

Suffering for Righteousness Sake

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 00] Welcome to Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. Special welcome if you're new or visiting with us.

We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we are trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, and that's why we come back.

We come back week after week to look at God's word because we believe that he has something to say to everyone. If you've been with us, you know we're in the book of 1 Peter, and as I've been telling you, 1 Peter is a letter, and it's a letter written by a man named Peter, and he writes this letter to Christians in the first century A.D., and these Christians are living in what is now modern-day Turkey, then would have been referred to as Asia Minor.

He writes to them around the 60s A.D., and he writes to them to both encourage them and instruct them. These Christians are going through a time where they are experiencing opposition from the world because of their faith in Christ, and they're, of course, because of that feeling out of place in the world.

So Peter writes, as I've been telling you, to instruct them and to encourage them. He writes to encourage them that Jesus is worth it. He's worth living for and loving for, and he's also worth suffering and dying for.

[1 : 22] By the way, we're getting to the part of the book where we're going to talk more and more about the fact that Jesus is worth suffering for. And he also writes to instruct them how to live as Christians in that kind of world.

If you were with us last week, you remember that we talked about what it means to be close to God, and we asked this question of how do we not just bring honor to God, but be close to him.

We're in this longer section of Peter where we've had two principles, essentially, that were introduced in chapter two. The principles were, one, speak well about God, proclaim his excellencies, our words, and then also our actions.

We're acting in such a way that other people would see how good God is, both words and actions. And I told you at one point about a quote from a man named John Stott, who said that our words without our actions lack credibility, and our actions without our words lack intelligibility.

And that's the principle that we've had all through chapter two of 1 Peter. And now we're moving beyond just the question of how we're close to God, but also a transition here in our book.

[2 : 29] We're gonna be looking more and more at the issue of suffering. There's a real quick outline of 1 Peter, and it goes like this. 1 Peter 1 and 2, we talk about God's salvation. That's a lot of the encouragement that Peter's giving to his audience.

1 Peter 2 and 3, there was a lot of talk of submission, submission to the government. Submission to Authorities. And now we're heading into the final section, three through five, which is gonna be about suffering.

And so I'll warn you just a little bit that these sections are gonna be slightly heavier than ones that have come before because of the topic matter. We talk about suffering as a Christian. It's not a light thing to discuss.

We're gonna ask this question as we come to this passage. We're in 1 Peter 3, starting at verse 13, and it's this. What do we do when we're afraid? What do we do when we're afraid?

And not just fear in general, but specifically fear of what we have to lose for following Jesus. What do we do when we're afraid?

[3 : 34] We're gonna lose something because we follow Jesus. It's that question that Peter has in mind, and so we're gonna turn now. You can read with me along in your worship guide. Our passage is near the end. You can open it on your phone or your Bible, but we are in chapter three, starting at verse 13.

And remember as we come to this, that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold. And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from a honeycomb.

And that's why we read it together now. 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, 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, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. Verse 17.

[4 : 38] For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we come as we often do, simply asking for your help. We know living in this world as Christians is something of great joy, and also something that brings great hardship.

And so we confess that we need you to help us with that. And so we simply ask that you would send your help by your spirit, and you'd speak to us through your word. That you would open our eyes and unstop our ears and clear our minds, and that you'd soften our hearts.

That we'd be able to see and hear and know and understand and believe everything that you've written in your word. And we ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Peter begins here in verse 13 with a rhetorical question. Of course, if you're an English major, you know the rhetorical question is something that they're not actually looking for an answer for.

[5 : 49] They're simply asking it to make a point. And the question is this, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? The answer, of course, is what? No one.

No one should be interested in harming you if you're zealous for what is good. Now we could preach an entire sermon about the importance of being zealous for what is good. Peter asks us this to make a point.

In general, most of what he's been instructing them in chapters two and three is to be zealous for what is good. Part of the reason for that is to protect them from unnecessary suffering.

But after making that point, he has a sub-point. In general, as a principle in this world, if you do good, you will probably suffer less. However, there are some times when that's not true.

And it's that sometimes that Peter is going to instruct these folks about. And you'll recall when we talked about suffering, earlier in 1 Peter, I told you that there are three categories for suffering. And these are very important for Christians to keep clear in their minds.

[6 : 54] Now I'm going to give them numbers. Whatever order you give to them is not necessarily important. But suffering, number one, suffering because you're stupid or what the Bible would call foolishness.

If you end up getting a DUI and you end up in jail and that costs you \$10,000, that is a form of suffering. And it's a form of suffering because of foolishness.

