

1 Peter 3:13-18 “Suffering Sharers”

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Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Wow, a glorious hymn. Many of you know that that glorious, celebratory, comforting hymn was actually written in the midst of terrible suffering. Remember that story?

Unfortunately, Horatio Spafford had already lost his four-year-old son. And then in the great Chicago fire of 1871, nearly all of his economic assets.

And the rest of his family, a wife and four daughters, sailed ahead of him to England to be a part of an evangelistic revival there. And there was a shipwreck and the ship sank and Spafford received a telegram from his wife that said, Saved alone.

He got on his ship and as he neared the area where his daughters had all died, he wrote those words that Tam just sang, that we love to sing, especially in hard times.

[1 : 22] It's glorious to celebrate Easter, isn't it? It's wonderful to have the hope of Christ being yours forevermore.

And we turn back to 1 Peter this morning and we realize that that has to be true now. And that we're not home yet.

And we're going to remember that this morning. That's been hard for me. I've felt that this week. Maybe many of you did too. We're not home yet.

God's people in Peter's day were well aware that they were not home yet. And the rest of 1 Peter, this letter that he's written to them, is written to address this issue of suffering.

Telling God's people about suffering that they're already facing or perhaps they're heading into. He's already touched on this some as we've talked through the first part of this letter.

[2 : 24] But this is the losing part of this series title. The losing, the suffering in a world that's not our home.

Specifically, the suffering Peter addresses is suffering for being Christians. We might say persecution or suffering as strangers in this world.

But many of the things we'll learn apply to suffering in general as well. As we enter into this context for the next few weeks, I want to give us a picture to orient us, to inspire us as we consider this.

It's one of the most iconic images coming out of Ukraine in recent months. We've seen pictures of Christians worshipping with one another, with bombs exploding all around them in their towns.

This brief video was filmed in a bomb shelter where Ukrainian violinist Vera Latichenko plays a Ukrainian folk song in the dark, somber shelter.

[3 : 32] and puts a man in a conference knowing between our lives.

It's a situation that brings happening to our guests as well. This keeps me on Twitter and of Ukraine. This keeps me on Twitter and making myself in a movable andcerous exchange.

It's a poignant song, isn't it?

Maybe you can imagine yourself in a situation like that singing, It Is Well. But the song is louder in their hearts than the bombs exploding all around them, isn't it?

Perhaps you don't yet feel like bombs are exploding all around you in terms of persecution and difficulty with living for Jesus day in and day out.

[5 : 01] But many of our brothers and sisters around the world do experience that. And many of us are already experiencing some of that where we live and in our worlds.

And Jesus wants us prepared for more, right? Beyond that specific suffering, suffering of many other kinds is quite real and pressing in on all of us in different ways.

So we need to hear God's word direct us right now, yes? And prepare us for days to come.

Read with me God's holy word. True and powerfully relevant across cultures, across generations. 1 Peter 3, beginning at verse 13.

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.

[6 : 06] Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts regard 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.

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for 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. Father, we thank you for your word. We ask for your help this morning.

That we would not merely hear it, but that we would receive it. That we would see our Savior. That we would find comfort in him. That you would speak clearly to us.

[7 : 10] We thank you that you delight to do that. And so, would you use my words. Would you speak far beyond them that we would hear your voice.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. When suffering hits your life, it's easy to forget who you are.

One of the things I love about this image is that Miss Slotichinko does not allow herself to be identified as a lonely person whose life is reduced to hiding in a bomb shelter.

No, she is a violinist, isn't she? Even in the midst of life-altering suffering, she is a Ukrainian who stands with a courageous people against those who attack them.

Peter begins this long section on suffering with this reminder. Verse 13. Now, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

[8 : 24] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. It's possible if you seek peace and you serve others graciously that no one will attack you at all.

But even more so, he's saying, if and when the attacks do come, you're blessed. What does Peter mean? The suffering itself is not good.

It's not a blessing in that sense. We know that. Rather, it's that no matter what comes, it's this idea of if God is for us, who can stand against us?

In God I trust. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The psalmist says. Don't forget who you are.

Identity amnesia, as Paul Tripp calls it, is dangerous, isn't it? You're a beloved child of God.

[9 : 29] Jesus told you there will be trouble in this world. And he didn't pray that you would be removed from it so you would have no trouble. Rather, he prayed that you would be protected from the evil one because he, Jesus, has overcome the world.

Don't forget that you are always held in his hand. Blessed. Jesus taught this in the Beatitudes, right?

Remember Matthew 5? 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. You are not a lonely person who is reduced to hiding from enemy attacks.

That is not your primary identity. Blessed are you because you stand with a courageous people who have an eternal hope.

