

1 Peter Chapter 3 v 13 - 22

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 June 2016

Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 0 0] Welcome. Good evening. Good to see you. And we come to worship the Lord once more together.

Psalms 106 begins like this. Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His love endures forever. Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord or fully declare his praise? God has done so much for us. There's not any of us, not even all the church, not all the saints in heaven as well, can fully declare the praise of our God. And I wonder if that's perhaps what Charles Wesley was thinking when he wrote this hymn, 566, which we're going to sing now. Oh, for a thousand tongues. Even if we had a thousand tongues, we could not sing the praise of our Lord Jesus as well as we could. So it's not 566, is it? 566. Oh yeah, 566. That's my fault, sorry. 566. Oh, for a thousand tongues. Thank you.

566. Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing, my great Redeemer's grace, my great Redeemer's grace, my great Redeemer's grace.

The Redeemer's Praise The pluries of my God and King The triumphs of His grace The triumphs of His grace The triumphs of His grace Let's continue then in our worship as we pray. Let us pray.

We confess, O Lord our God, that indeed even with the heartiest singing, the greatest musicians, the greatest music, the greatest lyrics and words written by the most godly of men, and women. Lord, there's nothing in this world that can give to you the praise you deserve. Nothing that can give to you the honour and the worship that really is fitting to one who is the God of gods, the Lord of lords and the King of kings.

[2 : 5 2] Everything that we bring, O Lord, we bring tainted. Tainted with our sin, tainted with our imperfections, our failings, our faults, our foolishness.

Everything we bring, O Lord, has the savour of earth about it. We thank you that in heaven that's not the case. We thank you that in heaven even now you are being worshipped by all those who have gone before, whose faith has been in you, the living God, who have been saved by your grace.

All those saints of the Old and the New Testament, all those saints, Lord, since Christ was ascended into heaven in the age of the church, even around, Lord, nations from around the world where people are now with you in glory.

We thank you that joining your people are the angels, that host of heaven, that number which we cannot count worshipping and praising you. O Lord, there is no sin to be seen.

There is no fault, there is no imperfection, there is no croaky voice, there is no out-of-tune singing, but all is as it should be. We thank you, O Lord, that as yet it still is not perfect.

[4 : 0 6] The worship you receive is still lacking. It's lacking us, Lord. It's lacking those for whom Christ died. It will not be perfect until that day when all your saints are gathered in, when every single one, Lord Jesus, that you died for is brought before your throne, when every single one who has put their faith and trust in you has run the race and finished the race.

And, Lord, then and only then, in the glory, when that multitude, that countless, numberless multitude of men and women from every land and every tribe and every tongue will, Lord, be gathered there.

Only then will you receive the worship and the praise that is complete and perfect in your sight. But we thank you, Lord, that we are preparing for that day.

Even as we sing now, we're practicing and making ready for that time when we shall be there by your grace. Lord, every Sunday is another week closer to being home with you.

We thank you for that, that we are further down the road. We're further down the race than we were a week before. We're closer to you than we've ever been before. Closer, Lord, perhaps to you calling us in death, or closer certainly to that time when you come again, Lord Jesus, as King and Lord of heaven and earth, when every knee will bow before you and every tongue confess your praise.

[5 : 33] Oh, Lord, we ask that you would give us perseverance to press on, Lord, in this race, that you would give us the strength, the encouragement, the help we need in this time to press on to the goal, to not give up, to not become weary in doing good, but, Lord, to persevere by the power of your grace at work in us.

So, Lord, come amongst us and bless us in this time. Speak to us and help us as we come and ask these things in the precious name of Jesus, our Saviour.

Amen. Because we're sharing in communion this evening, we won't be any notices, except, of course, to remind you that they're all on the notice sheet. Please have a look at that if you need to.

All the main meetings of the week are returning to normal after the half-term break, so please be in prayer for them. Appreciate prayer for myself. I'm writing the thought for the week in the Gazette for Friday, so I appreciate your prayer that I might put something clear and succinct about the Gospel in that.

Peter, can I just mention that? Yes. Well, we're in 1 Peter, and Chapter 3, where we've been for a little while, these past few weeks, on a Sunday evening, looking at Peter's very practical, helpful, and encouraging letter to Christians who are living like us in a world which is hostile, in a world which is opposed to God's truth, and often suffering for that in one way or another.

