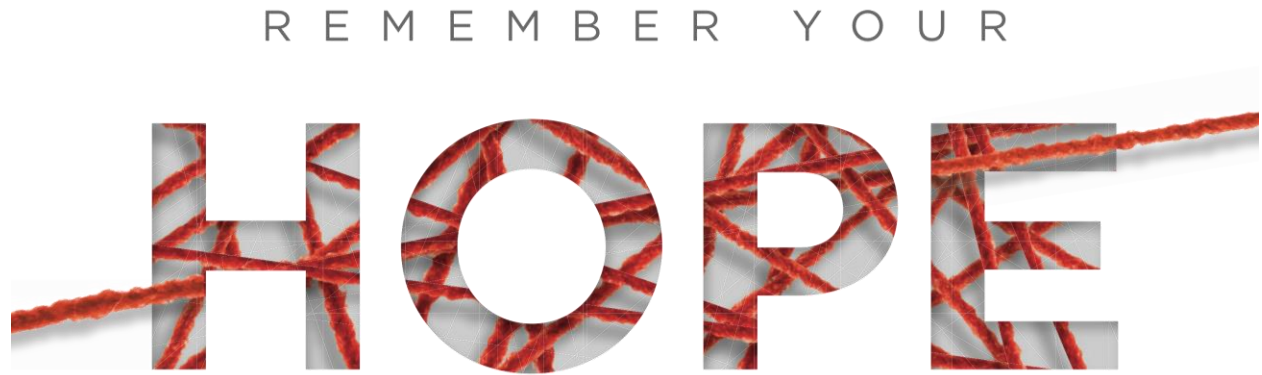


Lesson 6: 1 Peter 3:8–22

Hook



Main Point: When we suffer for righteousness, we will be blessed.

We're all familiar with burns from the sun or fire, but have you ever heard of ice burns? Ice burns occur when the skin is exposed for a prolonged period to ice or something else that's extremely cold. An ice burn can look like a sunburn; it might result in numbness, itchiness, tingling feelings, pain, blisters and waxy skin. An ice burn is a result of the water in the cells of your skin freezing. Sharp ice crystals form, damaging the structure of your skin cells, constricting blood vessels near the skin, and reducing the flow of blood to affected areas.ⁱ

Today we will discuss the suffering that might come from living a godly life. Like ice burns, the notion of suffering for doing the right thing may seem counterintuitive. It doesn't seem right that someone should endure hardship for doing what is right. However, we will discover that when we suffer for righteousness, we will be blessed.

Q: Have you ever endured suffering for doing the right thing? Was it surprising? How did you deal with the emotions that resulted from the experience?

Q: Why might we suffer for living a life that pleases the Lord?

Q: What good might come from suffering?

Book

Main Point: When we suffer for righteousness, we will be blessed.

Text Summary: In this concluding passage, Peter reiterates much of what he has said already. As believers, we must always do good—even when no one else around us is—and even when it may cause us to suffer. When we suffer for doing good, we will be blessed by God. When we suffer for doing good, we are acting like Jesus, whose suffering saved us from our sins and brought us into a right relationship with Him. When we endure suffering with hope and joy, it can be an incredible witness to the Gospel so, like Jesus, we can bring people closer to God through our suffering.

1 Peter 3:8–14 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Do what is right, even if you suffer for it.

Q: How does Peter say we will obtain a blessing? What Old Testament promise does this connect to?

Q: Why shouldn't Christians repay evil for evil?

Even though it is in the middle of the book, this passage starts with a “finally.” Peter isn't concluding his whole letter but this section. By saying, “finally, all of you,” he's transitioning from specific instructions for particular relationships to a list of godly virtues all believers should live at all times—humility, unity, sympathy, brotherly love, and tenderheartedness. All these qualities are consistent with the tone of what Peter has been writing so far.ⁱⁱ

Recalling what he said about submitting to a master even if the master is unjust, Peter repeats the same concept we studied in Lesson 4—when we suffer for doing good, we are suffering like Jesus (2:18–20). Peter is focused on “doing good” in this passage, a phrase he repeats several times (3:11, 13, 17), just as he did in chapter 2 (2:19–20). This is a moral good—doing the right thing no matter what anyone else does, even if it has negative consequences for you. He appeals again to our responsibility to obey God over man, as he did in 2:13–16. He implores his readers to focus on the spiritual ramifications of their actions, that no matter what mankind does to us, God will bless us for doing good (3:9, 12, 16). Even if we suffer at the hands of man for doing good, we will be blessed by God (3:14). And the blessing of God is of greater and more lasting significance than anything man can do to us.ⁱⁱⁱ

Remember, Peter is writing to believers who were already suffering for their faith, so he writes this to encourage them to keep doing good, even when it is hard. As in chapter 1, he encourages them to look forward to their future inheritance in heaven with hope when they are suffering (1:3–9). If they bless others even when they are mistreated, they will receive a

blessing from God (3:9). As he did in chapter 1, Peter alludes to the original covenant with Abraham—that they are blessed in order to be a blessing to others (Genesis 12:1–3). But this time (1 Peter 3:10–12), he explicitly quotes Psalm 34, which has an interesting context.

