

Ministry of Grace Church

1 Peter 3:14-22 - Speaker Notes

Introduction

Historically, since it's founding, people in the United States of America who are Christians have been accepted and admired. In the past 50 years, however, that has changed. It's clear from the unrest that exists on university campuses today that the Jewish people are looked down on as evil and this attitude is beginning to spread to Christians as well. But this should not be a surprise to anyone who is familiar with the Bible, because we know that there is spiritual warfare going on all around us.

Unfortunately, we in this country have turned away from our Judeo-Christian roots. God has been taken out of our schools and our businesses. God has even been removed from our legal system. When a witness is sworn-in for testimony in a court of law, they no longer place their right hand on a Bible and they no longer swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, **so help me God!** We are warned constantly not to mention the name of Jesus Christ outside of church. It is obvious that this is no longer a country where "In God we trust."

Christian pastors have been saying for years that God is going to judge this country. I submit to you, however, that God is already judging us! Even our churches are casting off the directives given in the Bible in favor of more socially acceptable ideas. Corporate worship has been turned into "worship-tainment" in which providing a good show and an emotional experience is more important than directing people's hearts toward God. Women pastors are in abundance in spite of the Apostle Paul's admonition against women preaching or having authority over men in the church. Sexual perversion, which was once abhorred by the church, is now celebrated with pride. I submit to you, my friends that God is grieved with the state of the western church today!

And – I believe that as a result of the apostasy that engulfs our churches today, the Father is just about to send the Son to gather-up all of His true children and take us home with Him.

Churches are being attacked from the inside as well as the outside today. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find a church that clings to the foundational doctrines. That's why it is more important than ever for us to cling to the Bible and learn what God has to say to everyone of us today. This is why Peter's letters to the 1st century church are so on-point today.

In the first century, Christians were considered a sect of Judaism. The Jews hated them for departing from Moses and non-believers saw them as promoting rebellion against Rome. Anyone who refused to worship Caesar as a god was tortured until they either proclaimed Caesar as god, or they died. It was extremely difficult to stand firm in faith during the first century. But, as Peter so eloquently explains, standing firm in your faith was, and is, more important than giving in to the fear of what might be done to us by someone else.

Peter makes it very clear how a Christian should behave in this anti-Christian world that we live in today. So - let's take a few minutes to review what Peter has taught us so far. In chapter one he told us:

Therefore, having girded your minds for action, being sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, not being conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, (1 Peter 1:13-14)

Then, in chapter two he laid it on thick and heavy:

Therefore, laying aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, (1 Peter 2:1-2)

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul, by keeping your conduct excellent among the Gentiles, ... (1 Peter 2:11-12a)

Be subject for the sake of the Lord to every human institution, ... (1 Peter 2:13a)

Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are crooked. (1 Peter 2:18)

Then, in chapter three, Peter continued getting very specific about how we are to conduct ourselves in the world.

In the same way, you wives, be subject to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, (1 Peter 3:1)

You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)

Now to sum up, all of you be like-minded, sympathetic, brotherly, tender-hearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but giving a blessing instead, for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:8-9)

And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? (1 Peter 3:13)

My goodness! Listen, friends, I've been a Christian for 50 years and I have not yet mastered all these things. Every time I think I have mastered a few of them, my sin nature proves otherwise to me! And I'm sure that most of you feel the same way.

Now, Peter is going to get into the blessing of suffering. Say what! Yes, Peter says that suffering for righteousness sake is how we get to know our Savior on a personal level. Here's how he said it:

1 Peter 3:14-16

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their fear, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and fear, having a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame.

In order to fully understand these verses, we have to look at the two verses immediately preceding them:

For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? (1 Peter 3:12-13)

In these previous 2 verses Peter told us that God is looking over us and is attentive to our prayers. This promise is not to all mankind. Peter is writing this letter to "the elect," Christians, those who have been chosen by God. Remember? Here's how he opened this letter:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as exiles, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,** (1 Peter 1:1-2a)

If you are a born-again Christian, then the promise of **1 Peter 3:13** is for you. As we said last time, however, this does not mean that nothing bad will ever happen to you.

