

February 6, 2011
Course: GROWING IN GRACE – Studies in 1 & 2 Peter
Lesson 7: “When Bad Things Happen To God’s People”
Text: 1 Peter 3:8-22

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According to the World Mission Digest, there were close to 100 million Christian martyrs in the 20th century. In fact, there were more people martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ in the last century than in the previous nineteen centuries combined. According to the Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance, some 200 million Christians today live with serious persecution, and an additional 400 million face “non-trivial restrictions on their freedom and the loss of many basic human rights, simply because they choose to love and follow Jesus Christ.”



“Millions of American Christians pray in their churches each week, oblivious to the fact that Christians in many parts of the world suffer brutal torture, arrest, imprisonment and even death – their homes and communities laid waste – for no other reason than that they are Christians. The shocking, untold story of our time is that more Christians have died this century simply for being Christians than in the first nineteen centuries after the birth of Christ. They have been persecuted and martyred before an unknowing, indifferent world and a largely silent Christian community.” – Nina Shea, *In the Lion’s Den*

Columnist Jeff Jacoby, who is a syndicated columnist for the Boston Globe, and who is also Jewish, has written:

“...for millions of Christians in other lands, fear is ever present. Never before – never before – have so many believers in Jesus been persecuted for their faith.... Wherever militant Islam has taken hold and wherever Communist dictators still rule, Christians are in desperate danger. [The Nuba mountains in Sudan]... which have had a Christian population since the 6th century, are littered with mass graves.... Nuba women are systematically raped by Arab soldiers in order to produce non-Nuba offspring. There have been reports, including from Christian bishops, of crucifixions of Christians by the army.”

READ 13-17 WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOD’S PEOPLE

We have already seen that one of Simon Peter’s main concerns is preparing Christians to respond to persecution. He had mentioned it earlier (1:6; 2:12, 15-20; 3:9) but the theme of suffering will dominate the book from here through 5:11.

Simon Peter is very careful to make a distinction: he is not discussing suffering in general (such as diseases, droughts, and natural disasters), and he is especially not referring to afflictions that are brought on by an individual’s own sinful behavior (see 3:17, 4:15). Simon is talking specifically about suffering “for what is right” (3:14); “for doing good” (3:17); “because of the name of Christ” (4:14); “as a Christian” (4:16); and “according to God’s will” (4:18).

Simon Peter presents several principles that may seem strange or unfamiliar to those of us who enjoy the freedom of modern Western culture, but which have meant a great deal to our brothers and sisters across the ages and in other societies:

1. Persecution will come to those who are faithful to Jesus: believers can and should *expect* to be hated and opposed by wicked men (1 Peter 4:12; 2 Peter 3:12; John 3:12).

2. It is a special blessing to be able to suffer for the sake of Christ, because:
 - a. It proves our faithfulness (1 Peter 1:7; Mark 13:12-13; Acts 5:42) and brings a special blessing from God (1 Peter 1:14; 4:14; Matthew 5:10-13; Revelation 2:10; 20:4-6).
 - b. It provides a witness (the word “martyr” means “witness”) to Jesus (1 Peter 3:15) and especially to his name (1 Peter 4:16; Acts 5:41).
 - c. It connects us uniquely to the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 1:20-21; 3:18f.; 4:13). Paul spoke of the “fellowship of His sufferings” (Philippians 1:29; 3:10).
 - d. It refines our character and empowers us to resist sin (1 Peter 4:1)
3. Persecution is a blessing only if it is unmerited and unavoidable, so Christians should continue to do right and stay out of harm’s way if possible (1 Peter 3:3).
4. Those who are persecuted experience a special measure of the Holy Spirit’s power and the presence of Jesus (1 Peter 4:14; Acts 6:15; 7:54-60; cf. 1 Peter 1:7-8).
5. The ultimate source of persecution is Satanic opposition (1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12f.).
6. Those who are not being persecuted have a special obligation to help their brothers and sisters who are suffering (1 Peter 5:9; Hebrews 13:3).



Everything we read in this extended section – both the passage that comes before it and the comments that follow – is related to the theme of suffering.

READ Verses 8-9 GUIDELINES FOR GODLY RELATIONSHIPS

In these verses, Simon gives five guidelines for the way Christians ought to treat each other. **LIST THEM BELOW:**

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



READ Verses 10-12 GUIDELINES FOR A GOOD & GODLY LIFE

Here Simon Peter quotes directly from Psalm 34. It is, under all circumstances, still a good “recipe” for a fulfilling life.

READ Verses 18-22 CHRIST’S SUFFERINGS & OURS

People often get so sidetracked by the puzzling parts of this passage (which we will deal with later) that they overlook the connection Simon is making between Christ’s sufferings and ours. If Jesus suffered for us, then how can we complain if we suffer for His name’s sake? **READ John 15:18-21**