

Series: Faith Under Fire

“Walking in Hope”

1 Peter 3:8-18

Throughout the month of May we will be concluding our sermon series called “Faith Under Fire.” The reality is that everyone who loves the Lord and lives for Him will have their faith tested through various trials in life. We have already seen this in **1 Peter 1:6-7**, “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” These two simple verses tell us a great deal about the testing of our faith. It first tells us that we will face “various” trials in our lives. Disease, disappointment, sickness, sorrow, pain, punishment, rejection, remorse – all are a part of our lives because we are imperfect people living in an imperfect world. However, the Bible says that we can rejoice when our faith is being tested. We can rejoice when we go through these trials because God is working through them to prove our faith and accomplish His purpose through our lives. The thought seems strange, doesn’t it? Rejoicing in trials? How can that possibly be?

All throughout our study of 1 Peter we have seen many keys to living when we face trials. I will not recap every detail this morning. But, we will focus on the key overall theme of the whole book.

Read Text

We have learned much about hope throughout the course of this study. In fact, it was the main focus of the first sermon several months ago. **1 Peter 1:3** says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a LIVING HOPE through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” I want to say very clearly this morning that you may be here today and feel completely hopeless. You may be in some situation where you feel overwhelmed, defeated, confused, and see no way out. You feel hopeless. But, I am telling you that no matter who you are, where you’re from, or what you’ve done, there is hope because of Jesus. He not only gives hope, but He gives living hope. It is living hope because it is completely based on Jesus who died on the cross, was buried in a borrowed tomb, and three days later rose from the grave. It is living hope because Jesus is the object and Jesus is very much alive today. He is our hope (1 Timothy 1:1). But that isn’t all. It is a living hope because when our focus is fixed on the Lord, this hope builds up inside of us and impacts us. In other words, this hope isn’t a passive feeling or emotion. It is an active, living experience that gives life and impacts us in many ways as we will see today. I want us to see three wonderful truths about walking in this living hope:

I. We have hope in the midst of trials (vs. 8-14)

The followers of Christ always have hope, but this is especially true when we face trials and circumstances. God gives us the grace we need in each moment to trust Him and His plan and

purpose for our lives. It is important for us to remember that the trial that the believers of Peter's day were facing was intense persecution. Nero was on the throne and he would do everything he could to unleash his wrath on the church. Because of their faith in Jesus, Nero was constantly inventing new ways to mock and persecute those who claimed to be Christians. He was aggressively trying to stomp out Christianity. However, his attempts were futile because he couldn't grasp this key truth – No matter what the believer faces, he has a living hope.

As a believer, we should anticipate and expect that we will face suffering. Jesus Himself told us this. In **John 15:20** He said, "Remember the word that I said to **you**, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they **persecuted** Me, they will also **persecute you**; if they kept My word, they will keep **yours** also." Of course, church history records many seasons of persecution that have been unleashed on her. However, in our culture it can be easy to close our eyes and assume that we don't have anything like this today. But, this simply isn't true. Christians throughout many countries in the world are still suffering and being persecuted for their faith. In fact, in 2015 Christianity was listed as the most persecuted religion in the world. Just last year there were an estimated 90,000 Christians killed for their faith throughout the world. Persecution is still very real. Some of you here today know this first-hand because you came to America as religious refugees who were being persecuted in your homeland. Persecution and suffering are very real. Because of the freedom in our country, it is easy to lose sight of the persecution that is still happening throughout the world. But there are many forms of suffering even in our culture today – physical, relational, emotional, psychological, social, financial, career, etc. Suffering takes on many different forms. We may be ridiculed, mocked, rejected, or fired, but we have a living hope to help us every step of the way. ****ILL:** Someone asked C.S. Lewis, "Why do the righteous suffer?" "Why not?" he replied. "They're the only ones who should be able to take it." We can take it. We can face trials and persecution and stand strong because we have hope in Christ. But notice how this hope impacts us.

