

Responding to Persecution: Plan Your Response

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Our Identity in Christ

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Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter 3, 1 Peter 3:8 to 12. We've been singing about joy this morning, and one of the songs Ted introduced earlier was speaking about the paradigm shift that happens when you come to Jesus; as you see things differently than you saw them before, you're able to see what is really real, eternal. I mean, Paul says we now look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are unseen. That's what faith does. Faith looks at the things that are unseen. The things that are unseen are eternal. And we find joy in the unseen, the reality of what really is going to last forever. And the only thing that is eternal are the souls of men and the word of God and so we rejoice in those things that give life eternally and we have a very different way of viewing reality than those around us. And so I say that because one of the things that we're going to see in this passage we began looking at last week, which really introduces to us the topic of persecution and dealing with persecution, which at first glance is not a happy topic, but when seen rightly really is. When seen through the lens of Scripture and through the eyes that God gives us by the Spirit and through his word, we see that in reality even persecution is an opportunity to have great joy. I mean, in fact, Jesus, he culminates his Beatitudes, if you remember, Matthew 5:3 to 12, the blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, etc. Blessed, blessed, blessed. Oh, how happy, you could translate that word, blessed are the poor in spirit. Oh, how happy are the poor in spirit. The paradox is seen there. Those who have nothing are actually filled with joy because to have nothing is to possess everything, to have nothing is to see that you have nothing before God spiritually is to come then to being ready to receive the fullness that is in Christ. Oh how happy are, and he ends that string of of blessed are the poor in spirit with blessed are you when men persecute you and say all sorts of evil against you. Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven. And there's a sense in which Peter's calling us to the same larger logic in his letter.

We've noted he's writing to people in the first century to the church who is in a time of very great difficulty, a time of darkness and opposition, and as we look at this passage, we can look around us and see that we are living in increasingly dark days morally, spiritually, and in that way, our circumstances are decidedly like the first century believers to whom Peter writes. They were in a pre-Christian era. I talked about this some last time. We are coming to see that we are in a post-Christian era in the United States as believers. The worldview of the people around us is decidedly post-Christian. They no

longer have the same basic thought forms about life and the purpose of life. And so we can be discouraged by that because we see the outworking of that in so many disconcerting and distressing ways.

Interesting quotation or quote that someone said some years ago, bankruptcy speaking of economic catastrophe, bankruptcy comes very slowly over time and then all at once suddenly, that is, to come into bankruptcy you make decisions over time slowly that puts you in a position of precarious financial instability and then suddenly it comes to fruition and there's no going back. How true that is of spiritual bankruptcy as well. I think we've seen that lived out in our country, in our culture. A spiritual bankruptcy has been coming along very slowly over time, the last generations, as fundamental biblical principles were being rejected and now suddenly it's coming on us all at once. So the darkness has gotten very dark very quickly in these recent decades, particularly in the last decade; the dissent has become profound.

So we look at that, we can be discouraged. I mean, there are reasons to be sad and there are reasons to grieve, but we should not be discouraged because we serve a Savior who is King of kings and Lord of lords and who is reigning over even, even the onset of evil. He's reigning over it and intending it for his greater glory and our greater good and so, as darkness descends, this is an opportune moment, a great moment of opportunity to let our lights shine in such a way that people see the glory of God in our lives. And in reality, it's an opportunity to experience great joy. As Jesus told those people who were listening to him on the mountain when he preached the Sermon on the Mount, "Rejoice and be glad when men say evil against you and speak all kinds of evil against you on account of Me. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad." We have reason to be glad. We're going to see that in this passage because Peter's going to basically say that the opportunity that persecution brings is an opportunity to greater union with Christ and the greatest degree of blessing that we can experience in this life. It's a doorway into greater blessing. That's what he's going to get to. That's the larger movement in the passage, 3:8 to 12. We're going to really see that clearly next Sunday, Lord willing, as we unpack all of this passage has to say.

