

Suffering 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: 27 March 2011

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Turn now to 1st Peter. We've been working through this letter from 1st Peter, chapter 3. Last week we were looking at Peter's advice to wives and husbands, and then moving out, as it were, more into the community.

And we were looking at that kind of section, suffering for righteousness' sake. And how we're not to repay evil for evil and so on. But at verse 10 then, Peter says, Chapter 3, verse 10, Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.

Let him turn away from evil and do good. Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. 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. 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.

[1 : 30] 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. Some people think that the Old Testament and the New Testament are incredibly different.

And of course there are differences, because, for instance, a lot of the Old Testament is pointing to the coming of Christ, and the New Testament is dealing with the arrival and the coming of Christ, and subsequently of the growth and development of the church.

A lot of the Old Testament is by way of picture, by way of symbol, the whole sacrificial system, and all the setting out of the law, and all these different things were pointing, they're all pointing to Jesus Christ.

But people often see this huge difference between the old and the new. And they tend to think that the Old Testament is much more brutal and ruthless, and that the New Testament, following the teaching of Christ, is much more gentle and caring and tender.

[2 : 48] And sometimes people do not realize that the old is and the new, although they are from two different periods, there is a wonderful unity running right through.

And that's what we find so often in the New Testament, is that the New Testament writers quote from the Old Testament. We find that often in the life of our Lord, we find it often in the life of Paul, and we find it in the life of Peter, we find it in the life of John.

There's a powerful link between the Old and the New Testament. And that's what we have here. As Peter is backing up what he's been saying, he quotes from Psalm 34, the psalm we read.

And that was a psalm, of course, that was penned by David, and it was a psalm that was penned by David when he was in real trouble. And that's one of the wonderful things, often, that we read in the Bible, that those who were chosen by God and who were instruments in the hand of God for the writing were often people who were going through their own personal traumas and difficulties and trials.

And some of the most powerful writing has come from times of great trial. And that was certainly true in the experience of David when he wrote many of the psalms.

[4 : 09] And even that psalm that we just read there in Psalm 34 was such a psalm because it was when it tells us at the beginning when he changed his behavior before Abimelech so that he drove him out and he went away.

That's when David was in the city of Achish and when the men of Achish discovered and they said, Hey, this is David. This is our number one enemy.

This is a man who killed Goliath. This is a man who has been the scourge of our nation. Remember how the women sang? Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands.

And David realized he was in serious trouble. That's this psalm. Psalm 34 was penned at that time. That's what came out of it.

So David knew what he was talking about. When David talks about God's deliverances, when David talks about these things, about the angel of the Lord encamping around those that fear him, David knew exactly what he was talking about.

[5 : 15] This wasn't theory. This came from the furnace of experience. He knew what he was talking about. So Peter is quoting from this particular psalm.

And so we, last week, as we say, we were looking at what the Christian's attitude should be like in the home and in the community. And then Peter said, Well, he's driving home what he's been saying, quoting from this psalm.

And he begins by saying, Whoever desires to love life and see good days. I wonder, how do you view life?

How is life for you? And I don't mean just particularly today, but in general. For some people, life is a burden.

Some people feel continually and constantly oppressed by life. And they, for them, you know how the song says, Help me make it through the day.

[6 : 19] That's the way it is for some people. They feel that just getting through the day, that they made it through another day, that's tough. But you know, for some people, that's how life is.

It must be really hard to find life as just a kind of an endurance thing, where you're just managing to cope through. Now, of course, life does bring many problems and pressures.

I think one of the pressures that comes from today is the amount of knowledge that we have. We are being fed knowledge. I mean, knowledge. Don't get me wrong. It's wonderful to know.

But I see the young people. Young people today know far more than I know now, I think. When you go back to what you knew, I'm speaking to the older people here, what you knew when you were young, compared to what the young know today, there's a huge gulf.

Because we are bombarded with knowledge today. Just bombarded at every front. It's extraordinary the amount that we're taking. And that, while it's good in many ways, it creates its own pressures, its own problems, its own difficulties, in how we deal with all these things, and how we cope with all these things.

[7 : 36] And there are many people, because of all the knowledge that they've gleaned about the world that we live in, and all the global problems, they become real issues with them.

