

Faith That Overcomes Part 3

Our Identity in Christ

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 3. 1 Peter chapter 3, looking again at verses 17 to 22. I'm sorry, verses 13 to 17 but the larger section is verse 13 to 22. We'll be continuing our exposition of verses 13 to 17 this morning. The title of the message is the same as it was the last two Sundays, "A Faith that Overcomes." A faith that overcomes. Actually, in chapter 3 verse 8, all the way through chapter 4 verse 19, the main concern of the Apostle Peter is to prepare Christians for persecution. These 34 verses are all about bearing up in the face of persecution. He sees it's going to be a real threat for the Christians to whom he writes. He knows they're already experiencing it. We've noted that he writes this letter in around 63 AD, a massive persecution breaks out from Rome, emanating out through the Roman empire in 64 AD. In the providence of God, God gave his people this letter about a year before that persecution breaks out. It's not that they had already, they had already were experiencing persecution. They knew what it was, but it intensified and so this letter was a gift of God to help them. This particular passage, verses 13 to 17, particularly help us in preparing ourselves for the encounter and to not only not be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil by good. That's why we're calling it a faith that overcomes, that we can, instead of being overcome by fear, discouraged, we can actually advance the gospel when we act in accordance with the scriptures.

So let's read 1 Peter 3 verses 13 to 17 together.

13 Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? 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, 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and 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. 17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we come to You this morning to praise and honor You. You are the King of kings and Lord of lords. We come acknowledging that we belong to You. Lord, all who have been created belong to You, but those who have been redeemed belong to You doubly so, twice as it were, because You not only created us and owned us, You redeemed us. So we come asking that You might work in our hearts through Your word to make us faithful, to strengthen us for the difficulties that we may encounter, and to prepare us, Lord, to shine brightly in the midst of a dark world. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

A faith that overcomes. As we've looked at this passage, we've already seen a couple of things in the previous two Sundays and I think kind of a broad outline has come clear to me as we work through this, that if we're going to overcome in the face of persecution, what Peter begins to tell them in verse 13 is, we need to set our mind right. When he starts off who is there to harm you, raising that rhetorical question, if you prove zealous for what is good, what harm can come to you, in reality you are blessed. He says, we need to know this, that no ultimate harm can come to us. He says, in a sense, understand this. It feels like harm is coming, but no harm can come to you in Christ. If you are in Christ, you are only blessed; even what Satan means for evil, God will turn around to result in your good.

So he says, set your mind, that's the first part, focus really verse 13 and 14a, and then last Sunday, we looked at the second element where he turns from the thinking to really the feelings and in a sense, you could say that was fix your heart. Verse 14B and 15A, last part of verse 14 and verse 15 is what we looked at last Sunday, where he said how do you fix your heart? You look at your heart attitudes, you avoid fear, that is, you resist the temptation to fear what they fear, and you replace the worldly fear with the fear of Christ. And that's how you fix your heart. So you set your mind, you know that you're blessed, you fix your heart, you're determined not to fear what they fear, but to fear Jesus, to see him. And then we come in verse 15b through verse 17, the focus this morning, to now saying, prepare your message. There's a sense in which when you come in the face of persecution, you need to set your mind, know that you are blessed, you need to fix your heart, don't fear what they fear, fear Jesus, Jesus is here, and you need to prepare your message. That's the focus of what we're going to see from the middle of verse 15 through verse 17.

I want you to note, first of all, he talks about always being ready to make a defense. It's the idea of readiness, prepare. In fact, this word, being ready, actually the adjective by itself in the sentence, in an emphatic position, it speaks of extensive preparation, the kind of preparations that go into preparing a banquet. You know, a wonderful banquet is thrown and all kinds of preparations go into making sure that every detail is right, the seating arrangements, the decorations on the tables, and certainly the quality of the food. And so prepare, prepare like that. Word is also used in other contexts to speak of preparing lodging for someone. Jesus uses this word in, or the verb form of this adjective here in John 14:2, when he says, "I go to prepare a place for you. I'm going to go do extensive preparations so that everything is right when you come to where I am." And so

this idea of being ready and prepared, it's a word which speaks of thorough preparation. And so we're to prepare to speak. You know, we get our mind right, we get our heart right. We set our mind, we fix our heart, and now we're really prepared. We watch our mouth. What are we going to say? We prepare our message.