We began looking at this last Sunday and we saw this passage, 3:8 to 12, basically, there's three main points in the passage that serve as our themes for each week. Last week, the theme that flows out of this passage is, and the bigger question is, how do you deal with persecution? That's the big question. How do you deal with persecution? And so the first thing he says in verse 8, we're going to see as we read in a moment, is prepare your heart. Prepare your heart for persecution. There are five essential attitudes he reminds us that we need in verse 8. We need to recalibrate our mind we saw because the heart makes the mind and the emotions and the will make up the heart and so he deals with both in those five attitudes that we looked at last Sunday. Prepare your heart, recalibrate your mind, cultivate your emotions. So prepare your heart. That's the first big step, verse 8. Then verse 9, the theme of today's message is plan your response. Plan your response. And then next time we're going to see pursue God's blessing. That's next Sunday. So plan your response, that's the theme today. We don't just prepare our hearts but we plan our response.

Now I want to remind you, I didn't really have time to finish one point last week and I want to quickly, before we jump into responding to persecution, planning your response, I want to say a word about the cultivating of the emotions again. We saw that those five emotions, well, let me read the text, we'll pray, and then we'll jump into that. 1 Peter 3:8.

8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. 10 For, "THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. 11 HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT. 12 FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL."

Let's pray together.

Father, we come to You this morning to worship and adore You because You are worthy of all our worship, all of our affection. We should love You with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind, with all of our strength at all times. We come acknowledging that we fall so far short of the glory of God. We ask that by Your Spirit You might send forth Your word that it might lead us to Your holy hill, that it might cause us to see areas that we need to repent more deeply and areas that we need to trust more fully in our great Savior. So be glorified in Your people. Lord, make us joyful in Your presence through Your word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So today the title of the message really is "Responding to Persecution" and the theme, of course, is "Plan Your Response." Plan your response. In fact, the title really for all three of these messages would be responding to persecution last week, prepare your heart. This week responding to persecution, plan your response. Next week responding to persecution, pursue God's blessing. So today responding to persecution, plan your response.

Now I said for us to really see this, I want to make sure we wrap up a little bit of what we said last week that you prepare your heart by setting your mind. We saw that the emphasis on the first and the fifth of those attitudes in verse 8. Harmonious and humble in spirit both speak about the mind, setting the mind. And so we saw that there's something of a chiasmic structure here, a chiasm A, B, C, B, A in those five words. The first matches the fifth in that it deals with the mind. The second matches the fourth and it deals with the idea of sympathy and compassion. Sympathetic kindhearted really speaks of a word of deep compassion. So cultivate, the idea was have a right mind, a mind of lowliness so that when you deal with other people who are going to mistreat you, you already think rightly about yourself. And it's not so much about what they're saying to me

because I'm just a slave of Jesus Christ anyway. So I'm not quickly offended because I don't think too highly of myself. That's what we're called to do. And then we're to cultivate genuine sympathy and compassion to suffer with and to be concerned about the suffering of unbelievers around us. We're to reflect on it, we're to pray about it, we're to pray for them, we're to listen to them, to seek to understand what they're dealing with.

I didn't have enough time to talk about that middle point, the third, brotherly, the idea of brotherly affection. Literally the word philadelphia, love of the brothers or friendship of brothers. Here he's saying we're to cultivate a genuine affection for lost people. We're to cultivate affection for them. We're to care about them. We're to be like God in this way. God loves his enemies, and so, as we see in Matthew 5, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. He causes it to rain on the just and the unjust, so love your enemies, he says, just like your Father does. And here, the same idea, be affectionate for them, care about them, show them you're a friend. That's the attitudinal stuff that has to happen before the persecution comes; it needs to be there consistently through the persecution even. When you prepare your heart like that, now you're ready.