[10 : 41] A reward in heaven, right? The kingdom of heaven is yours. No matter what they say about you here.

No matter how they treat you here. No matter what they take away from you here. They cannot take that away. They can't take away your eternal inheritance.

They cannot harm your soul. They cannot knock you out of the strong hand of your heavenly Father. Amen? Remember who you are and whose you are.

Who is holding you. No matter what suffering comes your way. We are going to learn several particular things about suffering in the weeks ahead.

How we as God's people are to live and approach suffering. But the key principle at the center of this passage this morning is in my words, that suffering affords us unique opportunities that we

must embrace to share our hope with others.

[11 : 53] This section that we're studying this morning is one of the main reasons that God led us to 1 Peter this year and a year that we're focusing as a church on evangelism in our daily lives, our relationships with our neighbors.

Hopefully many of you will remember Pastor Bill Nash standing down here for several weeks in January and teaching us about 1 Peter 3.15. It comes in the context of suffering.

As your heart is overwhelmed, as your mind is strained, as your body is being worn down, opportunities to share your hope will arise right there as well.

Now the suffering itself is not good. But those opportunities are exciting, right? Let me remind us why. Why are they so exciting to us?

Because we are God's people, not that we might have comfort and ease here in this life. No. We are God's people that we might proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, right?

[13 : 13] Remember your identity as pastors. Remember that? All of you? If you were here then? Pastors who are to pray for and point people to Jesus. I hope as we think about this that at least those three names that you've committed to praying for and to looking for opportunities to point them to Jesus are coming to mind.

Those people that are in your life that you're living with and seeking to love. And maybe you're wondering, well, when and how we'll ever get to share with them? I just don't know how that'll happen.

Well, suffering is not the only way. It is one of the ways that such opportunities are presented to point to Jesus as your hope.

So what are we sharing? Here, verse 15. Make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

A reason for the hope that is in you. Why do you have hope? Someone might say. How do you have hope when all of this is going on in your life and around you?

[14 : 28] I mean, we celebrated, especially last week on Easter, it was a very celebratory service, right? There's hope. We celebrated. We have a living hope because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

But maybe life hits and someone says, now? Do you have that hope? That's the hope that we're to be sharing.

Do people see and hear where your hope is, especially when life hurts? Could you share with someone why your hope is beyond success or comfort or fame here in this life?

Could you share what the death and resurrection of Jesus promises you now and forever? That's your hope. That's what we're sharing. Well, when?

When should we share this hope? The most direct answer here in this passage is when someone asks you. See, because you haven't retreated into a holy huddle of some sort, Peter assumes that others who do not know Jesus will see your life and not only at times malign you, which will happen, but also at other times ask you.

[15 : 41] The assumption here, by the way, is that they don't just see your successes, so that they don't just know you on Facebook, right? They also see your sufferings.

Hmm. You okay with that? That feels pretty vulnerable, doesn't it? Pretty personal. But they don't just get to see the good days.

Apparently, people are seeing the hard times. Are you okay with them seeing that? Can your heart say, say yes, because I want them to see my hope.

I want them to see my Savior. Another answer to that when question would be always. Always we should share.

This verse is not trying to give us an excuse never to talk about Jesus unless someone asks us, so just try to make sure no one ever does. That's not the point. Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone.

[16 : 45] You can stand and share your story of God's grace scheduled before a large group like this. That's wonderful. Or you could unexpectedly bump into someone in the grocery store checkout line and share the hope of Jesus.

Always with anyone. So this is the reason Peter tells us always to be prepared to share our hope. Always be prepared. As every good scout knows, and I'm not one, I'm faking right now, but every

good scout knows if you're going to be prepared, that has to happen ahead of time before you go on the hike, right?

Where you might need fire or food or something. Always be preparing ahead. Preparing ahead of the occasion where the conversation comes up and you need hope, hope to share, right?

Can we do some preparation together this morning? You and I will both be a bit more equipped for the next hope opportunity that we have.

Let's spend just a few minutes in this preparation, helping us be prepared. Answer this question, where does preparation primarily need to take place if we're to be ready to share our hope?

[18 : 02] My guess is for many of you, you may say, oh, it's in my head, this is great. Pastor's going to give me some theological arguments and he's going to teach us some things and that can be helpful.

Probably some of you are thinking, ah, yes, this is going to be a homiletics course, public speaking. He's going to teach me how to say things so that it comes home just right.

How about your heart? To be prepared in your hearts, regard Christ the Lord as holy.

That's the word from the Lord's prayer, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Treated as holy, glorified.

