

11-12-23 Shadows: Lessons on Suffering

1 Peter 3:13-22.

If you do what is right, if you spend your time doing what is right, your life will be problem free, won't it?

How many times in your life have you gotten into trouble while you were doing something good, or trying to help another person?

How many times have you suffered for doing the right thing in life? You know what I am talking about, you are doing what God has called you to only to face people making fun of you, or people who would try to get other people to persecute you.

I know for students, living for Jesus, trying to live for God can be difficult. There are always people who try to make fun of people who do good, or those that are trying to live to please God.

In the workplace, when you try to do good, it is sometimes met with resistance and trouble from other people.

We look around us and see good people dying at the hands of the wicked and we see the wicked seemingly prospering.

Life is not always fair. It is tempting to think that if we do what God calls us to do with our lives that we will not have problems, but it does not always work out that way because life is not always fair.

What do we do when life does not treat us as it should? How did Jesus deal with what happened to Him?

Read 1 Peter 3:13-17.

Life is not always fair because:

- I. **Doing what is right can lead to us suffering.**
 - **Verse 13** asks, "who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?"
 - This leads to the subject of the rest of chapter three which is, suffering while doing good can open other areas of service for us as it did for Jesus.
 - I like how the ESV translated **verse 13**. "**Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?**"
 - To be zealous for what is good means to love doing good with the same passionate intensity with which the most fanatical patriot who loves his country has.
 - The word "**good**" deals with a lifestyle of doing good, not just occasionally doing good. It is a lifestyle that loves to do morally good things even if the person we are direction our good works toward has been hostile to us.
 - Have you been around people who seemed to get joy out of doing the right thing? That person who finds the wallet stuffed full of money and wants no reward for returning it to the owner, money intact.
 - Can you think of times in your life where you suffered for doing the right thing? Maybe you lost a friend with whom you would not follow down the wrong path they wanted to take you.
 - When we are persecuted for doing what is right, what do we do? We are doing what God calls us to do, but we seem to be paying a steep price for it, what do we do?

- You would think God would not allow bad things to happen to us as we are following His will for our life; it does not seem fair does it. The one who is living for themselves is seemingly getting along fine, and then here I am, being persecuted for doing good.

Since life is not always fair:

II. How will you respond to unjust suffering?

- **Read verses 14-17.**
- When we suffer for doing good, how do we handle it? How do we respond?

Here are five responses we are to have that will help us to deal with the injustice.

1. Do not give up, God is still blessing you! (14,17)

- **Verse 14** tells us that at times we will suffer for doing good, it should be a rare occurrence, but it will happen.
- The original readers of this letter were facing persecution like nothing we deal with today. If you are being persecuted it feels/seems that God is not with you. **Verse 14** reminds us that if we are suffering for doing good, we are still being blessed by God. The word “**blessed**” in this verse is the same word Jesus used in the beatitudes. It means to be spiritually prosperous.
- It does not mean we will enjoy the persecution, but dealing with it properly can help us to grow spiritually.
- **Verse 17** also reminds us that it is better to suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing evil.

2. Do not allow misplaced fear to intimidate you into quitting! (14)

- We are encouraged not to allow people to intimidate us into ceasing doing good. The fear of persons is misplaced because our God is stronger than person. A person can take your life, but they cannot take your soul.
- Do not allow yourself to be intimidated into silence. In **Acts 4**, Peter and John were arrested and then the Jewish leaders tried to intimidate them. They tried to get them to stop preaching. In **verse 19** Peter and John said they would obey God.
- The word “**troubled**” in **verse 14** gives us the picture of putting water in a jar, then placing the lid on the jar and then shaking up the water. Do not allow yourself to be troubled to the point of quitting!

The third response we are to have is:

3. Give Jesus His rightful place in your heart. (v.15)

- We are told to “**sanctify the Lord God in your hearts**”. The Lord is the one we should fear, not those who persecute us.
- To sanctify in the heart means to: enthrone, honor, worship as sovereign, to acknowledge in the inner part of the mind as supreme. If Jesus is first in our heart, if we allow Him to be our LORD and Savior, we will be able to handle the bad treatment that can follow as we try to do good.
- If God is for us, who is against us?

The fourth response we are to have is:

4. Turn a bad situation into an opportunity for Jesus. (v.15)

- When we are going through unjust treatment, we can use it for an opportunity to reach people for Jesus.
- **Verse 15** tells us to **“always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...”**
- When people see how we deal with adversity, they will want to know how we are able to do it.
- **“Ready”** means to make the necessary preparations and to be anxious to take advantage of the opportunity.
- **“Defense”** means to answer before a magistrate with a reasonable, intelligent statement of one’s position.
- We are to give this defense with an attitude of gentleness and reverence. We cannot come across as angry or with an “I’m better than you attitude.”

5. Maintain a good conscience. (v.16)

- Conscience is the voice in our head that tries to get us to do what is right and convicts us when we do wrong. People will only take notice if we keep ourselves pure in action.
- **Verse 16, “having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.”**
- It is easy to give up and reason that if we are going to be persecuted, we might as well get in trouble for doing evil. That will accomplish nothing.

Even though life did not seem fair:

III. Jesus turned a bad situation into an opportunity for God! (Verses. 18-22)

- **Read verses 18-22.**
- This section of scripture is one of the more difficult ones we can tackle. It is also a very rich passage! The first thing we need to remember is:
 1. **Jesus did not suffer for His wrongdoing. (v.18)**
 - It was the sins of the world that put Him on the cross and all the suffering that came with it!
 2. **Jesus turned what looked to be a bad situation into a ministry opportunity.**
 - The word in **verse 18 “bring”** is a word used by the official who would decide who would have access to the king and who would not get access. Jesus is our access to God. Jesus is the one who allows us to be with God.
 - Jesus died so we could be brought close to God. Jesus took our sins and offers cleansing to all who will come to Him.
 - The most brutal thing, being crucified, was done so that we could be set free!
 - **Verses 19 and 20** have been debated for years and I am not quite sure which view is correct.

God’s Word doesn’t elaborate enough for me to hold either view. Some believe the “spirits in prison” were fallen angels mentioned in 2 Peter 2:4, and Jude 6. Others speculate that Christ preached to the wicked and dead and gave them a second chance to be saved. However, “preached” may mean simply that He (Jesus) reported to the “saints in prison,” (O.T.) His vicarious suffering and impending resurrection, the thought being not of appeal but of announcement. The scriptures offer no “second chance” for those who have died without Christ. -The Complete Biblical Library

- Jesus' resurrection gave us a new beginning and a clear conscience. **(v.21)**
- We are told that baptism is not a removal of dirt, but an appeal to God for a good conscience.
- When we are immersed into Christ, we can stand before God with a clear conscience, knowing are sins are washed away!
- Jesus' suffering led to a greater position and ministry. **(v. 22)**
- Jesus is at the right hand of God and is making intercession on our behalf. All authority is subjected to Him; Jesus is in charge.

Conclusion

There are times when we will suffer for doing good. We must not lose heart; we must press on and continue to do what God calls us to do. The world is watching how we deal with adversity.

Is our faith only strong when things are going well, or will it withstand tough times also?

We need to always understand that no matter what, God is in control!