But then there's all the different pressures of life. And as I said, I'm not talking just how you feel right at this moment, because maybe some of you today, life is tough. But it's not always tough.

But maybe in the particular situation you're in today, things have changed. Maybe it's hard for you. If so, then that does make life difficult.

But we'll see in a moment exactly what the psalmist is saying. For other people, life is so tough that they just want to escape it. They cannot really face up to the reality of life anymore.

It's not just a burden of just trying to make it through the day. There are people who say, I just can't face life. I can't cope. And some people try and live in an escape life through pills or drugs or through running away, constantly running away from life or drink or whatever it is.

[8 : 45] They try and bury themselves into something else so that they just cannot face the harsh realities of life. Now, when we come to the Bible, the Lord does not want us to live like that.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not minimizing in any way the pain and the pressures that some people in here today may have in their heart. And as I say, life today might be difficult because of particular circumstances that you've gone through.

I'm not talking about that at the moment. I'm talking about how it is all the time, how life is generally. But when we come here, we see what Peter is saying, and he's talking about life in the form of loving it.

Whoever desires to love life and sometimes translated, enjoy life. And that's what God wants us to do.

He wants us to love life, to enjoy life. You know, there are some people who genuinely, honestly think that Christianity is, if you, once you become a Christian, that you can wave goodbye to enjoying life, to loving life.

[9 : 58] There are many people who genuinely feel pity in their heart towards a Christian. And they say to themselves, what on earth? They've signed up for a life of doom and gloom.

That's not the case. Because Christ himself, Christ has told us that he has come to give life and to give life more abundantly.

In other words, whatever life we can enjoy in this world, and naturally, Christ says, I will enhance it. Over and over, I will give to you the capacity to enjoy life, to understand it, to appreciate it, to know it in its fulfillment.

Now, again, it's possible as Christians sometimes that we do go down. And as I say, I'm not talking here about times, the difficult times that we go through in life. I'm talking really here about how it is in general.

And let's remember, it's quite important to remember this. Peter is writing to Christians who have life tough, really tough.

[11 : 08] We're not talking here about sort of, where things are a wee bit challenging. Peter was writing to Christians who were facing real persecution.

You know, sometimes we read about a phrase that there's a country that's closed to the Christian. Well, I don't think that that would be a concept that would be understood in the early New Testament church.

they wouldn't have taken that on board. There would be, in their thinking, no such thing as a country closed to the gospel. Because these men and women and boys and girls lived, they were, they lived life, as it were, with one foot in the grave.

These were times of brutal persecution, times when people were being killed daily, where people were being sacrificed, where people were being burnt, where people were losing all their possessions, losing all the rights for becoming a Christian.

It was tough being a Christian. If you signed up, as it were, if we use that expression, but if you began to follow Jesus Christ, there was every likelihood you would lose your life.

[12 : 24] And yet, Peter is talking here about enjoying life, about loving life. And you know, when you, when we look at what the New Testament church faced, we realize often we live in a comfort zone.

And sometimes we talk a wee bit about, about opposition to Christianity and such like, and there is, without, there's no doubt, whatever within our nation, that there is a growing opposition to Christianity.

But whatever opposition there is, it is nothing like the opposition that the New Testament church experienced when the likes of Peter wrote and the fires of persecution burnt.

So we've always got to sometimes see what is written before us and to understand something of the background from where it came. And so Peter is telling us, you know, life, life is for loving, for living.

And if Jesus Christ is our Lord and our Savior, then life takes on. And let me say this to anybody in here today who doesn't have Jesus Christ as Savior. You're missing out the best.

[13 : 33] Take, for instance, some of the benefits that you gain when you become a Christian. One is, all of a sudden, there is a real purpose to your life.

you know why you're here because you're here to glorify God. You begin to learn that ultimately it's not about you, it's about Him.

And that God has given to you a mission and a work. Whatever that is, for each one of us, it will be different. But He's given us something to do.

And we have to do it. And He gives us these different gifts and abilities where we're at. And we're not to be looking over and saying, oh, well, I wish I was him or I wish I was her. You're you.

You're unique. You're precious in God's sight. And He has loved you so much that He gave a son to die for you. And then He says, now on you go, I want you to work for me wherever you're at in this world.

[14 : 32] And that gives a tremendous sense of purpose, of identity. We know to whom we belong. We know where we're going. So many people live their life in utter despair.