Type of suffering, number two, you could suffer because the general presence of sin in the world.

So type one, your personal sin. Type two, the general presence of sin in the world. You come down with an illness.

It's from no fault of your own, but you live in a broken world. That is a kind of suffering. You're not personally responsible for that illness, but it's suffering that comes from living in a broken world that's filled with sin.

Suffering, type three, what I've called before, suffering for the name of Jesus Christ, where in this passage is suffering for righteousness' sake is the third and final type of suffering.

[7 : 55] And that's the kind of suffering that Peter is writing about. He's not writing about type one suffering. Clearly, he's trying to have them avoid that, right? If you're zealous for what's good, you'll avoid type one suffering.

You will not have to experience the consequences of foolishness. But instead, he's hitting suffering type three. There are times when, even if you do good, you're going to suffer.

So we're doing a little math here today. Three kinds of suffering, and there's going to be two kinds of doing good. There's doing good that leads the world to praise you, and there's doing good that leads the world to persecute you.

There's doing good that leads the world to praise you, and doing good that leads the world to persecute you. We see this in verses 13 and 17. Excuse me, verse 14 and 17. Verse 14, he acknowledges there's an exception to the rule.

Generally, if you're zealous for what's good, you'll avoid suffering, except there might be a time you suffer for righteousness' sake. And then in verse 17, it is better to suffer for doing good. Okay, there's a type of doing good that leads to suffering than for doing evil.

[9 : 01] Three types of suffering. Two types of doing good. Doing good that will lead to others' praise, right? If we as a church decided we were going to be very specific in our mission, and we, after a time of prayer and discernment, decided that God was calling us to start a soup kitchen in southwest Colorado Springs, we would almost certainly face no opposition from the world.

We would be zealous for what is good, and people would potentially praise us for that, right?

There's types of doing good that God calls us to as it's going to lead other people to applaud us.

However, there's also good that the world condemns. There's good things that Christians do that God has called us to that will lead to suffering for righteousness' sake. Perhaps, and these are less serious and more serious, on the less serious side, perhaps there's family members who don't follow after Jesus Christ, and they don't understand some of your parenting choices.

And so they criticize you. And they don't just criticize you, they criticize you openly to other members of the family. That is a type of suffering for righteousness' sake.

Maybe you're excluded socially because you have to excuse yourself from certain events. You can't participate fully because there are things that are happening at those events that you can't be a part of. And this is true for some people.

[10 : 20] Maybe you're single, and as someone who is single, you've decided you're going to live with sexual integrity. You're going to remain celibate until you're married. And in certain parts of this culture, you'll be mocked for that.

People will tell you that you are an idiot. Maybe you're a prude. Maybe you're stuck up. That is a type of suffering for righteousness' sake. Maybe you're mocked by someone else for that.

All Christians experience some level of suffering for righteousness. And then there's more serious. You could lose your job. You could lose educational opportunities. That's less true in this country, but remember we talked about examples last week under communism.

This was very common. Christians would lose their jobs. They'd be prevented from educational opportunities. Sometimes they wouldn't lose their jobs, but they'd have their pay frozen. That was common under communism.

You'd be working the same job as someone else, but you were a Christian. Magically, your paycheck was much smaller. This is one of the ways that the Communist Party would coerce Christians to try to have loyalty to the party, is using their paycheck as bargaining chips.

[11 : 27] Maybe you lose your business. This is something that people are facing in the U.S. right now, because you refuse to participate in certain things that go against your conscience. And then finally, worst of all, perhaps you go to prison or the most extreme, you face death.

There is real suffering for the name of Jesus Christ. There is real suffering for righteousness' sake. And at risk of stating the obvious, if you choose to be a Christian and follow Jesus Christ, you will suffer for that decision at some level.

God has a wonderful plan for your life, and it involves suffering for the name of His Son. That is part of God's wonderful plan.

And so that continues to take us back to our question, how do we respond when we face suffering for righteousness? What do we do when we're afraid? And that's what Peter addresses here in verse 14.

First of all, he tells them, if they suffer, they'll be blessed. And then he tells them, have no fear of them, nor be troubled. Of course, he's acknowledging what would be normal, right? Facing these things, of course, of course it would make you afraid.

[12 : 38] Peter understands that. God knows that. God's not unaware. He knows that we are just dust. And so that's the natural response as we face these things.

It's a natural response of fear. And so he gives us not just a command to do away with fear. Simply a command would be moralism, right? Just do this. But we have to have something that's able to expel that fear, something that's even greater.

