

How To Shine In Suffering

1 Peter 3:13-17

Pastor John Miller

We're going to read the entire text, beginning in verse 13. I want you to follow with me this morning in your Bible. Peter says, verse 13, "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if you suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are you, and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear..."—or respect. Or gentleness and respect—"...Having a good conscience..."—verse 16—"...that, whereas they speak evil of you, as evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse you of your good manner of living in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that you suffer for well doing, than for evil doing."

We come in our study of the book of 1 Peter to the third and main section of the epistle. Peter is actually entering in today in this verse to his main topic in Peter. We saw, first of all, that we stand in salvation. We saw that we stand in submission. And today we move to suffering. We are standing in the suffering that comes from a Christ-rejecting world.

Now Peter's writing to help suffering Christians to stand during this time of persecution and opposition and suffering. I believe that we are going to begin to face, as Christians in the United States of America—it's already beginning to happen—We are going to be facing open persecution. Many laws that are being passed today fly in the face of God's Word. And we, with gentleness and respect, have to take a stand for truth and say, "We will obey God rather than man."

Now we saw in the submission section that we are to submit to governments. We are to submit on the job. We are to submit in the home. And we're to have an attitude of submission to the powers that be. But if there's a point where the government expects us to do something that contradicts God's Word or causes us to disobey God, then like the apostles in the book of Acts, we say, "We must obey God rather than man." Amen? Our allegiance is not to the United States; it's to God. Now we are committed to our nation, and we love our nation and we respect the government and the laws, but our ultimate allegiance needs to be to God. And that will sometimes cause us to be in opposition to the world around us.

I want to mention three reasons why, as Christians, we suffer in the world. First of all, we live in a world that is fallen. We live in a fallen world. When people ask, "Why is there suffering in the world?" a simple answer is because of sin, s-i-n. Sin has brought sorrow and death and disease and sadness into the world. And there's no Christian fallout shelter. God doesn't put you in a bubble as a Christian and protect you from adversity. Christians get in automobile accidents just like heathens do; okay? Now I know God puts His angels around your car when you're driving. And some of you put them to work overtime. Some of your angels are out in the parking lot right now going [huffing], "Man, it's hard to keep them safe the way they drive!" And God does watch over us, but even Christians get into accidents. Even Christians get cancer.

Even Christians do get cavities. Even Christians' toilets get stopped up and overflow. Even Christians' dogs dig out and run away. You know, things like that happen around the house. And we suffer because we live in a sinful, fallen world. It's part of life.

And we secondly suffer because of our sin sometimes. If we do something stupid, we sow to the flesh, we're going to reap corruption; right? If we do something dumb and we are reprimanded or we're punished, then we deserve the punishment we get. Or maybe because of other sinful behavior.

But there's a third reason, and this is Peter's focus in this epistle. We also suffer because we follow Jesus Christ. So we begin the third and last main section of the epistle, and it is the main topic of 1 Peter. If someone asked, "Pastor John, what book in the Bible should I read when I'm going through a time of suffering?" one of the first books I'll tell you to read is 1 Peter. Because from here on out, that's the theme: How to handle suffering, how to have an attitude when some things don't go your way. When people oppose you, people attack you and you suffer in this world, you need to turn to these passages that we're going to look at the next several weeks on standing in suffering.

So this is the kind of suffering, persecution, that Peter is addressing in his epistle. I want to point it out to you. Go back to our text, chapter 3, verse 14, where he says, "If you suffer for righteousness' sake." Now notice he doesn't say you're just suffering. But the reason you are suffering is because you are living a righteous life. You're following Jesus Christ. Then jump down to verse 17. He says, "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that you suffer for well doing." You see that there? Now jump down to chapter 4, verse 16; my favorite section on suffering in 1 Peter. He says in chapter 4, verse 16, "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian..."—not as a criminal, but as a Christian—"...let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf."