[7 : 05] And in Chapter 3, we've seen how Peter has been giving us clear instruction about how we are to live. We've got another hymn. Is that right?

I'm just going to read, and then we're going to sing another hymn. Is that okay? Sorry. By apologies. I'm only going to read. It was just a sort of introduction to the reading. Yeah, sorry.

Yes. There's five. Yeah, there's going to be, then there's two for communion. We're in Chapter 3 of 1 Peter. You're getting your hopes up there, I think.

But no, I'm going to read and then preach. Sorry. Right. Behave yourself. Okay. So, Peter has been given these instructions to how we live in the world, particularly as we are foreigners, he says in verse 11 of Chapter 2, and exiles.

And so we're going to pick up, we looked at really some very challenging teaching of Peter the last two weeks, really relating to the church in many ways, in our relationship with one another, and the importance, really.

[8 : 15] It's so important, of course, that we are those whose words and whose life edifies, builds up. We are to be a blessing. That's the wonderful thing. That's the essence. As believers, we're to be a blessing to one another in everything we do, but we're to be a blessing in the world.

And so I'm going to pick up from verse 13 and read to the end of the chapter, and this is the passage, particularly verse 15 and following, that we're going to be thinking about. Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?

But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear their threats. Do not be frightened, but in your hearts, revere Christ as Lord.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

For it is better, if it's God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God.

[9 : 31] He was put to death in the body, but made alive in the spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits, to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

In it, only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water. And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also. Not the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a clear conscience towards God.

It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand with angels, authorities, and powers, in submission to him.

May the Lord help us as we trust you will to understand his word. So we will sing again. Thank you. Number 464. Go forth and tell. 464. Sorry about that mix-up with the songs there.

So we're back in 1 Peter in chapter 3 in verses 14 particularly and 15 through to the end of the chapter. There's a very old film in which Cary Grant stars, I think probably one of his first films, those of you who are old enough to know Cary Grant is, or was rather, it's black and white and it's called Gungadin.

[11 : 10] And it's the story, have anybody seen Gungadin? Do you know the story of Gungadin? Yes, well done. It's a very old story and it's about Gungadin who was a native water carrier in my family.

I made them sit and watch this film some time ago and said, this is for your cultural education. And he's a native water carrier serving the British army in Afghanistan in the 19th century.

And he bravely, though a water carrier, saves the whole army, the whole of the British army. He does this without shooting a single shot or carrying a gun but simply by sounding a warning on the bugle whilst being shot at from all sides by the enemy.

Even when he's wounded, look away, Mel, even when he's wounded, he carries on blowing his bugle until at the very end he dies a hero and the enemy are vanquished and the army is saved.

Now, as believers, as I've already said by introduction to the reading, as believers, we are, we have sided with Christ against the world. We are in Christ's army, I might say.

[12 : 17] We've been called to serve him in his church in a world which is hostile, a war zone where we can expect to be shot at and attacked constantly.

Now, this is a reality that Peter has brought again and again to his readers in the letter. We see all that back in chapter 2 that they live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong they may see your good deeds.

And here, chapter 3, 13, who's going to harm you if you're eager to do good but even if you should suffer? And again and again we've seen about how God's people suffer in a world which is hostile towards them.

And so, in his letter Peter's written about how we as the church are to act, how we to live in a world as God's holy people when the society around about us is hostile, is against us, is opposed to the people of Christ.

I said the last week and I said again in the introduction that we are to be a blessing. That's our purpose. That's the reason God has saved us. That's the reason we continue to live for Christ now.

[13 : 33] That even though we suffer insults, even though we are attacked, as we saw there in verse 9, we are to be a blessing, to repay, to respond with a blessing to them.

What greater blessing can we be to the men and women of this world than to tell them of Christ? The greatest blessing we can be, the greatest blessing we can give to our neighbours, our friends, our family, those who harm us is to tell them of Jesus.

Like Gungadin of old, we are to trumpet the gospel until the very moment that we die. Charles Wesley put it like this in his hymn, Preach him to all and cry in death, behold the Lamb.

Is that all we've really got to look forward to though? It's not very encouraging, is it? Are we to just continue to preach Christ and people take pot shots at us and to continue like that until we eventually die?

