

XXXII. I Peter in Biblical Perspective
Lifestyle of Evangelism and Discipleship
“Christian Suffering and the Suffering of Christ—Part 4”
I Peter 3:18–22
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We will be looking at I Peter 3 and I Peter 1 in this study. I Peter 1:1–2 says [1] *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, [2] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This is our 32nd study in the book of I Peter but I’d like to recap where we’ve been. We left off in the last study a little while ago in the last two verses of I Peter 3 and since it’s been awhile I want to make sure our framework in studying I Peter ins in place so I’m going to just bring out a couple of salient factors from God’s Word for you so that we’ll all be in the same ball park when we dive back in where we left off in the next study.

Also we’re committed to expository preaching and sometimes we’ll do topical expository but by in large we do the consecutive study of the Word of God – expository preaching. Some believe that is mandated when Paul says to Timothy ‘Preach the Word’ because that’s a call to expositional preaching. II Timothy 3:16–17 says [16] *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

So we are supposed to unfold the text, the doctrine and the application consecutively and when we tend to jump around as pastors we can end up riding our own hobby horses where ministry can get out of balance. Plus it’s easy to avoid certain things when we jump around that we need to take on. For instance, when Peter surfaces in the last two verses of I Peter 3 the Christian doctrine of baptism, there are many who would rather avoid this text in its explanation yet we are to take on all Scripture by backing it with other Scripture. When you are preaching through the Scripture you have to handle what comes next and you have to be faithful to it. I believe that creates balance and keeps us from getting on the pastor’s hobby horse so that’s why I believe in expository preaching.

When I think of expository preaching it reminds me of an interesting occasion in my life where a man had been listening to my 30-minute In Perspective radio program and came up to me and said ‘Are you Harry Reeder?’ I said ‘Yeah.’ He said ‘I’ve been listening to you on the radio and I thought you were one of those California preachers but you’re right here in Birmingham.’ I said ‘Yes, I’ve been here for a while now.’ He said ‘Can I start coming to church where you are?’ I said ‘Sure, you’re welcome, come on.’ He said ‘I’ve been looking all over for a suppository preacher.’ I know another reason this is funny, because there’s an element of truth in that.

I want to go over the rudiments of the package of I Peter since it’s been awhile. The reason I’m going through this book is because our theme is a lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship and I believe Peter is dealing with this issue. So to give you an overview of this epistle we know by the opening verses that this is written by the Apostle Peter. Peter, James and

John are known as the big three in whom the Lord invested so much time with. Peter is a marvelous example of one who is saved by grace for we see him rising up and falling down. Wherever his heart is it's going to come right out of his mouth and sometimes he is on target but sometimes he misses the target so much Jesus has to rebuke him by saying 'Get behind Me Satan' meaning that Peter was actually speaking what Satan would speak in this moment. He is a great walking compendium of sermon illustrations of reminders of who we are as sinners saved by grace.

Peter is also the one that before Jesus left him He restored him from denying Jesus three times and said to him three times 'Tend My lambs, feed My sheep.' I don't know what the occasion was but churches that he has never been before are all in the area of six provinces of the Roman Empire. They are in what we know today as Turkey. They had sent him a letter because persecution was rising up in their midst and they didn't know where to go, what to do or how to handle it and he writes back to them. Peter like Paul, takes on a certain pattern that is circumscribed in that phrase 'elect exiles' and we see this in the opening verse of I Peter.

The 'Dispersion' mentioned in the first verse was God's judgment upon His Old Covenant people and because of their unfaithfulness they were dispersed in the Assyrian captivity and the Babylonian captivity. Now Peter speaks of God's New Covenant people, Jew and Gentile, as in the Dispersion but that's not an act of judgment but an act of God's blessing in which His elect that are dispersed in all the nations of the world He is bringing them to Himself by Jesus Christ. So elect exiles are the profile of what we are.

The word elect is used to tell us who we are by God's grace in Christ because of Christ's love for us. We are the elect of God. Father, all whom You have given Me I lose not one (John 18:9). Romans 8:33 says [33] *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.* So the elect are the people of God from all the nations that He is calling to Himself by His sovereign grace and we are who we are in Christ because of Christ's love for us.

From I Peter 1:5 all the way to I Peter 3:12, Peter gives us the Gospel blessings for the elect in Christ and there are 13 of them, which are Good News messages of who you are in Christ, by His grace and because of His unstoppable love for you. Some of those 13 blessings are that you are the chosen ones, the holy ones, the sons of God (a title of inheritance), those who have been born again by the imperishable Seed (the Word of God), those who have been cleansed by the incomparable blood of Christ, those who have an undefiled inheritance kept for you in heaven and He is keeping you for that inheritance. All of these blessings are not because of our love for Christ but because of His love for us.

