

How Do I Endure Unjust Suffering?

January 18, 2015

Good morning! I want to send a special greeting to those who are watching live on the Internet. It is good to have you. This morning we continue our study in the book of 1 Peter called Hope In Hard Times. Today we come to a turning point in the book.

Let me show you what I mean. The book of 1 Peter divides itself into three large pieces. You may want to physically put your finger in the book of 1 Peter so you can see this.

1 Peter 1:1-2:10 — What is our new identity in Jesus?

From 1 Peter 1:1 until approximately 1 Peter 2:10 is about our new identities in Jesus. In Peter's summary of this section he said we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people for God's own possession set apart to proclaim God's excellencies on this earth. We are to live holy lives in an unholy world to reach our society with the saving news of Jesus. The first section of the book is about who we are in Jesus and that we should live a holy life in an unholy world to reach people for Jesus.

1 Peter 2:11-3:18 — What does it look like to live a holy life in an everyday world?

From 1 Peter 2:11 to 1 Peter 3:18 is the second part of the book. In this section, Peter described what it looks like to live a holy life in our everyday relationships. If you skim this section you can see he talked about the way Christians live in different spheres of influence. He talked about Christians

obeying their governments. He talked about Christians honoring Christ as an employee with a corrupt employer to introduce an employer to Jesus by our good and honest work. He talked about Christian wives living for Jesus and making Jesus appealing to their non-Christian husbands by their transformed characters. We saw how Christian husbands treat their wives differently than other men treat their wives. Last week Peter wrapped this section up by summarizing the way Christians live their lives. We live our lives blessing one another and others around us. We even bless our enemies. We do everyone we can spiritual and practical good. This brings us to the third section of the book that we begin today.

1 Peter 3:19-4:19 — What does it look like to live a holy life when facing hard times?

How do we use hostile people and undeserved suffering to make the name of Jesus famous? How can we introduce people to Jesus through the way we endure suffering? This is an important topic.

Last week we learned Christians are to bless their enemies. We are to say good things to those who insult us, spread rumors about us and lie about us. We aren't to be known for taking our adversaries to court. We aren't to be known for swearing at people when they hurt us. Islam takes revenge for supposedly disrespecting Mohammed. We are the exact opposite. We are not a people of revenge. Rambo is not our hero. Jesus is our hero. We extend blessing and forgiveness to others even when they don't deserve it, just like God extends blessing and forgiveness to us through Jesus because we don't deserve it.

This week we look at a subtopic of that. Sometimes our enemies agitate us only once or twice, other times they sink their teeth into our flesh and hang on like a pitbull. We work with our enemies every day. We go to school with our enemies. We live next to our enemies so we can't get away. The question is how do we endure unjust suffering over the long haul?

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:13–17 (ESV)

Try to stop undeserved suffering by doing what is good.

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 1 Peter 3:13 (ESV)

Peter asked a rhetorical question. Who is going to harm you for doing what is good? Usually people who do practical good for others are not in conflict with other people. When an enemy is your neighbor and you shovel his driveway in the winter, it is hard for him to stay mad. When you work with your enemy and his car breaks down so you offer to drive him to work, it is hard for him to stay mad at you. When you go to school with your enemy, and your enemy is struggling in math so you offer to tutor him, it is hard for him to stay mad. It is usually the folks that are hurting others, cheating others or swearing at others that it is easy to fight with. People who have fits of rage or outbursts of anger that are the ones getting in trouble. It is hard to be angry at somebody when they

are good, kind, decent people that go out of their ways to help you. It is that simple.

Peter said that when you have people that pose themselves as our enemies and say evil things about us or go out of their ways to hurt us, what you do is you go out of your way to do them practical good. It will be hard for them to stay angry when we take the initiative to be good and kind to them.

When someone hurts us, this is hard. When someone hurts us, we like to build walls. We set up our own little fortresses of self-pity and pride and gossip to all our friends about how right we are and how wrong they are. We spend all our energy telling our friends the evil our enemy do so we can make ourselves feel better. It is a subtle way of trying to get revenge. Don't go there. Instead of building walls to protect ourselves from our enemies, build a bridge to reach your enemy. Spend your energy doing them good.

I love the way Peter described this. He said we are to be *zealous for what is good*. Zealous is a descriptor of a Jewish political group that started in the days of the Maccabees and existed in the days of Jesus called the zealots. They were the crazy religious fanatics. They lived in the desert. They engaged in terrorist warfare against Rome. They knifed Romans in the crowd. They were a terrorist group that was willing to die for the cause if necessary. The ealots were the absolute nut-cases for the cause.

