

XXVII. I Peter in Biblical Perspective  
*The Elect in the Exile*  
“An Unwanted but Effective Gospel Platform – Part 2”  
I Peter 3:13–17  
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This is our second study in the unwanted platform for the proclamation of the Gospel on Christian suffering. I Peter 3:13–17 says *[13] Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good (the good)? [14] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, [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; yet do it with gentleness and respect, [16] having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. [17] For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.* The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

The initial Reformer perhaps of the magisterial reformers was Martin Luther. Much to thank God for in Martin Luther's life and ministry, not the least of which, his translation of the Bible into the German language which created today's German language and his 95 Theses that initiated the Reformation. And then there is the Augsburg Confession which is of great profit. In the Augsburg Confession Martin Luther affirms what all the other reformers affirmed which is the four marks of a Biblical, faithful, evangelical church committed to Biblical truth – prayer, Word, sacrament, and the disciplines of grace – but in this confession he adds a fifth mark or badge as the Puritans called it later, was Christian suffering. Inevitably Luther says ‘As irrational as it might be that the rebellion of men and women led by the one whom they serve, Satan, against Christ will break out against His people and His church and His church will be persecuted throughout all the ages.’

Peter has obviously picked up on that. First, we've seen the apostolic profile of how to pastorally disciple people which is to give them their assurance of salvation with Gospel blessings and then the call of salvation with Gospel commands. Peter has given us 13 blessings that are built into the life of God's people, which he calls elect exiles. Those who by the sovereign grace of God have been saved from all eternity in time and have been given without merit these Gospel blessings because of the love of God in Christ then this is who they are as the elect in Christ and now they are exiles, sojourners or pilgrims on a journey. They are to live a certain way not for salvation but for their Savior. We have looked at five of these Gospel commands and we are about to look at the sixth one which comes to us in a new section in I Peter.

This new section goes from I Peter 3:13 all the way to I Peter 5:11. This fifth section deals with Luther's fifth badge/mark of an evangelical church and Christians. This is a badge that you don't want to learn but if you love Jesus you are likely going to have to wear it one day. How will you wear it? God says He will mark His people out and His true church with it – Christian suffering.

When I'm studying a text like this I think of things like ‘Peter, when you only have so much space why do you spend so much time embedding this sojourner's journey in the context of teaching on Christian suffering? He talks about how you suffering verbally, socially,

emotionally, physically and even lethally unto death. You won't see that suffering is the inevitable badge that Christians will wear in the celebrity preaching that is out there.

I answered my own question of why Peter spends so much time on it because he believes the Bible and the Bible warns us that suffering will accompany the Christian life. He knows Paul and Paul said in Philippians 1:29, [29] *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake* and to fill up our cup of sufferings for Christ. Peter also believes Jesus for He said in Matthew 5:10–12, [10] *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

Jesus also said in Mark 13:9–11 [9] *“But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. [10] And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. [11] And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.”* Blessed are you when that occurs and know that He will be with you to let you know what, when and how to speak in that very moment. Because Peter believes Jesus He wants to be faithful to Scriptures.

Peter also knows that God's people are already encountering it to some degree as he has told us in I Peter 1 and 2 but it is nothing like they are going to encounter it because in just two to three years after he writes this epistle Nero's lethal persecution is going to land. Believers will be impaled upon sticks, poured on with tar oil and Nero will mockingly put signs under them that read 'The light of the world, a Christian' as they are set on fire. He knows what they are experiencing and what they will experience. He also knows what Jesus told him about his own death and that was if He told Peter how he was going to die he wouldn't go to it but that the Lord would be with him on that day and in that day.