So the kind of suffering that we are encountering is for righteousness: Following Jesus, being a Christian, saying that we're not going to lie, we're not going to steal, we're not going to cheat, we're not going to commit adultery, we're not going to live an immoral life. We stand for truth, and we're going to be opposed by a very dark and sinful culture that is surrounding us.

Now in our text today, I want to point out six things that we need to be or do to stand strong and shine for Jesus when we suffer for His name. Yes, you heard me right. I said six things. Now that doesn't mean that we're going to go real long. It means that we gotta move a little faster. You go, "Yah, I've heard that before." But out of this text—I want to kind of break it down for you—we're gonna see six attitudes that we need to have if we're going to be able to shine for Jesus in the midst of suffering and persecution. Write them down.

Number one, we need to be zealous for that which is good. Be zealous. Write that down. Be zealous. This is found in verse 13. Look at it with me. Peter says in verse 13, "Who is he that will harm you, if you be..."—and here's our word "zealous" or—"...followers..."—which in the Greek could be translated "zealots" or "zealous"—"...for that which is good?" I want you to

notice the question mark at the end of verse 13. Why? Because this is a rhetorical question. In other words, it's a question that expects a certain answer. It expects a "no" answer. "Who is he that will harm you, if you are followers of that which is good?" And the obvious answer is "no one," when you're doing right. This is a general principle here, by the way.

When you're obeying the law, you're driving the speed limit, you know, you don't have to worry about the police department. Remember before you got saved, you were always looking in the rear-view mirror? You're always looking over your shoulder. Come on; you know what I'm talking about. Right? You look at me, "No, Pastor Miller. I've always been a good person." Well, you're lying right now. Remember how paranoid you used to be when the cops were driving behind you? "Oh, maintain, maintain, maintain., maintain." It's like, "Oh, what do I have in my car? Oh, don't break the law." You were afraid if you got pulled over, you'd be busted. Right? Of if you had to go to the principal's office, you're like, "Oh, no. I'm busted." Or your mom said, "Wait 'till I talk to you today." You're always, like, looking over your shoulder. Well, when you do what is right, you don't have to worry.

I remember very clearly—I'll just share my own life with you. When I got saved, it's like, "Whew. I don't have to worry about getting arrested anymore." That's one of the great benefits of being a Christian; right? You don't have to worry about getting arrested. I'm not worried about goin' to jail. I'm not worried about, you know, doin' time. I'm not breaking the law anymore. I'm not doing anything illegal. So if you be zealous for what is good, as a general principle, you'll be okay. No one is really going to harm you.

But there's a secondary sense in which no one can really harm you. Jesus said it like this. This has always been one of the mind-blowing statements of Christ. He said, "Don't be afraid of those who can kill your body." It's like, "Excuse me! Say that again." "Don't be afraid. All they can do is kill you." "Got it." And then He goes, "And afterwards, there's no more they can do." You're dead. All they can do is kill you, and after they kill you they can't do anything. They're not going to kick your corpse around for a while. I mean, you're dead, so what more can they do? But then Jesus said, "I'll tell you who you should be afraid of. God. Fear God." Because He is able to both destroy your body and your soul in hell for all eternity. "Fear God," Jesus said. But we have this fear of man rather than the fear of God. But notice that all they can do is kill you. In other words, they can't really harm you. They can hurt you but they can't harm you.

I believe that underneath this statement is the idea, you know, as Christians, no one can take your salvation away. They can put you in prison. They can persecute you, but they can't take Jesus away from you; right? They can't take your salvation. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." But the principle, in verse 13, is no matter what opposition, no matter what persecution, keep on doing what is good. Keep living a righteous life.

Here's the second thing we need to do. Verse 14, we need to be fearless. Don't be afraid. I want you to notice in verse 14. He says, "And if you do suffer for righteousness' sake, happy..."—or blessed—"...are you. Don't be afraid." So be zealous. "Don't be afraid of their..."—that is, the ungodly world, the persecution. "Don't be afraid of their terror, neither be

troubled.” Now there’s an intended contrast in verse 14 where it starts with the word “but.” “But and if.” In other words, it’s very possible and highly probable that God will allow you to experience persecution for righteousness’ sake. Paul the Apostle said, “All that will...”—or desire—“...to live godly lives will suffer persecution.”