Peter said we are to be like the zealots. We are to be nut-cases doing lots of practical good for people around us, especially our enemies. If you have

someone who talks smack about you on social media, go out of your way to befriend them and do them practical good. The Bible says this again and again.

But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you...
Luke 6:27 (ESV)

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV)

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 1 Peter 2:15 (ESV)

Interestingly, the Greek verb in this verse is in the optative tense. That is a rare tense. It means a situation is possible but it is unlikely. In other words, if you are zealous for doing what is good, it is unlikely your enemies will continue to harm you. Being a zealot for goodness typically defuses our enemies.

A few years ago, before I moved to Spirit Lake, I had a man in my life who decided to become my adversary. He attended the church I pastored. He began talking evil about me in public and in private. He gathered a group in the church and just said nasty and untrue things about me. This was a very trying time in my life and the life of my family as we saw a split emerge in the church with my outspoken adversary leading the opposite group.

Why was he against me? It was years later I learned he had me confused with someone else who was a child molester. No, I was never a child molester, but at the time, his confusion cost me dearly.

As I was praying about this, I remember reading some of the verses we just read. This man was building a new house on a lake and I knew what I needed to

do. I took my day off and volunteered my time to help him build his house. I wanted to do anything I could to diffuse the situation. It was awkward. It was weird.

I am not here to tell you that he magically became my friend. He didn't. I left the church to prevent a split because he continued to undermine me. I knew I had done what God wanted me to do. He knew, and others knew, I had nothing against him. I just wanted to bless him.

When we have an enemy that persists, we persist in doing them good in hopes of defusing the situation. It is not guaranteed this will work but it is likely it will work.

What are we to do when our enemies refuse to turn away? What are we to do when we need to batten down the hatches and endure our enemies? That is the question the next verse's answer.

How do I endure unjust suffering?

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake... 1 Peter 3:14 (ESV)

1. Know I am blessed.

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed... 1 Peter 3:14 (ESV)

Whenever Christians are enduring undeserved suffering, especially for following Jesus, they must remember that enduring unjust suffering means they are blessed by God, not cursed by God. What does that blessing look like? Last week we learned two ways God blesses us in unjust suffering. God watches over those who suffer for righteousness and he answers their prayers.

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. 1 Peter 3:12 (ESV)

God also promises to give special ear to their prayers and watch over their life.

The Bible also tells us that this blessing from God is not just in this life but God will reward us in the next life for our unjust suffering in this one.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Matthew 5:10–12 (ESV)

I like the way the Greek says this. It says, "Are you suffering for doing what is right?" Then it just says one word, "Blessed!" Whenever we suffer for doing what is right, and we don't deserve it, remember that God promises to bless us as we endure it. We are not cursed by God, we are blessed. When it is hard to endure unjust suffering be confident that God will bless you because of it in this life and the next.

2. Don't be afraid.

...have no fear of them, nor be troubled... 1 Peter 3:14 (ESV)

Whenever we face suffering and people are saying evil about us, we tend to get pretty uptight about it. We get fixated on fearing the person who is committing the evil against us. I don't know what happens to you but my heart starts pounding, my armpits start sweating profusely, my voice locks up and I can hardly talk. Peter said that if you are suffering and don't deserve it, don't be afraid of the person who is after you. You have nothing to fear.

That doesn't mean the evil done to us isn't a big deal. It doesn't mean the evil words spoken against us won't hurt. It doesn't mean someone won't hurt us physically. It doesn't mean we won't lose a ton of money if they steal from us. It simply means the person who is doing evil toward us and hurting us is not the one we ultimately need to worry about.

The Greek wording of this verse is almost an identical quote from the Greek Old Testament words of Isaiah 8:12-13. In Isaiah, the Assyrians were threatening to attack Judah when Ahaz was king. The kings of the northern kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Syria wanted Ahaz to join them in a three-nation alliance to defend themselves against the ruthless Assyrians that were threatening to attack. King Ahaz didn't want to join the alliance. When he refused, Israel and Syria decided to attack him. Out of fear, Ahaz approached the invading Assyrians and entered into an alliance with the enemy. Ahaz, out of fear, was driven to conspire with the enemy. In the book of Isaiah, God had a talk with Ahaz. "Ahaz, you have it all wrong. You are afraid of the wrong things, external circumstances. All you have to worry about is that you are in a right relationship with God. Don't find your confidence in alliances. The only thing you have to worry about is that you are in a right relationship with God. Make sure you stay in a right relationship with him and he will take care of you. Stop worrying about the other armies and nations."

Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. Isaiah 8:12–13 (ESV)

Peter took the wording of this verse and brought it straight to his readers and ultimately to us. Don't worry about those who have set themselves up as your enemies and want to make you quake in fear. Don't worry about that guy who has it out for you at work. Don't worry about the bully at school who picks on you. Don't worry about getting in trouble for reading your Bible on your lunch break. Ultimately everyone will stand before God. If you are in a right relationship with God through Jesus, you have nothing to worry about. Your enemy, that probably doesn't know Jesus, will face an eternity in hell with just retribution from God for making you suffer. That is the one to fear.

Jesus put it this way.

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28 (ESV)

3. In my heart honor Christ as Lord.

...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy ... 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

This is a quote from Isaiah 8:13. Isaiah 8:13 tells us to honor the Lord as holy in our hearts and let him be the one we fear. This is the same wording as Isaiah 8:13, with one change. The Lord of hosts is called Christ the Lord. Peter said the same God that Isaiah told Ahaz to fear in the Old Testament is actually Jesus in the New Testament.

When you are suffering for doing what is right, focus on honoring Christ in your heart. If we can't create a right relationship with our enemies, we can certainly make sure we are in a right relationship with God. Persecution and trials and opposition gets us on our knees in a hurry. It causes us to search our hearts, confess our sins, fast, pray and then seek God really hard. To that end,

trials are good. They cause us to check our relationships with God through Jesus. They cause us to honor Christ in our hearts. For that, we can be grateful. We may not deserve it when people hurt us and say evil things about us, but God uses it for our good as we go through large steps of spiritual growth in these rough times.

So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” Hebrews 13:6 (ESV)

Later in the book of Isaiah, in Isaiah 37, the Assyrians came back to attack Judah. This time Hezekiah was king instead of Ahaz. He didn't go to other countries for treaties and security. He went to God. He literally got on his face in the temple calling out for God to save the nation from the Assyrian attack. What happened? Isaiah 37:36 says the angel of the Lord went out during the night and killed 185,000 members of the Assyrian army. The Jews got up to look around, and they were not surrounded by an Assyrian army but they were all dead. Who should we fear? The army coming against us or the God who can wipe 185,000 out in a single night in their sleep and justly send them to hell for eternity when he does it? Who should we fear, someone who can kill our bodies or someone who can condemn our souls to hell forever? When enduring unjust suffering, set your heart to honoring Christ as holy in your life. Your relationship with God is the only thing you have to worry about.

4. Use the opportunity to witness.

...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you... 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

This is one of the famous verses everybody quotes to make sure we can explain the truth of the our faith to anyone who asks. There is nothing wrong with that. It is good. In context, that is not what the verse means. In context, it means we need to be able to explain to people why we are blessing our enemies. We need to be able to explain to people why we are do good to our enemies. It is not because we are wimps. It is not because we are vegan herbal tea drinkers. It is not because we are pacifists. It is because we are Christians. We bless our enemies just as God blessed us when we were his enemies.

We are just giving to others what we are getting from God in hopes of them coming to Jesus.

This means when Christians are enduring undeserved suffering we don't miss the opportunity to bless our enemies because we know God will use these times of conflict to bring many people to him. It is just like a fight in middle school at the bike racks. Do you remember when all the kids in the school came out to see the fight at the bike racks? That is what people do when they see we are oppressed by our enemies. When they see we respond by blessing them instead of fighting them, everybody will be listening to what we say about Jesus.

5. Keep a good conscience. Speak of my enemies with gentleness and respect.

...yet do this with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 1 Peter 3:16 (ESV)

Peter said, when you are talking about your enemies make sure you talk about them with gentleness and respect. Don't call them jerks. Don't call them idiots. Don't rip into them. Don't go there. Resist the temptation to raise your

voice, insult your enemy or hurt his or her in any way. As you stand before God, strive to keep your conscience clear so you have nothing to be ashamed of before God.

This is really hard. It is easy to let nasty comments slip by the lips. It is easy to say hurtful things, snide remarks and unhelpful words. It is natural to point out others wrongs and our rights.

