



## **BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 1 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair**

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**Message Title: You Are Blessed Pt. 1**

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Part of living as hope filled people in a culture of despair is to understand even if we are treated unfairly, even if we are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, we need to remember we are blessed. We pick it up in Chapter 3, Verse 13:

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? (\*NASB, 1 Peter 2:13)

So, this kind of builds off the theology of verse 12—that ultimately God is sovereign; God is for the righteous; He will judge the evil. It is very much like Paul in Romans 8, “If God is for you, who can be against you?” The position Peter has taken is even in a hostile culture, if you seek to follow the script, follow the commands, and follow the strategy that God has laid out, by and large it will go well for you. Verse 14:

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.

The grammar there is kind of interesting. It basically reflects the idea that chances are if you follow the script, even in a hostile crowd, it’s probably going to go better for you. But there is this possibility, that even following the script, seeking righteousness, that you can end up suffering persecution or unfair treatment. But even then, you are blessed. Now it gets confusing because there are a number of Greek words that are translated blessed in English. So, for example, this word is a completely different word than the word used in verse 9, when he was talking about blessing. This is the word that basically means to be happy. This is the exact same word that is used in the Beatitudes. “Blessed are the meek; blessed are the poor in spirit.” It isn’t kind of a surface-y, trivial happiness. It’s more a sense of this deep, joyful satisfaction that brings a deep soul-satisfying happiness. So even in the midst of the worst of circumstances, there is every reason to be happy. It is also helpful to understand he is not saying... “when the trouble is over.” He is saying... “in the midst of it we can still be happy.” So why does he say that? He goes on to quote from Isaiah chapter 8:

AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED. (Vs. 14b)

So that’s a quote from Chapter 8. So, Isaiah is writing to the southern part of Israel that is referred to as Judah. By the time Isaiah is writing, the kingdom has been divided. It’s Israel in the North; it’s Judah in the South. Israel has already been conquered by the Assyrians and hauled away. The Babylonians have conquered the Assyrians and they’re coming for Judah. God is going to allow this as a discipline on His people because of their rebellion and idolatry. It is a corrective judgment on them. But what is being said in this verse is that there has always

been a remnant. Even when Israel was at its worst, there was always a remnant of those who were faithful to God, those who were numbered among the righteous. And what that verse is literally saying is that remnant of the righteous should not fear the same fear – that’s literally what the text says - nor should they be troubled or agitated or stirred up. Again, it reflects this core theology of verse 12—that God is sovereign, that God remembers His people. He is for the righteous, and even in the most difficult of circumstances, God will not forget His own righteous people. So, Babylon will come. They will conquer Judah; they will haul them off; life will get really hard, but God will not forget the remnant, and He will take care of them. Verse 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;

So again, remember these people are aliens and strangers living in a foreign land, beginning to experience persecution. It’s going to get dramatically worse, and yet in the midst of that, the one thing they can hold on to is God is sovereign; God is for the righteous, and we don’t need to have the same fear as those who rebel against God. But then he goes on. The next verse in Isaiah 8—it’s kind of a paraphrase that Peter uses—but basically the verse in Isaiah says, “The Lord almighty is in control.” Lord almighty is the Hebrew that is a reference to the God who is the General over the armies of Heaven. So, Peter is kind of capturing that, saying, “Remember that you have to be set apart, sanctify...in your heart. In the first century, heart was not primarily emotion. It was like intellect, emotions, and will. So, what we talked about was putting our game face on. That is kind of the reflection here again. Put your game face on and remember that the Christ that is for you is the Christ that is the General over the armies of Heaven. So, the God that is righteous, who doesn’t forget His people, is the God who commands the armies of Heaven and He is going to take care of you, and everything is going to be okay. The idea of the verse, then, is if we remember that even in the worst of times there is reason for hope, which then causes the people around us to wonder, “What is with these people—that even in the worst of times, they seem to have hope?” So, they’re going to ask the question, “Defend yourself; what is the basis by which you have hope in a culture of despair?” What the verse is saying is your right behavior is going to bring that question, so just be ready to answer it.

