

## **Armed by the Truth of Jesus. 1 Peter 3:17-4:11**

### **Nonsense ! v. 17**

*1 Peter 3:<sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*

"It is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil"

It is better to do good and suffer than to do evil

I hope you reckoned Peter's recommendation that we should just accept suffering as nonsense.

No? Then you are out of step with much of society.

For many, in Peter's day and ours, the goal of life is to avoid suffering and maximise your pleasure and enjoyment – to be happy.

In their view It is better not to suffer at all, to avoid, not accept suffering. Counselling acceptance stops you from resisting the causes of your suffering, frustrates the goal of human life on the earth – and that's the only life we have, the only life in which we can enjoy pleasure and happiness

And suffering for doing good, doing the right thing – that is worse. The injustice of it just adds to the suffering, the anguish

Suffering for doing good should be resisted

And adding in 'if that should be God's will' just reinforces for many how religion stops people from really flourishing in this life

Religion is just used to keep people quiet, to accept what they should resist, to not be active in getting for themselves the happiest life, the most pleasurable life, they can

For many telling people that it is better to suffer for doing good is exactly the wrong advice

They would rather hear 'Avoid suffering if you can at all costs. Why let the only life we have be made miserable? And if you can't avoid, resist, with violence if necessary, those who are making you suffer'

*1 Peter 3:<sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*

[It is better to do good and suffer, if that should be the will of God, than to do evil." Not repeating 2:20, 4:15-16]

So why does Peter say it, and why is it, as Peter will write in 4:1, the key thought we must embrace if we are going to live like Christ in this world, live as God's children doing His will?

The answer?

Christ suffered for doing good – and triumphed

Christ can keep us safe

And accepting this thought will break the hold of sin over us so we can live for God. 4:1-5

### **Christ suffered for doing good and conquered v. 18-22**

*1 Peter 3:<sup>18</sup> For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,*

**v. 18 Christ also suffered, a suffering that was purposeful and effective**

Christ suffered. Right at the heart of the Christian gospel is that truth. Suffering is there from the beginning

He didn't suffer as an evil doer – He was righteous 2:22 – he had not committed any sin

He suffered for doing good, accepting in the garden to do God's will to the end, to drain the cup of God's judgement on sin on our behalf

He suffered for our sins, making himself an offering for sin, the offering that would turn aside God's just anger from us

He suffered for doing good, and that suffering, in God's will was purposeful

And it was effective – He has brought all who believe in Him into the presence of the holy God.

The believers Peter was writing to knew that

Knew They had been healed by His wounds

They had returned to the shepherd of their souls

They called the holy God Father

Believers today know that

Know we are forgiven

Know we have the Spirit in our hearts crying Abba Father

Know we can come with confidence into the holy God's presence

Christ suffering according to the will of God, Christ suffering for doing good, and by that suffering saving us – is our starting point.

Great good can come from suffering according to God's will

It is not purposeless, useless

But it would be pretty discouraging if that suffering only brought good to others, left the sufferer in their misery and suffering

So Peter wants to say more.

Christ's suffering for doing good was the way God brought Him to triumph – He was no loser for suffering according to the will of God

And His triumph demonstrates and guarantees the triumph of God's judgments in His creation, establishes God's order as unassailable – tells us that it is God's way, and those who live by it, who will win in the end.

*1 Peter 3: He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,<sup>19</sup> in which he also went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison<sup>20</sup> who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. In it a few—that is, eight people—were saved through water.<sup>21</sup> Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,<sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.*

#### **v. 18-20, 22 Christ suffered and triumphed**

There are in this passage quite a lot that is unfamiliar to us, and also a number of words and phrases whose interpretation is disputed – giving some quite different understandings of the passage.

I will be presenting my understanding, my conclusions so that we don't get lost in the details – but am more than happy to give a detailed explanation for those conclusions afterwards.

The point of the passage is to present to Peter's hearers and us the extent of the triumph of the Christ who suffered for doing good.

Peter does this in two related ways – first by recounting what happened to Jesus after His death, and secondly by relating that to 'the spirits in prison'

#### **The movement of the passage**

*He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,<sup>19</sup> in which he also went and*

Jesus was put to death in the flesh – He is referring to the Lord Jesus's death on the cross for sin, of which He has just spoken.