And so he gives them the solution. Instead of fearing or being troubled, choose the opposite. In your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy. Don't fear man.

Fear God. Now, he doesn't use the phrase here, fear God, but if you were paying attention earlier in the service, you know we read from Isaiah chapter 8. This passage quotes that section from Isaiah chapter 8.

In Isaiah chapter 8, God is telling Isaiah, don't be afraid. Don't fear man. Instead, fear me. And this is in a very serious situation because Isaiah is facing hostile forces that are coming in to Israel.

[13:43] It would be very tempting for him to remain silent and give in to that fear. And God tells him, in that situation, don't be afraid of men. Instead, fear me. The same thing is true here.

Replace the fear of men with a fear of God. Be more afraid of God's judgment than man's judgment. Be more eager for God's approval than for man's approval.

Replace one with the other. It's not just that you do away with fear, but you have a new kind of fear. You have a replacement. You have something better to honor Christ the Lord as holy. It's not just remembering the fear of God, but also remembering his power.

That's a lot of what we're going to talk about next week. Peter follows up this section with another section talking about how powerful Jesus is. Caesar is not the ultimate Lord.

Jesus is. And so remember, not just our fear of God, but the authority and the power of God is greater than the authority and power of men. God's judgment is greater than man's judgment.

[14:56] God's power and God's authority is greater than man's power and man's authority. Give you a little preview for next week. At the very end of next week's passage, Peter tells them in verse 22 that Jesus has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

In other words, Jesus' death and resurrection is certainly for our sins and it demonstrates God's power in that. It also demonstrates God's power in the world over death and evil. And so these people afraid of what's around them can look both to the fear of God and to God's power as their hope.

Instead of being troubled or afraid in their hearts, they honor Christ the Lord as holy. Last fall, when we were going through 1 Peter in an earlier section, I mentioned the book *Evangelism as Exiles* by a man named Elliot Clark and in that book he tells the story.

He was a missionary in Central Asia. So this is recent. That book came out last year. This is a story from probably the last decade. And he attended this church and there was a pastor there and the man's name was Yusuf.

And Yusuf at one point showed him a Bible that he had that had a bullet hole in it just to demonstrate kind of the suffering that he was going through. At one point, people came to Yusuf's house and they roughed him up a little bit because he was a pastor.

[16:15] And finally, Easter Sunday came and this man was preparing his preaching and as he was preaching on Easter Sunday, there were some visitors who came in. Now, as Clark describes in his book, visitors in that context means something different than visitors means for us.

In the American church, we think visitors are wonderful. We're glad they're here. We welcome you. In other parts of the world, there's a lot of questions. Who are these visitors? Are they here as government informants? Are they terrorists?

Are they seeking to do us harm? And so he describes that in this church, there is a palpable sense of fear and dread. The kind of fear that Peter is telling these people about.

And the pastor doesn't notice anything about these visitors until he gets up to preach and they watch him. As he gets up, he recognizes the visitors in the room and they can suddenly see that he is filled with fear as well. He waits for an uncomfortably long amount of time and then begins his sermon.

And as he begins his sermon, he chooses not the fear of man, but the fear of God. This man is trembling in his voice and as he trembles in his voice, he's very clear about the reality of the gospel, that God's come to save us from our sins, that judgment is a real thing and that he calls everyone to repentance and faith and belief.

[17:39] Elliot says this, Yusuf, that's the pastor, had taken the inventory of the fear in the room and he decided to stock the shelves with an even greater fear, the coming judgment of God.

His spirit-filled boldness was amazing. It's natural and normal for us to be afraid. But God gives his people an even greater power and an even greater fear.

Elliot goes on to share this, Yes, Christians in America are increasingly isolated and denigrated.

Yes, our cultural and social capital is vanishing before our eyes.

Yes, in the span of one short week, the Supreme Court could easily rewrite our futures and remove many freedoms. Yes, public school curricula are being weaponized to indoctrinate children in secular dogma and a new sexual ethic.

It doesn't even take much imagination to envision how well-intentioned laws could one day be used to justify the imprisonment of Christians. And it doesn't end there.

[18:46] On a personal level, we have plenty more room for fear. By standing up for Christ, we run the risk of forfeiting promotions or positions, of missing out on a tenure or a contract.

We might even lose our families. But this shouldn't surprise us. Jesus said he didn't come to bring peace. But a sword. We have much to lose.