A. Hope leads to a Godly attitude (vs. 8)

The emphasis here is that the living hope we have in Christ causes us to love others like we ought. The context here is referring to those who are in the body of Christ. If we have hope in Christ, even in the midst of persecution, we will have a deep abiding love for God's people. This love is one of the key identifying factors of those who are truly Christians. Jesus said in **John 13:34-35**, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." This love is evident in many ways. It is evident by having **unity of mind**. This doesn't mean that we are all the same, but that we work together for the cause of Christ. It is evident by **sympathy** for the needs of others. We seek the needs and interests of others as more important than our own. This living hope causes us to be **kindhearted, humble, and sincere** with one another. If we have our hope fixed on Jesus then we aren't fighting with each other, blaming each other, or competing with each other. This is important because when we go through trials and sufferings the enemy has a powerful way of causing us to think that we are battling against flesh and blood. But it is important for us to realize that

our brothers and sisters in Christ aren't our enemy. They are family and we should love them and treat them as such.

B. Hope leads to Godly actions (vs. 9-11)

We have seen how we are to love God's people, but here we see how we are to treat those who oppose us and seek to hurt us. As Peter wrote this letter from the Roman Empire, the Christians were facing persecution because they were doing the will of God. They could respond to this persecution in three ways. They could return evil for good, which is the satanic way to respond. They could return good for good and evil for evil, which is the human way to respond. Or, they could return good for evil, which is the Godly way to respond. We must remember that Jesus is our example of how we are to respond to the world. **1 Pet. 2:21-23** tells us how Jesus faced suffering, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." If that wasn't enough, Jesus even forgave His persecutors because He knew they were doing it in ignorance. Evil with all of its cruelty was certainly hurled against Jesus, but He personally turned away from it and calls us to do the same. The verse says that even when evil comes against us and we are insulted for the cause of Christ, don't give in to the threats. Turn away from doing evil. The clear message of Scripture here is that evil will be done against us and we will at times be insulted for the cause of Christ. When that happens, what should we do? Jesus commanded us in **Matthew 5:44**, "But I say to **you**, love **your** enemies and pray for those who **persecute you**." God then adds through Peter that "we must give a blessing instead. We must turn away from evil and do good. We must seek peace and pursue it."

The phrase here for "turn away" means much more than just to avoid something. It means "to avoid something because you despise it." In other words, we should carefully guard our conduct because we hate sin and want to avoid it all costs. The word refers to the act of bending aside from one's path. Perhaps you've been walking down a path or through a park and you saw a path that wasn't very well lit, and in your mind you thought, "I probably shouldn't go down that path." You felt uncomfortable, as if danger lay ahead. So, you went out of your way to avoid the dangerous path. ****ILL:** Heather and I walking in downtown Baltimore, MD. Turning down the path of returning evil for evil and doing wrong is a dangerous path. It is an unending path as people seek revenge and harm. But God, says, "Believer, you have a living hope and because you have a living hope you must do good. You can do good. You must seek peace and pursue it." This means that we are to continually do good and seek peace with all men. This doesn't mean that all men will be peaceable, but by praying for and blessing those who cause us harm we can do good and look to the Lord to work in any given situation. So, when a believer has living hope in his heart it causes him to live differently. It causes him to be careful how he walks, regardless of his own circumstance.

C. Hope leads to a Godly assurance (vs. 12)

When we have a living hope, we have a peaceful confidence and calm assurance in our soul that God is in control. God gives us several promises here that help us in times of trial. Verse 12 explains clearly that the eyes of the Lord are directed in a favorable sense for the good of those that are righteous. Not only this, but it says that His ears “attend” or are “into” the prayers of the righteous man. The picture here is that the Almighty God of heaven bends down into the very prayers of His children, earnestly listening to their petitions, eager to answer them and come to the aid of those who pray. *****ILL:** Oftentimes when I talk to a child, I will bend down or go to my knees so that I will hear everything and show them that what they are saying to me is important. I want to do everything I can to help them or answer their question. **This is the picture of God.** You may feel like God is too busy or too big to hear your prayer. You may feel like nobody is listening at all. But when the righteous live for God and call out to Him in times of trial and suffering, the Bible says that He bends down to hear you. The imagery is showing us how important we each are to Him. It is true that we can cast all our cares on Him because He deeply cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). Friend, we don’t have to beg God to make Him willing to answer our prayers. He is more desirous of answering our prayers than we are of having them answered. When we are walking through trials and circumstances, we must never forget that the Lord is with us and He cares for us. We don’t walk alone. He is with us every single step of the way. **Hebrews 13:5b-6** summarize this well, “for He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,’ so that we confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?’ ” These are wonderful words of assurance.

