

**1st Peter Series**  
**COMFORT FOR THE SUFFERING**  
**“The Question of Suffering”**

Last time we ended with 3:11-12, which instructs us how to “enjoy life” and “see good days.” Now this time we’re going to finish chapter 3 with a look at the question of suffering.

**3:13 “And who *is* he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?”**

Peter is stating a general principle here, that if you live a good and godly life, people as a rule will not seek to harm you. The exception is persecution, where it is exactly *because* you are a Christ-follower that some people want to harm you. As Paul warned, “Yes, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).

Next, Peter tells us that when we suffer, let it be for the *right reason*, with the *right reaction*, and with the *right resolve*.

**3:14 “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake (the right reason), happy are ye (the right reaction). “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled” (the right resolve).**

Remember, this is the same Simon Peter who denied Jesus after his arrest. He has been totally transformed by the work of

**the Holy Spirit in his life. In the book of Acts we find him going to sleep the night before they intended to execute him. Terror and dread have now been replaced with rejoicing. He knows he will soon be crucified just as Jesus had told him years before. Yet courage has replaced cowardice!**

**He continues with instructions on how to face suffering:**

**“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;”**

**The first part of this verse is a quote from Isaiah the Prophet, and it means we are to suffer *with the Lord enthroned in our hearts*. And not only with the Lord enthroned in our hearts, but with the Word enthroned in our minds.**

**Why? Because we may be asked to explain why we are willing to suffer for the name of Christ. So Peter says, “Be ready to give a defense in meekness and fear.”**

**Even as Peter was writing, Christians at Rome were facing horrible deaths. Many of them had suffered the loss of everything. Others had been tortured. Others martyred. Many of them had seen their loved ones used as human torches to light up Nero’s garden.**

**All they needed to do was offer a pinch of salt on some pagan altar as a sign of renouncing their faith and they would have walked free. They refused. In the end, their refusal and courage in the face of death took the pagan world by storm. The blood of the early martyrs became the seed of the church.**

**Peter continues on with advice on how to face suffering:**

**3:16 "having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed."**

**A clear conscience was and is essential to a Christian witness. It was the very thing the Apostle Paul confessed to having when brought before the Sanhedrin. "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1).**

**Peter says that when our conscience is clear, our persecutors have no weapon against us. "That when they defame you as evildoers....they will be ashamed."**

**With all the times the Apostle Paul was taken to court, he knew they had nothing on him. This made him bold as a lion! We can't do anything about the sins of our youth, but we can seek to keep a clear conscience now. Peter says,**

**3: 17 "For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."**

**Notice: Sometimes God's will allows us to suffer for the cause of Christ. Peter says, "If it is the will of God." Why would it ever be God's will that we suffer for Christ? Let's recall what Peter wrote in the very first chapter:**

**1:6-7 "So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though the going is rough for a while down here. 7 These trials are only to test your faith, to see whether or not it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests gold and purifies it—and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold; so if your faith remains strong after being tried in the test tube of fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day of his return." (LB)**

**When we pass through suffering for the *right reason*, with the *right reaction*, with the *right resolve*, Peter says our faith is purified. We come out stronger, bolder, better!**

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**Next, Peter turns to Jesus as an example of suffering:**

**Jesus's suffering eclipsed all other suffering. The Bible says that He was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Is 53:3). Our Lord's life was marked by suffering.**

**Peter says that, first, Jesus' suffering on the Cross was *redemptive*. He points to His *vicarious atonement*:**

**3:18a "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,"**

**Then Peter points to His *victorious attainment*:**

**3:18b "being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,"**

**The vicarious atonement accomplished for us by Christ on Calvary's cross is the greatest reason for His sufferings. He could have opted out at any time and gone back home to heaven. But He didn't. He had come into this world with the sole purpose of dying for our sins, "the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."**

**His atonement was a plan worked out in eternity past. God knew that the human race would be plunged into sin, and that a rescue operation would be needed.**

**The plan involved an exchange: Christ would take our place. And we would take His place. All of our guilt and sin, suffering, and shame would be transferred to Him. All of His holiness, righteousness, goodness, and acceptance would be transferred**

**to us. He would die so that we might live. The ground zero of the exchange would be a cross on a skull-shaped hill named Golgotha.**