So if you are committed to being zealous for what is good, I can guarantee you that sooner or later someone’s going to oppose you. You go to the job, and you’re living your Christian life and they say, “Hey, holy Joe, your halo’s crooked. Why don’t you straighten it out?” They mock you. “Oh, you’re reading your Bible today.” And they mock your Christianity and your faith in God. And they oppose you. Maybe in America today we aren’t being openly persecuted, but there’s a more subtle kind of persecution and opposition that comes against your faith in Jesus Christ.

Now when we suffer for righteousness—and he alludes to the possibility of that in verse 14—I want you to notice a couple of things. Number one, you are blessed. That’s what the word “happy” means. You go, “Run that by me again.” Yes; if you are following Jesus, obeying Jesus, serving Jesus, doing what is right and you get persecuted for that, happy are you. In Matthew 5, Jesus opened with the same word in all of the Beatitudes. “Blessed are you that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” He said, “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, because so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” You’re in good company. They persecuted Jeremiah. They persecuted Isaiah. They persecuted Jesus. They’re persecuting you.

Now the word “happy” there means that you are blessed or that you are highly favored. It’s used in all the Beatitudes. It doesn’t talk about outward circumstances, which is an earthly happiness. It talks about a blessed state where you have the smile of God or the approval of God. Max Lucado in his book on the Beatitudes titled his book *The Applause of Heaven*. I’ve always liked that. And I believe that’s contained in that concept of “Blessed are ye.” It’s the idea that God is applauding for you, that you’re living a life that brings a smile to the face of God. And when God looks at you, He’s actually clapping for you. I don’t know about you, but I want God to clap for me. I want my attitudes, I want my words, I want my conduct to bring joy to the heart of God. I want His favor. I want His approval. I want His applause. I want the applause of heaven, not the applause of men.

Peter himself in Acts 5, after being persecuted and beaten actually for preaching the Gospel with the other Apostles—it says in Acts 5:41 that they “departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” They were actually beaten up. And they were rejoicing. You go, “You guys lose something there?” You imagine their eyes were black, their noses were bloodied, their teeth were knocked out. “Praise the Lord, we lost our teeth!” “Are you crazy?” “No. I am identified with Jesus!” You know, why are we surprised when the world hates us? Jesus said they hated Him. Why should we be surprised when the world hates us? They rejected Him. If you’re a follower of Jesus Christ, you expect any other treatment than rejection? Jesus was crucified. What do we expect the world to do toward us? You’re following a crucified Savior. So they’re going to treat us like they

treated Jesus.

So we rejoice because God will use our suffering. Let me mention a few ways God will use it in the sense that we can be happy. He'll use it for His glory. And that should make us happy. When I suffer persecution and I take it patiently, I glorify God. God receives glory.

Secondly, He will use it to bless others. Remember when Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was being stoned? That's what you call persecution; okay? I mean, full on rocks pelting his body. He was being put to death, and his face was shining like an angel. I call him the "angel-face evangelist." He was glowing with the glory of God. I believe that when those rocks were hitting him, God gave him martyr's grace. I don't think he even felt those rocks. They were like Nerf rocks hitting him, you know. And he saw the glory of God.

In 1 Peter 4:14, Peter said "the spirit of God and glory rest upon you." I believe God gives them martyr's grace. I believe many of the saints who died by being burned to death experienced the presence of God in such a way that they just pass from life to life. And as Stephen is there and the stones are hitting his body, his face was shining like an angel, and he prayed, "Lord Jesus, lay not this sin to their charge." And he died.