This verse has kind of been misunderstood over the years. It causes Christians to think you have to have like your degree in apologetics and be able to respond to every objection that somebody might raise. It is helpful to remember there are lots of questions people ask where it is okay to say, “I don’t really know.” I have become really good at that over the years. Nobody should be expected to be just this answer machine. That shouldn’t prevent you from having meaningful conversations around the basis for the hope that is in you. What causes you to still have hope in the midst of a culture of despair? The answer is, “Simply the message of the Gospel. This is what Jesus has done for me; this is what I believe, and this is why I still have hope in the midst of difficult circumstances.” That’s basically what’s being said there. One of the things I find helpful with this verse is it just reaffirms what we have been saying all along. If we choose to respond rightly, if we follow the script, if we do good, if we pursue flourishing, what the text is saying is that that is so counter to the culture, it’s so odd compared to everyone else, it will raise the question. This, then, becomes the platform from which we present the message of the Gospel. But Peter says it should be done with gentleness and reverence or respect. It is really

important to remember we are not trying to win an argument; we are trying to persuade someone to Jesus. Those are two very different things. Winning an argument, winning a debate is all about, “I’m right and you’re wrong, so there.” So, we have to be really careful that even though we see the contradictions and the hypocrisies and the inconsistencies of a secular worldview, the goal is not to beat them over the head with it—so that we can say, “I’m right, you’re wrong.” The goal is to present the conversation in such a way that they are persuaded to consider a relationship with Jesus. That’s the goal of the conversation and Peter reminds us of that.

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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. 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. (Verse 16 & 17)

Now I’ve mentioned that Peter keeps recycling some of this discussion. It’s not really linear—from one end to the other—like Paul in Romans, but it keeps cycling back to these major themes—so he has told us this before. If we are going to suffer, let’s suffer for righteousness. When we do wrong, we suffer the natural consequences of that. There is no witness in that. Everybody looks at us and says, “Well, you had it coming; it’s your own fault.” But when we do right, even if we are slandered, even if we are verbally abused, and we are slandered or abused for the sake of righteousness, at least in the midst of that, there is still a testimony. If we are going to suffer, let’s suffer for righteousness.

Then in verse 18, for the third time he cycles back, that the fundamental theology behind this is: this is what Jesus did for us! Before we’re tempted to pull the unfair card and say, “Wait a minute; I shouldn’t have to suffer for righteousness,” he again reminds us, “Wait a minute, this is what Jesus did for you!” and He is asking you to follow His example—to be a witness to others in a dark and hurting world. I do think it is interesting in verse 17 that he says, “If God wills it that you suffer for the sake of righteousness.” There is this reminder that all of that comes through God’s filter. I am God’s child and God is for me, but it may be necessary at times for me to go through difficult things, for me to suffer for righteousness. And for reasons probably only God will know, He does allow it. Maybe there is something in my own character that needs to be refined. Maybe there is an area where I need to grow. But perhaps it’s also, there are people around me that don’t know Jesus, and the only way that the message is going to get their attention is, if I go through unfair treatment and respond rightly, in such a way that it gets their attention, and they wonder, “What is it about you that causes you to respond rightly?” I find myself thinking: if life is just kind of a crapshoot and it’s kind of like a lottery and you get what you get, it makes it very hard to endure suffering. “I just got a bad ticket.” But if I understand that actually it’s all gone through God’s grid, and for strategic purposes for the sake of the Gospel He is going to allow this in my life, then I can accept that. If it’s for the sake of the mission, I’m on board with that. And if that’s necessary, then I need to respond rightly. And again, we are reminded, “That’s what Jesus did for us!” Verse 18:

For Christ also (So they also are connecting with this unfair treatment idea.)

