

## **Finding Purpose in Suffering 1 Peter 3:13-22**

### **1 Peter 3:13-22 Introduction**

- Suffering is never any fun.
- That is especially true when we feel that the suffering is unjustified.
- We may be tempted to get angry with God.
- “If He loves me, how could let this happen?”
- Our challenge as believers is to find God’s purpose in the midst of suffering.
  
- Today’s section of 1 Peter reminds us that suffering, even while doing good, gives us a very real opportunity to communicate to others the reality of Christ.
- What we say and do in times of adversity can have more impact than what we say and do when all is going well.

**Times of suffering can be perfect opportunities to bear witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.**

### **1 Peter 3:13-22 Outline**

- I. The Witness of Our Words. 3:13-15
- II. The Witness of Our Life. 3:16-17
- III. The Glory of Christ’s Suffering. 3:18-22

### **The Witness of Our Words. 3:13-15**

- 3:13 Normally, when we do good, we receive good from other people in return.
- There are exceptions of course, but this is still the usual way that things go.
- 3:14 Sometimes persecution of the righteous does happen. If so, we’re blessed.
- Peter looks back to Isaiah 8:12, which in context is a warning not to fear what faithless people fear, but to fear the Lord.
  
- 3:15a Here is the alternative to fear.
- In the previous verse Peter quoted Isaiah 8:12.
- Here he is thinking of Isaiah 8:13.
- Peter’s words are not precisely an admonition to fear the Lord, but they are close.
- The Lord ultimately rules over human events, not our enemies.
- Therefore, He should also rule in our hearts.
  
- 3:15b The word defense (*apologia*) almost always means “a reply to an accusation.”
- It can be replying to formal legal charges, which is how it used in Acts when speaking of Paul’s defense to allegations of wrongdoing.
  - See Acts 22:1, 25:16.

- Peter’s use of the words “always” and “everyone” make it clear that more than just a formal legal defense is here in view.
- 3:15b We should be prepared for the false accusations that will inevitably come against our faith.
- Paul is a perfect example of this, the way he uses every opportunity he has to bear witness for Christ.
- Even when he is on trial himself, he turns the conversation into a way to tell his accusers and judges about Jesus.
- 3:15b We will benefit from the study of *apologetics* – the type of study that teaches us how to defend our faith against the lies that are frequently thrown our way.
- Notice that Peter assumes we will be questioned about our faith.
- He takes it for granted that our lives will be different from others’ lives, so opportunities to share our faith will come naturally.
- 3:15b And when we give that defense of our faith, it should not be done with an arrogant or aggressive attitude.
- It should be “with meekness and fear.”
- Also, “with gentleness and respect” (ESV)
- Or, “In a gentle and respectful way” (NLT)
- The goal is not to win the argument, but to see the lost won to Christ.

### **The Witness of Our Life. 3:16-17**

- In the words of English literary figure Samuel Johnson (1709-1784):
  - *“Shame arises from the fear of men; conscience, from the fear of God.”*
- A good conscience demands more than an outwardly moral life.
- It brings with it an inward demand to keep our accounts with God clear.
- We do this by:
  - Avoiding willful disobedience to God from day to day.
  - Being quick to confess, repent and pray for forgiveness once come to our senses and realize that we have sinned.
- An important verse in this regard is 1 John 1:9.
- As a result of a good conscience, there will be nothing of which to accuse us.
- It’s the truth behind the cheesy bumper sticker that says:
  - *“Live you’re your life so the preacher doesn’t have to lie at your funeral.”*
- People will simply know that your life has been a life well lived.

## The Glory of Christ's Suffering. 3:18-22

- 3:18 Peter comes back to the cross.
- Our strength to suffer, if need be, for the sake of Christ must be grounded in the wonder of Christ's willingness to suffer death for us.
- Peter is once again thinking of how Christ took our place on the cross, dying for our sins.
- Look back at 2:21-24.
  
- 3:18 that He might bring us to God
- When Christ died, the veil of the temple was torn in two.
- The Holy of Holies was laid open and the Ark of the Covenant was exposed.
- This event symbolized the new and open way to God through Jesus Christ.
  
- 3:18 but made alive by the Spirit
- There are a few possible ways to translate this, but the ESV is probably the best.
  - "but made alive in the spirit"
- The essential point is the flesh-spirit contrast.
- Christ's resurrection body is now fit for the realm of the Spirit's activity, the eternal, spiritual realm.
  
- 3:19-20 These words were no doubt clear to the people who first heard them.
- They're simply not very clear to us.
- Some 500 years ago, Martin Luther put it well:
  - *"A wonderful text is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for a certainty just what Peter means."*
- Sometimes it's best just to admit it.
  