The idea of conversation and this dialogue is really obvious in the text. It's an emphasis of the text. Just look at the emphasis with me. Verse 15, "make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account." The word translated, I'm reading the New American Standard, "make a defense" is the word apologia. We get our word apology from that, though apology does not mean what this word meant. Apology has come to mean in our setting to say, I'm sorry. But this actually, the original meaning, an apologia, apo means "from," logia, "a word," a word from someone. It's a word of defense, a plea, a defense, an argument in defense of oneself. So be ready to offer a defense and logia, it's the spoken word. It's about you've got to be ready to speak. Prepare your message, prepare to speak. And this emphasis on spoken word is so clear in the passage. You be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you. They're asking you, Greek present tense. They're going on asking you to give an account. Other translations say "reason," but the word translated "account" is also the word logos. It's a spoken word. You're giving an account. You're giving a spoken answer.

So the emphasis on the spoken word and the conversation. So we're to respond in the moment of persecution. Be ready to speak. We don't necessarily start speaking, but we're ready when the time comes, the moment is right to offer a defense, a ready defense. That's the idea and what we want to look at today. And he's saying, prepare your message. That's interesting. There's a sense of tension between two things, emphasis in the Scriptures is often the case; one passage of Scripture will tell you one thing and another passage tells you something that at first glance seems to be contradictory, but in reality it's just creating a tension and balance. Here you're told to prepare for persecution, prepare what you're going to say, but in Matthew chapter 10 verse 19 and Mark 13:13, Jesus tells the disciples when they find themselves being persecuted, they're not to worry about what they're to say in that moment. Do you remember that? Don't give a thought to what you're going to say for the Holy Spirit will give you the words in the moment. And so both realities are true. God will give you a word to say in the moment. So he's not really saying you've got to think about every single thing you're going to say, he's telling us here, just be prepared with the big picture in your mind firmly. In the actual situation, the Spirit will be with you. He will help you. But he's telling us now, prepare in that big picture way what you're going to say. The basic thrust. That's the focus this morning.

So prepare your message because you're going to have to speak the truth when the time comes. There's three points now. The theme is prepare your message and there's three points about the message that we prepare. First is the content of your message. You're going to prepare, you need to think about the content of your message. We've noted already, apology is a word of defense. The word translated in verse 15, "an account," logon is the idea of a word of reason or rationale. He's saying that there's going to come a moment when you're persecuted for righteousness' sake and you bear up, you have your mind set correctly and your heart is set correctly so that you're not being afraid and in

trouble, but you're bearing up with the grace of God and you're standing in the moment and you're moving from fear to hope, you're having hope in the moment, then a natural question is going to come to those who are watching you and that is, how can you have hope in this moment? They want to hear the reason for the hope that is within you. They want an account, they're asking you to give an account for the hope. Explain your hope. And the content of your message is just that, the explanation of your hope.

How can you have hope in the midst of persecution when it looks like your life is falling apart to the world, how as a Christian can you be filled with hope? I think it's important for us to think about the word "hope" here for a moment. We talked on this a little bit last week, but we need to look a little more closely at this if we're going to defend our hope. We said that the word "hope" in the Scriptures is a word which speaks of the desired good in the future, some future desire of good, but the biblical word for "hope" is different than how we use it in English. The biblical word for "hope" in context of the gospel is, it's a desire for future hope with the expectation of obtaining it. That's the difference. It's not hoping just, you know, on a whim or hoping that it might happen. No, it's hope that you know will happen. It's the desire for future good with certainty that you will obtain it.

But what's important to understand is hope still in the moment, you are certain of something that you cannot see. In fact, if we just take a moment to do a little work on hope, turn with me back, hold your place in 1 Peter, turn with me back to Romans chapter 8 and let's continue to look at what the word "hope" means in the Scriptures. Verse 24, "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?" This is an important concept. Hope is the certainty of something coming that you cannot see and if you can see it, you don't need to hope for it. It's already there. Right, who hopes for what he sees? You know, I hope we're going to have spaghetti for dinner tonight. Not necessarily... whatever we have is fine. But if I'm thinking, I hope we're going to have spaghetti for dinner tonight and I say that I hope we're going to have spaghetti for dinner, and I sit down at the table and when Patty puts on the table spaghetti, I don't say, "I hope we're going to have spaghetti for dinner tonight." I say, "Awesome, we're having spaghetti for dinner tonight." There's no need for hope anymore, it's realized. Hope is wanting something and desiring something and knowing you're going to have it, but you cannot see it yet and that's what he's saying, people see in the lives of Christians who are being persecuted, who are holding on to Jesus in the moment. They see that they're receiving something, they're certain of something that cannot be seen and it's transforming them in the moment and people see the effects of it and want to know how do you have this hope?