For Christ also died for sins... (Why did Jesus die? He died for sins) once for all. (This once for all is not referencing once for all people. It's referencing once for all time. Contrary to the priest coming and offering sacrifices day after day—those were all shadows of Jesus' sacrifice once for all time for sin. Now I do believe Jesus did die for all people, but I don't believe that's what this text is referencing. He died once for all. Jesus uttered the word "Tetelestai" (a Greek word uttered on the cross which was a banking term that simply meant "paid in full", one time for sin) ...the just for the unjust... This is what we refer to as the substitutionary death of Jesus, meaning, He was just; He knew no sin. I am unjust. I am a sinner worthy of condemnation before a holy God. Therefore, the just died for sin, but it wasn't His sin. He had no sin. Whose sin did He die for? He died for my sin. Therefore, before I pull the unfair card, I need to remember the utter unfairness of the cross. The just died for the unjust. Why would He do that? ...so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

That is actually technical priestly language which referred to the priest bringing a sacrifice to the altar for God. So, Jesus is the priest that brings us now to God; we are acceptable because the just died for the unjust. So why did He do that? In order that sinful men and women might be acceptable before a holy God. Then he talks about being put to death. It came through His death but made alive in the spirit. That's not a reference to the fact that Jesus bodily died on the cross, but His spirit lived on. That way the language would be something like continuing in the spirit. It is rather a reference to the Resurrection. He died on the cross, was buried, but made alive. It's resurrection life. When Jesus resurrected from the death, He resurrected in His new resurrection body—what Paul would refer to as the prototype of the body we will have one day in the resurrection. There were differences with the body of Jesus when He rose that are described in the Gospels. So, this is now in the Spirit, in the spiritual, in the Spirit's power, the spirit life. It's this whole new body, that is now the resurrected body of Christ.

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Cara: Bryan, this was a great message today. Your title for this series, "Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair", that pretty much sums this whole thing up. Peter's defining how-to live-in hope, even when we have really dire situations going on.

Bryan: Yeah, so I think it's really helpful to remember the circumstances that the first readers were very hard and about to get a lot harder. And frankly it's been hard for most Christians for 2000 years. So, no matter what, there is every reason for hope. Jesus wins. And as His people, we win with Him and we have every reason to be hope filled.

Arnie: Here in America, and in a few other parts of the world as well, we've sort of been able to live with one foot in the Kingdom of God and the other in the world and kind of balancing, you know, being cool, but still wanting to go to Heaven. Do you think that's going to change in the near future?

Bryan: Yeah, so first your assessment I think is right on. I think we do have the luxury of living with one foot in the Kingdom of God, one foot in the world. And I think it creates all kinds of

problems and misery to us as Christians. So, it's a unique opportunity we've had as Christians in America, to have the kind of freedom we've had. So, whether the future is persecution, or whether the future is apathy, I think is a big question, maybe more like Europe, where the church just kind of goes to sleep, and it's more, we're just irrelevant. I don't know. I frankly find the apathy option more frightening.

Cara: I was just going to say that.

Arnie: Yeah. Isn't that a strategy of Satan? Really?

Bryan: Yeah, just go to sleep. But I think the likelihood of a great divide between cultural Christians and true followers of Christ will happen and I think that will be a good thing for the church.

Cara: So, it's helpful to realize that God allows us to suffer. It creates opportunities for people to see Jesus in us. Peter says that we should live lives, that cause people to ask us why we live the way that we live. And there's really not a gray area there. No need to argue. We are called to live differently.

Bryan: Yeah. So that's a passage that's I think sometimes misunderstood by people. But the key to that text in Peter is they ask. So, we're not forcing something on people. It's not a big argument, but because we live lives that are so distinct from the rest of the culture, they ask for the reason "for the hope that is within us". And in that moment, we don't have to be the world's greatest apologist. We just need to be able to express; this is the truth of the Gospel. And this is the message that gives me hope. But nobody's going to ask if there's nothing in my life that's obviously different.

Arnie: So ultimately, what is the point of our suffering for Christ?

Bryan: So that's a big question and I suppose we could talk a long time on that. So, there's suffering in general, just because we live in a sin-cursed Earth, and that has created suffering, and God uses that to help us grow. That's what we talked about in James One. Then Peter talks about suffering for Christ. So specifically, because we are Christians and he talks about, that's what God uses to refine us, to grow us, to burn away the impurities. But he spends a lot of time talking about for the sake of the mission, that it's what creates opportunities to reveal what makes us different from the rest of the world. What could possibly give us hope in the midst of a despairing world, especially if we're the ones being persecuted? And the answer to that reveals the truth of the Gospel.