If we behave the way God has commanded us to, keeping our tongues from speaking badly, turning away from evil, and pursuing peace, then we know that God is watching over us and listening to our prayers and nothing eternally bad is going to happen to us, **but if we should suffer because of righteousness**, we are blessed.

In other words, even if we should suffer for doing what is right, then we are still extremely fortunate. We have been adopted by the great Lord of all creation, and we are to be the bride of His Son, and - He loves us with a perfect love!

Peter says in the last half of this verse, “then don’t fear their threats nor be troubled.” Even if you should suffer, don’t let it make you fearful. That sounds very much like what our Lord told His disciples:

“And do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ... “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. “So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:28-31)

Peter has just told us that we are blessed if we suffer for doing good and that we should not be afraid of their terror (those who would threaten us because of our faith). Now, he is making a play on words with regard to the notion of fear. He says, in effect (this is a paraphrase),

... don’t fear or be troubled by them [those who would threaten you] but put the fear of Christ the Lord in your hearts.

Part of the reason I think this is Peter’s meaning is because the opening phrase of this verse is a quote from Isaiah.

“It is Yahweh of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your cause of trembling. (Isaiah 8:13)

The remainder of today’s verse tells us that we need to always be ready to give a reason for our hope to anyone who asks us, and to do so with meekness and fear. We know that our God is both holy and just. That means that He is pure and fearsome Himself and that He will judge evil. We also know that we have been saved and set-apart from that judgment through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ and, as a result, we have a hope that others in this world don’t have. That hope, and the fear of God which goes along with it, should be so evident in our lives, especially when we are suffering for doing what is right, that others will want to know how we can keep such an attitude in the midst of our suffering.

Peter may have even been thinking of a specific martyr of the early church, perhaps Polycarp, one of the early church fathers and a disciple of the Apostle John. We will talk more about him in a few minutes.

We should always be ready to give the reason for the hope in us because our witness in times of persecution and our patient suffering is the type of behavior that the world doesn’t understand. It appears supernatural to those who don’t have it and, in some cases, may be used by God to open the eyes of others in order to bring them to saving faith in Christ. It was Christ’s patient suffering that paid for all our sins, and it is our patient suffering that shows our own conformity to Him.

But whether suffering or not we should all be living a life that is a testimony to the One for whom we are ambassadors. Our manner of life should be such that others will see Christ in us, and when they ask us about it, we should always be ready to give them a reason. The reason is Christ and what He did for us. The reason is a God who loves us so much and wants to have such fellowship with us that He provided a way for that to occur if we will but humble ourselves and believe.

1 Peter 3:17-18

For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing good rather than for doing wrong. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, so that He might bring you to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

Food for thought: Sometimes God chooses to have us suffer even when we are doing what we know is right.

In the past few verses, Peter has been talking about our suffering. This type of suffering is not suffering as a result of discipline, though it sometimes feels that way. Let us not miss the truth that he is teaching us. When we suffer for doing good, we have a tendency to turn to God and say, “Hey, wait a minute, God! I did the right thing! Why am I suffering for it?” Have you ever felt that way?

Peter has told us in a number of different ways that it’s a good thing for us to suffer unjustly. He has also said that not only is it pleasing to God but sometimes it is what God has determined. He now tells us that our Father, who has adopted us, is not asking us to do anything which his own Eternal Son has not already done. According to this verse, Christ suffered for sins. Did He commit any sins? No! So, whose sins did He suffer for? Obviously, He suffered for yours and mine and for those of all mankind from the beginning of time until the great judgment day. Is that fair? No, but it is what God determined.

Now, for just a moment, let’s look at this from Christ’s perspective. He didn’t have to die. He didn’t have to go through the agony and suffering that He did, nor was He personally desirous of doing so. He didn’t want to do it! Let’s listen in on his prayer to the Father when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane just before being taken by the crowd to be tried, tortured, and crucified (**Matthew 26:36, 39**):

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ... And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.”