I want to tell you what I'm not saying about Christian suffering. I'm not saying Christians suffering but Christian suffering and here's the difference. Christians suffer just like everyone else does in a broken world. There is sin in this world and that means there is broken everything. People get sick and die although the only two I know that didn't were Enoch and Elijah. Unbelievers get sick and die. Businesses fail, people lose jobs, natural disasters effect everyone and the curse of sin has marred everything that is beautiful. We can still see the beauty of things but not like it would be without sin. These things happen to Christians and unbelievers. Now God is sovereign over all that happens in His providence. He is His own Interpreter and behind the frowning providence is the smiling purposes of God.

This is not precisely what Peter is dealing with in Christian suffering, nor is it suffering that Christians may do if they do something stupid or wrong. The will of God is not suffering for evil but if a Christian decides to do wrong, like break the law there are consequences for those actions and that is not suffering for Jesus. Now as a Christian when you do wrong hopefully those consequences will lead you to repentance and help you make some changes in your life.

What is Christian suffering? Peter describes it and Jesus affirms it. It is suffering for Christ's sake, for righteousness sake. Peter says here, *Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for doing the good?* This is a rhetorical question. If you are pursuing these Gospel commands Peter has given us and it is God who gave you this life in Him through salvation, then *who* is there to bring harm to you? This is the same language of Paul in Romans 8:31b which

says [31b] *If God is for us, who can be against us?* It doesn't mean there aren't people against you but in comparison to God who is your Redeemer, Savior and Lord then who are your enemies?

Who is there to bring condemnation to you when you have Jesus who has removed your condemnation? Romans 8:34–37 says [34] *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.* [35] *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?* [36] *As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”* [37] *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

Who is so irrational that when there are people who are producing what is profitable in a community, you would persecute them as they are walking around in submission to authority, to one another etc, with all its benefits it produces in society? Doesn't the Bible say if you pursue peace that even your enemies will be at peace with you? Sadly, the perversity of rebellion against God and Christ is so enormous that when they can't get to Him, no matter if you are zealous for the good, they will still get to you to try to get to Him.

Peter's next words are (I Peter 3) [14] *But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.* This is not because you were breaking the law or a catastrophe but this is Christian suffering for being zealous for the good, not to be saved but because you love your Savior. Then Peter gives you a perspective and prescription after he says when you suffer for Christ. The perspective is that you're blessed which Peter gets from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:10–12) which we referred to earlier.

He is saying that when the suffering comes it is irrational and it will never succeed for the rhetorical question sets this up for us. When the persecution comes, no matter what kind it is through the one seeking to devour you, remember that the One who saved you is greater than the one who is persecuting you and wanting to devour you. God is sovereign and in control and no one can do anything that He is not allowing for His own purposes in His glory and your good. When this persecution comes don't go die in a pile of self-pity for you need to realize you just received a double blessing/benediction which I went over in the last study. What they do to you is doomed to fail because the sovereign God will defeat their purposes. I know when suffering comes it doesn't seem congruent but Peter is basically telling us that when the suffering comes we are to lift up our hands and open our hearts for a blessing is on the way. And realize that God has counted you worthy to suffer for Christ's sake.

Then Peter gives us a prescription which has a negative and a positive. The negative is when this persecution comes do not fear and literally it is do not fear, fear, their tactics, their threats or them. All targeted persecution whether it's verbal, financial, social, emotional, physical or lethal has one purpose and that is intimidation. Intimidation, if it works, has four possible consequences in someone's life.

Consequence number one from the fear intimidation brings to the one being intimidated is it will cause you to act irrationally. Fear causes irrational behavior/action. I love the moment in Rocky IV when the trainer gets in Rocky's face and “No fear! No fear!” Peter is telling you, “No fear.” Who is this doing it and who is your God? Don't let their irrational persecution of you cause fear in you for your irrational response to them. Secondly, fear causes paralysis and silence. The Bible says that Satan goes around like a roaring lion. Why does a lion roar? He knows when he roars you freeze. He's got you. Thirdly, fear can bring compromise for survival.

They will back off if I give up this or that or apostatize here or compromise here. Fourthly, fear brings panic and flight from the day of battle.