It's not very inspiring, is it? For the believers here, not very inspiring for us if that's the message and the only message that we have here, that we are to suffer and to repay suffering with blessing in the sharing of the gospel.

[14 : 55] No, that isn't all the message that there is. That isn't all that we can hope for, just to keep on being oppressed and attacked, preaching Christ until we die. There's a better hope than that and we'll come to it as we get through this passage.

But first of all, we need to look at what it means to be a blessing, what it means to be someone who speaks Christ in all situations, when we are threatened, when we are opposed and it does happen.

I had an email from Roger Carswell, if you remember, last weekend he'd asked us to pray for him, for being at Speaker's Corner. he told me that on two occasions he was stopped from preaching at Speaker's Corner by the police themselves, who told him, one, that his platform was too high and then they told him that on a Friday he can't preach the gospel.

So, there is persecution in that way, opposition in that way. But it's not, we're not really afraid too much of being arrested, are we? We're more concerned about our friends, our family, our schoolmates, our neighbours, how they will react to us as Christians, how they will attack us.

Notice here that Paul says, do not fear their threats and you've got a footnote or fear what they fear. They will tell you to be afraid. They will seek to put fear into us.

[16 : 17] Well, if you do that, don't expect to get a career, a rise, don't expect to get promoted, don't expect to get very far in life if you're going to believe those sort of fairy tales or nonsense.

They'll tell us all sorts of things to keep us under fear. But rather, Peter says, don't be afraid, don't be frightened. So how do we overcome those fears?

How do we overcome that opposition which we face from time to time when simply because we are Christians, simply because we live for Christ, we find ourselves knocking heads in one sense against the world and against our society?

Well, here we have the answer, don't we? Verse 15, but in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. When suffering comes, when we are threatened, when we are insulted, when we are abused, when we are opposed, we are to this, first of all.

Now, some of us will have different translations. This translation is the new 2012 NIV, revere Christ as Lord. Others will say sanctify Jesus as Lord in your hearts, set apart the Lord Jesus in your hearts, honour, as the English Standard Version.

[17 : 34] It's really the same word translated in different ways. It's the word which is very similar to the word we use when we pray, our Father hallowed be your name. It's that word hallow, the Lord Jesus Christ in your heart as Lord.

What does that mean? Well, all of those translations in one sense are correct, they're just different ways of saying the same thing. It means lift up Jesus in your heart as Lord.

Recognize, be assured in your heart that he is the Lord above all others, that he is in control. And we're to do it in our hearts, remember. It doesn't say do it with your voices, it's good to sing Jesus as Lord.

It's good to be assured of that in our minds, to think in that way, yes, but it's our hearts, of course, that are the vital place of our faith. Set apart Jesus, exalt Jesus by believing in your heart with certainty that he is the Lord of all things.

The heart is the place of faith. Romans chapter 10, verse 10, it's with your heart that you believe and are justified. It's not just in the mind we to acknowledge, think, but with the heart we're to trust trust in the complete rule and sovereignty of Jesus over every part of our lives.

[18 : 56] You see, if we fail to do that, if we do not have in our hearts that confidence, that assurance that Jesus is in every aspect of our lives, in everything that goes on, including the sufferings that we face, then we will not be able to stand boldly for him.

We won't have the strength of being able to say to people, yes, I am a Christian, and this is what I believe. Fear will cripple us, the opposition of others will crush us, if I'm not sure that my life is in the hands of an almighty and sovereign Lord.

It's the very foundation upon which we are to live our lives. It's the foundation which is the best preparation for answering those who question us about our faith in one way or another.

Because this is what we see here. In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer. There's the preparation, isn't there? In one sense, the preparation of speaking for Jesus is the assurance that he is the Lord of this situation, that he has us in his hands.

But it's not the only preparation. In your hearts, always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

[20 : 15] We need to have a reason for the hope that we possess. Can I explain why I am a Christian? That's very different from explaining what a Christian is or who Jesus is.

Can we explain why I am a Christian? Why do I have this hope of heaven? Why do I have this hope in Jesus Christ? Christ? Can I give a reason as to why I believe in him?

Not what I believe. They're different things. You see, we can understand, again, mentally, who Jesus was, what he did, why he came, why he suffered on the cross.