Yet none of that justifies Christians being terrified. We must not, according to Peter, tremble in fear at the thought of surrendering a job or business at a failed school board initiative or a particular Supreme Court decision.

Because if we do, we're preaching the completely wrong gospel to the world. We're telling them our greatest fear is the loss of money and power and influence.

the loss of our beloved comfort. But as long as that is the case, we show that our fear and our gospel is no different from theirs.

[19:47] Peter encourages these people as they are tempted to fear. Not to fear man, but to fear God. because he is the one who is powerful.

And he is the one that has all authority under his feet. Peter then shares with us in a sense a test of our fear.

If you want there to be points in this sermon, point one would be fear. Point two would be something like sharing. Now verse 15 here has been often isolated by itself as a verse, but it would be foolish to take it out of the context here.

Peter tells people to have a reason for their faith, a defense for their faith in the context of talking about fear of suffering for Jesus Christ. Verse 14 or verse 15, it says, always be prepared to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is within you.

In other words, the temptation to fear and the temptation to be silent are combined. How do we know that we're not afraid? How do we know that we have taken God's command seriously?

[21:04] Well, we have it with the example from Yusuf, we're not afraid to speak. And so there's two things going on. On the one hand, there's this connection between a lack of fear and a willingness to speak about and for Jesus Christ.

And there's also a reason that they need to speak about Jesus Christ. They're actually not taking the initiative in this verse. They're always being prepared to make a defense for this hope, not in general, but specifically to anyone who asks you for a reason for it.

In other words, if you're living in a 1 Peter 2 and 3 sort of way, it should cause you to look different from the world. And that difference from the world inevitably will cause other people to ask you why that difference exists.

Not just that you're living in a different way, but also this lack of fear. As you live in the world living differently and it's clear that you're not afraid of the threats that other people are afraid of, when it's clear that you can't be intimidated by the loss of employment in the way that someone else might be, there is something different that may cause other people to ask you for the reason of the hope that's within you.

In other words, be prepared to explain to people why it is that you're different and be prepared to explain that it's because of your hope. It's a hope that as we discussed before in 1 Peter 1-2, God is coming back to make everything right in this world.

[22:32] He is the most powerful one. And so if we want to know whether we reverence God as holy, we know if we're willing to speak about him when it's risky.

That's the test. That's our test of whether we have truly been able to replace the fear of man with the fear of God. A lack of fear means a willingness to speak about God.

And then he goes on to tell us if people are going to be offended, verse 16, the only thing that should be offensive to them is the content of your message.

If you tell them that our sins are so great that they require God's judgment and our only hope is to accept the sacrifice of his son, that alone will be offensive. There should be nothing else that's offensive to them.

Not our tone, not our manner. And this good conscience here, part of what it's getting at is that our lifestyle should also back up what we say. They shouldn't be able to say, well, these Christians say they have hope, but clearly they act differently.

[23 : 45] Instead, there's an integrity, there's a continuity between our lives and what we say. And so really, Peter's just taking the principles from earlier in the letter and he's applying them to a new situation.

We're living at peace with those around us as much as possible. We're showing grace and kindness to others as much as possible and that extends to our witness.

Of course, we saw that in the story about Pastor Yusuf that he talked even when he was afraid. We also see it in the story of Corrie Ten Boom. If you're familiar with her story, she lived during the 20th century and she was someone who risked her life in Holland to protect Jews from the Holocaust. Eventually, she was caught for that and she herself was sent to the very same camps in Germany that she was trying to rescue people from. And in her book, *The Hiding Place*, she tells the story of her interactions with one of the guards, a man named Lieutenant Roms.

And as she interacts with this man, his job is to interrogate her. And so he interrogates her as much as he can. She's already prepared for this for years, so she's able to evade a lot of his tactics.

[25 : 01] But near the end, she begins to speak to him about the ways that she has worked with people who face handicaps. And this man, having been indoctrinated in Nazi doctrine, immediately tells her, well, that's kind of a worthless thing for you to do, right?

It would be much better for you to convert one person who has no handicaps than thousands of people who do. Coming at her with the Nazi worldview, right? That there are some people who are worth more than others.

And so Corrie Ten Boom begins to share, and she's in this camp, right? She could face incredible suffering for it. She begins to share her belief in something different. She says, the truth, sir, is that God's viewpoint is something different from ours.

So different that we could not even guess it unless he had given us a book which tells us such things. She's telling us to a Nazi guard in a prison camp, in a determined camp. In the Bible, I learned that God values us not for our strength or our brains, but simply because he has made us. Who knows? In his eyes, someone who faces handicaps may be worth more than a watchmaker. That was her profession. Or a lieutenant. That was his profession.