Christ knew what was coming and He didn’t want to go through with it, but He willingly did so because He knew that God the Father had determined for Him to do it. He was obedient, even unto death.

Now we get to a somewhat controversial passage in Peter’s letter.

1 Peter 3:18b-20

having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.

Peter says that Jesus, “made proclamation to the spirits now in prison” It is not likely that this was an evangelistic message because Peter would then have used the verb *euangellō* (good news declaring or preaching) rather than *kērussō* (proclaiming).

This is a very difficult verse to understand. It is the sole verse upon which the Roman Catholic Church bases its doctrine of purgatory. But before looking at this verse we must look at the end of the previous verse, which we have included here for reference.

In the end of the previous verse Peter said that Christ was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. Some believe that this is referring to Christ dying in the flesh but living in the spirit. In fact, the grammatical construction of the Greek at the end of the previous verse suggests that it was “by the Spirit” that Christ was made alive again (in the flesh). The word translated “made alive” can mean either giving

initial life or giving life again after it has been lost. But either way, it can't refer to Christ's spirit being made alive since His spirit is eternal.

Finally, to get the full meaning of the current verse we have to join it to the next verse. The construction of this verse and the one following implies that the proclaiming occurred at the time when God was waiting in the days of Noah, but that the imprisonment of the spirits was contemporaneous with Peter's time. In other words, Peter is saying that Christ proclaimed to the spirits who are currently in prison, but the proclaiming occurred in the time of Noah.

We will get into this a bit more when we look more closely at the next verse. What I want you to come away with today is that this verse is in no way saying that Christ preached to the unsaved in purgatory giving them a second chance to be saved. There is absolutely no basis for the notion of purgatory here in Peter's writing ... or anywhere else in the entire Bible.

Continuing on from the previous verse, you will recall that it said Christ preached to the spirits in prison. These spirits are the people who were disbelieving in the days that Noah was building the ark.

Not only did Noah accomplish physical salvation for himself and his family by building the ark, but his faith (his belief that God really was going to bring a flood), which was demonstrated by his construction project, was a saving faith. And - it appears that all the time that he was building the ark, Noah was proclaiming that God was about to bring a flood, but no one believed.

Therefore, Peter is saying, the spirit of Christ in Noah was proclaiming a message to unbelieving people all the time he was building the ark to the saving of his soul and those of his family. The spirits who were preached to are now in the prison of Hades awaiting the Great White Throne Judgment of the unsaved, which we read about in [Revelation 20:11-15](#).

1 Peter 3:21-22

Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal of a good conscience to God—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

This verse is another very difficult verse and one that has been misinterpreted by some who try to espouse the idea that one must be baptized to be saved. Similar to other supposed proof texts for false doctrines, this verse actually argues against baptism being a means of salvation.

Peter has just made a reference to the spirit of Christ who was proclaiming to the unbelievers during the time that Noah was building the ark.

A literal translation of the beginning of this passage is:

also to which an antitype does now save us—baptism, ...

There is significant disagreement by scholars about whether the former "antitype" was the ark or the water. In either case it was simply a model of salvation to which baptism is compared. Noah did not receive spiritual salvation through the ark or the water, he received it the same way Abraham did and the same way we do today, through faith; he believed God. The building of the ark simply demonstrated his faith, just as baptism is our act of obedience **after** salvation that demonstrates our faith.

You see, Peter could not have been saying that we are saved by baptism. Otherwise, he would have been saying that our salvation is based on works, not faith, which is quite contrary to his and the other apostles' teaching regarding salvation through faith alone.

Peter goes on to address just such a misunderstanding in the following phrase, as if he knew that what he was saying was likely to be misinterpreted. He says that baptism has nothing to do with the putting away of the filth of the flesh (it doesn't matter whether you interpret this as physical dirt or the filth of sin on our souls), but that of a clean conscience toward God. And where does a clean conscience come from? It comes from being obedience (after salvation).