And Peter, by the way, has no problem using that of Jesus Christ the Lord. What does that mean? If in your hearts you're honoring Jesus as holy, that means you're trusting, even and especially in the midst of your suffering, remember, that's where we are, that Jesus is the one in charge of all the events in your life and in your world.

[19 : 21] He is Lord. If you're going to worship him while losing everything, while the world brings chaos all around you, and it does, then this means instead of fearing your enemies or being overthrown by persecution so that you abandon the eternal hope of Jesus just to get a little hope of comfort and security here, how can I protect myself?

means that you settle in your heart ahead of time, that Jesus can be trusted, that he alone is worthy of fear and also of trust.

And you don't just train your head to assent to these truths theoretically in a way that won't impact you when the rubber meets the road. No, you help your heart embrace that hope.

There's so much we could say here, but molding my heart means a bunch of things. It means prayer, right? My heart's going to be able to engage with God, to talk with him, to listen to him. It means worship. Worship shapes our heart, doesn't it? To come in here with God's people and to together cling to his promises, together to hear stories like AC shared with us last week about God's faithfulness in real hurt and loss.

[20 : 50] It means soaking in God's word and its truths about the heart of God and the suffering of God's people, including God's very son and how God works in the midst of all of that.

My heart needs to know that. It means being honest, especially about your fears and your hurts, being honest with others.

Talk to your grace group, right? Email one of the pastors and say, I just need to talk. Listen, we love talking with you. We love to get to hear what's going on in your world and to pray with you, to go together to remember who God is right where you are.

Grab a brother or sister this morning and just say, I need some help. I can't see the hope of Jesus right now in my depression, in my grief, in my fear about what might be coming my way at work or in my neighborhood or just in my life.

I can't see this hope we sing about and talk about. I just need some help. Will you listen to me?

Together, you can ask God to prepare your heart to find your hope in Christ.

[22 : 04] We need each other. You may memorize a speech to share with someone. That's great if you do. Some of you are good at that. That can help. But if you prepare your heart to hope in Christ in every situation, then the hope can just come out when the hard stuff happens.

Even sometimes it comes out in messy words. Even sometimes it's through tears. Even sometimes you look back and you think, oh man, I wish I hadn't have said it that way. And the suffering floods in and that's reality, right?

Opportunity arises suddenly and someone asks unexpectedly and you're still stinging from being left out by your friends, from being passed over by your boss, from whatever it is.

You're just hurting in that. And it doesn't come out like a prepared speech, but the reality of your hope in Christ can come out with, well sometimes it's indirect questions that someone will ask.

Other times, unexpected opportunities. And there's plenty of those. I've missed a bunch of those because I wasn't eagerly prepared to share my hope. Maybe you've felt that way as the person walks away and as you get in your car and oh man.

[23 : 22] But lots of opportunities. I've been asked, sitting in a car in India, I know Jesus was a good man who died on a cross, but I just don't know why he died on a cross.

Can you explain that to me? Sure. Teeing it up, right? That can happen. I've also walked by someone I didn't even know and a simple, hey, how's it going?

It was answered with deep personal loss and longing for hope. But if our hearts are prepared by treasuring Jesus, by praying for people, then we'll have this opportunity to point the people to Jesus, right?

To share where our hope is. We get to share our hope and worry about rhetorical flourishes later. You know what? It's not about you anyway. It's about Jesus.

You don't have to say it impressively. Don't fear people who might be against you. Decide now, at your core, that Jesus is worthy of all glory, all your trust, and so look forward to sharing your hope that he is that wonderful, that he is your treasure, that he is yours forevermore, and just sharing that hope in him.

[24 : 48] Can you believe, by the way, that Peter just told us that? That he's the one writing, have no fear of them.

What's Peter's most famous answer to the question, why are you with Jesus? What's his most famous answer to that? Who? I mean, not me.

Not who? That guy? I mean, you're a pretty intimidating servant girl. After all, I'm a little afraid. He feared the servant girl.

Maybe like me, you've failed on many occasions, and you feel the weight of that, those missed opportunities. Jesus tells Peter what?

Jesus says, Peter, I've prayed for you, and you're gonna fall, and I've prayed that you'll repent, and that you'll actually help others. And so the risen Jesus comes to Peter, and he reinstates him, and he says, feed my sheep.

[25 : 51] Feed my sheep. Keep pointing people to me. And so when Peter is asked at Pentecost in front of many friends and foes, why are you with Jesus? He shares his hope and boldly declares, God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Repent and be baptized, all of you, in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. And then when the authorities threaten his life because he keeps telling people about Jesus, they say, stop! Or we'll stop you. The one who was afraid of the servant girl says what? I cannot help but speak of what I have seen and heard.