But His life did not end there, did not end with His suffering for doing good.

He was made alive by the Spirit. Jesus rose from the dead in the power of the Spirit [Rom. 1:4, 8:11]. Peter is referring to Jesus' resurrection – so whatever he is referring to next is not happening in the period between Jesus' death and resurrection.

Now Peter refers to what happens after His resurrection.

'In which' – in His Spirit empowered resurrection, or more likely 'on which occasion' [Wallace p. 343, NIV After being made alive,]<sup>19</sup> *in which he also went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison*

Peter is referring to a journey Jesus makes – and the English translations make it sound like it is a journey whose destination is the spirits in prison. He went to the spirits in prison.

But it is literally 'Going' he proclaimed. The emphasis is on his proclamation, a proclamation he makes by His going.

But where is He going? That is made clear in v. 22 where 'he has gone' is exactly the same Greek word as in v. 19

<sup>22</sup> *who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.*

Who, going into heaven, is at the right hand of God.

Peter is describing the one movement of Christ

He died

He has risen

And He has ascended. The risen Christ has gone into heaven and is seated at God's right hand.

And in doing that He has proclaimed to and demonstrated His victory over all spiritual powers

The Christ who has suffered for doing good according to God's will now reigns in heaven over all, an unassailable rule

And Peter brings that home by speaking of the impact of His ascension on the spirits in prison.

### **His triumph assures of the victory of God's judgment [the spirits in prison]**

*<sup>19</sup> in which he also went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison <sup>20</sup> who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. In it a few—that is, eight people—were saved through water*

We probably don't give much thought to Genesis 6 and what happened to 'sons of god' who defied God by seeking to impose themselves, their desire and power, on humanity.

But the people of Peter's day and place did.

Scholars tell us that not just amongst the Jews but also amongst the non-Jews of that part of Asia Minor in which the believers to whom Peter is writing lived speculation about Noah and the flood was active. [Jobes 245-247]

That speculation is witnessed in the Jewish book of 1 Enoch [ch. 6]

Two things to note about that speculation.

Firstly the activity of these sons of God, reckoned as angelic beings, was believed by some to be the source of evil spirits and powers on the earth.

And secondly, unlike humanity, they were not destroyed in the flood. It was believed that they were living, but imprisoned.

This is also what is taught in 2 Peter and Jude.

*2 Peter 2:<sup>4</sup> For if God didn't spare the angels who sinned but cast them into hell and delivered them in chains of utter darkness to be kept for judgment;*

*Jude<sup>6</sup> and the angels who did not keep their own position but abandoned their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deep darkness for the judgment on the great day.*

Peter is referring to these angelic beings when speaking of the spirits in prison, and for many in Peter's audience these spirits were the archetypal rebellious powers, and in a sense a continuing threat to God's justice and order, the source of chaos and opposition to God still waiting to be released and again defy God

But Peter tells them that the Lord Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus who suffered for good according to God's will, has removed from them all hope.

His triumph over all evil, His vindication of God's moral order and His judgements in His death and resurrection, is proclaimed to them as Jesus goes into heaven to reign at God's right hand where all spiritual and earthly powers are subject to Him.

In His going they and all the world know Their end, their destruction, is certain.

Now these spirits may not play much of a role in our imaginations, or our conception of evil at work, or of the powers that challenge God's rule.

But think for a moment of what you see as the greatest threat to God's order, now restrained.

Collective human rebellion?

Godless philosophies that seem to grip the popular imagination?

Or unseen evil spirits, powers from beyond this world?

Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension proclaims they will not triumph. He reigns, securely.

God's justice, His moral order, will prevail

And the Jesus who, suffering for good according to the will of God and triumphing, is the Jesus who can keep His people safe when God's judgements are enacted on the earth, when the establishment of God's righteous order means the removal of all the wicked from His creation.

Having spoken of the spirits Peter directs his hearers to God's salvation of Noah from judgement as a type of Christian salvation from judgement, the salvation symbolised in baptism.

### **Christ keeps His people safe vv. 20-21**

*1 Peter 3:<sup>20</sup> who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. In it a few—that is, eight people—were saved through water.<sup>21</sup> Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,<sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.*

*ESV<sup>21</sup> Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,*

#### **Through judgement saved from judgement**

How did God save Noah when he judged the wickedness of human violence on the earth?