It's related to faith. In fact, turn to Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1, you may know this verse. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." The assurance of things hoped for, the confident certainty of things hoped for. Faith and hope are intimately related. Faith is rooted in the promise of God. God says he's going to do something. Faith says, I know he will. And hope is what springs forth from that. The assurance of things hoped for, you could say the evidence of things not seen. Faith is confidence in the fact that God has promised and I know I'm going to receive what I'm

hoping for, and in reality, faith like that is even an outward evidence to unbelievers of the reality of the truth of God. The faith itself is evidence, and the hope is evidence but it's about what we don't see. We can't see it, but we know we have it. This is the idea of what hope is.

I mentioned last week that Peter quotes Isaiah seven times. He quotes Isaiah in our passage back in verse 14. I mentioned he quotes the Old Testament 12 times, Isaiah seven of those. And when we looked at Isaiah a few weeks back, spent four weeks in Isaiah back around Christmas, we saw that Isaiah was controlled by what he saw and what he saw was he saw the unseen. He saw that which is invisible to man. He saw the Lord and he, in his writing, is helping us to see what is unseen. The reality is that the way God has made the universe and all of his creation, he has made the seen and he's made the unseen. Colossians 1:16 says that Jesus made all things, through him, all things have been made visible and invisible. Everything that's been made visible and invisible, Jesus has made. And it goes on to say, thrones and dominions and powers and authorities, that is the spiritual world of angels and all of that God has made. And what we are seeing through faith is we're seeing the reality of the spiritual world. It is absolutely true. It is absolutely real. And faith and hope see what is unseen. That's the very character of them. They see what is unseen.

Look with me at 2 Corinthians chapter 4. So there is a real spiritual world at work at every moment, okay? Every time you or I sin, you know, our sin nature's at work, Satan is tempting, there are spiritual realities happening around us and we live in a world where the intersection between the spiritual and the physical is continual. But we can't see it and unbelievers can't see it. Christians begin to almost see it and through the eyes of faith and through hope, we really lay hold of it. 2 Corinthians chapter 4, Paul is describing this. The key verses I want to point out first, and then I want to show you something else. Verse 16 to 18, he's talking about suffering and this really resonates so much with Peter, because Peter, one of Peter's key themes in 1 Peter is suffering. I mentioned it's persecution, but it's also suffering and suffering has a wonderful capacity for Christians, the blessing that suffering can bring is it makes the invisible visible. This is what Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, one of the things that he's saying.

Verse 16, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." He's saying we're learning as our outer man is wasting away, as we're suffering, we're learning to see the unseeable and we're learning to look at the invisible because that is the one thing that will last forever. The outer stuff is going to be burned up, but the inner realities, the spiritual realities will last forever.

Look back at the same chapter, verse 7, 4 verse 7. He speaks about the Christian has come to know God, verse 6. It's like a new creation. In the same way he created light out of darkness, he's now "shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory

of God in the face of Christ," verse 6. Verse 7, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; for we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed." He's talking about all the suffering we're going through, that the apostles were going through. "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed," verse 10 is the key, "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." That is, as an outer man is broken down, the inner man is being renewed, as he says a little bit later. As the physical body is experiencing the dying of Jesus, the death of our flesh, the life of Jesus spiritually is being manifested in our body. It's becoming visible. Verse 11, "For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh." That's why he says in verse 16 we're looking at the things which are unseen. What he's saying is, we don't see the unseen world, we just see the physical world, but there's something about going through suffering that makes you able to understand that there's something real and more real than ever before about all that we believe.

Peter actually has gotten at this a little bit. If you go back to 1 Peter and you go to chapter 1, he shows us how suffering helps us to almost see the unseen. He talks about trials in verse 6 of chapter 1, 1 Peter 1. He says, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials," and the idea is that these have come so that the proof of your faith, that is the proving of your faith, the proving of the genuineness of your faith, what is faith? Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen, the genuineness of your faith, the reality of your faith, "so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." So your faith is being tested so that it can be shown to be genuine. Look at verse 8, "and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory." You don't see Jesus, you never have seen Jesus with your eyes, but there's something about going through suffering and holding on to Jesus in the suffering, believing his word, that makes him so very real to you because he is.