[26 : 14] After taking this risk, not knowing what's going to happen, he ends up coming back to her, and he comes up and asks her for the hope that's within her. The next day, he says, I could not sleep last night thinking about that book where you have read such different ideas.

What else does it say in there? Corey tells him, it says that a light has come into this world so that we need no longer walk in the dark. Is there darkness in your life, lieutenant?

There is great darkness, he said at last. I cannot bear the work I do here. She goes on to share the gospel with him, and it's unclear what happens.

We don't know if Lieutenant Rahm's ever had faith in Christ, but it's clear that he was someone who was asking her about the hope that was within her. In fact, so explicitly so that he had one major objection to Christianity, which is that he could not understand how the people in this camp, like Corey, still had faith in God even though they were suffering.

Corey was not characterized by fear, and that was something that caused someone else to ask her questions about her faith. Even in a risky situation, it would have been easier for her not to share about the book, but instead, what was most important to her was that this man would know about the truth of the gospel and that as he lived in his darkness, there was the opportunity for light.

[27 : 40] I also share that story with you because Corrie ten Boom was a very simple woman. She's described by some as childlike.

It's tempting to take verses like 1 Peter 3.15 and believe that there is some heavy weight on us that we must be people who know multiple and various complicated philosophical defenses of the Christian faith, and that is a good thing, right?

We need people who know those things. We also need normal, everyday Christians who are willing to share the basic truth about their faith in Jesus. The requirement here in 1 Peter 3 is not that we

be the smartest person in the room.

The requirement is that we fear God more than man. The requirement is not that we be the smartest person in the room. It is that we fear God more than man, and because of that, we are willing to share the basics of our hope in Christ.

There is nothing complicated that Corrie Ten Boom shared with this man. She shared with him the basics that God values all people equally, challenging his worldview. And then she shared the basics that this is a world of darkness, but God sent his son into the world to give us light.

[28 : 57] And so Corrie was able to share the reason for the hope that was within her. She wasn't a seminary professor. She wasn't studying flashcards.

She was just someone who followed after Jesus and was willing to be bold enough to share it with someone else. And so for us, the hope is that as we live our lives, people would come and also ask us for the hope that is within us.

As we see, people see that our family is a mess and we are struggling, and they ask us how we keep going, we can share with them our hope in Jesus. When our family is going really well and they notice something is different about our children, we can share with them that our hope is in Jesus.

When you have an incredible work ethic and they ask you about that, you can share with them that your hope is in Jesus. You can give them a reason for the hope that is within you. You could pull a Corrie ten Boom.

They could share a situation with you and you could give them some biblical teaching. Maybe they'd share with you that they're struggling with unemployment. You could share with them that makes sense. I can understand how that would be so challenging for you.

[30 : 11] And part of the reason I know that that's challenging is because God made the heavens and the earth. And when he made the heavens and the earth, he also instituted work. And you as a human being made in his image were made to work.

Sharing our hope is not something that's complicated. It's just something that's hard. It's not something that's complicated. It's just something that is hard.

And yet we have the hope that God gives us. What empowers us to live in this way is the hope that we give is the hope that we're holding. We're telling people about a hope that we have.

That's the hope that empowers us and it's the hope that Jesus is enough. That he's worth living and loving for. He's worth suffering and dying for because he suffered for us.

Tells us in the end of this passage that it's better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. And who suffered more than Jesus? And who did more good than Jesus?

[31 : 17] He is our hope and he's the reason we share our hope because he's the one who suffered and died for our sins for anyone and everyone who's willing to repent and have faith in him.

And so what do we do when we're afraid? What do we do when we have a lot to lose for following after Jesus? First, we let the fear of God replace the fear of man.

And second, we hold out the hope that allows us to do it to anyone who asks. And we have that hope because of Jesus and what he has done for us.

And so we can continue living and loving for Jesus and suffering and dying for him as well because he is worth it. Please pray with me. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you sustain us in our suffering.

And we thank you that you've given us a greater fear and a greater hope. We ask that you would work that deep into our hearts that we would be able to persevere not out of a sense of duty or moralism, but we persevere because we know the truth about you and your love for us.

[32 : 38] And we ask that you give us boldness to share the truth about you because we love you and we fear you more than anything else. And we ask all these things not because we have earned them or deserve them, but because Jesus has earned them for us and so we ask them in his name.

Amen. I invite you to stand.