What happens is when our enemy continues to say rotten things about us and instead of fighting back we bless them, over time it becomes clear that our enemy has the problem, not us. Jesus is made famous through the way we handle conflict.

Remember that enduring suffering for what is right is very different than enduring suffering for what is wrong.

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:17 (ESV)

Not all suffering is the same. Suffering for doing what is wrong is very different than suffering because you did what was right. Suffering is never fun. Nobody looks forward to it. But if two men go to jail, one accused of being a Christian while the other was accused of murder, even though they suffer the same way, the eternal outcome of their lives will be radically different.

While all suffering is hard, not all suffering is the same. What does this look like in real life?

Conclusion¹

What does this look like in real life? Jacob DeShazer was born November 15, 1912, in West Stayton, Oregon.² He graduated from high school in 1931 and enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1940. In 1941, when he heard the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor he promised to “make the Japs pay.”

Soon he had a chance to fulfill his wish. The United States developed a plan to get the first bombs on Japan called the Doolittle raid. The plan involved flying modified B-25 Mitchell bombers off the aircraft carrier USS Hornet. After bombing fuel storage facilities in Japan, the planes were on their way to China. Unfortunately the planes flew into a strong headwind and were forced to leave the aircraft carrier 200 miles before their planned departure.

After bombing Nagoya, Japan, Jake and the rest of his crew were forced to parachute into enemy territory because their plane ran out of fuel. He was captured and sent to Tokyo where he was held in a series of P.O.W. camps for 40 months. He was brutally tortured to the point of losing consciousness, sometimes on a daily basis. He was kept in solitary confinement for 34 months, nearly froze to death and nearly starved to death when fed only a few pieces of stale bread and weak tea at each meal. For months, he was forced to sit on a stool and stare at the back wall of his cell for 16 hours a day and not move. As a result, he almost died. Three of his crew members were executed. One died of starvation.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_DeShazer#cite_note-More_Powerful-2

² http://melbarger.com/deshazers_remarkable_forgiveness.html

At one point in his captivity, Jacob's guards allowed him to read a Bible. Although he only had the Bible for three weeks, when he read it, he gave his life to Christ and memorized large portions of it before it was taken away. One of the parts God really pressed on his heart were the passages about loving your enemies and doing them good. God changed the hatred and fear in his heart toward his guards into a sense of pity because they didn't know the forgiveness of Jesus. He decided to follow the Bible's words about loving his enemies. Even though he was consistently tortured by his captors he began speaking kindly to them and greeted them in Japanese by saying, "Good morning." Like we saw in our first point, that kindness made a change in the way he was treated by the Japanese secret police. They eventually gave him more food which helped him survive. After the war God gave Jake a desire to keep loving the Japanese enemies that tortured him mercilessly for almost four years. He returned as a missionary to Japan where he served 30 years.

Japan's culture is a culture of *katakiuchi*, which means revenge. When the Japanese heard that the man they tortured mercilessly for four years was returning to Japan to bless his enemies, they were fascinated. They had to hear why he did this. Jake found himself speaking to crowds of 8,000 to 10,000 Japanese a week to tell them about Jesus. He preached 40 sermons a month and was giving away 6,000 Gospel of John tracts a month.

While in Japan, Jacob wrote a tract titled, "I was a prisoner in Japan."³ One of the people who read that tract was Mitsuo Fuchida. He was a Japanese pilot

³ <http://archive.statesmanjournal.com/assets/pdf/J0103377317.PDF>

that led the attack on Pearl Harbor.⁴ Fuchida was a Buddhist. He couldn't understand how someone could love his enemies. He couldn't deny it was true because Jacob was living and helping the very people who tortured him. Fuchida decided to buy a Bible and read it for himself. After reading it, Fuchida renounced his Buddhism and became a Christian.

Ultimately Fuchida met with Jake to thank him for forgiving his enemies. He thanked him for the way he lived his life introducing him helping introduce him to Jesus. Fuchida, one of the men who dropped the first bombs on America, and Jake, one of the men who dropped the first bombs on Japan, eventually joined forces traveling Asia together telling the world about how Jesus changes your life and enables you to forgive your enemies.

My friends, enduring undeserved suffering for what is good is very different from enduring suffering for what is wrong. Love your enemies. God will use it to help people understand the gospel when they see it lived in your life. You may be surprised. God may use your undeserved suffering in a way you never expected. That is what happened to Jake DeShazar. It may happen to you.



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⁴ <http://www.biblebelievers.com/fuchida1.html>