Guess who was in the crowd watching and listening? Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the Apostle, and I think partly because he saw Stephen's testimony, he saw Stephen's witness. Stephen didn't curse God, he didn't get angry, he didn't pick up stones and start throwing them back at the angry crowd. He just said, "Lord Jesus, lay not this sin to their charge." And the glory of God rested on him. And Saul was watching that, and he couldn't escape that. And it drove him crazy. And when he was converted in Acts 9 on the way to Damascus to arrest and persecute Christians, the Lord said, "Isn't it hard for you to kick against the goads?" The conviction of the Holy Spirit. I believe that Stephen's life was a witness to Saul of Tarsus. And we can owe Saul's conversion, to some degree, to the witness of Stephen, who so wonderfully withstood that persecution. And it blessed others. When you're on the job and you're suffering and you're a Christian, others are watching you.

And thirdly, we can rejoice in our suffering because God will use it to bless us. He will use it to bless us. In 1 Peter 4:12-14 he says, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing is happening to you. But rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad with exceeding joy. If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is spoken evil against. On your part He is glorified." So I believe God uses it for His glory, uses it to bless others and uses it for our good.

So he says in verse 14, "Be not afraid." Don't be shaken. Don't be troubled. Don't be afraid and don't be troubled. The same word Jesus used in John 14. "Let not your heart be..."—what?—"...troubled, neither let it be afraid. You believe in God; believe also in me." The NASB translates verse 14, "Do not fear their intimidation." You don't need to be afraid. You know, Peter—again, the man who wrote these words—was arrested and thrown into prison, in Acts 12, with

James, and they were both to be executed. And the story was that James was executed first. His head was cut off. And Peter was in prison to be executed the next day. So he's in jail, arrested for preaching and being a Christian, and he's going to be executed, beheaded, the next day. Guess what Peter was doing that night? Sleeping. I can't even sleep that good when I'm going to have a good day the next day. You think, "Man, if they're going to cut my head off tomorrow, I'm going to party tonight," you know. I'm going to eat my favorite meal, watch my favorite shows and I'm just going to have a good time. I'm going to dance in my prison cell." I don't know where you can go, you know. You can't go to Vegas that night. "I'm just going to have a good time, because I'm going to die tomorrow," you know. So what did Peter do? He just goes to sleep.

You know, when you're in the will of God, you don't need to be afraid. When you're doing the work of God, you don't need to be afraid. You don't need to fear. Peter was sleeping until the angel came and woke him up. And I love that story. The angel had to shake him. He had to hit Peter to wake him up. Peter woke up, saw an angel, the door was open and he thought he was dreaming. That's the kind of dream you have when you're in prison. An angel comes and springs you. So it's "Okay. This is a nice dream." And, you know, he starts following the angel, and he walks out and he's like slapping himself, pinching himself. "Wow, this is for real!" Then he runs over to the Christian's house. "Hey, an angel delivered me, you know." And they were freaking out because they were praying that Peter would be delivered, and Peter's on the front porch. They go, "You can't be Peter! You're going to be killed tomorrow. You're in jail." "I'm Peter!" "You must be his ghost." And they're in a prayer meeting asking God to deliver Peter, and Peter's at the door. And they didn't believe it. You talk about a prayer of faith. God answers prayers even when we are faithless; amen? But Peter's sleeping. We don't need to be afraid. What a wonderful thing that is.

Here's the third point I want to make about our attitude in the face of persecution and opposition. And that is in verse 15. We need to be surrendered. Be surrendered. I want you to see that in verse 15. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." So if God allows you to suffer for righteousness' sake, you're blessed. Don't be afraid. Don't be troubled. But this is what you do need to do, in verse 15. You need to "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you the reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." But just notice that statement in verse 15. "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." What does that mean? It means that you surrender your life to Jesus Christ as Lord. Is that you set apart in your life Jesus, and that He is preeminent above everything and everyone else.