We can understand all those things. Many children from Sunday school could do that. But the question is not who is he, but why do I believe in him? It's a different thing.

And it's worth taking time to do that. I'd encourage you, if you've not done that recently, take time just to do that when you're at home. Even take your pen and paper. Write out perhaps the reason why you're a Christian.

[21 : 18] If somebody wants to ask you. It can be very helpful for us. Not only that we can answer those who question us, maybe at work or at school and say, well, what do you believe?

Why do you believe those things? It's also a great encouragement for ourselves when we have doubts, because we all do from time to time. Am I really the Lord? Am I really trusting Christ?

Or is it just in the head? Am I a genuine Christian? We know that the devil attacks us and he will seek to sow doubts if possible in our minds that we've never truly been born of the Spirit, that we've never truly trusted Christ, that we're just following after the way of perhaps our parents or perhaps of others, all the things that we've heard.

Or we've thought that we were a Christian, but actually maybe I'm not. Maybe when I start to sit down and think about the reason why I believe in Jesus, I come to the understanding, well actually I never have really trusted in him.

I've thought of myself as a Christian, but I haven't really come to that saving faith. It will lead us either, this questioning of ourselves, and the Bible encourages us to do that, either to assurance that yes, Lord, I know why I believe in you, I know why I trust you, or else it may lead us to come to Christ for ourselves.

[22 : 33] I do need to trust in you. It's not just enough. To know these things in my head, I must have that assurance. So let me encourage you to do that, and take time to do that, even this week.

Always be prepared to give an answer. But how should we give this answer, Peter says, and he gives us three points very briefly here. We're to answer with gentleness, he says.

Do this with gentleness. When people come to us, and there is the implication really that when people come and question us, it isn't out of genuine curiosity, saying, I really want to be a Christian, tell me why you're a Christian.

It's more out of this case, as we see, speaking maliciously, mocking maybe, ridiculing maybe. Why on earth would you believe that? Why on earth did you believe in this man who lived 2,000 years ago?

Why do you believe that the Bible says this? So there's a sense of arrogance maybe, antagonism, malice as people speak against us, speaking harshly.

[23 : 33] But remember what we've been taught back in verse 9, do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. So when people come to us in a putting down sort of way, don't respond in that same attitude.

Rather respond with gentleness. Proverbs chapter 15, verse 1 says, a gentle answer turns away wrath. A gentle answer can actually be a great antidote to somebody coming in an angry sort of way towards us with questions about why we are Christians.

So gentleness, do I respond in that way? Or does their sort of antagonism get my heckles up as well? It shouldn't do. Secondly, with respect, do with gentleness and respect.

We're to treat all people who come to us in the same way, with respect. It may well be that Peter's thinking particularly of those who will be brought before the courts, the law courts, as they were, and many times since then, even Christians now, questioned about their faith, under sentence really, of punishment, being interrogated, perhaps even tortured.

Peter again reminds them that they're to have respect. We're to have respect, we're told, verse 17, show proper respect for everyone. Whoever questions us, whatever their motives, we're to respect them.

[24 : 57] Respect that they may have a different viewpoint to us. We may have to agree with it to respect it. We don't have to agree with somebody who's a Muslim to respect them, or somebody who's an atheist to respect them.

Seek not to belittle them. Sometimes we can be guilty of that, belittling some, they belittle our beliefs, so we'll belittle their beliefs. No, there's respect. And then, of course, it's so important that we have a consistency of life.

Keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. A clear conscience.

In other words, my life, I want it to be in keeping with my testimony, my witness. There's nothing in my life, nothing in my life which contradicts that.

we seek to be blameless before God. That's a clear conscience before God. Saying, though I know that I sin, I ask your forgiveness. Those accusations that people make against us may be false.

[26 : 01] They can't stand. Accusing us of fanaticism, accusing us of something else, of not thinking it through properly, whatever it may be. Let our lives be free from hypocrisy.

Be blameless before God. And then we're brought back, aren't we? Verse 17, to that full circle again, to the sovereignty of God over every part of our lives.

For we're told it is better if it is God's will to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. Suffering can be part of God's will for us.

That's a strange thing, isn't it? For us to understand suffering can be God's will for us. It can be what God wants. We are to do good.