By the ark which Noah faithfully prepared. Yes.

But what carried Noah to safety, separated him from his evil age?

It was the water, he was saved through water v. 20.

The very waters that were the means of judgment on all those outside the ark were the same waters that lifted Noah from the judged earth and carried Noah and his family to safety and a new life.

Think of how God saves us as we are in Christ by faith.

The very death that He has spoken of in v. 18 where Christ makes Himself the sin offering, the death that is His judgment on sin, is in Christ the death that saves us.

In Christ, joined to Him by faith, we are carried by Him through judgment to new life, as He shares with us His resurrection life.

And this is what is symbolised in baptism that now saves us – our being joined to Christ in His death and resurrection by faith.

Peter makes it clear that it is not the physical washing of baptism that saves. It is not the act itself – a washing that removes dirt from the body, but what baptism symbolises, what Peter calls, following the ESV, the ‘appeal to God for a good conscience’

That appeal is made on the basis of Christ’s work, on the basis of the authority of the risen Christ to forgive sins just as He promised.

When believers are baptised in response to the gospel they are crying out to God to do for them, individually, what God has promised in the gospel to do for all who repent and believe

To forgive them, to cleanse them from sin, to wash their conscience clean of all that defiles.

And this forgiveness is certain, for the Lord Jesus to whom God has entrusted the authority to both judge and forgive – reigns over all.

No one will ever overturn His verdict, no evil power will threaten His people’s security

It may seem complicated imagery – but don’t miss the big point.

The Jesus who suffered for doing good according to God’s will keeps His people, safe, rescues them from the judgement of God, brings them to new life, to share, as Peter makes clear in 4:6, His risen life. All, who trusting His gospel that He died for our sins, was buried and rose again, and show that believing response in being baptised in obedience to their Lord, are safe forever in Christ.

Having reminded us that the Lord Jesus in suffering for doing good has both triumphed and saved us Peter now applies that to believers, renewing his call to persevere in doing God’s will by being willing to suffer for doing good

### **Trusting in Christ, believing like Christ, we can live like Christ in the world**

*1 Peter 4: Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same understanding—because the one who suffers in the flesh is finished with sin—<sup>2</sup> in order to live the remaining time in the flesh no longer for human desires, but for God’s will.*

### **vv. 1-2 Understanding, like Christ, that it is better to suffer for doing good, we can live, like Christ, to do God’s will [Matt:68, 26:42]**

Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh. ‘Christ suffered in the flesh’ is an abbreviated reminder of all he has just taught, that Christ suffered for doing good and through that suffering triumphed and became the almighty Saviour of His people

Since Christ has done that in this life - Arm yourselves with the same understanding – that is equip yourself in our struggle to live as God’s people in a world that still is ignorant of God and wants to live as if God does not reign, by adopting the same mindset as Christ had, the mindset that says it is

better to suffer for doing good according to God's will than to do evil, better to suffer than to disobey God.

*Why? - because the one who suffers in the flesh is finished with sin—*

That is not saying that bodily suffering will make you sinless. Experience demonstrates that is not the case. Nor is there an argument here for self imposed ascetic practices that afflict the body as the path to holiness.

Peter is talking about adopting a mindset, a commitment to do God's will even if it means suffering.

This commitment, resolved beforehand, frees us from the hold of sin. IF we are going to live as Christ's followers we have to reckon that it will bring suffering, and accept that. Otherwise as soon as suffering arises – for example the mocking, suspicion and exclusion of those we once were associated with that Peter is about to speak about – we will crumble, we will start finding reasons why we don't have to do what God says.

But there is other suffering – like longings denied, or exclusion from our families, equally powerful in making us question God's will

But knowing beforehand that doing the good God commands will bring suffering, and it is better to endure that suffering than do evil, than disobey our God, sets us free *to live the remaining time in the flesh no longer for human desires, but for God's will.*

That is – it sets us free to live as God's child, trusting Jesus to live like Jesus.

Just a little phrase 'for God's will'

But that is what Jesus teaches us to pray for – 'your will be done'

That is what Jesus committed Himself to do in the garden – "My Father if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Matt. 26:42

That is the life of Jesus' followers – doing like their Lord God's will.

And that life will be a different life from the lives of those around us who do not know God

A different life from the life we lived before we trusted Jesus.