Now there's been a raging theological debate in the church for some time about what's called "lordship salvation." And I'm not here to talk about that right now. But they basically teach that unless you really surrender to Jesus as Lord, you can't even be born again. I don't believe that that's clearly taught in the New Testament. I do believe that we must repent. I do believe we must believe in Jesus and trust Him alone to be saved. But I believe it's possible for someone to accept Christ or trust in Christ or believe in Jesus as their Savior, and then maybe over time, they come to realize He wants to be Lord over my whole life. That I need to surrender

everything to Jesus Christ. Now He is Lord whether we make Him Lord or not. There's no debate there.

But the question is, is He Lord of your life? And I believe that there are a lot of Christians who have saved souls but wasted lives. You're going to heaven but you're not serving God. And I believe God's will and design for you is, once you come to know Jesus as your Savior, that you need to surrender to Him as your Lord as well; that Jesus leads you and guides you and directs you and takes control of your whole life. So when it says, "Sanctify the Lord God in your heart," it's basically saying make Jesus the Lord of your life. And you do that by surrendering to Him, by submitting in obedience to Him. And when I say, "Lord of your life" I mean Lord of every facet of your life: Your intellectual life, your emotional life, your married life, your social life, your sexual life, your financial life. He wants to be Lord of your wallet.

You go, "Wait a minute, preacher. You crossed the line there. I'm more than willing to give God a few hours on Sunday morning, but don't ask Him to be Lord over my wallet." You know, we don't own anything. It all belongs to God. He just loans it to us. It's not your wallet, and the money in it isn't yours. It belongs to God. I just thought I would encourage you. Your time belongs to God. Your spouse belongs to God. Your marriage. Your children. Everything you have belongs to God. And He needs to be Lord of your life.

Now here's the principle. When we're facing opposition, when we're facing persecution, when we're going through a time of suffering, there's nothing more important to know than Jesus Christ is Lord of my life and that all of my life is submitted to His lordship. Jesus needs to be Lord of our lives. The great Alexander MacLaren said, "Only he who can say, 'The Lord is the strength of my life' can go on to say, 'Of whom shall I be afraid?'" I love that. When you can say in your heart, "The Lord is the strength of my life," then and only then can you say, "Of whom shall I be afraid?"

Now let me give you the fourth point. Verse 15, as well. Be ready. Be ready. So be surrendered but be ready. Notice it in verse 15. "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you for a reason of the hope that is in you..."—and you do it—"...with meekness and respect." Now when you are suffering, always be ready to speak for Jesus. If Jesus is Lord, you will want to tell others about Him. You know, one of the reasons that God saves us is that we can tell others about the Lord. Sometimes Christians have the idea that "If I just keep quiet on the job and no one knows I'm a Christian, there won't be any problems." I met one guy one time. I asked, "Hey, how's things going on the job?" "Really good; no one knows I'm a Christian." What's that? Christ of the secret order? "Yah, shush. Don't tell anybody. I'm a Christian, but I don't want anyone to know." What's with that?

I believe that when the world gets dark, we should shine brighter; amen? And as saddened as I am by the moral decay of our culture right now in the United States, I'm gladdened that it means the church can shine all the brighter. Now let me tell you. Wherever we go politically or wherever we go morally, the church will grow stronger in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And we want to shine brighter in this darkened world around us; amen? And we need to keep doing

what is good. We need to be devoted to Jesus as Lord, and we need to be ready.

Now the word “answer” there, “Be ready to answer” in the midst of our suffering—The word “answer” means to give a defense. In theology we have a department known as apologetics. It means the defense of the faith. Reasons for your faith. And we get it from this concept here, taken from the Greek word translated “answer” or “defense.” It means a formal defense for what you believe. Now notice we are defending what? “For the hope that is in you.” And what is that hope? It’s the hope of heaven. Christianity focuses on a hope, and that hope is that one day we’re going to be with the Lord. We’re going to go to heaven. And this world is not our home. But what gives us a reason for that hope? We need to be ready to answer people. And people say, “Why are you a Christian? Why do you believe the Bible? Why do you trust Jesus Christ? Why do you go to church on Sunday? Why do you have joy in the midst of the economy and the things that are going on in our world today? What gives you hope?” You need to be ready to give them a defense.