Better if it is God's will to suffer for doing good. What is he talking about when he says suffering to doing good? Is he talking about being charitable all the time and being involved in all sorts of events?

[27 : 06] No, he's just talking about living for Christ. Doing good is simply living for Jesus day by day. It's not being a do-gooder, if I can put it that way, or filling our lives with all those things that many other people do.

Good as they are, they aren't the things but seeking to please God. Living to please him day by day. Isn't it a sadness and a reflection upon our own society that in this upside-down world it's those who do good who often are the ones who act according to their conscience, who are sacked or ostracized or prosecuted?

The person who will not take part in a marriage, same-sex marriage, is someone who is sacked as a registrar, somebody who doesn't agree with something which is unbiblical.

We're told they cannot be a social worker or whatever it may be. In our upside-down world, the truth is that those who do good often suffer because they seek to keep a clear conscience before God.

But when that happens, it's not outside of God's will. It's always part of God's will. We may misunderstand this phrase, for it is better if it is God's will to suffer for doing good.

[28 : 23] Does that mean there are times when it's not God's will when we suffer and times when it is God's will when we suffer? No, that's not what Peter's saying. He's saying sometimes we do good and we don't suffer for it.

But when we do suffer for it, that's just as much God's will as when we don't. It's always in God's will. If you do happen to suffer, it's God's will. When those insults come, it's not outside of his control.

It's not something whereby suddenly the devil has taken hold and has the reins of your life. No. Always and in every way, your life and mine are under the sovereign hand of God, the control of God.

That's why at the very start he tells us to set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts. Be assured of that so that when you face suffering, it won't rock your world in that way. But then we come to this part of hope.

I promised you there'd be some hope. So far we've just learned about suffering. We've talked about how we're to witness in the face of it and how that will often at times result in discouragement.

[29 : 32] So what's the hope? What's the hope for us living for Christ in this hostile world? What should we expect? Well, our hope of course, as in all things, is centered on Christ.

For Christ also suffered once for sins. Our hope is always based upon Jesus' lordship, yes, but here our hope is built upon the actual historical events of his life, death and resurrection.

When he suffered, he did so because it was God's will. It is God's will for you to suffer. Christ also suffered. We know it was God's will. Isaiah 53, verse 10, it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer.

Well, was his suffering in vain? Was his suffering just pointless? Did he die without hope? Was his witness for God to this sinful and wicked world purposeless?

A big fat no. We know that's not the case. We know that he didn't just go through the suffering of a hostile world and die and that was the end and there was no hope in the midst of it.

[30 : 45] And so we know with ourselves that we are not simply to live in this world to witness for Christ, to be a blessing, to no avail. Peter points to three truths which are a great encouragement to those who suffer for Christ then and now.

Three great encouragements from the person of Jesus. Notice this, that Jesus was perfectly righteous and yet he was opposed, insulted and persecuted. Christ also suffered once for all the righteous for the unrighteous.

Nobody has lived a more blameless, godly, wonderful, perfect life than the Lord Jesus. When he lived in this world he never ever did anything wrong.

There's no fault to be found in him. He never was insulting. He never was unpleasant. He never caused people sorrow and harm by his sinfulness or selfishness.

And yet in spite of that life that he lived, in spite of that perfection that he lived in the sight of God and before men, they still attacked him. They still found fault with him.

[31 : 54] They still persecuted him. He still suffered. And they still put him to death. Therefore, dear friends, don't take it to heart too much when you are insulted.

Don't take it personally. When living for Christ, people attack you. Don't think, well, there must be something in me that makes me horrible, that makes me unlovely, that makes me worthy of their attacks.

No, even if you were perfect, which you're not, even if you did live a perfect life, the world would still attack you. It's because there is a glimmer of Christ in you, because there is just a reflection of Jesus that they would treat you in the same way they treated him.

He promised his disciples. If they listen to me, they listen to you. If they persecuted me, they'll persecute you. What they did to me, they'll do to you. So, dear friends, don't take it personally.

We do, because we feel it is an attack against us, but it's not because of us, it's because of Christ. They attack the perfect one. They will attack those who reflect something of that.