He's with you and what's happening is the distractions of the world are retreating. We're surrounded by so much continual distraction in this world, and suffering allows you the distractions to fade away, and you cling to Christ, and he says it becomes so real that though you haven't seen him, you believe in him, and you greatly rejoice, a joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. What he's getting at is when you suffer and you hold on to Jesus, he becomes real to you and you know that you will be with him for eternity. You know that you're obtaining the outcome of your faith. This is where assurance comes from. Genuine biblical assurance of salvation comes through persevering in trial. It's not just knowing the truth and believing. It is that. That's where it starts. That's the root of it. It's believing God's word, believing his promise, but biblical assurance comes through the testing and the more that you hold on in the midst of the testing, you know that you have Christ. That's what he's getting at.

And what he's saying now in chapter 3 is something similar, that in the midst of persecution you have the opportunity to see in an even clearer way again, the reality of your hope. It's like what Paul says, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He's able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day." Your spiritual eyes are seeing more clearly the glory of Christ. This is the foundation of the content of your message. The reason that I have hope is because I know Jesus. It's as if you're saying like Mary Magdalene, now she saw him with her eyes. You remember what she said, her testimony, she was the first one to see the risen Christ. She sees the disciples, she runs to the disciples and she says this, "I have seen the Lord." And there's a sense in which the Christian who's walking with God in the midst of persecution, his message is the same, your message is the same. Where does your hope come from? "I have seen the Lord. Not with my physical eyes, but with my spiritual eyes, I have seen Him and I know Him." And that's the essence of the message.

Is there also a sense in which we should have a gospel summary prepared? I think we should be prepared to give a summary of your faith. You know, the gospel, essentially four points. We need to be ready to tell people about God, who God is, that's the first point of the gospel. The second point of the gospel, man and his problem. Third point of the gospel, Christ, God's provision. And the fourth point of the gospel response, will you repent and believe? You start with God, who is God, and the message is, "I know the living God who created the whole world. The reason I have hope is I know God and God is going to judge the world in righteousness. Because we have sinned, we have all sinned and fallen short of his glory, we deserve His wrath, but Christ has done everything necessary to save us." And the gospel in a word is Jesus Christ, "Look what Jesus Christ has done, His person, His work, and what is your response?" That's the message of the gospel but the idea here is that the undergirding of it is this confidence, this certainty, this hope that is persevering.

So you're ready to share. When they ask you the reason for the hope, "I know Christ. He is the Son of God. He is the Savior of the world. I've come to know Him. That's why I have hope." And the hope is rooted in the fact that he's sovereign. In fact, he goes on to explain this a little later in the passage. I mentioned down to verse 22, he actually reminds us of the gospel right after this, verse 18, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." There's the gospel. Let's get down to verse 22, speaking again of Jesus, "who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him." The reason that we can have hope in the midst of persecution is Jesus is on the throne at the right hand of God now. He's reigning and ruling over all things. He's reigning and ruling over every demonic force. He's reigning and ruling over them now. The man Christ Jesus has ascended to the right hand of God and he's on the throne.

So my Savior, this is how we're to think, "My Savior is on the throne." Hebrews chapter 2, I think it's verse 14 says, it talks about the fact that Jesus, we worship Jesus who all things have been put in subjection to him, but the author of Hebrews says, though we do

not yet see things in subjection to him. There's the contrast. It doesn't look like all things are in subjection to him. This is where the whole question comes, right? You look around, it doesn't look like everything's in subjection to him. Look at how ungodly the world is. Look how evil people are. As the righteous are suffering, it looks like Jesus is not on the throne, but the Christian knows he is. In fact, he knows so even more because this is exactly what he said would happen. He told us that we would suffer, "If they hated Me, they'll hate you." In fact, I think that's one of the reasons that our faith can become stronger in the midst of persecution. This is something you need to take heart in, even in the moment.

