

Even If You Suffer, You Will Be Blessed

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[0:00] Amen. So this morning, we get to talk about suffering.

Everyone's favorite topic, right? But here's the thing. We should be at least somewhat acquainted with it, because it is unavoidable in this life, isn't it?

We live in a world where pain really hurts, where disappointments happen to everyone, where death is unavoidable. And the scriptures don't try to sugarcoat any of that.

Yes, it's true we'll suffer. Yes, it's true we'll face disappointments. Yes, other people will hurt us. We will be betrayed. And yes, death is unavoidable.

That's our reality. If the Bible tried to sugarcoat that, it couldn't really speak to us. We really don't think it could. But here is the amazing thing that we see in the Bible.

[1:30] The Gospel tells us that our God knows what suffering is like firsthand. Because God the Son took on human flesh, was betrayed, was beaten, and died.

That's where we find our hope, isn't it? Our hope that our suffering isn't the last word. Our hope that our pain isn't the last word.

Our hope that death isn't the last word. The Bible tells us of Jesus that He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with His wounds, we are healed. We find life in His death. Hebrews 5 we read, In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death.

And He was heard because of His reverence. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.

[2:49] So, if He suffered, we are following in His footsteps as His disciples. We know that we will too. But Jesus' suffering is not the end of the story.

He obeyed through suffering, even unto death, and then rose again. And so He has become our perfect, complete, certain source of eternal salvation.

So, what do we really have to be afraid of? Christian novelist George MacDonald once said, The Son of God suffered unto death, not that men might not suffer, but that their sufferings might be like His.

We will suffer, but because of Jesus, our suffering will be like His, leading to the eternal life which He purchased for us with His very own blood.

That in mind, as we think about suffering, let's jump into our text. 1 Peter 3 started in verse 14. Even if you suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.

[4:08] Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. Now, the even if here sounds almost hypothetical, but it's describing something that's virtually certain and guaranteed to happen.

Now, most of us, for example, if we've been believers for very long, have had the experience of being mocked or ridiculed for our faith. Ever run into that? On the street, I once got called a religious fanatic because I was wearing a cassock.

What do you think? Do I count as a religious fanatic? Huh? Yes. Oh, right. Well, the bishop has spoken.

But have you been mocked or ridiculed for your faith? You probably have. And I also know for a fact that some of you have been through the experience of losing your congregation's church building for standing firm for the gospel.

Sadly, that has been the case for people in every Anglican congregation I've ever been a part of since becoming Anglican. That is a painful thing.

[5:25] And if you've been through that, you have suffered for righteousness' sake. Now, then we stop and consider that some of our brothers and sisters around the world have had it much worse.

They've lost homes. They've had their churches burned to the ground. They've been beaten and brutally killed for their faith in Christ. Now, Peter, the author of this epistle, would go on to suffer death himself for his commitment to the gospel.

Yet he says, even if you suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Why? Well, because in this life, we already have the joy of being God's adopted sons and daughters.

The joy of knowing Jesus. Now, doesn't that make it worth it? Whatever it is. And that is not all. We are promised that one day our suffering will come to an end.

That we will be raised never to hurt or die again. So, by God's grace, we can hang on. Now, Peter goes on to give us some more instruction about how to behave, how to think, if we find ourselves persecuted for righteousness' sake.

[6:50] First, have no fear of them, nor be troubled. Now, you can put that in the category of biblical teachings that are easier said than done.

Other people can do a lot of damage to us. Have you ever been hurt by someone else? Right?

Other people can betray us. Other people can rob us.

Other people can injure us. Other people can even kill us. Beyond that, our real adversary, the devil, is real. He is evil and he is active in the world in which we live.

How can we have no fear nor be troubled? Let's look at it this way. Can any of our adversaries, even the devil, knock God off of his throne?

The Father is on his throne. Jesus is risen. He is ascended. He is seated at the right hand of the Father where he makes intercession for us and there is absolutely nothing that those who would wish to destroy us can do about it.

[8:03] Even if we suffer to the point of death, Jesus is still Lord. Jesus is still victorious over death and we have an unshakable promise of eternal life in him.