The second word Peter attaches to elect is exiles and this refers to all the movement of God's people who were liberated from the bondage of slavery, then brought up through the wilderness and brought up through the Promised Land, but we don't have a Moses for we have Jesus – One greater than Moses. We don't have a Pharaoh that has been defeated but we have Satan who has been defeated. We don't have chattel slavery from which we have been taken but we have sin slavery from which we have been liberated and we are exiles on our way to a Promised Land. That Promised Land is not here but in a new heavens and a new earth which has been secured for us and He has gone away to prepare it for us but until we get there He has a mission, a message and a ministry for us. Just remember not to put your roots here for we're exiles, we're on a green card if we're a Christian.

We happen to be wonderful citizens in whatever nation you find yourself in because He has taught us how to live, but our ultimate and allegiance resides with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in heaven. It is in Him that we have our life and it is for Him that we live our life.

The meaning of being an exile is what you are by God's grace for Christ because of your love to Christ and we love Christ because He first loved us. So out of love, affection, adoration and allegiance that is unchallenged in any other affection and love, I want to serve Him on the way there. We have seen five Gospel commands from Peter on how to live for Christ.

Here is the biggest reason I'm going over this before we dive back into a particular verse from this whole epistle. Peter is doing what Paul does. Every time they talk to us about who we are in Christ, what it means to be a Christian and how we live for Christ, they tell you who you are by grace in Christ, because of Christ, before they ever whisper a word to you what you do for Him because we all have a tendency to think we are a Christian because of what we do. No, Jesus didn't come to set you up to do better. Jesus came because you couldn't do better. All the man-made religions of the world have this in common – they tell you what you have to do and give to maybe get some kind of salvation.

Christianity says 'here's the bad news – you can't save yourself. You need a Savior.' Jesus came to save you from the penalty and power of sin. His righteousness is our only dress and as the word of the hymn go;

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood,
from thy wounded side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure;
save from wrath and make me pure.*

He did just that and everything I do is because He did it and not to help what He did. If we hunger for these five Gospel commands that Peter gives us, like be holy, the Word of God, putting off maliciousness and hypocrisy, we'll be blessed. You'll never be good enough to be a Christian and that's why Jesus came. When there was no way God made a way and that way is His Son Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life and your trust is in Him alone. He declares who you are in Him.

If God gives you a measure of effectiveness and faithfulness, you will never be more forgiven in Christ than you are right now. You will never be more loved by God than you are right now. You will know His love more. You will be more intimate with Him but what we do doesn't create or enable His love, what we do is because of the efficacy and sufficiency of His love for us in Christ.

Some don't go to the Gospel commands lest they think it's how you become a Christian and we call that antinomianism, libertinism and we say 'no' to that. We also need to say 'no' to legalism which is any notion that it's what I do that saves me or what I do that enables God to save me. It's what God does in Jesus that enables me to do what I do out of love to Jesus who first loved me.

Peter has spent three chapters on these Gospel blessings and Gospel commands and one of the last commands that he gives us is to be ready to suffer. The point he makes on Christian suffering is every true Christian who by God's grace is intentionally living for God's glory will at some time to some degree suffer for Christ's sake. There won't be any exceptions to this. Not everyone will die on a burning post but every one of us who are faithful to Christ in a broken world will suffer for being a Christian.

When Peter talks about Christian suffering he is not talking about the fact that everyone suffers in a broken world. All die, all get sick, all lose jobs, all lose loved ones, all have broken relationships and businesses fail in a bad economy. Christians suffer like anybody else in a

broken world but the only suffering Christians don't encounter in this world that unbelievers do is God's judgmental suffering because Jesus has taken all of that for us. Peter is talking about a Christian suffering because they are a Christian, not because of the suffering of consequences to our sins in this broken world or suffering that's in a broken world. It is suffering for Christ's sake, not because you've been obnoxious or arrogant or you broke state laws. This is suffering directly related to your intentionally honoring Christ for God's glory by God's grace for righteousness sake, for Christ's sake.

I'm sure about this suffering because the Bible tells me so. The reason this doesn't resonate with us is because we're an anomaly. For about 200 plus years we've lived in a corner of this world called the United States of America where in God's sovereign plan and providences this country has been unusually blessed with the Gospel. So much so that Christians get parades historically here. That's not true everywhere else. Today, 3 out of every 10 Christians are suffering not just the loss of livelihood but the possibility of losing their lives in nations all around the world. The majority report for 2,000 years in this world is that they don't give parades for Christians, but they get persecution, they get targeted.

One of the reasons I'm preaching through this book is that my heart is where Peter's heart is because he knew what was coming for these Christians under the persecution that was on its way. And he was going to take the time to make sure they were ready. I think the bubble is bursting here in our nation. It is interesting to note that Peter gives almost one half of the words in this book to deal with this fifth Gospel command of Christian suffering. This Gospel command starts in I Peter 3:13 and goes all the way to I Peter 5:11 to talk about Christian suffering. The reason he uses so much material is that this is a crucial issue.