So you see that you're going to be persecuted, it seems that someone is starting to make fun of you for your faith or to malign you for the way that you live, remember this is the place of blessing, set your mind, fix your heart. "I'm not going to be afraid, fear what they fear. Lord Jesus, You're here. I want to stand in awe of You." And now be ready with the message and the message is Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords, and I know he is, and part of what's going to happen in the moment is you become even more aware of it. In fact, think about this, when people persecute Christians, they're vindicating the truthfulness of everything you believe in the word of God because if this was not true, they think it's not, they think we're just, it's fanciful fairy tales, but why does it bother them so much? Why do they get so angry that you love Jesus and you speak the truth about Jesus if it's just all fairy tales? Does it make you mad when somebody starts spouting off about their religion, you know, if they're Hindu or if they're just, you know, talking about some absurd things, does that just really get under your skin and you want to shut them up and you want to beat them up because they're doing it? Of course not. Why do they hate us? It's because what we're saying is true and they know it. Their very action is proving that Jesus is who he said he is. I mean, the fact that they rage so much against God is proof that God is God and everything he said is true.

So even in the moment of persecution, your faith can be being built up and strengthened, and if you cling to the Lord, you will see him even more clearly. You'll be able to see the things which are unseen and then to speak confidently, "I know Jesus. He is who He said He is." And the very fact that people are reacting like they are right now to just a simple message. I mean, it's even a valid thing to talk to, "Why does it bother you so much that I believe in Jesus and that you don't? Why are you so bent out of shape about it? Have you ever thought about that? Let me suggest to you that God's word says it's because you know it's true and you're trying to suppress it. That's not the way to live. Submit to Him. He is a glorious King, a loving Savior."

So the content of your message, a gospel summary, but really the content of the message is he is on the throne. Even though it doesn't appear to our natural eye, reality is he is, and everything he said is happening just as he said it would. I mean, the reality, you look at the world and it decays and more and more and more, you know, we see happening around us what Romans 1 talks about, that men suppress the truth in unrighteousness. How do they do that? They're actually actively suppressing the truth by living ungodly lives. It's their sin is an attempt to suppress the truth of what they know about God. And he says they will get more and more aggressive in it, Romans 1, that God's wrath is

revealed when he gives over the unbeliever to impure desires so that they start lusting after one another in an even more fervent way. Then he gives them over to homosexuality. Then he gives them over to a depraved mind. It's this where they call evil good and good evil, and as we see this happening in the world, what do we see? What do we see through the eyes of faith? We see the truthfulness of the word of God. Everything he said is true. We're seeing it played out in front of our eyes. You see, we're seeing the unseen. We're seeing God's word is true.

That's the content of the message. The tone of your message. The tone of your message, second point. The key phrase here is "yet with gentleness and reverence." Yet with gentleness and reverence. The word here translated "gentleness" is really better translated, I think, with the word "meekness," but the problem is, in English, meekness isn't, I mean, if we define it correctly, it's very helpful. Let me just tell you what the text, the Greek word means. Meekness, this is according to Spiros Zodhiates, meekness, we're called for meekness but not in man's outward behavior only, nor in his relations to his fellow man or his mere natural disposition, rather meekness is an inwrought grace of the soul, and the expressions of meekness are primarily toward God. It is the attitude of the Spirit where we accept God's dealings with us as good and do not dispute or resist. He goes on to say meekness does get angry, but listen to what he says, meekness is getting angry at the right time, in the right measure, and for the right reason. This is not readily expressed in English. Meekness means weakness but not so in the Scriptures. It is a condition of mind and heart which demonstrates gentleness outwardly, but not in weakness, but in power. It is balance born in strength of character. It's an inward disposition toward God where you see that he is on the throne, he's ruling in your life, and you are submitted to him, therefore, when someone comes into your life and attacks you or harasses you or maligns you, your first thought isn't to defend yourself against them, your first thought is, "God, what are You doing here?" Not, "Hey, what are You doing to me?" "God, what are You doing? Why have You brought this person in my life because they could not be here if You had not brought them."

Do you see that? It's an inwrought grace of the soul which sees God first and foremost. Every person that comes into our lives is a divine appointment. It's not like God sits there and forgets for a while what he's doing in your life. "Oh, I lost My head for a moment. I lost focus. I didn't realize that was happening to you." No, every single thing he brings into your life as a divine appointment and meekness then looks at it and understands that, and when you understand that, the first thought is, what is God's purpose in bringing this person who is reviling me even right now? "What's Your purpose, Lord? I'm Your servant."