So we have no fear. There is no reason to be afraid. Our risen Savior guarantees it.

And what else does Peter tell us? Verse 15, 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.

You have to deal with gentleness and respect. Now if we are adoring Christ as holy in our hearts, seeking from the heart to imitate his holiness, then we'll be prepared to suffer for righteousness' sake.

Prepared not to be afraid and prepared to make a defense for the hope that is in us. So here's the question. Are we prepared to make that defense?

[9:15] We each have to ask ourselves that. Do we know Jesus intimately? Do we honor him in our hearts? Do we know our faith well enough to defend it if need be? If not, we're going to be missing out on some opportunities.

Do we read our Bible? Do we know what we believe and why? We absolutely have to if we're going to be prepared to give a good defense. But here comes the second half of that equation in giving a good defense.

Doing it with gentleness and respect. Now, something that we have to address here is that the culture around us is in some measure hostile to our faith, the secular culture.

And a lot of people think that Christians are judgmental. Now, some of that has to do with Christians actually having been judgmental. Let's not do that. But some of it we can't help, right?

Our culture is steeped in moral relativism. What's right is determined by each individual. It's like what we see in the book of Judges. Each person does what is right in his or her own eyes.

[10:33] That's the norm. Now, inevitably, when you make the claim that there is right and there is wrong and it's not a matter of personal opinion, you're going to offend some people.

But, that doesn't mean that we have to be that guy who is screaming at people through a megaphone on the street corner. Don't be that guy.

We can bear witness to our faith in a way that is uncompromising, that doesn't shy away from the truth, but is gentle and respectful.

A way that is kind. And that's precisely what we're called to do. Why should we behave that way?

See in verse 16, having a good conscience so that when you were slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

Here's a newsflash for us. Those who slander and persecute those who do good will be exposed.

Take a look for a second at the plight of Christians in the Middle East today.

[11:49] Sure, they're suffering for their faith, even to the point of giving their lives for refusing to renounce Christ, right? Now, look for a second at their persecutors.

Think about the difference. These are people who don't mind murdering innocent women and children in the name of their false religion. Clearly, they're behaving in a way that is shameful. That's obviously shameful, even if they're too blind to see it. And that makes the light of those who are suffering for Christ shine even more brightly, doesn't it?

So, we have to accept the reality that we might be called to suffer for doing good. But as verse 17 tells us, it is better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will than for doing evil.

We will suffer. It is unavoidable in this world. It's going to happen. But here's the question. Will we suffer for doing what is right or for doing evil?

[13:03] Will we suffer in imitation of Christ's suffering with faith in Christ, following Him in the way that leads to life, or will we suffer doing evil?

Suffer in a way that only leads to more suffering. that's the question before us. Everyone suffers, believers or unbelievers. But the promise to believers is that all things, even if it comes to suffering for what is good, all things will work together for their good.

Now, suffering for doing evil is a different thing. Most of us have probably had some measure of experience with that. As I was thinking on this, had an event from my childhood just pop into my mind.

Remember once as a kid, my older cousin suggesting that we should throw walnuts at passing cars. Now, I didn't think that was a good idea, but he said, oh, come on, it'll be fine.

Since he put it that way, how could I refuse? Right? We see a truck coming, and we decide, okay, on the count of three, we're going to throw our walnuts. One, two, three.

[14:29] I throw mine, and he doesn't throw his. Long story short, the truck stopped.

My mother was not very pleased. Needless to say, I suffered for doing evil. Some measure, we've all been there too, haven't we? But in suffering for good, we have the great example of Christ, don't we?

We read in verse 18, for Christ also suffered once through sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

Think about that. Christ, the eternal Son of God, took on human flesh so that he could suffer. He loved us so much that he suffered for us, the righteous for the unrighteous, so that our sins would be forgiven and we could be reconciled to God, so that we could become the Father's beloved children.

He loved us so much that he tasted death and conquered it so that he could rescue us from death. Jesus did that for us because he loves us.