So now that said, now we're getting into today's message, plan your response. Plan your response, that's the theme of this morning. We want to see really to look at what he says in verse 9, "not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing." So there's three points this morning to talk about our response and the idea is determine ahead of time what your response is going to be when you're persecuted. Plan what you're going to do. That's what he's telling his readers. And the first point this morning is stop returning evil for evil or insult for insult. Just the words of the text, not returning evil for evil or insult for insult but I'm calling that stop returning evil for evil, and the reason I translate it that way, stop returning for evil for evil, is you have here in the Greek two participles that are parallel, and the NASB translates them as participles. You can see that in the way it's translated in the NASB. You miss it in the other translations, but not returning evil for evil. Participle and verb form, you usually recognize with the ing on the end, not returning. The others say, do not repay. It's not really an imperative. It's the idea, clearly it has imperatible force, but strictly speaking, it's not a main verb, imperative. It's not returning. And the idea, not returning evil for evil, and in parallel to that, but giving a blessing but both of those participles are in the Greek present tense. The present tense in Greek, tense in Greek, the language in which the New Testament is written, is more about the kind of action, the kind of action than the time of action. English tense is more about time. We have past, present, future, and that's why we have past time, present time, future time. Greek has that element in it, but it emphasizes not the time as much as the kind and a present tense verb in Greek emphasizes continuous ongoing action. That's the emphasis of both of these verbs, not returning evil for evil, that is, don't go on returning evil for evil is the idea. It's not just, you know, don't return it once. That's the aorist tense, it would use the aorist, the Greek aorist. But he didn't use that, he used the present tense. Don't go on returning evil for evil or insult for insult. The idea is you're being assaulted verbally, you're being mistreated, you're being maligned, it's an ongoing thing, and the idea is as it's happening, don't go on returning evil for evil. And when the Greek present is used

with this negative, a lot of times the idea is stop what you are already doing and that's how I'm encouraging you to think about it. Stop returning evil for evil or insult for insult.

You may not have verbally done that, but you probably in your heart are dealing with that, right? When somebody insults you and attacks you, what's the thing that comes up in your heart? There's a sense in which we're wired in such a way, even from the good part of how God wired us, put his law in our hearts, there's a sense in which we understand that an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, justice is right. So you punch me, you know, in the mouth, I punch you in the mouth. I mean, I'm talking about metaphorically. You say something harsh to me, the natural response of the human heart is to respond in kind and he's saying, don't do that. Stop doing that. Don't go on responding in kind to this mistreatment. That's part of the human wiring, but it's also sin just takes that to the nth level. Please stop that, put this off.

Now the verb translated returning evil for evil in the NASB, I mentioned in other translations say repay, do not repay or render, the King James, it has the idea of giving back. Something's been given to you and you give back. So what'd they give to you? They gave to you an insult. What do you give back? Stop giving insults back. They give evil. Stop giving evil back. The word evil here, it's important for us to understand the way the Bible uses that concept. Evil is the antithesis to good. Good is what God has done, what God has made; in its proper state, estate, it is good, everything about what God does. Evil is harm to what God has made good. Evil is hurt. It hurts. It harms. It destroys. It tears down. It's the opposite of that which builds up and makes good. And so he's saying, you're having people speak to you in such a way that they're tearing you down, they're seeking to hurt you, to harm you, to destroy you. Yes, that's what's happening.

Now, a lot of times people don't realize what they're doing. Just like Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." They're being used by Satan. Yeah, there's willing complicitness that they're going to answer for, yes, yes, yes. But even beyond what they're able to even understand, Satan is the one, because he's the god of this age who's blinded their eyes, and he's motivating them to do his work. What is his work? To steal, to kill, and destroy. He's a murderer, so he uses his minions, those who belong to him, to do his dirty work. So they do evil. They seek to harm, to hurt, to tear down, to destroy. He's saying, you and I are not to respond in kind. We're not to harm. We're not to hurt. We're not to tear down. We're to do the opposite. We're to bless.

The word insult speaks of harsh, abusive speech. This noun that's translated in verse 9, insult for insult in the ESV. ESV gets it better when it says reviling, or reviling for reviling. It's the same word that we saw in 1 Peter 2:23, speaking of Jesus, while being reviled, he did not revile in return. That's the verb form of this same noun here in verse 9 of chapter 3. 2:23, Jesus, when he was reviled, did not revile. And so he says to us, don't return reviling for reviling. Don't repay reviling with reviling. When someone gives you a reviling, abusive, harsh mistreatment, do not give that back to them.