Peter will tell us not to be surprised at the fiery ordeal but be ready. Let's look at where he starts this Gospel command in I Peter 3 as he starts off with a rhetorical question. I Peter 3:13-17 says *[13] Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is 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.*

Suffering is not a failure of my faith but an instrument to refine my faith. This word suffer shows up 28 times in this book. Suffering gives you two blessings by one giving you a chance to refine your life so that Christ is Lord. When the challenges come will you compromise in order to be comfortable or will you hold fast to Christ as Lord? Secondly, suffering teaches you how to hold fast, not angrily. We can be angry at sin but we are to have gentleness. This persecution gives you a change to solidify why you are on mission, on message and in ministry for it gives you a platform to tell more people about Him. So it's better to suffer for Christ's sake because He is using this to refine you, and to bear witness for Christ which stabilizes you and solidifies you in Christ. He is using this to develop your life.

I believed that my math teacher in high school would go home on Thursday night and say to herself 'what test can I put together to fail Harry Reeder?' I would think if that's not what she was doing then why was she doing it? The test is there to show you what you know, what you don't know and what you need to know. This is what testing adversity does when we suffer for Christ.

Peter knows that Satan has two primary schemes. He loves to penetrate the leadership and fellowship of a church to cause problems. I can't help but thank God for people who love the truth in a loving way here in this church. It's not only important that we hold the truth but it's also important how we hold to the truth. I learn so much from you all and I thank God for all the blessings of that. It is something that the membership says 'Satan you're not going to bring divisions of the flesh or a schismatic spirit to us for we are going to be faithful to Christ in a way that honors Christ. He also loves to penetrate the leadership.

Another thing Satan loves to do is persecute from the outside. He loves to bring the snares of persecution to intimidate the people of God into silence. We have to say we will not be silent. We will stand up and speak up in a way that will honor Christ. That is what God calls us to do and when He calls us to that He is giving us a blessing. Then Peter brings us to a focus of Christ's suffering. There is some of His suffering that is unique but there is some that is like ours.

I Peter 3:18–22 says *[18] For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous (Him) for the unrighteous (us), that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, [19] in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, [20] 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. [21] 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, [22] who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*

The Spirit that brought Jesus forth is the same Spirit that resides in us and Peter goes back to a judgement in the days of Noah where he says that Christ preached through Noah. In other words, it wasn't just Noah, the preacher of righteousness, but it was Christ speaking through him. That is why the Bible says His sheep know His voice and they follow Him (John 10:27). This is why back in the days of the puritans they wore black gowns when they preached to block out the preacher so people could hear the Word of God being preached. It is through the foolishness of the message that we are being saved (I Corinthians 1:21). Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ preached (Romans 10:17). Paul says I didn't come to baptize but to preach the Gospel.

Poor Noah, preached for a hundred years and the only ones who got saved were his family but praise God he got his family. He was faithful. The preacher knows this. Every time I preach I know that if God gives you eyes to see and ears to hear there is a hunger because it's Jesus that is speaking to your heart, not the preacher. We will look the issue of baptism Peter brings up in I Peter 3:21 and we'll finish up looking at this paragraph in the next study. Here are five reasons why Peter is focusing so much on Christian suffering.

One is due to personal experience. Peter preached in Jerusalem and 3,000 come to Christ. In the next week 5,000 come to Christ. Everyday people are coming to Christ. Do you think Satan and the kingdom of darkness is going to retreat? The evil empire always strikes back and one of the ways Satan strikes back is through persecution. He does it in leadership for three times Peter and John find themselves in jail in the opening seven chapters of Acts. Peter knows about persecution.

Secondly, is by observation. Peter saw the Sanhedrin, the Roman authorities and how they responded to the Gospel. He saw what was happening when the church was persecuted and

scattered from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria as we see in Acts 8. Peter saw Stephen stoned for his faithfulness to Christ. Peter knows about Christian suffering.

Thirdly, Peter heard the warnings of Christ that there would be suffering. He walked with Jesus for three years and heard Him say in John 15:18–21, [18] *If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [20] Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. [21] But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.*

Peter also heard what is recorded in John 16:33 which says [33] *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.* Peter also heard Jesus when He delivered the Sermon on the Mount. The reason Peter says we’re blessed when we suffer is because he heard Jesus in that little section we call the Beatitudes and one of those Beatitudes had a double blessing. That is Matthew 5:11–12 which says [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.* Peter had heard the warnings and promises of Jesus.