[33 : 02] Then we see as well that Jesus' suffering brought many to God. He was put to, sorry, Christ also suffered, verse 18, once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

His life and witness and suffering were not in vain, but were used by God to save many. We know that. That's the wonder of the gospel. Yet remember this. The Lord Jesus Christ did not see the fruits of his labors and his suffering while he still walked on the earth, did he?

He didn't see. Yes, he saw the 5,000 coming to him because they were hungry, and he saw all the people on the road leading into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday cheering, but on his death, he was all alone.

Even his best friend denied him. Even somebody so close to him betrayed him. Jesus lived his life and died on the cross without seeing the fruit and the results of his suffering.

And we can get discouraged, can't we? We can get discouraged because we seek to live for Jesus, we seek to be those, in the best way we can, be a positive witness for Jesus. We seek to answer those who speak for him.

[34 : 19] We seek to witness and live. We think, well, is it all worth it? Nobody seems interested. Whenever I speak to people, they sort of listen and then move away with indifference or even receive what I have to say with hostility, with insults.

Is it worth it? Yes. We're back to setting up the Lord Jesus as Lord of our hearts, of Lord in our lives. We need to leave the results with him.

He's sovereign. He's sovereign overruling the things that happen to us, the effects and the attacks that people bring against us. But he's also the one who overrules in the saving of sinners, even through us.

Yes, Jesus suffered, but it had results. It bore fruit. Dear friends, your witness and mine, you're living for Christ. Though we may not see the fruit at this time, though we may not see the results of it, prepare to be surprised.

Perhaps not in this life, but certainly in eternity. Suffering is not in vain. It's not pointless. God always has a purpose in it.

[35 : 28] And as with Jesus is, it is to save the lost. But also thirdly, just in this little passage here, encouragement from the life of Jesus, we see that Jesus' suffering was not the end.

Jesus' suffering was not the end. He was put to death, yes, in the body, but made alive, better phrase is, by the spirit. Not in the spirit, by the spirit. Romans chapter 4 and verse 1 tells us that the spirit of Jesus Christ was declared with holiness.

Sorry, I'll read it properly. Jesus Christ, who through the spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead.

Jesus Christ, our Lord, it's the spirit of God who raised him. So he wasn't just raised in the spirit, there's some false teaching amongst some of the cults that say, yes, Jesus rose like a ghost almost.

Not his body rose, but just his spirit rose. No, that's not what Peter's saying here. He knew that Jesus physically rose. No, it was the spirit of God that brayed him alive by the spirit.

[36 : 34] It wasn't the end of him when he suffered. And dear friends, when we go through suffering in this life, it's not the end. This is not the only life that we have to live in this world. The world that we see, that we hear and touch is not the best.

That's to come. It's not the best that we can hope for. The people around about us, what they can earn, what they can receive, what they can possess, that's the very best that they hope for.

But we don't live with that sort of temporary, failing, dismal hope. We have that hope, rather, that as Jesus was raised to life, as Jesus conquered death, so this world is not the end, this life is not the rest.

But we, like him, verse 22, will go into heaven and be seated at God's right hand. We shall share in his glory as we share in his suffering.

So Peter is bringing great encouragement. Yes, you're suffering. But in that suffering, God has a purpose. God has a purpose to bring you through it, to bring people to himself, and ultimately as well, that it's not you that is taking the battering.

[37 : 46] It's because you are like Christ. And then Peter brings us some encouragements by way of an example. He gives us an example of the blessing that belongs to those who live for God in a world that is ungodly.

Encouragements for us to live for Jesus in a world which lives for itself. Verses 19 to 21 are some of the most difficult verses in the Bible.

They have various interpretations. That's why even if you've got one of the new NIVs, you'll see that in the footnotes there's two passages particularly which can be interpreted in different ways.

So it's not easy. But in spite of that, dear friends, I would say to you that the central message of what Peter's getting across is the same.

The central message, and we'll look at the differences in a moment, but we're not going to look at all of them, but we're going to look at how we can understand these passages these passages right, I hope. But the central message of the encouragement he brings, the example he brings, is here.

[38 : 57] And again, it comes in three parts, very simply for us. First of all, there have always been those who disobey the gospel, no matter who it is who preaches it to them.

So let's pick up verse 19. Now here in the NIV it says, after being made alive, he went and made proclamation. That isn't a very helpful translation.