It's an important thing because, I mean, there's a sense, like I said, the sense of justice, and you know, you read in the Old Testament, you read things like the imprecatory

Psalms, those are Psalms where the psalmist calls down judgment from God upon people, and basically, our posture in the New Testament era is to not do that. Now, there's a balance, and we're going to talk about that. There's a place of knowing that God's wrath is good and glorious and right. And when you actually pray, as the last words of the New Testament tell you to, "Even so, come Lord Jesus," what are you doing? You're praying for Christ to come, and when he comes, he's going to come in wrath upon all the wicked. So there's this balance. where you know, but you leave room for the wrath of God, "Vengeance is Mine, I'll repay says the Lord." For us, we're not to repay evil for evil. We'll leave that to God. That's what Peter's saying. We don't return for them what we think they deserve. Instead we bless.

This idea of being persecuted is such a clear thing in the Scriptures in general, but in 1 Peter in particular. Look with me, just quickly, I want to show you this. Chapter 2, verse 12. Key verse that starts this whole section that Peter is summing up. Remember he said in 3, verse 8, "To sum up." He's summing up basically all he said between 2:12 and 3:7. That section is being summed up right now. When 2:12 he said, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation." He's saying, "Listen, they're going to be slandering you as evildoers. That's what's going to happen." Verse 15 of chapter 2, "For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men." They're saying foolish things about you because they're foolish. And in chapter 3, the idea of not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, in verse 9, look at verse 14, "But even if you should suffer for the sake," this is 3:14, "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation and do not be troubled." They want to intimidate you, he's saying. Look at verse 16, 3:16, "keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame." It's the normal course of life for the Christian to be reviled for his good behavior. In fact, it goes on, chapter 4, verse 4, "In all this, they are surprised," this is the unbelievers again, "they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they," what? "They malign you." Because you don't run into the same wickedness that you used to before you came to Christ, they now malign you. Verse 13 of chapter 4, "to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation." Verse 14, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed." This is part and parcel of the Christian life. That's what he's saying. This is why Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:12, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Jesus said the same thing, John 15:18 to 21, chapter 16:1-4. Basically, you are light in the midst of darkness and men hate light.

So to the degree that you live a godly life, your good behavior, your good conduct, they're going to initially reject you. So don't be surprised but have determined in your mind you're not going to return to them the same thing they gave to you. They give to you evil, that is they harm, they hurt, they destroy, you're to give back to them goodness. In fact, second point, stop returning evil for evil or insult for insult was the first point. Second point, start blessing those who mistreat you. Stop returning evil for evil and number two, start blessing those who mistreat you. Again, it's a present tense Greek verb,

it means to go on, start and continue blessing those who mistreat you. Bless them and keep on blessing them. That's the idea.

The word bless, the word eulogeo is the verb here. We transliterate eulogeo into the word eulogy in English. It's transliteration, letter for letter rendering. E-U-L-O-G-Y. But if you put an E-O on the end, that's eulogeo. Eu means good or well. Legeo means to speak, a word, logos word. So it's a good word. A eulogy is a good word. Something said at a funeral generally is the way you use the word, right? You're doing the eulogy. That means you're going to speak some good words about the person who passed away.

He's saying that we're to use, we're to speak good words, we're to bring goodness in our words. Again, understanding a word like this, the way it's used is always good to understand the Old Testament background for the word blessing. It's not just the Greek meaning because the New Testament authors are Jews and they think in terms of the Old Testament, they think in terms of the way the words were used in the Old Testament. And the word barak is the Hebrew word to bless. He's saying instead of speaking evil or insult, speaking things that hurt and tear down, speak blessing, and the first time you find the word bless in the Old Testament, it's Genesis 1:22, 1:28, and you know who's speaking? God. And he is blessing. God speaks, and the first thing God does when he speaks is he blesses. For God to speak is to bless. He says to the man and woman he's created, "Blessed are you, be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." God's blessing makes someone what they were created to be. It imparts goodness. It endows, the word itself endows, that is, gives goodness. His words actually, now this is true of God, not true of us like it is of him, but we're in his image and we're supposed to be like him, but his word, when he speaks a blessing, the blessing itself, the word actually accomplishes the giving of the goodness. I mean, his words isn't, God doesn't say something like, "I hope you have a good day." I mean, he may say that, but if he says, "I hope you have a good day," you know what, you're going to have a good day. I can say, "I hope you have a good day," you may have a terrible day. You're like, "Huh, that's the worst day I've had in years. Thank you." No, I had nothing to do with it because I can't give through my words goodness or ultimately that kind of evil either. I can do harm, I can allow my words to tear down, but not the way that God's words have power. If God says you're going to have a bad day, you're going to have a bad day. His word accomplishes what he says.

