

Living Hope in Suffering

1 Peter 3:8-22

What do we think of when we think of the suffering for our faith? We may have pictures of being insulted, looked over for a promotion at work, or more sinister pictures of enduring physical violence. In the context of the early churches that Peter is writing to they were undergoing significant persecution, both physically and verbally. Peter writes this section to encourage believers to continue to live in submission to Jesus as Lord, no matter their circumstances.

- Reflect on times when you have felt like you have suffered for your faith. How did you respond? How might you respond in hindsight?

Called to Live as God's Community (v8)

Verse 8 continues the instructions for believers that began in 2:11-12. Peter has expounded how they live such good lives that people give glory to God in regards to those in authority, slaves and masters, and men and women. In this section he continues that call to the Christian community. He calls the believers to live towards one another:

1. To be like minded, (single minded, united standing together in persecution)
 2. To be sympathetic (In the same way Christ demonstrates to us, Heb 4:15)
 3. To love one another (seek to serve one another before ourselves, 1 Jn 3:16)
 4. To be compassionate (a feeling that moves to action Prob 31:8-9, Matt 9:36)
 5. To be humble (Valuing others needs before your own Phil 2:5-8)
- Which of these do you find most difficult to demonstrate? Which do you find easiest? Which one do you think you most need to grow into?
 - All these commands are 'others focused', encouraging us to keep in mind the needs of others over our own needs. How would our Christian community look/respond differently to one another if we lived out these five? What might change in the GWAC community? How do we think outsiders would respond to this change?

Called to Respond to Insults with Blessings (v9)

As Peter pivots from how they are to behave in community to how they respond to those outside the community he calls them to respond to insults with blessings. Culturally when someone verbally insults you (which is what it assumed in this passage) you would respond with insults to defend your honour, and the honour of your family and community. Here Peter is calling them to respond in blessings. This is in line with Jesus' instruction to bless those who persecute you (Luke 6:28)

- What effect might this have to those listening?
- Why might Peter be encouraging them not to be concerned for their honour in a strong honour/shame culture? How does this apply to us today?

Why? God is present and against all who do evil (v10-12)

In explanation for what he is asking the Christian community to step into, Peter quotes from Psalm 34. Take the time to read and reflect on Psalm 34.

- Why do you think Peter is referencing this psalm? How does it link with the instructions Peter has given?
- What does the psalm say about God's response to those who do evil? Is the way we see God's response to evil today?
- Peter seems to be encouraging believers that every opportunity is a choice, to act in line with God's blessing, or to do evil? Is that how we see and engage with our decisions everyday? What else impacts the decisions we make about how we behave in different situations?

The message of this passage pivots on this question (v13):

- **Who will harm you if you are eager to do good? Reflect on this question as a group or an individual.**
- Are there times where we see ourselves suffering for the gospel when we might be suffering because of our own choices or actions?
- Perhaps spend some time pondering the question, 'Are Christians today eager to do good, or to be heard/right in discussions?'

Unjust Suffering (v14-17)

While suffering can be brought on by our own behaviours, there will still be times when we suffer for doing good. We shouldn't seek out suffering, but if we encounter unjust suffering we are encouraged to do the following four things:

1. Don't fear their threats
 2. Keep Christ as Lord
 3. Be prepared to speak to the hope we have in unjust suffering
 4. Answer with gentleness and respect
- How easy is it to do these four things? Which is easiest? Which do you find most challenging?
 - What does it look like to hold Christ as Lord in the midst of unjust suffering? How does that help us to live out the other three commands?

Following the example of Christ (v18-22)

The following section is one of the most confusing parts of scripture for many people. The key overarching message of this part is that Jesus suffered unjustly (v18, for our sin), yet God vindicated him (v22) and now all those who were in power over him sit in submission to him. This is to be an encouragement to those who face unjust suffering that we can be confident that even if we suffer unjustly, we have already been vindicated by Jesus' resurrection and we can be assured of the hope we have in him.

- How can we be encouraged by what Jesus has been through as we seek to live out our hope in suffering? How can we ground this, and help ourselves to remember this even during suffering?

Digging Deeper into V18-22 (for those who would like to)

This section goes into depth on few key issues. Verse 18 demonstrates the work of Christ on the Cross as substitutionary. He was both sinless and righteous. He was able to completely fulfil the requirements of the law as a righteous man, and also be the sinless sacrifice for our redemption (1 Peter 1:18-19).

- *Jesus work of redemption 'brings us to God'? How do we understand this? Do we fully trust that this is complete, or do we continue to allow sins of the past to keep us separated from God?*

Verses 19 – 21 cause much debate and are the basis of the creedal statement for some that 'Jesus descended to Hell'. This statement that 'he proclaimed to the imprisoned spirits' is perhaps better seen as referring to Christ's victory proclamation following his resurrection as he ascended to heaven. The references to Noah, I believe, serve to encourage Christians who feel outnumbered that only eight people were saved by the flood, and in the present time only a few will be baptised and saved. Baptism is not what saves people, but rather then inward reality of submission to Christ that baptism represents, that is often seen in the questions answered before baptism, the 'pledge of a clear conscious before God'.

- *How do you understand the references of Jesus proclamation and baptism in this passage? For further discussion perhaps read the following article and discuss with others. https://margmowczko.com/1-peter-3_17-22/*
- *What is the final reality for believers enduring suffering? How can we keep our eyes fixed on this reality?*

As we seek to LIVE HOPE as a community, even in suffering what do we sense God is calling us to action?

- **The way we love one another?**
- **The way we respond to insults?**
- **The way we respond to suffering?**
- **Our confidence in the vindication won for us in Jesus?**

Spend some time sharing together:

- What is God is saying to you through this passage and discussion?
- What will you do in response to that?

Pray through these things together as a group.