Now there’s a lot of different areas that we need to know to answer questions. But let me mention a few. Number one, when people ask you what makes you think God exists. I believe every Christian should understand some basic reasons—rational reasons—for the existence of God. It’s not enough to just say, “I believe it; that’s all. Call my pastor if you don’t believe it. He’ll tell you.” You don’t believe God exists just because you believe God exists. What reasons do we have for believing that God exists?

And then, secondly, the Bible as the Word of God. What reasons do we have to believe that we should trust this book? Why do we believe this book is the Word of God? Why do we believe that it’s without error? It’s infallible? It’s alive and powerful, sharper than any sword? Why do we believe this is the living, powerful, active Word of God? This is where your faith is going to be tried and tested. Is the Bible true? Did God really say that? I’ve always found it interesting that the first recorded words out of the mouth of Satan in the Bible were, “Did God really say that?” And the central point of attack for the Devil has always been the Word of God. Why do you believe the Bible’s the Word of God? You say, “I believe the Bible.” But why? What reasons do you have? What answer can you give to people when they ask you for your faith in God’s Word?

And thirdly, understand the work and person of Jesus as the Savior of the world: That He’s God in the flesh, and the life of Christ, and the evidence for His Resurrection and reasons that we can trust Jesus Christ.

And then, fourthly, I would say, that you can give a defense for your faith by simply sharing your testimony. “Once I was blind and now I see. Once I was bound and now I’m set free. Once I was living in sin and now I’m living for the Savior. Once I was living in sadness and now there’s joy and peace and love in my heart. I know God’s real because it happened to me. I had a front-row seat. God changed my life.” And there’s power in your personal testimony.

But you also need to give reasons why you believe Christianity is true. And how do you do it?

Notice in verse 15. "With meekness and fear." Or better translated "gentleness and respect." You're not trying to win an argument. You're not simply trying to prove your point. You're not trying to impress people with your intellectual prowess and your learning. You're trying to bring them to Jesus Christ. So when we witness in the midst of persecution, let me tell you Christian brothers and sisters, do it gently. Do it respectfully. Speak the truth, but "speak the truth in love." And when you share the Gospel, make sure you are listening, as well. I think one of the mistakes we make in personal evangelism is that we want to speak; we don't want to listen. And we need to listen to where people are at. We need to listen to their questions. We need to listen to their heart's cry and their problems. And then we need to be able to give them an answer. And the answer lies in Jesus Christ.

I believe that if we at Revival Christian Fellowship would go out with this mentality—that I'm going to stand for Jesus, and when I'm persecuted, I'm going to speak with gentleness and respect. I'm going to respect other people, and they can hold their views and I'm not going to tell them, you know, that they can't do that. But I'm going to respectfully disagree, and I'm going to boldly share the love of Jesus Christ. You do it with gentleness and you do it with respect, and you'll see that God will use your testimony to bring others to Jesus Christ.

Now there's a fifth attitude that we need to have, and it's in verse 16. Write this down. We need to be right. Be right or have a clear conscience. Notice it in verse 16. Peter says, "Having a good conscience." Get in context; when you're suffering and when you're being persecuted, keep your conscience clear. "That whereas they speak evil of you, as evildoers, they may be ashamed because they falsely accuse you of your good manner of living in Christ." When you suffer, it's important to have a clear conscience.

Now let me say some things about the conscience. I do believe that God gives us a conscience. And you're all aware of that great theologian, Jiminy Cricket, who said, "Let your conscience be your guide"; right? Yes and no. It depends on whether your conscience has been educated and enlightened by this book called the Word of God. Or whether your conscience has been perverted by watching too much TV, which can happen. You know, a conscience is only as good—listen to this. It's so important.—Your conscience is only as good as the light that it receives from the Bible, the Word of God. You know, without God's Word, we have no way of saying anything is ultimately right or wrong. It's all relative. And that's what our culture believes today. We have eliminated God. We've eliminated God's Word, so everything's relative; there's no absolute right or wrong.