And so the word bless, when God blesses, his word accomplishes the giving, the endowing of goodness. He makes it happen. Now then he says to you and me who are made in his image, bless. When they curse, when they revile, when they do evil, you and I are to bless. We're to start blessing those who mistreat us and to continue blessing them and what we're going to say that the biggest thing you can do to bless someone else is to speak to, listen to this, to bless them, there's two sub points under this second point. Start blessing those who mistreat you and the first sub point, 2A, speak to God about them. Best way you can bless someone is to speak to God about them. They revile you, what do you do? You pray for them. Immediately. You go to God and say, "God, have mercy on them. Open their eyes. Bless this person." May they be like the Apostle Paul, who was a persecutor of the church and became the greatest apostle, giving us half of the New

Testament. I mean, think about that. That's amazing. Isn't that amazing? I mean, if you were voting, if we were there in Acts 1, they voted Matthias in as the next apostle. I really think they jumped the gun. This is different, guys have different opinions. Myself, I think they jumped the gun. Paul was the 12th apostle. God was going to bring him along when he wanted to. But that's not the big point. If we were there, and someone had said, let's take another vote, who's going to make the biggest difference in giving us the New Testament, the word of God, who would have been the one everybody voted for? The author of our book, Peter, I think. Peter's going to be the one and he does give us two books, plus the gospel of Mark's really his book too, so he did a good job. But the Apostle Paul gives us 13 books, some people think 14 because they think Hebrews was written by Paul. I don't. But 13 is good enough, 13 out of 27. And he was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and God showed mercy to him so that he could say, Paul says, "He showed mercy to me so that you could know that the chief of sinners, if God can do this in me, He can do it in anybody." So pray for that person who's persecuting you, who's mistreating you, who's misunderstanding you, misrepresenting you, and maligning you. Pray for them. Speak to God about them.

I mentioned Matthew 5, let's turn there for a minute and see these words that Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount. Before we look at verse, we're going to look at 43, but I want you to look back at verse 10. Like I said, this is the conclusion of the Beatitudes, the first section in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Look at verse 10, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted," 5:10, Matthew 5:10, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." It's interesting, the persecution gets the double blessing. He says "Blessed are" twice about those who are persecuted and then rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great.

Now, skip on down to verse 43. This is where Jesus is interpreting the law and showing us the true heart of the law, what God always really ultimately intended to do through his people. Verse 43, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and," what? "Pray for those who persecute you." What are you to do when somebody persecutes you? Speak to God about them in the moment. Pray for them. That's the best way you can bless them because God is the one who blesses. Pray for them.

Look what he says after that, pray for those who persecute you, verse 44, "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Be like your daddy. Be like your Father.

Verse 46, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" These tax collectors he's using as a term to describe just the normal, run-of-the-mill sinner, even the ones that are a little more aggravated. These are greedy people. They love those who love them, he says.

Verse 47, "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." He says, we need to be people who love those who hate us. We need to be people who greet those who don't greet us, that we speak blessing.

In fact, on the way back to our text, let's go by Romans 12 and see how the Apostle Paul makes these same points powerfully in his letter to the Romans. It's a practical section of the book of Romans. The first 11 chapters, Paul organizes this letter, it's all theology and doctrine, the glory of the salvation that's been accomplished in Jesus, Romans 1 to 11. And in 12 to 16, he says now how do you live this out? It's ethics, it's your life now. And in chapter 12, right at the very beginning of this discussion, what's practical, he deals with the fact you're going to encounter opposition. Look what he says in verse 14, Romans 12:14, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." Saying the same thing Peter's saying.

Skip on down to verse 17, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Verse 19, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. But if your enemy's hungry, feed him, and if he's thirsty, give him a drink, for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Start blessing those who mistreat you.

You speak to God about them, you pray, and then how do you bless them? Second point, this is number 2B, start blessing those who persecute you. A was speak to God about them. B, speak to them about God. First thing you do is speak to God about them. That's the first thing you need to do when you find yourself being mistreated and persecuted is pray for grace and pray for them. And now look for an opportunity to speak to them about God because the best thing that you can do, how can you bless someone? Tell them about God. You can't give them anything except what you have received and what have you received? A knowledge of the true and living God. Speak to them about God.