II. Our hope in the midst of trials furthers our testimony (vs. 15-17)

It seems to me that most people, including believers, despise trials and suffering. I do believe it is unwise to pray for trials and circumstances. None of us desire them. However, we must be careful that we don’t view suffering as our enemy. It is often through trials that we are tested, tried, and purified. It is often through trials that we are molded into the person that God wants us to be. As a result, we must have hope that God is going to use these trials for our good and His glory. It is through trials that God furthers us for His divine purposes. *****ILL:** Speaking with a man recently diagnosed with cancer. I told him, “I’m so sorry you are going through this.” He quickly responded, “Don’t be. It is exactly what I needed. I have never felt closer to the Lord and I’ve never seen my family grow more spiritually.” *****ILL:** On Thursday night I heard the testimony of a high school athlete who lost her home in a major fire. The fire was so severe that it caused significant internal burns. The doctors told her she would never talk again, never play sports again, and never have the life she once knew. Her life was significantly impacted, but she survived and on Friday I heard her say to hundreds of us in attendance, “I wouldn’t change a thing if I could. God is using my now raspy voice and difficult story as a way to tell others about Him.”

Friends, our trials and sufferings are one of God’s ways to grow our faith, make us stronger, and equip us to share Jesus with the world around us. It is a means by which we receive blessing. **Verses 13-14 say,** “Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are BLESSED. And do not fear their

intimidation, and do not be troubled.” This is what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:10-12**, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” This is why the early church leaders responded so uniquely in **Acts 5:41** after they had been beaten and threatened. The Bible says, “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.” Paul explains further in **Romans 5:3-5**, “We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

The key to all of this is that Jesus is Lord. When Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, we don’t have to fear or fret. We have the clear promise that He is with us, that He is working all things for His glory, and that He is further preparing us to minister to others. We can trust Him and, because we do, we can suffer well. In fact, when Jesus is truly our Lord then each crisis becomes an opportunity for witness. Every Christian should be able to give a reasoned defense of his hope in Christ, especially in hopeless situations. Such a witness of Christ is powerful because it is completely different from what the world expects and anticipates. There are some key points to emphasize about us growing and being used through these trials.

A. We must be ruled by the Savior (vs. 15a)

The first step to explaining your hope when you are facing suffering is to sanctify Christ as Lord of your life. There is no way that we can shine for Jesus well if He isn’t the Lord of our life. The idea of Lord is that He is the boss, master, and leader. I believe that we must learn to trust and surrender to the Lord while on the mountain so that we stay strong in our faith when we walk through the valley. If Christ is truly the Lord of our life then it is freeing. We no longer have to fear men or circumstances or sickness or anything else. He is in control and He can be trusted.

What does it mean to “sanctify Christ as Lord” in our hearts? Warren Wiersbe explains it well. “It means to turn everything over to Him, and to live only to please Him and glorify Him. It means to fear displeasing Him rather than fear what men might do to us. It means being satisfied with nothing less than the will of God in our lives. And one evidence that Jesus Christ is Lord in our lives is the readiness with which we witness to others about Him.” We must be ruled by the Savior.

B. We must be ready to share (vs. 15b)

The text says to be ready always. **At all times be prayed up and studied up, so that you will be ready to speak up and give a witness of Jesus Christ.** Be Ready!

Look carefully at the word “defense.” The Greek word is “apologia.” The word was used in that day to describe a defense that was presented in court. It is from this word that we get our English word “apologetics”, which deals with how to defend the faith. We must