So meekness is the first attitude we have to have, and that changes the tone of your message, doesn't it? The natural response when someone attacks you is what? To elevate your tone, to respond in kind. Anger begets anger. But a meek person is able to have a gentle answer. A gentle answer turns away wrath. We need meekness. So he says, listen, you've got to be ready to deliver the message, but you've got to in the moment watch the tone of your message. The tone can completely undermine the message. The tone needs to be consistent with the truth that you're speaking. If Jesus is on the throne, that's the

message, Jesus is on the throne, whether you know it or not, Jesus is on the throne, well, it should look like that in the way I say it even in the moment because if I say Jesus is on the throne, but I'm like, and I'm yelling it, "Jesus is on the throne, you need to back off!" I'm saying Jesus is on the throne, but apparently I'm not believing it, am I? I'm contradicting it with my tone of voice. But if I know Jesus is on the throne truly, and I can look at this person who's maligning me or verbally assaulting me, maybe even physically, and I know what is God doing, "Lord, what's happening?" That first look to God changes everything. That's the essence of meekness and that's not weakness, that is strength. Jesus was meek. Moses was called the meekest man alive at his time. Men of great strength, not weakness.

It's not just meekness, but also reverence or fear. Actually, the Greek word translated "reverence" is the word "fear," which has already occurred in the passage twice. Don't fear what they fear, verse 14. "Their intimidation" is actually the word "fear." Don't fear their fear and now here in verse 15, "yet with gentleness and fear." Don't fear what they fear, but fear. That's what he's saying. Fear God. Fear the Lord. God has allowed this. "What is Your purpose, Lord? What are You up to? I'm Your servant. What I want to do is respond to this person in a way that's pleasing to You." It's not just them, it's not people around me that I'm concerned about. I'm concerned about an audience of one. What does the Lord think about what I'm about to say, how I'm about to respond? That's what it means to fear.

In fact, he emphasizes this even more. I think it's instructive to look at verse 17, "For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong." It doesn't come through in the New American Standard here the way...and no translation really gets it exactly, because this phrase, it literally says this, "for it is better if He wills it." It is better if he wills it, the will of God, if he wills the will of God that you suffer for doing righteousness. The "will" is there twice, the verb and the noun. It's better if God wills his will, that's the force of it, for you to suffer for doing righteousness. It's like emphasizing, you know, when you suffer for doing righteousness, you know whose will it is? It is God's will and it's better that when he wills you to suffer, because if he wills you to suffer, you know what's going to happen? You're going to suffer, right? Can we do anything about that? If God wills me to suffer, is there anything I can do about it? No, he wills his will for me to suffer. There's nothing I can do except suffer but I can suffer for only doing righteousness, not doing evil. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. The way we tended to find that is the way we would want the plan to be, but God loves you more than that. His will is for us to suffer, not all the time, but to suffer so that we can know him, we can see him.

I was reading again through Exodus this week and the first four chapters one morning and I was thinking about it again and just you read the language of Exodus and, you know, it starts off with telling us that Joseph died, all his brothers died, the people are there for several hundred years and a Pharaoh that comes to the throne that doesn't know Joseph and he begins to be afraid of the Israelites. The Israelites are being blessed by God, they're growing numerous and he starts afflicting them and he tells the Egyptians, "We really have got to give it to these guys. They're becoming too numerous. We need to

make their labor hard." And so they start oppressing the Israelites. And it just hit me again how striking it is that the Lord did that. I mean, you read the Bible and you stop and think God had told Abraham, "I'm going to make you a great nation. I'm going to give you the land of Canaan." He sends his people down into Egypt. At first, it's great because they're getting bread. They have an "in" with the number two man in Egypt, Joseph. I mean, they've got it made, right? That's awesome. But then it's like God looked away, forgot what was going on. Now, of course, this isn't what happened, but it looks like that in a way because the next thing you know, the people of God are being oppressed. They are suffering great oppression, so much that when Moses meets God in chapter 3 at the burning bush, God says, "I have heard their cries by reason of their taskmasters. I have seen their suffering and I've come down." Question, why did God let them suffer? Why did God lead so many of those people to go through that time of suffering? I think there's a simple, straightforward answer, so that they could see his glory. He let them suffer and be oppressed so that they could be delivered.