Now what does this look like? You know, someone mistreats you, makes fun of you, maligns you, pray for them. And rather than, when you have the opportunity to retaliate, the first thing you're doing is praying silently. You know, be one thing to pray out loud, "Lord, have mercy on this wicked sinner who is persecuting me right now." Pray that silently. So you send up a prayer to the Lord, you ask him for grace, "Help me be like You, help me be like Jesus, and then now, how can I speak a word of blessing to this person?" You know, they say something that makes fun of you, and you know, we want to say something, a gentle, kind answer in the face of wrath. We respond like the Proverbs tells us to, a gentle answer turns away wrath, but we look for a way to somehow to point to the blessedness of God and the wonder of knowing God. We may say something like, "I want you to know, you know, I know that what you said, but I want you to, I really want you to experience the blessing of God in your life. I just, I want you to experience and know His love and the joy of walking in His will. I live the way I live

and it may seem strange to you, but it's wonderful to be in the will of God and I want you to know that joy." Something like that. I think it'll silence most people. They'd be so thrown back because they're used to living in a world where, you know, when you curse someone, what do you get back? You get a curse. I mean, they're used to living in the world of road rage. I was driving the other day down here, about to turn back toward the church, and there was this lady driving, and this man kinda cut her off, and she was going into road rage. I was like, "Oh my," praying for this, and I'm thinking, it just seems so weird. She was an older lady, my age at least, and I'm like, "Wow. Somebody's grandma is about to run this guy down." That's the world we live in.

And so if you and I just pray for them, talk to God about them, and then in some way try to speak to them about God, and they may scorn it all the more but a lot of times we'll see, it definitely will, by bringing God into the picture, the reminder of the Lord often will arrest the tongue of that person. Or if not them, you may have embarrassed them even by your being kind, and they may double down, they may come after you, but somebody that's watching is seeing God at work. And later, sometimes I think those people who are the, well it's actually true, those who are the most intensely opposed to the things of God are often almost ripe to bring into the kingdom. It's those who are indifferent and unmoved by the things of God that are the farthest away. Sometimes we think they're the most pleasant but it's those people that are really intensely against us.

You know, we've been dealing with the subject of peacemaking on Wednesday evenings. It's really helpful for me to work through that myself using Ken Sandy's book, "The Peacemaker," excellent book. And one of the things that he talks about is some practical strategies for how to talk with people and he deals with a situation, one that comes to mind that we talked about was a woman who's being made fun of by another man, a teacher in a school, being made fun of in the teacher's lounge by this other teacher, you know, just kind of humiliating her, making fun of her, and then she prepares and goes and talks to him and basically deals directly with him and says, "You know, you've been saying some very unkind things about me and it's been hurtful, I want you to know." Now this guy was actually a professing Christianity but he wasn't acting like one in the story that Sandy's relating, but what she does is say, "Listen, you know, I don't think you realize how this is hurting others around you and even hurting your relationships with others because people have seen your sarcasm and people want to avoid you and I don't think you want that kind of reputation. So I want to talk with you about that." You see, I want you to have the blessing of God in your life. You're coming as a friend. You're wondering, what is it that's going on in this person's life that's making them strike out against me? What kind of bondage is there in their life? And so the compassion and all those things that we prepare our hearts for, now we try to speak out of that heart. We speak words from a heart that's prepared blessing. Now, even when your heart's not prepared and you feel like it, you still speak blessing. But oh, how powerful it is when you prepare the heart like we talked about last week.

Speak to God about them and speak to them about God, blessing them continually. So stop returning evil for evil was our first point. Start blessing those who mistreat you. And the third point is remember your calling. Remember your calling. This is a key point that

really frames the rest of what Peter says in our section from verse 9 to verse 12. He goes into an extended quotation from Psalm 34. Verses 10 to 12 here in 1 Peter 3, you may, in your Bible, will have some kind of way of changing the font so that you see that's a quotation from the Old Testament and I want to talk about Psalm 34 next Sunday because it's important for us to understand why Peter chose this passage to put here. But verses 10 to 12, he's going to really unpack for us the fullness of our calling, but I want to focus on one aspect of that calling that I think he's also getting at today that helps us in this responding to persecution.