We're told that he was made alive by the Spirit. Verse 19 is a continuation if you look at the footnote. Made alive in the Spirit or by the Spirit, in which also he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits.

What's that all about? What really Peter is saying is this, and we have to pick through some of the language and some of the word order as well. Peter is pointing to the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ, even before he came into this world in flesh, by the Spirit he preached through Noah to those who were living at that time.

Now that ties in with a few verses we find elsewhere. In 2 Peter, chapter 2, verse 5, Peter tells us that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. And that through his life in that sense, as Noah was building the ark, we see here, while the ark was being built, God waited patiently.

[40 : 25] Patiently in the sense that through Noah's testimony and witness, the gospel was being proclaimed. People were being spoken to about Christ. Well certainly that was the case.

Here you are, Noah building this great massive boat in the middle of the desert. People are going to question and ask, what are you doing? Why is this? And he would have told them, there's an implication by 2 Peter, he was a preacher of righteousness, look, God is going to judge this world, he's going to send a flood against it, and the only way you can be saved is to come into the ark.

And what's very clear, of course, is that nobody listened. But Peter's saying, it wasn't just Noah who was preaching, it was actually the Lord Jesus Christ speaking through him.

And whenever the gospel is preached, whenever the Lord Jesus is spoken of, it's God by his spirit who's speaking through those who are doing the speaking. Paul makes a very similar comment as well in 2 Corinthians and chapter 5.

He says this, chapter 5 verse 20, we are therefore Christ's ambassadors, his representatives. And he says this, as though God were making his appeal through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

[41 : 44] So when we are speaking and living for Christ, it is as if Christ himself is speaking through our lives, speaking to people, calling them to himself. That's why people become Christians through the preaching of the gospel, don't they?

Because they hear the voice of Christ speaking through the words of the preacher or whoever's witnessing. So that's the first thing there. Well, when was he doing that? These people he spoke to, we're told, they were the disobedient.

We're told that they are those who are now imprisoned. Jesus didn't speak to them when they're in prison. Jesus, by his spirit, spoke through Noah in that time when they were disobedient long ago.

They are the ones who are now imprisoned. So we come to the next point in this sense of encouragement from the example of Noah. One, that even when Christ spoke through Noah, even by his spirit, people still didn't listen.

So we shouldn't be surprised that they won't listen to us. If people were disobedient even then, they will be disobedient now in spite of us and ourselves.

[42 : 50] Secondly, those who will obey Christ and live for him shall be saved, even living in a hostile world awaiting judgment. Those who live for Christ now will be saved.

Those who rejected the salvation that Noah received were judged there and then by the flood, but they are also awaiting a future day of judgment. There's that sense of being imprisoned. All those who've died up until this point in time have not received that final judgment.

Yes, they've died and they are in hell, but there is awaiting them yet a further judgment. We don't fully understand these things, but we know that is the case. When all the living and all the dead will be gathered before God and every one of us will be judged according to how we've lived and in light of Christ.

The wonderful thing is this, that here's Noah in the midst of a world, all the world was against Noah, if I could put it that way, and his family. The only ones we're told who were saved there, only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water.

Only eight out of all that world were saved. Yes, because those who obey Christ will always be saved. Those who obey Christ, in spite of having the great, as it were, the deluge of men and women against them, thousands upon thousands, we don't know what the number was, but tens of thousands almost certainly, they were against just those eight believed and just those eight were saved.

[44 : 23] And they were saved by that which judged the others. The water, saved by water. How? Because, of course, the water lifted them up, didn't it, in the ark.

So though the water judged the others, it lifted them to safety. Peter stresses then that their salvation is a picture of ours when we were baptized into Christ.

But this has nothing to do with baptism with water. It's nothing to do with baptism that we carry out upon either infants or believers or upon those who come to faith in Christ.

Because he makes it very clear, this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also, not the removal of dirt. So he's making it clear. I'm not talking about water baptism at all. I'm talking about spirit baptism.

That's what saves us, doesn't it? None of us here believe that somebody's saved by being baptized with water, whatever age they are. We believe that men and women are saved when they have the baptism of the Spirit.

[45 : 23] That's what Peter talks about. Sorry, Paul talks about when he talks about the work of God in uniting us with Christ. Here's chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body.