You tell the roaring lion that you have the Lion of Judah who is the Lamb of God who takes away my sins and on this day by His grace the perfect love of Christ will cast out all fear, except the glorious blessing of the fear of the Lord. So he tells you negatively don't let persecution put fear on the throne of your heart.

Then the positive he gives you is in I Peter 3:15a which says *[15] but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy*. My heart has one Hope and it's Christ, the Lord of glory. There is no other Lord and fear will not be lord. Christ is Lord because He is worthy, able, saved me and I have put my trust in Him alone. He alone is the only One who I want to occupy the throne of my heart.

Satan wants the persecution and those who persecute want the fear and intimidation to have its rule over you but when you dismiss that, I love the moment when persecution does not have its desired effect. There is another effect for it becomes a moment to reaffirm and confirm what was already there on the throne, which is your Savior. This isn't the moment Jesus becomes Lord. This is the moment when you say 'no' to fear in your heart and you have the opportunity to communicate Jesus as Savior to the world. You get a platform for the Gospel that you didn't want but is unbelievably effective.

Christian suffering is a Divine blessing which provides an opportunity to fearlessly confirm Christ as Lord in our hearts and persuasively communicate Christ as our Hope to the world. I Peter 3:15–17 says *[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; yet do it with gentleness and respect, [16] having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. [17] For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil*. Here Peter gives us some characteristics of effective Gospel evangelism. Here are seven of them.

One, is Gospel communication in the day of suffering is personal. You personally communicate Christ as your Hope to anyone – person to person. Secondly, you are prepared, always ready. This is why our church offers so many different classes on sharing your faith. Thirdly, you are non-discriminating – to anyone and most especially your adversaries. When someone says to you 'why are you not intimidated' then you have the opportunity to say it's because of Jesus, He's my Hope.

I was recently going over the martyrs and Ignatius would be born about three to four years after this epistle is written. He would get the benefit of apostolic discipleship that is left over in his life and then there would come an evil emperor that was even worse than Nero. In 110 AD this emperor would arrest Ignatius at 60 years of age, take him to the Roman Coliseum and placed him in the middle of the arena. He told him unless he recanted and denied Christ, the beast would be unchained and set upon him. Here is how Ignatius responded to that; "O emperor may the wild beast this day be eager to rush upon me. If they are not eager but unwilling then I will compel them 'come you wild beast and do your work upon my body and my bones,' Come torturers and persecutors of the evil one, only let me this day exalt Christ as Lord and Savior." The fear is gone in the day of persecution. In its place is not superman but a man with the strength that Christ provides for Christ to be exalted.

The fourth characteristic in the day of suffering is rational. Fifthly is winsome, in actions of gentleness and respect. Six, is doing it from the heart, conviction. Number seven is to do it with personal integrity from a good conscience. This is not a seared conscience but a conscience

sensitive to our sins, ready to confess them, committed to Christ and that He alone is to be Lord of our life. These are not easy moments. These are those moments where the bud is bitter but our Hope tells us the flower is sweet. These are buds in which the Providence of God is frowning but we know the smile of God is hidden behind the cloud. These are moments that we can't make sense of but we know that God is His own interpreter and He will make it plain in His time.

We see this confidence in Joseph when he told his brothers, 'what you mean for evil God means for good.' He gets thrown into slavery, put in a kangaroo court with Potiphar's wife, gets thrown into prison for the people he helps and that's fine for what you set in motion brothers that you meant for evil God meant for good to bring this about. I want you to know the sweetness of the God who has sustained me.

So here's the takeaway. When Christ is our Hope and when Christ is affirmed as Lord in our hearts then the Day of suffering becomes the day of vanishing fear in our lives and the day of victorious salvation to the world. It does not have its desired effect. Intimidation does not rule but begins to vanish. Peter tells us to give an account of the Hope that is within us.