- 3:19-20 That said, there are 3 – 5 *major* interpretive directions people have taken here historically – and several minor ones.
- All of them have strengths and weaknesses.
- Wayne Grudem devotes a 38-page *Appendix* in his commentary to these two verses alone.
- We won't spend all that time, but we will follow the view of Grudem, John Feinberg and Edmund Clowney.
  
- 3:19-20 The three questions we have to answer in order to come to an understanding of these verses are:
  1. Who are the spirits in prison?
  2. What did Christ preach?
  3. When did He preach?
  
- 3:19-20 The NASB translation is helpful:

- “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 other words these were people who heard Noah’s preaching, but are now “spirits in prison,” in *Hades* if you please.
- 3:19-20 Again Grudem:
  - *“By saying that Christ went and preached rather than just saying that he ‘preached,’ Peter suggests that Christ did not stay in heaven but ‘went’ to where people were disobeying, and there preached to them through the lips of Noah.”*
- And He patiently waited for them to repent.
- 3:19-20 How can Noah’s preaching be considered Christ’s going and preaching?
- Clowney gives a reasonable response:
  - *“God’s interventions in Old Testament revelation are often described in terms of his going or coming.”*
- For example, Genesis 11:7; 18:21, Christ as the Rock who followed Israel in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:4), and especially 1 Peter 1:10-11.
- 3:19-20 Noah would have preached an opportunity to repent to his contemporaries.
- Peter refers to Noah as a “preacher of righteousness” in his next letter. (2 Peter 2:5)
- A large group of ancient texts, both Jewish and early Christian depict Noah as preaching to the people of his day to repent.
- That literature also describes the mockery that Noah had to endure.
- 3:19-20 So to answer our key questions:
  1. Who are the spirits in prison?
    - Humans who were alive in the days of Noah.
  2. What did Christ preach?
    - A message of repentance, through Noah, which they did not heed despite having ample time to do so.
  3. When did He preach?
    - During the time Noah was building the ark.
- 3:19-20 After a meticulous discussion of Peter’s Greek in light of ancient literature, Grudem gives us this extended paraphrase:
  - “In the spiritual realm of existence Christ went and preached through Noah to those who are now spirits in the prison of hell. This happened when they formerly disobeyed, when the patience of God was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”

- 3:19-20            Now Peter H. Davids:
  - *“Like Noah these Christians are a small persecuted minority surrounded by a majority that is disobedient to God... But ... they will be the delivered minority just as Noah and his family were, which is surely comforting in a time of suffering.”*
- We may benefit from that comfort as well.
  
- 3:21    Peter likens the waters of baptism to the waters of the flood.
- The same waters that buried the earth in judgment lifted Noah and his family to safety.
- We see death, burial, and a hint of resurrection, making this the *type*.
- Baptism signifies a clean break with the past.
- It also pictures Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. This is the subsequent *antitype*.
  
- 3:21    Peter is careful to explain that salvation does not come to us by means of water baptism.
- Water cannot remove the stains of sin.
- Only the blood of Jesus Christ can do that.
- Baptism is, however, an important step of obedience – the answer of a good conscience – toward God.
- And regardless of our personal convictions, it must be admitted that for Peter, baptism was strictly for believers and by immersion.
  
- 3:22    Christ has complete victory over “angels and authorities and powers,” which all refer to the evil hosts of Satan.
  - See also Colossians 2:13-15.
- Warren Wiersbe sums it up:
  - *“As Christians, we do not fight for victory, but from victory—the mighty victory that our Lord Jesus Christ won for us in His death, resurrection, and ascension.”*
- Times of suffering can be perfect opportunities to bear witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

### **1 Peter 3:13-22    Conclusions**

- We’ve talked about:
  - The Witness of Our Words.
  - The Witness of Our Life.
  - The Glory of Christ’s Suffering.
- There are things that we can learn from each point.

#### The Witness of Our Words.

- We should be ready to give an answer regarding both what we believe and why.
- As Christians we are responsible to understand our faith and defend it to the best of our ability.
- Believing “because we just do” or “because we always have” is simply not good enough.

#### The Witness of Our Life.

- A righteous, holy, god-fearing life is the best evidence we can give for the reality of the Christian faith.
- People may not like our opinions, but when they see the fruit of godly living, it will be very difficult for them to condemn.
- Never underestimate how many people are watching you at any given time.

#### The Witness of Our Words and Our Life.

- Let Christ's impending return motivate you in your witness for Him.
  - Consider Matthew 24:36-39.
- Our ministry is similar to Noah's in that we bear a message of repentance at a time when the world is ripening for judgment.
- Let us not lose our sense of urgency.

#### The Glory of Christ's Suffering.

- Jesus suffered with the purpose of bringing people like us to a saving knowledge of God.
- He now reigns at the right hand of His Father in glory, awaiting that moment when He will come back to earth to rule.
- No amount of adversity we endure at the present time can take one iota of glory away from Him.

**Times of suffering can be perfect opportunities to bear witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.**