Not all the psalms give us the occasion on which they were written, but Psalm 34 does, right there in its title: “Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.” Scholars agree that “Abimelech” is not the name of the king, but is used as a Philistine title for a king.^{iv} The story refers to David’s interaction with the king of Gath, Achish (1 Samuel 21:10–22:1, where that same phrase is used—“So he changed his behavior before them”). In the story, David was running away from Saul and went to Gath, where the servants of King Achish recognized him as the great warrior, repeating the song the people would sing about him. “Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (21:11). David was afraid Achish would feel threatened by him, so he pretended to be insane, and Achish sent him away. He escaped to the cave of Adullam and wrote this psalm of praise to God for being his refuge. Written as an acrostic, each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, minus one. The theme of the psalm is that God blesses the righteous and punishes those who do evil. This is the psalm in which David exclaims, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good,” which Peter referred to in 1 Peter 2:3.

Peter emphasizes the middle of the psalm, where David says, “Come, oh children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord” (Psalm 34:11). The next verses are the part Peter quotes. Peter’s audience was a mix of Jew and Gentile, but any Jewish people in Peter’s audience would have known the Psalms by heart and would have known that this was the line just before these verses. Also, scholars agree that Peter uses so many Old Testament connections because even the Gentiles in his audience would have been schooled in Judaism. So, this audience would have recognized this part of Psalm 34 as instructions from David in how to fear the Lord:^v

- Keep your tongue from speaking evil and deceit (34:13).
- Turn away from evil and do good (34:14).
- Seek peace and pursue it (34:14).

These instructions connect to Peter’s final exhortation to be humble and loving and pursue unity (1 Peter 3:8). In this conclusion, he paints the same picture he has been painting all along—a Christian is humble and loving and always does good to others, no matter what is being done to him. He is driving home this same point—if you suffer for doing good, then you will be blessed (3:14). As Jesus said in the Beatitudes, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). It is the natural human reaction to want to repay evil for evil (1 Peter 3:9), to want to take our own revenge (Romans 12:19). It’s natural to want vindication. But the Bible consistently tells us to leave vindication to the Lord. We are to be humble and kind and repay evil with good. Paul even writes that we can *overcome* evil *with* good (Romans 12:21).

Q: Why is it hard to stay humble and kind and seek unity when you are being wronged?

Q: In what situations have you struggled with wanting to seek revenge?

Q: How can repaying evil with good be a positive Christian witness?

1 Peter 3:15–17 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Always be ready to share your hope in Christ with gentleness and respect.

Q: Why should we have an answer ready for anyone who asks us about our hope in life?

Q: Why is it significant that this statement is in this context about having hope in God's blessing in times of suffering?

Many of us have heard and/or quoted this verse. It is often used as a reason to study apologetics—make sure you always have an answer ready for anyone who asks you about Jesus (3:15). But how often do those of us who quote this verse know the context in which it was written? In this letter, Peter has been talking about clinging to our eternal hope in times of great suffering. He has been encouraging those who were being persecuted for their faith to endure their suffering by putting their hope in the future inheritance they have in Christ (1:3–9).

So, this “always be ready to give an answer” is in response to people who see the incredible perseverance and hope these believers have in the midst of their suffering. This isn't a normal, everyday, people-know-you're-a-Christian-and-ask-you-about-it situation. This is a situation where people have seen you handle persecution and suffering with joy and hope, and in absolute shock, they say, “How can you have that kind of hope in a situation like this?” That's the context in which Peter says we should have an answer for the hope we have in Jesus. It is also true that all of us should be ready at any time to give an answer, but Peter's point here is that if we live with hope and joy in the midst of suffering, it *will* cause people to take notice and ask questions. The way we handle suffering is a strong witness of the Gospel.^{vi}

Q: Have you known anyone who showed incredible hope, joy and peace in the midst of suffering? Share how his or her life was a witness to others.

Q: Why would enduring suffering with joy and hope stand out in our culture?

Whether we are “giving an answer” out of a time of suffering or not, an answer should be given with gentleness and respect and with a good conscience (3:15–16). This is such a timely message for our culture, where there is so much outrage and divisiveness. Too many of us, so intent on making our argument, on being right, can forget to be kind and humble and gracious. We are called to be bold in preaching the Gospel, but never disrespectful or arrogant or angry. Gentle and respectful is the *opposite* of what we see so often on TV talk shows and in “discussions” in person and on social media, even from some Christians. If we have an answer for every theological question someone throws at us, but we belittle them or yell it at them in

anger when we share it, how likely will they be to listen to us?^{vii} But if we speak the truth in love, with gentleness and respect, we will not only be more likely to win them over, we will be more like Jesus (v. 16) and “trust the Holy Spirit himself to quietly persuade the listener.”^{viii}

Q: Why is it difficult to have a debate about religion with gentleness and respect?