You see, God's purpose, God's wonderful plan for your life is not to make you happy and make your circumstances easy. That is not his plan. He loves you far more than that. If he wanted just you to have a happy and easy life, you could have a happy and easy life and then wake up in hell. Or even as a Christian, after you get saved and you know him, you could have a relatively happy and easy life and wake up in heaven but you wouldn't know the Lord very well. You know how you get to know God is you need God. When you suffer, you need God, and he reveals himself to you. The song we sang earlier, Jehovah Jireh, they didn't find that out because everything was great. They find that out that God is the one who provides when they are... That's the name that Abraham gives to the Lord after he's asked to offer up Isaac. What an incredible amount of suffering that man went through and yet, what happens? He gets to see that Christ is going to come. He gets to see God is going to send his Son in the future. He receives Isaac back as a type, according to Hebrews chapter 11, somehow, God opened his eyes to see the whole plan of salvation unfold because God put him through the agony of telling him to go offer his son on the mountain. Now, if you asked Abraham, "Abraham, that was really hard, wasn't it? Don't you wish God didn't do that to you? I don't know why God did that to you." He would say, "You are a fool. I wouldn't change anything because I saw His glory."

He's made us to see him and know him and he has to break and distract, remove all the distractions because the world and sin and the transient nature of this passing life keep us from seeing it, and God uses our circumstances to wake us up and to say, "Come to Me. Know Me. Love Me and live, truly live." And so when we understand this, we have meekness and fear, it changes our tone. There's a confidence and there's a gentleness, a confident gentleness, "The Lord is on the throne. He's brought this circumstance in my life for a reason because He wants to show me His glory right now. Lord, thank You." It goes from being, "Oh no, what's happening," to, "Oh wow, I can't wait to see what happens. God's going to do something neat. Lord, what do You have for me? Help me be faithful."

And the will of God helps us to have the right tone of confidence and gentleness and it is confidence too, I mean, confidence that God is on the throne and doing exactly what he

wants to do changes the way that you respond to people. You don't have to worry about trying to plead with them to do anything. I mean, you can be, you know, reason with people, but you don't need to be begging them, hoping they're not going to do something. No, they don't have even the wherewithal to decide. Ultimately, God's going to decide what they do with you. So be worshiping God. Be kind to them. Show meekness and reverence for God.

Thirdly, not just the content of your message, the tone of your message, but also the proof of your message. The proof of your message, the compelling force of this proof is there in verse 16, "and 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." The proof of your message is your life and your actions in the moment. That's what he's saying. Keeping a good conscience, that is doing what is right, what you know to be right, doing good in the moment, rather than evil. Remember, he started off this whole section back in verse 9 of chapter 3, don't return evil for evil or insult for insult, but give a blessing. When you are insulted, don't return insult for insult. Don't return reviling for reviling, evil for evil, but return a blessing. Only do good. And the whole argument there in verses 8 to 12 was be sure that you are doing good, not harm. So you're not to harm the person who's attacking you. You're not to wish their harm. You're not to wish they go to hell. You're not to tell them that they're going to hell. I mean, you can tell them in the sense of you're going to hell if you don't turn to Christ, but you don't say you're going to hell and I'm glad you are. That's not a godly attitude. No harm. "You're going to hell if you don't repent. But there's a Savior. And if you won't bow the knee to Him now, you will bow the knee to Him in eternity before He casts you into the lake of fire." You see the tone? You say it with a heart of compassion. You say the same message, but it's with a heart of compassion.

And so he's saying, don't do something now in the moment, don't let your anger get the best of you so that you do something that does not keep a good conscience. Don't mistreat them, don't revile them, don't respond in anger, but keep a good conscience. Keeping a good conscience, as you've been saying this message with this tone, now doing the right thing all the way through the trial, all the way through the persecution, doing the right thing to please God, what he says is, when you do that, the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. That's the power. That's what he's saying. They go from reviling you and insulting you to being put to shame. Your behavior puts them to shame. They keep on harassing, they keep on maligning, they keep on doing evil to you, and you keep doing good and eventually, not in every case, but he's saying that there will be some who will come to absolute shame and conviction, that is, they're ready to be saved now. People watching you do that, the power of suffering and only doing good.