Fourthly, Peter had seen the sufferings of Christ. He saw them when Jesus was going to the cross, to the tomb and then when He had risen. I Peter 3:18 starts out ‘Christ also suffered...’ And lastly Peter saw the majesty of Christ. You can suffer because your King rules and reigns. I hear often people say ‘Would you like to make Jesus Lord of your life?’ We don’t make Jesus Lord. Jesus is Lord of your life whether you have signed off or not. The question is have you confessed Him and surrendered or are you kicked against the goads? He is Lord.

The takeaway is the suffering of Christ is the foundation, the formation and the motivation for Christian suffering. We confess the Apostles ‘Creed often. It says;
I believe in God, the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

**He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.**

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic* church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

**that is, the true Christian church of all times and all places*

The lines in bold shows us Christ suffered for our sins for that is the crucifixion of Christ. Christ was raised which is the triumph of the resurrection. Jesus didn't die a martyr's death, He died an atoning death, a substitutionary death, a vicarious death. I was recently reading about one branch of the church that calls their leader a vicar but that so bothers me because there is only one Vicar, for there is only one vicarious Leader for us and that is the Lord of Glory who took our place. My sin was in Adam and then living out my sin nature as I want God's place – I want my wife, my kids and a job to all be there for me, etc. That is my default program for apart from God's grace that is what I would get up and sing every morning and night, the preeminence and prominence of me. And that is what you want – it's all about me.

That all about me brings God's judgment for God is holy and He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:7). But the same God who is holy is also gracious and loving and He sent His Son to save sinners. In other words, I wanted God's place but God sent His Son and He took my place. Jesus took all of the judgment of God so that I could have life forever more. Do you see the Apostles' Creed in this I Peter 3 text? He was crucified, raised and He has ascended above all. He is Lord and King and when you get there He's already brought you there. He has already secured everything for you there and you can't be good enough nor do you need to be. You don't work your way there or give your way there. You work for Him on your way there. He is the One who has saved you with His relentless, unstoppable, incomparable love and it is that love that is the foundation, formation and the motivation for anything and everything that we may have to suffer in this world for Christ.

To be very practical here, that's one of the reasons I love the Lord's Day so much. The Apostles and Jesus maintained the rhythm of six and one, the Creation Sabbath, but in the New Covenant they have moved to the first day of the week to commemorate His cross and the triumph of His resurrection. We get reminded of it every Lord's Day. Then He points us to His ascension and His coming again. I can't wait for that moment. I will either go to be with Him or the Father says 'Step out My Son, go get My people.' Jesus says 'I lose not one of them.' Blow trumpet blow! Shout angels shout! That's why I would be willing to suffer and I want you to be ready.

Sadly, the week after we celebrated the sanctity of life the state (New York) in this country basically passed a hitlarian law to fund the death of children. That is why we have to be on mission, on message and in ministry and if necessary suffer for Christ's sake. It's your platform. Let's pray.

Prayer:

If you know this Savior, ask Him to fill you up to overflowing. I'm not going to seek suffering but if and when it comes no matter to what degree and what place, help me Jesus not to be silent or petulant but help me to honor Christ as Lord, always ready to give an account for the Hope that is within me. It is a Hope that has risen and secured at the cross where He paid for my sins. It is a Hope that rose in triumph from the grave and it is a Hope that is assured for He ever lives ascended in glory to intercede for me. Allow me to embrace that warning of the Apostle Paul – all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer (II Timothy 3:12). Then O God, liberate me from self-pity. Give me the joy of exalting Christ and I pray that many reading this will make that prayer with me but there may be some who don't know You as Lord and Savior. Then those who don't make this prayer; 'Jesus today I have read that I'm under Your judgment because of my sin. I know my sin. Then I heard that Your love has kissed Your justice at the cross of Christ so today I come to You.' If you want to pray with someone please call us at

Briarwood for we would love to pray with you and it is our joy to pray with you. Know this, the reason we have joy is because the angels rejoice when men and women come from their sins to Christ as Lord and King and Savior. God, I thank You in Jesus' Name, glory be to God, Amen.

Power Point

AN OVERVIEW – I PETER 1:1–3:17

ELECT EXILES

ELECT – Who you are by God's grace in Christ because of Christ love for you. – 13 Gospel Blessings

EXILES – What you are by God's grace for Christ because of your love for Christ. – 5 Gospel Commands

A CLOSER VIEW – I PETER 1:1–3:17

CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

Every true Christian who by God's grace is intentionally living for God's glory will at some time to some degree suffer for Christ's sake.

1. Personal Experience
2. Observation
3. Warnings of Christ
4. Suffering of Christ
5. Majesty of Christ {note}

LIFE TAKEAWAYS

The Suffering of Christ is the Foundation, the Formation, and the Motivation for Christian Suffering.

- His Crucifixion
- His Resurrection
- His Ascension
- His Glorious Return