Because as they look around with no sense of God, no sense of real identity, they don't know why they're here. What's it all about? You hear people ask so often. Well, the Christian doesn't have to ask that.

Because they know who they belong to. And they know where they're going. And they know that this life is a preparation for the endless glory that lies ahead.

Because they're going to be forever with the Lord. The Lord that they've begun to serve here, they will serve forever and ever and ever in glory. And so we, if the Lord is at the center of our life, things change for the better.

We have peace. There's lots of things we could talk about. Just one thing more. That's it. Peace. When we are crippled by guilt, guilt is a really, really difficult thing to bear.

[15 : 43] And if our person isn't dealing with the guilt that's in our life, and we all have guilt, because we all do things that are wrong against one another. And we all, there's a natural, instinctive, inbuilt guilt before God, even when people don't realize it.

Even people who claim to be atheists, there is deep down within themselves an unhappiness brought about by the guilt that's in their heart before God.

God's our maker. The fact that God has set his law upon our heart, that's not something that we can just decide, oh, I'm going to remove that. We can't just say, oh, there is no God, it doesn't matter. Whatever we may think, it's not going to change. If you bury your head in the sand and you cannot see the sun, that doesn't mean all of a sudden that the sun isn't there. And it's the same with people.

It doesn't matter what they think. God does not change. And so, that's part of the reason there are so many people, there's a deep-rooted unhappiness, there's an emptiness.

[16 : 48] Because of guilt, Jesus died to deal with our guilt. Isn't that wonderful? And that brings liberty. It brings freedom.

It means the weight of guilt is gone because Christ has taken it. It's freedom, liberty, peace. And so, it's no wonder that Peter is talking about loving life.

And I hope today that that's what we're able to do. But then Peter, at times, becomes more specific about loving life. And he says, whoever desires to love life and see good days, here's what you do. Keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. Be careful. I'll just be very brief running through this.

Be careful what you say about people. The Bible has so much to say about the wrong use of the tongue. And, you know, you can never spend any amount of time, if you end up slugging somebody, if you end up saying things about somebody, you never feel good about it, do you?

[18 : 01] No. Because it's wrong. And, you know, you can distort a person's view of somebody else like that. You can be quite, here you are and there's somebody over there and you think that person's quite a nice person and all the rest of it.

And then somebody says to them, a wee kind of whisper, ah, see that person there? He's this or she's that. And you say, oh, all of a sudden, you have a totally different view, totally different picture of that person, probably forevermore.

we can murder one another with our tongue and we can't take it back. It's one of the most serious things that we can do and that's one of the reasons why the Bible is so full in the Old and the New Testament about muzzling our mouth, about watching our tongue.

The psalmist was often praying about it, Lord, put a guard over my lips, keep my tongue from speaking evil because he knew the havoc, the devastation that it could cause.

We've used the example before about Naaman, that great man of Syria. He was a mighty man, he was a general, he was a second only to the king. He was a national hero but he was a leper.

[19 : 26] And you ask people, who was Naaman? They won't say he was a mighty Syrian general. They'll say, oh, he was a leper from Syria. See?

That's the way the mind works. We latch on to the negative. We latch on to the bad stuff. And so this is a warning. If you want to enjoy life, if you want to love life, don't be speaking wrong about people.

It's not good for them and it's not good for you. That's the first thing that is said. Then it says, turn away from evil and do good. That's not simply a matter of hating evil.

It is taking positive action against it. It's if you're faced, as we were looking there at temptation, maybe speaking to the young folk, when you're faced with the choices of life, to do this or to do that, take deliberate action to turn from the evil.

It's not just to, as it were, to try and avoid it, but to actually turn from it. So it's saying, let him turn from evil and do good. Let him seek peace and pursue it.

[20 : 40] This is one of the great duties and commands that is placed upon us. To pursue peace. It's like to chase after, pursue it.

It's trying to track something down. It's like a dog that's chasing after, you know, some of these dogs with a great scent and you send that dog out to get something. It's going to track it down.

Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers. Let us, the Bible is full of quotation, let us therefore follow after the things that make for peace.

When Jesus was born into this world, the angel sang glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and good will toward all men. Jesus' life was a life of peace.