If we can keep doing good because we're looking at God. That's what Jesus did. He kept doing good all the way to the cross. He kept doing good on the cross. No reviling. He was reviled. He was insulted. He did not revile again. Why? He knew the Father was doing his will. Remember he said, "Not My will, but Your will be done." He knew he was going exactly where the Father wanted him to go. In fact, he knew that God was sovereign over every moment of it. I love what he said to Pontius Pilate in John chapter

18. Pilate says to him, remember, he's talking to Jesus, asking him questions, and Jesus is not answering all of his questions the way he wanted him to and Pilate says, "Do You not realize that I have the power to release You or the power to kill You?" And Jesus says this, "You have no power over Me but such as has been given to you by My Father in heaven." He speaks that. That's truth. He cuts through the lies and says, "The truth is God is at work in this and I'm here because the Lord has given Me to you." And how strong that is, how powerful that is, how compelling that is.

When you and I have that conviction in the face of persecution, that is an incredibly powerful and compelling proof of what we've been saying. We've been saying Jesus is on the throne and we are believing Jesus is on the throne and the force of our faith will bring some to brokenness and shame. Whether they all come to brokenness and shame or not, God is glorified when you hold on like that. And the reality is that if we find ourselves in persecution, and none of us votes for that, right? If we take a vote right now, I hope we would 100% vote, I would prefer not to be persecuted. Now the reality is you're going to be persecuted in some way regardless, right? Persecution is a part of life. All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. I'm talking about physical, violent kind of persecution. We would rather not experience that. We'd rather the Lord send revival, and he may well do that. Right now, the direction of society is moving toward a situation where that could be more, if it continues on, it could be a reality. And of course, like I said, we vote no, but if the Lord does allow it, let's live out our theology. "You're my shepherd. You lead me in paths of righteousness. You lead me beside still waters, in green pastures. You also lead me through the valley of the shadow of death." I follow my Shepherd and so if You lead me there, Lord, You're with me." That's what he says in the valley of the shadow of death. "I will fear no evil." Why? "For thou art with me." We trust God. If he leads you there, he will be with you there and he will sustain you there. He will give you every bit of grace you need. He will not fail you.

Do you feel ready now? No, why not? Because God's grace isn't there for you. He doesn't give you grace early. "Hey, you're going to need this in a couple of weeks. Hold onto this." He gives you grace in the moment when you cry out to him. You find yourself experiencing something like that, I know I'm going to be sitting there thinking, "Lord, oh no," at first, you start to fear their intimidation. You start to fear what they fear. "Wait a minute, I've got to get my mind right. I'm in a position of blessing and I'm not going to fear what they fear. I'm going to remember Jesus Christ is here. He's leading me. He's guiding me. He will be faithful with me. He will stand with me. The Spirit of God and glory will rest upon me. If He allows me to suffer for righteousness' sake in this moment, Lord, let me be faithful. Help me. Give me grace. You know how afraid I am, Lord. Make me strong." And I love this, Peter's the one encouraging us this way. He knows what it's like to fail, denied Jesus three times. But he's saying, "Listen, you can trust the Lord. He will be faithful." And that's why he was able to be faithful and even offer up his life as a martyr.

The power of it though, when we believe what we say we believe, we really understand and we see the invisible reality that Jesus really is right here in the moment, ordaining this happening at this instant, and I know he's good and I know he's with me, and I'm

going to cling to him, "Lord Jesus, live through me all that Your faith, Your holiness, Your righteousness, give Your strength to me, give Your wisdom to me, show me how to live in this moment," he will make you fruitful. He will stand with you. He will stand because his God will make him stand.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for the sufficiency of Your word that You prepare us, Lord, You give us in Your word everything that's necessary for life and godliness. You deal with all the circumstances that we face, You show us how in principle form everywhere in Your word to live a life that's pleasing to You by grace alone as we exercise faith alone, in Christ alone. We pray that You would make us faithful. We confess our weakness. We confess, Lord, that we so often just want things to go well and be just comfortable and we know that in some sense we were created for a perfect world and so there's a sense in which even desiring that is not in itself bad. We long for the perfect world of the new heavens and new earth but we're not in a perfect world now. Give us more faith. Make our hope, anchor our hope, Lord, in Your word. Make us strong in the Lord and the strength of His might. Help us stand in the evil day so that Jesus would be exalted and glorified. Lord, make us pleasing to You. And even as we suffer, whether it's physical suffering of physical maladies, disease, accidents, or if it's the spiritual suffering of persecution, whatever it is, may You use our suffering to do as Paul said, to make our eyes able to see the unseen and fill our hearts and flood our hearts in those moments with the glory of what we see as we see You more and more clearly. We pray this for Jesus' sake and in His name, amen.