We have college students who actually believe that there's no such thing as truth. Now they're completely committed to the truth that there's no truth. How's that work? I've actually talked to college students. I've asked, "Do you believe in truth? Do you believe that there's absolute truth?" He goes, "Absolutely not." "Really? Did you hear what you just said? Is that statement true?" "Well...." They kind of backpedal. They go, "Well, maybe that's one truth, and the truth is that there's no truth." How convenient.

Unless your conscience is receiving the light of God's Word, it can become perverted. It can

become seared. And it can die. I liken the conscience to a sundial. Now we don't use sundials anymore, but a sundial can only tell you what time it is when the sun's on it; right? Duh. If you've got a sundial and you want to know what time it is, if the sun has gone down, it's not going to work. Same is true of a conscience. Your conscience isn't going to work if it doesn't receive the light of God's Word. It's like a window that's gotten dirty, and the light can't shine through it. So some people say, "I don't think it's wrong. I don't feel bad about it." That's because you have a perverted conscience, or seared conscience, or you're resisting your conscience.

But your conscience needs to come under the influence of God's Word. That's one of many reasons why I believe at a very, very young age children need to be taught the Scriptures. They need to be taught what is right and what is wrong. They need to be taught what God says is right and wrong, because their conscience will be influenced by the Word of God. Some people use their conscience like a wheelbarrow. They push it wherever they want it to go. How convenient. But when our conscience is receiving the light of God's Word, then it's a good barometer for what is right or what is wrong.

Now when you are suffering, nothing is more important than a clear conscience. Number one, it gives you courage in the face of persecution and opposition. Whenever Paul the Apostle was arrested and brought to trial before Festus and Agrippa, and he stood trial before them, he would often say, "I stand here before you with a clear conscience before God." That's what gave him boldness. He knew his conscience was clear.

Secondly, it gives us peace. You know, when you have a guilty conscience, you don't have peace. Read Psalm 32. David wrote that psalm after he committed adultery, after he committed murder and after he lied to cover his sin. He wrote Psalm 32. And you know what he said? He said, "My moisture was turned into the drought of summer. All the juices in my body dried up." He said, "God's hand was heavy upon me. Day and night God's hand was heavy upon me." He lost his peace. He lost his joy because he had a guilty conscience. So we need to turn to God and confess our sin, and He will forgive us of our sins and He'll cleanse our conscience. And we can have peace again.

And thirdly, a clear conscience during persecution removes our fears. Psalm 118:6 says, "As the Lord is on my side, I will not fear. What can man do to me?" I don't need to be afraid. You know, again, I noticed that when I got saved. Number one, when I got saved, I wasn't afraid of the police anymore. I wasn't afraid that my parents would find out any secrets about me anymore. I wasn't afraid of anything anymore. You know, "Perfect love casts out all fear." When you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear. When I became a Christian, I also gained that assurance that I'm in the will of God. I belong to God; nothing can happen to me, but God's in control.

And this is my last and sixth point. I want you to write it down. Be assured. Be assured. Verse 17. Look at it with me. He says, "For it is better." So this is his kind of closing rationale. Cause I want you to know "it is better if..."—or perhaps—"...the will of God be so, that you suffer for

well doing, than for evil doing.” Sure it is. If you want God’s applause, if you want God’s approval, if you want the smile of God, if you want peace in your heart, then keep doing what is good. Set Jesus apart in your heart and life as Lord. Be ready to give an answer to anyone with respect and gentleness. Be assured that you’re in the will of God. If you’re suffering, have the assurance that you are in the center of God’s will. You know, if you’re in the will of God and you’re doing the work of God, you don’t need to be afraid of anything that comes into your life.