[15:55] Shouldn't that make us want to follow him in loving obedience wherever that leads? Shouldn't it make us hopeful if Jesus has suffered for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, hasn't he put them away forever?

if Jesus was put to death in the flesh and couldn't be contained by death? Do we have to fear death? His victory is complete and it is finished.

So we can follow him in joy and hope knowing that the battle has already been won. So back to our text.

He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit in which he went and proclaimed the spirits in prison because they formerly did not obey when God's patience waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared in which a few that is eight persons were brought safely through water.

I've got to be honest with you. These two verses are among the most difficult in the New Testament to interpret. So the volumes written on the precise meaning of these two verses still haven't cleared it up completely from what I can tell.

[17:23] Personally, I have not completely decided myself on the precise meaning of what's going on here. But here is what I think is the most plausible explanation.

I'll try not to get too dry on you. I'll keep this short. Clearly, there is a parallel being drawn between Christ and Noah. By God's grace, Noah brought those with him through the flood.

Now, Peter, I think, is comparing that to Jesus' experience of death and his descent into hell, which is mentioned in the Apostles Creed, where he proclaimed his victory over sin, death, and the devil, and then rose again.

Now, every interpretation of this passage, and there are a lot of them, has its strengths and weaknesses, in my view. If you're interested, by all means, do some reading on the topic if you think that you can endure it.

but I think that regardless of what is meant by the notion of proclamation to the spirits in prison, which is the really difficult part, the overall point is pretty clear.

[18:34] Noah suffered the contempt of his contemporaries who mocked him for building the ark, but was preserved through the flood, taking his family through the flood with him.

He suffered for doing good, passed through the flood, and was vindicated. Christ also suffered for doing good, suffering for us, the righteous for the unrighteous, and he was vindicated.

He proclaimed his victory and defeated death. He suffered for our sins and passed through death, defeating it. Like Noah took his family through the flood, Jesus took us with him in his victory over death.

So we don't have any reason to be afraid. Jesus suffered for doing good, and the victory is his forever. So the victory is ours forever if we're in Christ because he has taken our sins and defeated death, and we are united to him through faith.

So we are forgiven and we share in his victory. Now this connection between Noah and Christ and how we fit into the picture gets driven home in an interesting way in verse 21 where we read baptism which corresponds to this now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[20:06] Now when we think of Noah and his family being brought safely through water in the ark, the imagery there reminds us of baptism, where we go underwater, go through water, for a specific reason as an effectual sign of our union with Jesus Christ and his burial, his death, burial, and resurrection.

Baptism signifies that we are united to Christ's death and resurrection, and so we share in his victory. We think on our baptism, it should cause us to remember that Noah and his family emerged from the waters of the flood victorious, right?

Preserved. In an even greater way, we are reminded that Jesus suffered for doing good for the sake of our salvation, and he emerged victorious from the grave.

We're reminded that if we are in Christ, we are united to his death and resurrection, so we have the victory, even if we suffer for doing good.

Jesus suffered for doing good, even to the point of death, but rose again, defeating death, and that is not all. See in verse 22, that he has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

[21:42] Jesus is reigning at the right hand of the Father. His victory is total and complete. All things have been subjected to him, to him who suffered for doing good and his triumph.

That is incredible news. Why? Because he is reigning as Lord. Because even if we suffer, we will reign with him. He has gone to prepare a place for us.

And he promised, if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself.

That where I am, you may be also. So can the momentary afflictions, the sufferings of this transitory life, even begin to compare to what God has prepared for those who love him?

As Jesus is victorious, victorious, we are victorious in him. Since Jesus is reigning, we have the promise that we will reign with him.

So aren't we blessed? Even if we suffer for righteousness sake, we will be blessed. Because Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.

[23:00] That cannot be changed. And that changes everything. our blessing in life or in death, in prosperity or in suffering, our blessing is guaranteed because our hope is fixed in nothing but Jesus.

And he has died, he has risen, he has ascended, he is coming back for us, and he cannot be stopped because he has already won. He's put away our sins, he's rescued us from death, he has defeated the evil one, and now he reigns as the rightful sovereign Lord, and he will reign forever. Even if we suffer for doing good, we will be blessed. In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.