Whether Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free, all given the one Spirit to drink. We've been baptized into Christ. Spirit baptism. That's what he's talking about here. And that is what unites us with Jesus.

That's what makes us one with him. That's what unites us with him so that all the accomplishments that Jesus has achieved become ours as well. That's why he says there in 1 Peter chapter 3, it saves you, what does?

Baptism with the Spirit by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. when baptism with the Spirit unites us with Christ. Here's Romans 6 talking about the self, same thing.

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ, it's Spirit baptism, not water, were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead to the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

[46 : 40] We've been baptized into the life, the death, the resurrection, the ascension of Jesus. All that he has done, all that he's accomplished, we're united with him. That's what being a Christian is.

The Spirit of God unites us with Jesus. He uses the example of the vine and the branches joined together. That's what the Spirit of God does. That's why we can only be a Christian by the Spirit of God.

Not by baptism, not by coming to church, not by being a good person, not even by witnessing. Those are all external things. The outworking of what God has done in our hearts.

The Holy Spirit's gift is to us the pledge of a clear conscience from God. That's what he's talking about there in verse 21.

Again, differing views, differing translations. It could mean an appeal to God for a clear conscience, we're told in the footnote. My understanding of it is this, that when we receive the Holy Spirit, it is the down payment, the pledge, the promise that God, that we have a clear conscience before God, that we are acceptable to God, that we are loved of God, that we have no need to fear the coming judgment as those who disobey had to fear that coming judgment.

[48 : 06] In Ephesians chapter 2, Ephesians chapter 1, this is what Paul says about the Holy Spirit. You also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of salvation.

When you believed, you were marked in him with the seal, the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, the praise of his glory.

The promise, the pledge, the down payment that we are right with God, the assurance that when we stand before God on that day of judgment, we have nothing to fear, but we have a clear conscience our sins have been dealt with, we have become righteous in his sight.

What a difference it is between those who obey and those who disobey. What a difference it is for those who live for Christ and those who don't. What a difference between those who oppose Christ and his people and those who love him and follow him.

As Peter says at the end in verse 22, our Lord Jesus is at the Father's right hand. And the clear implication, of course, is this, that we shall be there as well one day because just as he lived and suffered in a disobedient world, so all those who live and suffer for him in a disobedient world shall also be where he is.

[49 : 29] Where now we are oppressed, where now we have authorities and powers who persecute and push down upon the church, one day the whole situation will be reversed.

Dear friends, we are to live for Christ in this world, not pointlessly, not in vain, but we are to live and to be a blessing in the speaking of Christ and the gospel day by day because we know that it is not in vain but because we know that we are heading for glory.

That's always the principle in Scripture. Suffering first, glory after. I'll close with these words of Paul in Romans 8, verse 18. He says this, I consider that our present sufferings, and he did suffer a lot, didn't he, Paul?

I consider that our present sufferings, whatever trials, difficulties they may be, are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Whatever we're going through now, there's something far, far greater ahead, a hope that keeps us going. Well, let's pray together, shall we?

[50 : 48] Lord Jesus, we thank you that you understand us. You know what it is to walk where we walk and to live where we live. You know what it is to face the opposition of sinful men.

You know what it is to live in a world which is hostile against you. And we thank you, Lord, for the great privilege it is, though we don't count it as such sometimes, that we bear your image in this world, your likeness in this world.

But we pray, oh Lord, again, that when we live, as we live, as we speak, as we witness, that we might be bold, confident that you are the Lord of our lives and we have nothing to fear.

We thank you that we are following in the footsteps not only of the Lord Jesus but even of Noah and the saints who've gone before us who under great pressure and difficulty continue to be faithful to you.

And oh Lord, in your grace and mercy, you brought them through and brought them to glory in the end. That you proved them, Lord, in one sense, right when all the world said they were wrong.

[51 : 52] We thank you that we can trust you. We pray that you would give us that boldness, that confidence that comes from knowing that our lives are in your hands. And Lord, if it is your will that we should suffer for doing good, help us to answer with gentleness, with respect, with a clear conscience.

Help us to be those whose lives show that actually, oh Lord, it's your work in us, your spirit, your transformation. We pray, Lord Jesus, again that you would help us to persevere.

And we pray that Lord, our witness for you may indeed bring many to faith, many to trust, many to turn. For we ask it all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.