**But although Christ was “put to death in the flesh,” as Peter says, He was “quickened by the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit was active in every part of Jesus’ life. The Holy Spirit conceived Him (Matt. 1:16). He was anointed by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17). He was raised by the power of the Holy Spirit (Ro. 8:11).**

**Thank God, Jesus went all the way to the cross to die for you and me! And He arose from the dead that we too might one day rise at His return!**

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**We come next to one of the most difficult passages of Scripture in the NT. Peter writes,**

**3:19 “By whom (the whom is the Holy Spirit) also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,”**

**Peter is telling us that the Lord Jesus upon His death went to the underworld to make a proclamation. We are told in the next verse who the spirits were that He addressed:**

**3:20 "...who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine long-suffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water."**

**Okay, let's unpack this. First, the word for "went" in vs. 19 is used for a person going on a journey. Jesus' journey was long—all the way to the underworld!**

**The word for "preached" is from the Greek word meaning "to proclaim." He did not go to the underworld to preach the gospel, or the word for "evangelize" would have been used.**

**The word for "spirits" is *pneuma*. This word is never used in the NT to refer to human beings. The context demands that the *spirits* Jesus addressed in the underworld were the fallen angels of the antediluvian age, meaning the time before the Great Flood of Noah.**

**These spirits are said to be "in prison." This word literally means "a cage." Now, there are four Greek words for the underworld in the NT. The first is *Gehenna*.**

***Gehenna* was a deep, narrow valley to the south of Jerusalem, where the idolatrous Jews offered their children in sacrifice to Molech.**

**It afterwards became the common receptacle for all the refuse of the city. Here the dead bodies of animals and of criminals, and all kinds of filth, were cast and consumed by fire that was kept always burning.**

**Over time it became the image of the place of everlasting destruction. It is repeatedly used by Jesus in this sense as the place of eternal punishment of the wicked, generally in connection with the final judgment.**

**The second word for the underworld is *Hades*. In the OT it's called *Sheol*. Jesus taught that Hades consists of two different spheres divided by an impassable gulf. One side was a place of torment, the other side, called "Abraham's bosom," and "paradise" was a place of rest and comfort. The Lord Himself went to Hades at the time of His death and emptied the paradise section, taking its "captives" to heaven with Him (Eph. 4:8-10).**

**A third word for the underworld is "*the Abyss*," also called "the bottomless pit." We recall how the demons begged Jesus not to send them to the Abyss.**

**The fourth word for the underworld is *Tartarus*. It is found only in 2 Pet. 2:4. Tartarus is the prison where fallen angels are held awaiting the final judgment.**

**Now, the fallen angels Peter refers to are also spoken about by Jude: "And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; (vs.6).**

**Who are these fallen angels? And how are they unique amongst the other fallen angels who fell when Satan first rebelled against God? The answer is that these angels have fallen twice. Notice how Jude says they "did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode."**

**Both Jude and Peter are pointing back to the days of Noah when Satan hatched a plot to totally destroy the human race and thwart the coming of Christ into the world.**

**Moses tells us in Genesis: "Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, 2 that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they *were* beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.**

**3 And the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he *is* indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." 4 There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore *children* to them. Those *were* the mighty men who *were* of old, men of renown**

**5 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually” (6:1-5).**

**The “giants” Moses mentions were the hybrid offspring of fallen angels who “left their proper domain” and crossbred with human women.**

**Hence, these demons had fallen twice. First, when Satan fell. Though fallen, they were free to roam the universe. But some of them suffered a further fall. They went “after strange flesh” (Jude 6-7).**

**Their co-mingling with human women imperiled the whole human race by cross breeding the human with the superhuman. It was Satan’s attempt to stop Christ, and it almost succeeded!**

**By the time the ark sailed, ONLY Noah and his family were saved!**

**So, Jesus went to Tartarus to proclaim His victory to the twice fallen evil spirits. Though they had tried to stop His birth, death, and resurrection, they had failed!**

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**The chapter closes out with a word on water baptism:**

**3:21-22 “There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”**

**Peter is simply stating that the ark was a type of water baptism in that, just as the ark was the only place of salvation and deliverance from judgment, so our identification with Jesus’s death, burial, and resurrection likewise saves us!**