Q: How would changing our idea of what “evangelism” is change that? What if we no longer thought of it as a debate or argument, but as sharing the hope we have in Jesus?

1 Peter 3:18–22 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Christ also suffered for doing good, and through Him we were saved.

Q: What does this passage teach us about Jesus and salvation?

Q: Why does Peter refer to Noah and the ark in this passage?

Here Peter bursts forth with the Gospel. He has been saying all along that when we suffer for doing good, we are acting like Jesus. Now, he hits the climax of what he means by that. Jesus suffered the ultimate persecution for doing good—death on a cross, the most shameful death at the time, even though He was completely innocent. Peter describes why—“that He might bring us to God” (v. 18). It’s the same reason he gives us for enduring suffering with grace, humility, hope and joy—that we may bring others to Christ through it. That our lives of humility and love will be a witness of Jesus. That people will see our joy and peace and take notice.

Peter preaches the Gospel—we were put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit (v. 18). He succinctly explains the theological concept of substitutionary atonement—that the perfectly righteous Jesus died in the place of the unrighteous, taking on our punishment and atoning for our sin as the blameless perfect sacrifice.^{ix}

Then he continues with an unusual phrase that is not found elsewhere, except in Peter’s writings—that Jesus “proclaimed to the spirits in prison” (v. 19). He says it again in chapter 4—“the gospel was preached even to those who are dead” (4:6). There is debate among scholars as to what this actually means—who these “spirits” are, whether the people who did not listen in the days of Noah or the fallen angels the Bible says were on earth, intermarrying with human women at the time of the flood, the “sons of God” (Genesis 6:1–2).^x

Peter used these phrases to emphasize the fact that Jesus had truly conquered death and risen up to heaven. Christ descended into the abyss of death so we wouldn’t have to. Instead of actually dying that second death, in our baptism we “are buried” with Christ into His death (Romans 6:4). This is a metaphor; the act of baptism doesn’t save us. It is a symbol of the saving work of Christ in our lives and a public *proclamation* of it.

Peter's emphasis on the *few* who were saved in the time of Noah—only eight people in all—is meant to encourage the ones he was writing to, who were being persecuted for their faith. Noah and his family were likely ridiculed and persecuted for building an ark in the middle of the desert with no sign of rain, but they remained faithful to their calling, and they were saved. The same will be true for believers who faithfully endure persecution (vv. 20–22). Jesus said no one knows the day or hour that He will return, but that *lots of people* will be just living their lives, oblivious to God, as they were in the days of Noah (Matthew 24:36–44), and only the few who stayed faithful to Jesus, who endured to the end, will be saved (24:9–13; Revelation 2:10).^{xi}

Q: How does this passage affect your view of water baptism?

Q: How can this message of salvation in Christ encourage you in your times of suffering?

Q: What would it look like for you to “endure to the end” in your Christian faith?

Took

Main Point: When we suffer for righteousness, we will be blessed.

In days past, chocolate makers had a problem—summer. Sales of the dessert typically dropped off during the summertime due to a lack of air conditioning which caused melting. During the Spanish Civil War, Forrest Mars, Sr. (of the Mars Candy Company) noticed a soldier eating chocolate beads covered in a hard sugar shell; the sugar coating prevented melting. Mars was inspired by the product—imagining the same experience with a chocolate dessert despite the season.^{xii} Mars would go on to introduce the world to M&M's in 1941.^{xiii}

Q: What impact does a Christian make when he maintains a Christlike attitude whether he is enjoying comfort or experiencing suffering?

Q: Who in your life model this kind of consistency? What impact have they made on you?

CHALLENGES

THINK: *How can the way I handle suffering in my life be a witness for the Gospel?* How does my attitude need to change in the way I handle suffering? How does my perspective on what it means to witness need to change? How can I share my hope in Christ both through my actions and through my words? How can I make my life so different in peace, love, joy, etc., that people ask me about it?

PRAY: *For gentleness and respect* in the way that I talk to people about my faith, or about anything, really. For humility and a tender heart in the way that I interact with others. That I would not repay evil for evil but overcome evil with good. That I would reflect Christ in all I do and say.

ACT: *Practice gentleness and respect.* Ask the Spirit to guide you in what this action may look like for you. It may be something such as being intentional about the way you speak to your family. It may mean striking up a conversation (not a debate!) with someone about Jesus, one in which you really focus on speaking with respect and gentleness. It might mean re-evaluating how you interact with people on social media. You may choose to “target” one person who typically infuriates you and treat that person with gentleness and respect. Or the Spirit may guide you to do something else entirely.

ⁱ <https://www.healthline.com/health/ice-burn#causes>

ⁱⁱ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter, Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 158.
- ^{iv} John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).
- ^v Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997).
- ^{vi} Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter, Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 161.
- ^{vii} William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, The Daily Bible Study Series* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976).
- ^{viii} Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter, Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 153.
- ^{ix} *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).
- ^x *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).
- ^{xi} Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter, Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 240.
- ^{xii} <https://www.history.com/news/the-wartime-origins-of-the-mm>
- ^{xiii} <https://www.mms.com/history>