Peter is saying that baptism is like the building of the ark; it is an act of obedience that demonstrates something which already occurred (faith unto salvation). The act of obedience is not the saving thing itself, just the evidence.

Yes, our faith requires that we believe that Christ died for our sins, but the proof that He was sinless himself, the proof that He alone is God, is in His resurrection from the dead.

Peter now finishes that thought, declaring that Christ has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God (the position of preeminence and power) with all angels and authorities and powers having been made submissive to Him.

Remember what Peter has been telling us. He has been saying that we need to be patient under suffering especially if it is the result of us being obedient to God. Here, Christ is given as the supreme example. The result of His obedience was exultation to the highest position in all of creation. Those who have been His enemies will cringe when they see His exalted position. Those who have willingly submitted themselves to Him will glorify Him.

So What?

If you were being threatened with death for refusing to deny Christ as your Savior, would you be able to stand forth confidently and make a profession of faith in Christ? Let's briefly look at a man known only as Polycarp. He was a disciple of the Apostle John, and he later became the Bishop of the church in Smyrna. He, like John, was pursued by the Roman government because he refused to proclaim Caesar as a god. When he was captured, he was taken to the colosseum where thousands had gathered, tied to a post on top of a pile of wood and threatened with being burned to death if he refused to recant his faith in Christ. His response was,

"Eighty-six years I have served Him. He has never done me wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?"

The proconsul then, searching for a way to save Polycarp said, "Then do this, old man, just swear by the genius of the emperor and that will be sufficient." However, this would have been the same as saying that the emperor was a pagan god.

Polycarp replied,

"If you imagine for a moment that I would do that, then I think you pretend that you don't know who I am. Hear it plainly. I am a Christian."

The Proconsul then threatened him with the wild beasts, to which Polycarp replied,

"Bring them forth. I would change my mind if it meant going from the worse to the better, but not to change from the right to the wrong."

The Proconsul then threatened, "I will have you burned alive!" Polycarp responded with,

"You threaten fire that burns for an hour and is over. But the judgment on the ungodly is forever."

Then the Proconsul gave the word and the fire was lit. Polycarp lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed:

"Father, I bless you that you have deemed me worthy of this day and hour, that I might take a portion of the martyrs in the cup of Christ. . . Among these may I today be welcome before your face as a rich and acceptable sacrifice."

Then an amazing thing happened. As the flames grew they did not consume the body. Instead, they billowed around him like a sail with him in the middle untouched by the fire. As the fire surrounded him, the believers noted that it smelled not so much like flesh burning as a loaf baking. Since the flames were having no effect on him, it was then ordered that he be stabbed with a spear until dead. Legend has it that when he was speared, his blood gushed out and extinguished the blaze.

Are you suffering right now because you have done what is right and you can't understand why? If so, get on your knees and thank God for finding you worthy to suffer for Him. Then, be ready to give a reason for the hope that you have in Him!

Just remember that Jesus Christ also suffered, He suffered quietly, and He suffered for your sake! Now compare the suffering that you may currently be going through, or that you may go through in the future, with His suffering. He was willing to do so for the Father ... and for you. Are you willing to do so for Him? Even though it isn't fair?

Finally, if you believe that you have to earn the right to be in heaven with God, and you believe that in purgatory you will have a second chance, and that you can work your way out of purgatory, you are in for two horrible surprises. First, you cannot earn salvation. You can only receive it as a free gift when you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for your sins. And secondly, once this life is over, your choice has been made ... for eternity! There are no second chances. There is no purgatory!

Peter's teaching here is, just as Christ was rewarded for His obedient suffering, so we shall be if we are faithful and patient during times of suffering. Are you suffering for Him today? If so, do it patiently and give God the praise!

Finally, as Paul said to the believers in Corinth:

... now is "the acceptable time," behold, now is "the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2)

Let's pray.