions that people are going to ask them are going to sound like this how are you still hopeful all that you've got going on in your life all the death that you've seen all the suffering that you've seen all the sickness that you've seen all the trouble that you've seen all your days how are you still hopeful in

Christ why are you still hopeful in Christ why don't you just curse God and die you remember Job Job lost his livelihood and his legacy all in one day everything he owned and all of his children lost in one day day two comes he loses his health and his wife comes to him and says do you still hold fast your integrity curse God and die Peter wants Christians to live with Jesus so large as Jehovah in their hearts that no one causes us to fear or be troubled and we're ready to give an answer to the question why are you still hopeful in Jesus

Peter is telling us that we need to be ready we need to be able to give a defense a reason for this hope what is the reason that you won't abandon Jesus when you get a terrible report from the doctor why will you not abandon Jesus and his word when you get at odds with one of your children or grandchildren what is the reason that you will give that you're still trusting in him even while you're struggling to breathe polycarp the martyr tied to the pyre ready to be burned at the stake said I've served him for these 86 years and he's never done me wrong never done me wrong Christians we need to be able to give an answer for the reason that we're still following him well Brady what kind of answer do we give well let's let's just change the subject for a second and see if we can ask the question in a different way and see if it will help you understand the kind of answer you need to give just imagine somebody asks you why are you still married to your spouse why haven't you dumped them and gotten somebody new now in some situations I understand but just work with me here right I'm gonna tell you something

I do not need a degree in history or philosophy to tell you why I am still married to Michelle there's no end to the answers that I can give and you know part of that is because we spend a lot of time together now maybe it's too much time for some you know my wife sometimes she needs a little break from me I can be a little extra but because we spend time together because we've experienced things together because we understand one another because we've understood one another's words because we've gotten into seeing things because we've gone through difficulties together you ask me why are you still married to Michelle and I'm gonna say well how much time do you have I could start with her kindness and I could be

[34 : 14] I could be telling you story after story after story after story that illustrates all the kindness that she has given to me and others I could tell you about her intelligence and I could give you story after story after story that demonstrate just the sheer intelligence that this woman has except for her one weakness and that's when she married me but the point is the point is that in order to answer such a question as to why there's still this relationship why is there still this hope it's there and the answer comes easily because we spend time together Peter is saying to these Christians honor Christ as Lord in your heart commune with your God when you go open the scriptures commune with your God commune with him over the scriptures commune with him in prayer commune with God here as we worship together and we preach commune with him in the weekly

Bible study because I tell you what if you're the kind of person who never spends time with your spouse and is always working during the day going to sleep at night and gone on the weekends with your buddies then it's a lot harder to answer the question why and if you just give God your leftovers if you just give Jesus Christ your you know I didn't have anything better to do then when someone asks you why you still trust him you're going to have this doubt in the back of your mind it's like I'm not real sure it's tradition my mama did it's what I've always done and that will never see you through suffering never the only thing that will see you through suffering is that he has walked with me before I've seen where we've come I know where we're headed he is good he has never done me wrong but

Christian that means that your relationship with the Lord must be the most growing vital and of utmost importance to you Christ as Jehovah in your heart and maybe there are some here you do not have that relationship with God at all you go to church because it's kind of the thing to do and I fear for you I fear for you because you're around Christians and it's easy when you're around Christians to assume you're a Christian and sometimes as they start talking about Jesus you ever notice some people get them to say the name of Jesus and they almost flinch some people are just uncomfortable like they want to talk about God and use God and say the word God a lot but start talking about

Jesus and people get uncomfortable and the reason is because your relationship isn't as it ought to be and maybe maybe you're just waiting for the day when like you can just kind of get out of preaching like this and not have to sit here and listen to someone hammer at you because as we start talking about things we start talking about this walk that we have with him and the relationship we should have with him it begins to get uncomfortable and you think there's something wrong with this and you may even think it's me the truth of the matter it's you it's the guilt that you feel it's the guilt deep inside that you keep hoping will go away and you know you have the guilt because you've told the lies you've lusted you've stolen you haven't honored the Sabbath day you've been angry enough to murder right and the truth is is that unless you repent of that in this life then you will suffer for all eternity under the punishment and the wrath of

God that is the truth that's what the Bible teaches and I fear for you that you've become comfortable because being around Christians is pleasant and that feels to you like enough and it's not you must repent of your sin and you must believe in Jesus Christ for yourself it's your relationship with him it's not your husband's it's not your wife's it's not your kids it's not your parents it's yours I can't believe enough for me and my wife we both have to trust Christ and so I'd say to you today if you have never trusted in Christ for your salvation then what keeps you from it today let's pray