You know, his life was almost like a benediction. When you look at the life of Jesus, he was always seeking to bring peace into situation. Or there were certain people that provoked him.

[21 : 44] There's no question whatever. But there's something about the life of Christ because it was a pure life and a right life where he was there held out before us as a great peacemaker in life.

My friend, may you seek to be a peacemaker. Pursue it. Pursue the promotion of peace. Wouldn't it be a great thing over you? What will be written over our tombstones?

Well, maybe we tend often not to write, but in the old days you used to see things in some cemeteries that would write a wee bit about a person. It will write sometimes a wee bit about a person.

After we die, people will often talk about people and they'll say, oh, he was this or she was that. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be known as a peacemaker? Somebody who pursued peace.

And that's what it's saying. If you want to enjoy life, you be a peacemaker. The great advice, watch your tongue, turn away from evil, seek peace and pursue it.

[22 : 54] And then it tells us there that for the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their cry. It doesn't just mean that God's eyes are taking note of, they're on.

In the same way as a parent will be watching their young child. Supposing you take your child to the play park. It's a big play park.

And you say to the little one, on you go. And that little child thinks it's got all the freedom in the world and nobody's caring, but all the time the eyes of the parent are following. On the swing and the roundabout and the seesaw and all the different things running about.

All the time, watching. They might be talking to other people, but their eyes are still following. And often the little child's oblivious to the fact, thinking, oh, this is great. I have freedom to do what I want.

But all the time, the eyes of the parent follow. That's the idea that we have here, is that the Lord's eyes are upon us, his faces to us, for good.

[23 : 58] And the idea is also, it says, for the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. It gives this idea, you know sometimes when somebody is hard of hearing, and they'll tilt their head forward towards you, in order to hear a little more clearly, clearly what you're saying.

Well, it's almost got that picture, that idea, that this is what the Lord is doing for the righteous. It's as if he's paying close attention to what they're saying. Always watching, in order to help, in order to protect, to be with.

Yes, troubles and difficulties and problems are going to come into your life, but he's there, and he's going to help you. He's going to deal with these things, and deal with you in these things.

all was to you, all was for you. No wonder we should enjoy and love life, when that's how it is. But then he goes on to quote this opposite, this contrasting picture, but, is against those who do evil.

It's not an awful thought. The face of the Lord is against. On the one hand, you have here almost this parental picture given to us of the way that God is working towards his people.

[25 : 23] Eyes following eyes of love, head tilted to hear what they're saying, but for those who are against him, for those who are doing evil.

It's, you can almost, again, and this is using, of course, everyday language to try and teach us about God, who is, God is a spirit, and doesn't have the bodily features.

The father does not have these bodily features as such, but it's using language so that we will understand. The face of God is set against. It's like a sternness.

It's like this face of the judge. The face of the judge who has before him one who is guilty. The face of God is set against those who do wickedly.

You know, it's an awful thing to be without Christ. And it doesn't matter what a person may gain in this world or have in this world. You know, there might be some people in here today and you're saying to yourself, oh, I wish I was so and so.

[26 : 32] Maybe somebody who's famous in this world who has loads of money and seems to have power and fame and everything and you're saying to yourself, oh, sometimes young people think like that, oh, I wish I was so and so. Well, it's not for me to judge, but maybe that person that you're envying today, the face of God is set against them.

I don't know, but maybe, and I would not like ever, ever, ever to be a person that the face of God was set against.

I would hate to be that person. whatever else we have or don't have in life, if God's face is to us in love, if his eyes are on us watching us carefully, if his ear is open to our cry, oh, isn't that wonderful? But the reverse is equally true. I would never, ever want to have God's face set against me. And if you're here today without Jesus Christ, may I urge you to look to Jesus.

Because you know what things are. Without Christ, that's where you are. The face of God is set against. But it needn't be.

[27 : 52] Because Jesus is here in his mercy with the outstretched arms, inviting you to come to him. So that you will know the face and the favor of God shining upon you and to you.

Move on very quickly. But then he says, now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? It's not a wonderful thing. So we say, here's Peter's writing to Christians who are facing every kind of trouble and trauma, and yet he's saying, you know, nobody can ultimately harm you.

Yeah, they may hurt you, they may do things against you, but you remember Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are for you. The devil who's out to get you, he won't ultimately succeed. The world which may hate you and persecute you, they cannot rob you of your grace, they cannot destroy your hope, they cannot destroy your future, they cannot destroy your link and love to the Lord.