*1 Peter 4:<sup>3</sup> For there has already been enough time spent in doing what the Gentiles choose to do: carrying on in unrestrained behavior, evil desires, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and lawless idolatry. <sup>4</sup> They are surprised that you don't join them in the same flood of wild living—and they slander you.*

#### **vv. 3-4 By that will we are committed to a different life that provokes opposition**

Like ours, the society of Peter's day was marked by self-indulgence and sexual immorality. Drinking parties, whether private or associated with civic groups like guilds, were a common feature of their social life and would be accompanied by sexual indulgence with courtesans and prostitutes, and such indulgence was often associated with feasts in honour of the gods. It was a society where the pursuit of pleasure was the goal, a relief from drudgery and also from the consciousness of the nearness of death.

But then as now Christians were called to live self-controlled lives – to have nothing to do with sexual immorality – all sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman, - and shun drunkenness which dishonoured God.

The believers Peter is writing to had once shared that life – a sign that they were converts from Gentile backgrounds. They had seen no problems with it before they believed, it was just normal to party and join in the socially sanctioned worship of the gods.

But having come to be believers in Jesus they had stopped, withdrawn from those activities – and this had provoked their former companions.

They thought their behaviour strange, unnatural almost. Why wouldn't you pursue pleasure where you can?

More – they classed it as anti-human, spoke of Christians as enemies of the human race, people who threatened the well being of the whole society by their refusal to honour the gods, people who substituted secret and shameful rituals for open enjoyment of healthy pleasures. They slandered them.

That is the kind of suffering Peter's readers were experiencing, and with it the anxiety that worse would follow. For where lies are told about a group of people, where they are labelled as odd and suspicious, as not part of the mainstream, it is easy for that group to become the target of worse oppression – of legal sanction or mob violence.

It has a modern ring about it, doesn't it? Because believers today won't participate in and endorse our society's sexual immorality, don't agree with the claim that human freedom is sexual freedom, we are labelled as people who oppose human flourishing. Because we think marriage is a model of the relationship of Christ and His church, and so is a union from difference, with different responsibilities of husband and wife, our teaching is treated as suspicious, slandered as supporting domestic abuse.

Because you might be the only one in your sporting team who won't join in the drinking, or is reluctant to share in the carousing of the office end of year party – you will be marked out as strange

And that can be hard, to be treated with suspicion, to have your motives and views misrepresented, to be isolated from your peers

To endure, we need to arm ourselves with the same attitude as Christ, that it is better to suffer for doing good, than to do evil

And to remember what Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension make certain.

*1 Peter 4:<sup>5</sup> They will give an account to the one who stands ready to judge the living and the dead.*

*<sup>6</sup> For this reason the gospel was also preached to those who are now dead, so that, although they might be judged in the flesh according to human standards, they might live in the spirit according to God's standards.*

#### **vv. 5-6 This is the life that will share Christ's resurrection life**

They will give account.

Instead of getting angry at your treatment, or fearing them, or feeling sorry for yourself – you should shudder for those who continue to reject the Lord Jesus.



It has been said to me from time to time over the years that I speak too much of judgement. But the judgment of the last day is something we should live conscious of every day, conscious of our own accounting as God's servants and children, and conscious of the terror that awaits those who will meet the living, holy God as their judge on that day.

He knows the truth, He searches the heart – the excuses we make for ourselves will be exposed in His light as empty self justifications

He is no relativist. His standards of truth and love are absolute, His commitment to His word and commands unwavering. He won't accept the standards we have chosen for ourselves

That judgement is certain and searching

And, unlike what Peter's age and our age wants to believe, death will be no escape.

He is the judge of the living, and the dead.

Peter's pagan contemporaries did not give much thought to judgement after death. That is why the idea of accepting suffering in this life for good seemed so unreasonable, for this life is all you had.

And that is why they thought that Christians who suffered for doing God's will and died were such losers.

But Peter assures his readers

*<sup>6</sup>For this reason the gospel was also preached to those who are now dead, so that, although they might be judged in the flesh according to human standards, they might live in the spirit according to God's standards.*

That though believers in the gospel who had died had suffered the same judgement of the death of this age, of the body, that all the children of Adam endure, they would live to God in or by the Spirit, the same Spirit who gave Jesus resurrection life.