What are we talking about in hope? When we talk about the Blessed Hope we are talking about our confidence in Christ that all that God has promised for us by His grace and for His glory has been secured through the death and resurrection of Christ our Lord. I have a new record, a new heart, a new home for He is preparing a place for me and He will never leave me nor forsake me. He will not lose one that belongs to Him. My conviction is that all His promises are secure and they are my Hope now and for all eternity and I will not be disappointed in Christ. My hope is rooted in Him who is in the heavens who is coming again, and one day all these blessings that are mine will one day be fulfilled when I am with Him and He is with me. That is my Hope.

I hear people say 'those Christians are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good' and I would say to that, until you get heavenly minded you will never be earthly good. Until that great Day is your Day and your hope in Christ to deliver what He has already secured at the cross then you will be no earthly good on this day for there will always be something in this day that Satan will use to compromise you. We live now but we don't live for now. To live is Christ and to die is gain because I'm not living for now. I'm living now for Him, then. We live as full of hope, heavenly minded for that which is yet to come which sets us free to be of earthly good until He comes.

When you get a big hope from a big God then you get a big love and love casts out all fear. In fact, I would love it if you would pray that for me. The constant pressure for you to feel the intimacy of God is to tame God down to someone who fits in your life. Would you pray that I would never fall prey to that as a preacher but that I would keep presenting to you the majestic God of glory and then to tell you the amazing miracle that this God who is above all, in all, through all and over all is in you. And we didn't have to get Him down to bite-size or downsize Him.

He fills us up to overflowing by His presence of glory and grace. Our God reigns. He reigns in our heart. He is Lord. He reigns in our suffering. He dismisses fear. He reigns in our evangelism. He reigns in our every day, every moment, because He is Lord. That is the One who has saved you.

I love Tolkien's book The Fellowship of the Rings and I love the moment where the ring, evil and Mordor are destroyed and the emptiness of sin has all crashed down and dissipated. In the midst of it the eagles have come to rescue Frodo and Samwise Gamgee. They wake up in a bed in Minas Tirith and Sam says "Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?" "A great Shadow has departed and been vanquished," said Gandalf, and then he laughed and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count."

Now not only has all things that are sad become untrue but their sadness is only going to magnify the glorious truth of what has happened to this world. That's our Hope. Jesus says 'I make all things new.' Our Savior is our Hope and that's why the day of suffering becomes the day of vanishing fear. So what is cherished as hope in your heart?

What is the hope in your heart? The job, the next one, a marriage partner, children, money, power, a degree...these things in and of themselves are fine but they are not your hope. If they are then you just gave a handle to Satan to silence you. Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart. He is your Hope. If people want to bring lethal persecution to you then they have just promoted you for to die is gain. In the meantime you have built a platform for fear to vanish and the Gospel victorious to be proclaimed. God help me.

Earlier I said that fear is compromising, paralyzing and does its work to silence us and the man who wrote this epistle telling us this had experienced every one of those. In fear Peter acted irrationally in the garden, he was silenced, he fled and he was compromised where Paul had to confront him because Peter was starting to preach another gospel. Peter is not writing this as a paragon of virtue but he is writing to you pastorally as a sinner saved by grace calling you from the fears of this world to Christ. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for this time in Your Word. If you have never come to Him I invite you to come to Him today. If you would like someone to pray with please call us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 and we'd be happy to pray with you. Today, you may be like me and Peter and have had those moments when fear has overtaken us to silence us, ready to compromise, ready to act irrational but on this day ask the Lord to give you your hope in Christ and with that hope eradicate, eliminate fears and enthrone Jesus upon my heart, afresh and anew, I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

GOSPEL BLESSINGS – GOSPEL COMMANDS

Christian suffering is a Divine blessing which provides an opportunity to fearlessly confirm Christ as Lord in our heart and persuasively communicate Christ as our Hope to the world.

LIFE TAKEAWAY

When Christ is our Hope and when Christ is affirmed as Lord in our Hearts, then the Day of Suffering becomes the Day of Vanishing Fear in our lives and the Day of Victorious Salvation to the world.