Peter's story of hope includes fear and failure and forgiveness that is there for us.

I want you to think just a minute what your personal hope is. Maybe think of a couple of things you could highlight in your story of grace. That's what we call them around here.

[27 : 04] Maybe think of a struggle Jesus met you in. A favorite Bible verse or song that encapsulates your hope quickly and that you always remember because you've known it a long time.

Maybe it's a moment or an argument or a realization that helped you trust Jesus. I want to urge each of us to spend some time after you leave considering that and preparing in your hearts. But before the last little bit of the sermon I'm going to actually give you 60 seconds right now to think on that or just to pray for God to be preparing your heart even right now because I know some of us are going to leave here and this afternoon is going to get busy and your intention to spend three hours contemplating this is going to be tough.

Take a little bit of time right now. God would you keep speaking to us and keep preparing our hearts to share this hope.

Amen. In case you didn't miss it I'm not quite finished yet. A couple more things Peter shows us here about sharing our hope amidst our suffering.

[28 : 49] When the time comes how should we share? Always share eagerly but do this with gentleness and respect. Gentleness means I'm not focused on myself.

Respect means I'm elevating the value of the other person. Your manner should not be attacking or offensive. The only offense should be the offense of the cross of Jesus.

You're speaking to a person he made in his image that he loves that he values. Humbly tell them you're no better at all but you found hope in one who is and who loves us.

Why? Why share this way? Well Peter says be gentle and respectful for your own conscience.

Verse 16 because it's right and true but this is primarily for others.

Look that even though they slander you they may be put to shame. The idea is not so much their public humiliation it might sound like that to us but rather their change of heart that they may move from belittling to believing.

[30 : 06] that they may move from shaming your hope to sharing your hope. Right? That's our desire. We must embrace these opportunities because this is our mission.

It's our purpose for existing. God has sent you with the best news ever that many others would enjoy the riches of his grace through Jesus alongside of you.

He sent you for that. Take advantage of these opportunities. Do you remember the story of the Israelite lepers in 2 Kings 7? Things got so bad in their lives that they despaired of life.

They decided they had nothing left to lose. They'd walk over into the camp of the enemy and just hope against hope for mercy. And so these four guys walk in and they get there and God has chased the Assyrians off and there's a huge camp full of silver and gold and food and drink and clothes and they're just it's all theirs for the taking.

They carry all they can off. I don't know where they hit it and as they come back to start plunder round two they suddenly stop and they look at each other and they say something's wrong.

[31 : 24] This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. Let's go tell. Let's go share. There's plenty here for everybody.

Southwood this is a day of good news. Amen? Let's not keep it to ourselves. Let's embrace the opportunities even our suffering gives us to share this hope.

After all verse 17 it is better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will than for doing evil.

Remember back to chapter 1 Peter told us all our suffering comes from a good God and though it's not good it's for your good.

It's to bring something precious in you. Remember that? Remember how he's working? He's the one who wills. You're suffering unjustly not for your sins and so did someone else.

Jesus also suffered unjustly. That's the connection to verse 18. We'll pick up at verse 18 next week.

But I love that the Bible always takes us back to Jesus doesn't it?

[32 : 42] I'll admit it's not always as clear as this passage right here. But that's why we preach the Bible here every week because it never ever lets us miss Jesus.

When you suffer don't forget your suffering Savior. Not only does he know first hand about unjust suffering so he can relate he can understand he can weep with you.

If you if you have a lot of tears this week this morning please know feel his tears with you and for you.

He has been there he knows what that suffering is like. But also he suffered to bring you to God.

You who are sinful unrighteous who had distanced yourself from God like Peter through your words and your actions and your lack of words and actions he died to bring you to God so that you are his.

[33 : 52] God's people recipients of his mercy that's who you are and whose you are. Jesus suffered for you so that no matter what you suffer you could confidently sing it is well with my soul.

Not it's good in my world it is well with my soul. He died once you don't have to repeat the sin bearing part. No but you you proclaim the sin bearing part of his suffering that though his body died he was made alive forever in the spirit which will really last so there's eternal hope.

So we have a hope to stand on. A hope to sing about no matter what's exploding all around us in this world so that we have a hope to share with anyone and everyone.

Amen. Let's pray. Jesus thank you for your death in our place and thank you that you live. We need you with us.

We need a living savior who doesn't leave us alone and so we we thank you for that. Would you remind us that you're with us? Would you send us out in your strength to celebrate the hope that we have to share the savior who gives us that hope?

[35 : 27] Give us joy in that we ask in your name. Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org reported in the last walk through French se at the the right and hip lion pray pray