The life of those, who, trusting Jesus, equip themselves with the same mindset as Christ had, that it is better to suffer for doing good, for doing God's will, than to do wrong, is the life that will share in the life of God forever, the life that will share in resurrection life.

It is only in Christ, believing Him and following Him, walking in His footsteps by being committed to doing the will of God whatever it costs us, that we will be carried through the overwhelming judgement of the just God to new life.

That is the big point.

And if you have not yet committed yourself to Christ, found forgiveness through believing in Him

If you are still pursuing your pleasures and living as you please ignoring God

You should think about what your hope will be in that judgement Christ's resurrection makes certain.

And if in God's mercy you realise you have no hope, call out to the living Lord Jesus 'who suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He may bring you to God', and come and talk

But we should not stop until we remind ourselves what the will of God for us is, especially those aspects of that will Peter focuses on here.

We have seen that will means we should have nothing to do drunkenness and sexual immorality and the worship of the false gods of our world – like money, or our own wills

But if that is what God wills we do not do, what does He will we do?

*1 Peter 4: <sup>7</sup> The end of all things is near; therefore, be alert and sober-minded for prayer. <sup>8</sup> Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since **love covers a multitude of sins.** <sup>9</sup> Be hospitable to one another without complaining. <sup>10</sup> Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, let it be as one who speaks God's words; if anyone serves, let it be from the strength God provides, so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.*

#### **vv. 7-11 God's will for strangers and sojourners**

These are timely words for us as we endure the continuing pressure of the Covid pandemic and the steps taken to stop its spread, and all the emotions that go with that.

God wills that we should be sober minded – not carried away, intoxicated by our passions

And we should be a people who look to God for salvation, for relief. Prayer seems so ordinary, but God wills we should be devoted to it, relying on Him, setting our hope on Him.

And v.8 we must *maintain constant love for one another, since **love covers a multitude of sins.***

Remember this is the will of God we should be willing to suffer for to obey

Love is very general, and it has to be practical – and what that practical love looks like will vary from situation to situation

But Peter particularly points to what you might call the patience and forbearance we have to show each other.

When we experience others disappointing us, or making life difficult for us by their choices

We can be critical, resentful, withdraw – or we can stay committed, seek to encourage, practice the love that covers a multitude of sins

Then there is hospitality, practiced cheerfully – when we have been so long apart, and when there is still fear about contact with people, it takes a bit of effort, trusting obedience to have each other in our homes

And Peter says it is God's will that we should serve one another with the gifts that God has given us, and again there is a cost to that at this time.

Above all we have to be committed to a life that brings glory to our God through our loyalty to Jesus, from our living His way in every part of life.

Timely reminders – the will of God for us is prayer, patient forbearing love, hospitality, service

Seems so ordinary – but in a world that mocks relying on God in prayer, that seeks to cast suspicion on Christians, where we can become impatient of each other – it costs to do this will of God.

We should reckon with that, remembering what our Lord Jesus modelled and vindicated, that it is better to do good, the good of obeying our God, doing His will, and to suffer, than to do wrong.

That commitment to the will of God come what may is the mark of Jesus' people in this world.

### **Arm yourself for life as God's child**

And that is the challenge of this passage to each of us.

Have you reckoned with the reality and certainty of suffering as the cost of doing the good God calls each one of us to do, and believing the gospel have you settled in your heart that it is better to suffer for doing good if that is what God wills than to do evil?

Whether you spend the remaining time you have on this earth to do His will – not what you feel is His will but what He has declared in His word is His will – is the measure of whether you really believe the gospel

That Jesus who suffered for doing good, doing God's will, was dying for you, bearing your sins

And that God has raised Him to life

And that He now has all authority, authority over all the powers and forces that rebel against God

And His judgments, and His forgiveness will never be overturned

The gospel that offers – not necessarily happiness, success, wealth now, but in Christ sure forgiveness, rescue from a judgment Jesus' resurrection makes certain, rescue to resurrection life

IF you, or others, looked at your

Willingness to confess Jesus, to give a defence for your hope

Your prayer

Your love

Your service of God's people

Would they, do you, see someone who believing in Jesus was becoming like Jesus by persevering in the will of God – even if it means suffering?

Arm yourself with the attitude that it is better to suffer to do God's will than to do wrong and give yourself to God's good will while there is time