Plan your response, stop returning evil for evil, start blessing those who persecute you, and remember your calling. When he says in verse 9, "for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing," I think he's intentionally alluding to something he said just a few verses back. He says, "You were called, for you were called. You were called unto this," literally, in the Greek. It's exactly the same wording. Look back at chapter 2, verse 21. I'm reading the New American Standard, it says, "For you have been called for this purpose." That's exactly the same wording as "you were called for the purpose." Now it has "very purpose" because in 3:9, there's a little more emphatic language about it, but there's still the resonance, the strong resonance, calling and the purpose of your calling. He says you need to think about that when you're being persecuted, think about your calling and the purpose of your calling. And he had said the same thing in chapter 2, verse 21, "for you are called for this purpose." Think about your calling and the purpose of your calling.

Now I mentioned earlier that chapter 3, verse 8, begins with "To sum up." To sum up. The end of all this. He's summing up everything he's been talking about since chapter 2, verse 12. He's been saying, "Listen, people are going to slander you, they're going to slander your good behavior, and how are you to respond in that?" And he's dealt with three different major sections in which we live in which we will be slandered. The first is government. In your relations with the governing authorities, that is, the governor, the president, even the police officer, you're going to find that you're going to be on the wrong side of things from them, how do you live in that? That's verses 13 to 17. Then he goes to verses 18, this is chapter 2:13 to 17 I'm talking about. So because I'm trying to show you 2:12 to 3:7 is one section that's being summed up in 3:8, okay? And he's basically saying, "Listen, they're going to be slandering your good behavior but you're to keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles so that the things they slander you as evildoers, they will come to see that you are actually glorifying God. They'll come to see that you're living life as it's supposed to be lived." That's the whole point and it's going to happen in government, it's going to happen in the workplace, 2:18 to 20. "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable," that is, twisted.

So deal with it, you're going to deal with it in the workplace, you're going to deal with it out there with interacting with the governing authorities, they're going to malign you, they're going to mistreat you, they're going to misrepresent you. You're going to deal with it in the workplace. Your boss sometimes is going to do it, coworkers are going to do it. They're going to misunderstand, mistreat you, misrepresent you. And then it's going to

happen even in the family, 3:1-7. Wives and husbands in the family relationships, you're going to be misunderstood, misrepresented, mistreated. So how do you do it? How do you deal with that? Giving practical instruction, all those passages, but in the very centerpiece of that section is 2:21 to 25. The centerpiece of the whole section is what he says about Christ in 2:21 to 25. For you have been called for this very purpose, that is suffering unjustly. You've been called for this very purpose. Your calling is to suffer unjustly. That seems like bad news at first, but it's not. It's actually the path to great joy, to great glory to your Savior and great joy in fellowship with him. It's the greatest joy. Doesn't seem like it, but that's just because you and I, we don't think right. We need a paradigm shift, and Peter's trying to give us that.

But he says, "Listen, if you're going to bear up with government mistreating you, with people at work mistreating you, with people in your own family mistreating you, you must keep your eyes on Jesus." That's what he's saying, "for you have been called for this purpose since Christ also suffered," this is chapter 2, verse 21, "since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." Your calling, you were called for this purpose. When we looked at that, that's such powerful language he uses in 2:21. He says you were called to follow Christ and it's amazing, he layers term upon term here. Basically, Christ is your example. That's the first key word there, 2:21, "leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." Example, I mentioned then, I'll remind you, this word was used to speak of children learning to write their Greek alphabet. They're learning their alpha, beta, gammas, their ABCs. They don't really have a C. So ABGs, alpha, beta, gamma. They're learning to write it, how do they do it? Well, they have the letter written above and then they're to copy the letter, just like that. "Little Johnny, Susie, you write exactly what is here, you write here. What's here, you write here. What's here, you write here. What's here, you write here." You're looking at it and you're trying to copy the pattern to the finest detail. That's what the word example means. But then he layers on top of that, you're to follow, and it's actually an intensified word, a form of the word follow. It means follow hard upon. There's a preposition added to the normal word follow here, and it means to follow upon, follow close after.