Even sin itself cannot do ultimate harm to you, even death can't. But then it says, just moving as the time is going, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy.

In other words, have a reverence in your heart, a reverent awe for Christ in your heart. And it then says, always have defense when anyone asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

[29 : 24] Now the language here would suggest that when it says anyone asks you for a reason. Now this is not the asking that's in an interrogation, but just the normal kosher conversation.

And people will ask you, if you live, as Peter has been describing, if you live a Christ-like way in this world, and your attitude shows, because if you live as we should live, a particular attitude will come through, and there will come times when people will notice that attitude, and they're going to ask you, how come, in the face of all these things and difficulties, how come that you, what is it about you?

And you know, these are wonderful opportunities. Often we are saying to ourselves and we're saying to the Lord, Lord, give me an opportunity to speak to somebody. See, we aren't just to grab people and try and ram the gospel down people's throats, we'll put people away, but it's amazing the opportunities that will be given, and they will be given, and people are going to ask.

It's amazing, for instance, in this community, when you come to faith in Jesus Christ, I remember, I'm digressing here, when I was converted, and I was saying to myself, oh, I'm ashamed to say it, but I was afraid of all the different people I would be meeting, and I didn't know how they would react, would they turn their back upon me, would they, I didn't know what it was going to be like, you're thrown into this, as it were, like a world of the unknown, how are they going to react?

Will I have the courage to confess Christ before people? Do you know the amazing thing was this, the number of people who said to me, what happened?

[31 : 22] See, there's an invitation to give your testimony, and it was incredible the amount of people that you actually, on the street, different places, maybe it only took a few minutes, but you've got to give your testimony, you've got to tell them what Jesus Christ did for you.

You didn't have to go around and sort of start saying, well, I've got to try and find an opening here. They asked you. And so, we've got to grab all the opportunities that are given to it.

So, this is what it's talking about here. People are going to ask you about the hope that is within you. They're going to see that. 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.

And my friends, we, and this is not, and this is, we of all people have hope in our heart. You know, the rest of the world ultimately has no hope.

We're not saying that in a proud or arrogant way. We're saying it in a biblical way. Because that's what the Bible says. That a person without God is without hope in this world.

[32 : 39] And I can't think of a much worse condition to be in than having no hope. So when people ask you about the hope that's within, you tell them, but there's a word of caution. Yet do it with gentleness and respect.

In other words, there's no place for a hard, arrogant attitude when you speak to people about Christ and about what Christ has done.

you have to have respect for the person you're speaking to. It's got to be done with gentleness and with tenderness. You've got to always remember that.

Let me ask you today, where do you stand in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ? The most important question that you ever have to ask yourself. Am I in Him?

Have I come to put my hope and my trust, my faith in Him? I often fear that here, and I don't just mean here in this congregation, but maybe within our culture, that we're looking for something extra.

[33 : 50] And I believe that there are people who have come to put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet they're looking for something extra. They're saying, I don't really know.

there must be more than this. And you know what happens? Is that you come to faith in Jesus Christ, and because you're still looking, and still looking, and still looking, and still waiting, and still looking, you're not growing.

By now, you should have been flourishing, and growing, and developing, but you're still just almost like it's where taking these little baby steps, because you are already there, but you're still looking, still looking.

You're waiting for something else. My friend, the Lord is saying, come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you a rest. Come unto me, and I will in no wise cast out.

Have you come? Well, if you have come by faith, and you have accepted the Lord as Savior, then the word tells, we've got to go on what the word says, not according to what we feel.

[35 : 01] You know, if we go according to what we feel, we're not going to get very far. We've got to go on what the word says. Let's pray. Lord, our God, we pray to bless us now, and we give thanks for thy goodness and grace towards us, and we pray that we may hear and live what the word says.

As we prepare to leave from here, we pray that we might go with thy blessing upon us, feed our souls, and fill our hearts with thyself. Be merciful to us. We pray for those who are sad, those who are downcast, those who are struggling with issues and difficulties and sore providences in life.

Lord, we pray to help them and to make things easy for them. Lord, heal the sick, and we pray to heal the brokenhearted. Bless us and take away sin in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.