be ready and prepared to give a clear, personal defense of the hope we have in Christ. Now, remember the context is that people may come against us, do evil things to us, and even insult us. But here is what so often happens. When we live a life of obedience to the Lord and face trials and persecution, it is a powerful time of opportunity. The world is watching, longing, and waiting. The Scripture says here that people will ask you to give an account for the hope that you have. Why are they asking for you and I to give an account of this hope? Because they know nothing of it. It is completely foreign to them. They don't get it. They can't grasp it. To them it seems to be the most terrible situation possible. But for the believer we recognize through faith that this world is full of troubles. If our Savior was persecuted and endured hardship we know that we, too, will face them. We believe that God is clearly in control and is working things together for His glory. As a result, we see each trial and circumstance as an opportunity to grow and to further share His truth with others.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we must be faithful to give a witness of the Lord Jesus. Many of us have been lulled to sleep by the culture and have become silent in our sharing of the Gospel. We have become afraid to speak up for Jesus. But, God clearly calls us to present an account of what we believe and why we believe it. Peter, though, adds a word of instruction. He says that we are to give this witness "with gentleness and reverence." In other words, we are not to speak with harshness, arrogance, self-righteousness or a know-it-all attitude. We are also not to argue with lost people and try to dominate an argument. **Our focus and motive is not to win an argument but to win lost souls to the only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.**

C. We must be righteous in our actions (vs. 16-17)

We must be sure that our trials and sufferings aren't due to us doing wrong. Some of our trials and sufferings are due to consequences of our own actions. ****ILL:** Waiter at a restaurant asked me to pray for him because he got a speeding ticket. He didn't know how he was going to pay for it and was angry that the office gave him a ticket for only going 11mph over the limit. I encouraged him and prayed for him and left a little larger tip than normal, but was his trial justified? Of course it was.

When we go through trials and sufferings, the world is watching more than ever. As a result, we must make sure that our actions are above reproach. We must be diligent to keep our testimony. We should strive to live a blameless life that clearly points people to Jesus. The old poem said it well, "You're writing a gospel, a chapter each day, by the deeds that you do and the words that you say. Men read what you write distorted or true, so what is the gospel according to you?" (**Anonymous**) Verse 16-17 reminds us that even as we are facing these various trials we must be sure to keep a good conscience. The word "keep" is a military term which means "to guard, protect." The phrase here refers to an ongoing action, which means that we must work continually to maintain a good conscience.

Our word "conscience" comes from two Latin words that combined mean "to know with". Our conscience enables us to know whether our actions are right or wrong, good

or bad. As a believer studies the Word of God, he better understands the will of God, and his conscience becomes more sensitive to right and wrong. But, if he refuses the Word of God and turns to his own devices, his knowledge becomes very cloudy and his conscience very dim. ****ILL:** Some have compared our conscience to a window that lets in the light of God's truth. If we disobey God and continue to disobey God, the window gets dirtier and dirtier until the light can't enter. The way to have a clear and clean conscience is to hear God's Word and obey it. So the way to maintain a good conscience is to deal with sin in our lives and confess it immediately. A strong conscience is the result of obedience based on knowledge, and a strong conscience makes for a strong Christ witness to the lost. If we don't have a good conscience we will not have the courage we need, the peace we need, or the confidence we need to be an effective witness to the lost.

Christian, are you living with a good conscience? When the world looks at you what do they see? Are they seeing Jesus in you? Are you prepared and ready to share the reason for the hope that is in you?

III. Our hope in the midst of trials will result in triumph (vs. 18)

Jesus wasn't defined by His suffering, but by His victory. We are amazed by His suffering and death, not because He remains dead, but because He was willing to do this for us. But His death was not the end of His life. Three days later He arose from the grave in victory over sin, hell, and the grave and all who believe in Him will experience this same victory. This means that Jesus is Lord. This means that He has all power and authority. Not only does it mean that Jesus is Lord, but it means that all who believe in Him as Lord experience victory through Him. Even when we are suffering here in this temporary world we can be assured of the victory that we have through Him in eternity. Paul testified of this in **2 Cor. 4:16-18**, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." He further stated in **2 Tim 2:12** says, "If we endure, we will also reign with Him." We don't have to live in fear and worry. We can look to Jesus who has defeated the enemy for us.

****ILL: Battle of Waterloo** – "Wellington defeated the enemy." To only see the suffering of Christ is an incomplete message. If it ended there He would only be an example of how to suffer well. But, it didn't end there. He was victorious over the enemy.

Whatever you are going through today, it is nothing compared to what God is doing in you and what He is doing for you. You may be suffering today, but it isn't the end of your story. God is in control and He has a plan for you. Trust him and live for Him. Walk in hope today.

Close with **Romans 8:31-39**