So you're to copy what you see, and you're to follow close after that, and then he adds on, that would have been enough, follow hard his example, but he says "in his steps," literally in his footprints. Follow after him and place your foot exactly where he placed his foot and exactly where he placed his next step and follow him like that. Think about the mindset of that kind of intensity. The closest thing I can think of like that is if you've seen war movies or something where they're trying to walk through a minefield, and you see them stepping, and the person behind them, when this guy doesn't get blown up right here, the person behind him thinks that spot's safe, and they step right where he stepped before, and right where he stepped. That's how we're to follow Jesus. We're to step exactly as he stepped. He's our pattern, he's our example. Look at Jesus, and in this passage, verse 22, this is the example he gave us, "who committed no sin nor was any deceit in his mouth." You and I have committed sin, deceit is in our mouth. When people slander us, there's a lot of truth in what they have to say, isn't there? When they slandered Jesus, there was zero truth. Only good, perfectly good, beautiful character.

So there was "no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth and while being reviled, He did not revile in return, while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." If Jesus was slandered like that, he says, Peter says, "Do exactly like Jesus did. When you're being slandered, when you're being misunderstood, misrepresented, keep entrusting yourself to God who judges righteously. Don't return evil for evil or insult for insult. Be like Christ, follow hard after Jesus." And implicit in this whole thing, he goes on in verse 24, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, for by His wounds you were healed." It's not just following his example, it is follow his example, but it's not just follow his example, it is lean on his provision. He bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, that is, realize that your strength to step and to follow and to be like Jesus and to not revile in return is in your union with Jesus in his death and resurrection. "Christ, You are my strength. You are the ability I have now to not revile in return. Be in me. Love this person through me. Give me a soft answer. Give me a kind word. Help me pray like You prayed, 'Lord, have mercy on them. They don't know what they're doing. Father, have mercy on them. They don't know what they're doing.' Live that in me. Now help me speak a word of blessing and may I be as inviting as You were." And in union with Christ, you can do exactly what Jesus did because he will by his Holy Spirit enable you to. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God. I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Jesus lives out his life in you as you cling to him by faith and we start blessing people, not returning evil for evil, but blessing them, talking to God about them and talking to them about God, remembering our calling, being like Jesus, trusting in Jesus, and in those moments, the glory of God starts showing through because they're seeing something that is otherworldly. They're seeing something they can't explain. For you to genuinely love someone who hates you, that is supernatural power. That is Jesus. And the people, like I said, it may not be the person who's persecuting you that's being impacted, it's the person over here who's watching this happen. They look at that venom coming from one side, and they see love coming back. Venom comes again, love comes back. Venom comes again, love comes back, and they say, "Surely God is among us." God is real. They see Jesus. They say, "I want what that person has." There's hope.

The light shines brightest in the darkest nights. You get out away from the ground light of Atlanta, you get way out in the countryside, isn't it amazing how you can see the stars so much clearer. Man, the world gets darker and darker, and when people are doing this, the darkness is intensifying, and if you and I cling to Jesus in the moment, realize this is an opportunity for his glory, and what we're going to see next time is it's the pathway to such great joy. It's not just in seeing him work in other people's lives, and that is a part of the joy. It's in the communion that we're going to experience with him, which is what Peter is really going to lead us to see, Lord, really, next Sunday.

Responding to persecution, plan your response ahead of time. "I know what I'm going to do when somebody mistreats me. I'm not going to return evil for evil or insult for insult,

I'm going to bless them. I'm going to talk to God about them, and I'm going to talk to them about God, and I'm going to remember my calling is to follow Jesus and cling to Jesus." May the Lord help us be faithful.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank You for Your word, we thank You for the high calling You've given us in Jesus and the great resources that You've given us. Thank You that what You call us to do, You equip us to do. You have given us more than we need in Christ Jesus to deal with every temptation we will ever encounter. My God will supply all of your needs according to His riches and glory. We have everything we need. Lord, give us more faith to trust in Your promises. Help us be people who when difficulty comes, we're not cowed or discouraged, but we run to Jesus and we find in Him strength, encouragement, joy, and love. And may the world see the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ shining in His people. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.