Now inferred in verse 17—and I want you to see this—“If the will of God be so, that you suffer for well doing...” You know what he’s implying there? Very clearly implied that it might be, and probably will be, God’s will and purpose and plan will be to allow you to go through suffering. God bless you. You go, “Did I just hear the preacher say what I think the preacher just said?” “Yes; you heard me.” I believe with all my heart that God will choose and purpose and design to allow you to suffer and face persecution, face opposition and face difficulty. I already mentioned that it glorifies God, it’s good for others and it blesses your own life. So God cares about you; He’ll allow you to suffer. What Peter is saying in verse 17—he’s saying there that God will allow you to suffer for well doing. When you are suffering for well doing, you have that assurance that it is the will of God. You can suffer in God’s will.

In verse 18—we get it next Sunday—“Christ has also once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust.” Next Sunday he’s going to give Jesus, our example of suffering for righteousness’ sake.

Remember when Jesus was in the boat with His disciples out on the Sea of Galilee? As a matter of fact, one of my favorite stories in the Gospels. Jesus said to His guys, “Get in the boat and let’s go across the sea.” The Sea of Galilee is about eight miles wide. That’s a pretty good body of water. So halfway across that sea, the closest shoreline is four miles. I can’t swim four miles. That’s a bad spot to be in when a storm comes. But that night when they were rowing out on the Sea of Galilee, guess what happened? A storm hit. And the waves were crashing over the boat and all the disciples were freaking out. They were sure they were going to drown. These brave fishermen were crying, “Ahh!!” And you would be crying too. And guess what Jesus was doing? Sleeping. You know why? He knew that they were in the will of the Father. He knew they were doing what they were supposed to be doing, where they were supposed to be.

Let me point it out this way. I would rather be in a storm in the will of God than in the calm out of the will of God. I would rather be in a boat in a storm with Jesus, obeying His commands, with the peace that’s there, than on the shore out of the will of God. We’re safer in the storm in the will of God than we are out of the will of God. So that assurance is what strengthens us. “I’m in God’s will; I don’t need to be afraid.”

I didn’t share this first service, and I’ve shared with you before. I don’t know how many years ago it was. I was on a trip to Australia. And myself and two other pastors were outside the airport at Los Angeles having something to eat before we went into the airport to board our flight. And we were kidnapped at gunpoint. Carjacked. Two fellas with guns forced us into our car, held guns to our heads, robbed us, and then they said, “Start the car,” driving us around,

threatening to kill us. And one of the things that gave me such peace in the midst of that situation was, "I'm in God's will. I'm not down here doing stuff I shouldn't be doing." I had my Bible. I'm on my way to preach. I believe that we prayed and God directed us. We're going to Australia to preach in some conferences, to preach in some churches. We're God's servants doing God's will; no one can harm us. "You may kill me, but I'm going to heaven if you do." Knowing that you're in the will of God takes away all of your fears.

So right now, if you're living a secret life, if you're practicing sin and trying to cover it, your conscience is bothering you, you're not going to be able to handle opposition or persecution or trouble. You're going to be persecuted for evil doing, not righteousness. And you don't have that assurance that you're in the will of God. The safest place to live your life is in the will of God. And no matter what storms come your way, you can rest assured.

You know, by the way, when the storm's waves were breaking over the boat and the disciples were freaking out and Jesus was sleeping, you see His humanity. And when they woke Jesus up and He calmed the storm, you see His deity. He's the God-Man. And even the disciples were so blown away, they go, "What manner of man is this that even the wind and sea obey Him?!"

Now let me summarize what we have covered this morning. When you suffer for Christ's sake, keep following that which is good. Secondly, remember that you are blessed, highly favored. Happy are you. Thirdly, surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Fourthly, "Be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks the reason of the hope that lies in you with respect and gentleness." And fifthly, keep your heart and your mind and your conscience clean. Don't let it become defiled. And then lastly and sixthly, rest in God's loving purpose and God's plan; knowing that you are His child, knowing that you are doing His will, knowing that you are walking for what is good—you're zealous for that which is good—Jesus is Lord of your life. Your conscience is clear. You'll be able to weather the storms. And in the context of these verses, you'll shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. Amen?