

**Theme:** Faith in Exile

**Title:** Suffering with Hope - I Peter 3:13-22

**Aim:** Suffering is part of life but that we have hope to share.

**Intro:** It's no debate that we live in a broken world filled w/suffering. That brokenness & suffering often leads to hopelessness & despair. The dictionary defines hopelessness as "a feeling or condition of having no hope; despair, desperation. It is a state of mind where one feels that there is no way out of a situation, that things will never get better." We can well imagine that the exiles to whom Peter wrote might have despaired & felt hopeless, because of the suffering they endured. We also know that hopelessness touches many lives in today's world, leading to anger, destructive, hurtful acts, suicide, etc. I have good news/bad news for you: Christians are not exempt from suffering (you know that by experience); but Christians are not hopeless – rather we have much reason to be hopeful in Christ. Theme: Faith in exile. We are exiles in this world that's not our home but we are to live by faith in Christ our Savior/Lord, who is our hope & gives us hope that is sure. I Peter 3:13-22 [READ]. I) **Suffering is part of life.** Peter asks a somewhat rhetorical question. Who is there to harm you – oppress, afflict, mistreat, embitter, render evil against? The answer is a lot of people. Those believers were being persecuted for their faith. There were people who hated them because they had become Christians, because they moved into their area & took up their space. Suffering happens; it's part of the curse of sin - not that you have sinned specifically leading to the particular suffering you have encountered, but the world is under the curse of sin. Yes, sometimes we bring suffering upon ourselves: smoking sometimes leads to lung cancer; speeding can lead to a deadly mva. Those things might be the consequence of our own sin. But sometimes suffering is the result of others' sin – sinful people sinning against others, causing suffering. Sometimes the cause is simple the overall curse of sin – the world's systems are out of kilter & we have earthquakes, floods, other weather disasters, etc. The point I think Peter is making is that others are less likely to harm you "if you are zealous

for what is good.” That’s the way it’s suppose to work & Peter, having exhorted them to not return evil for evil, is urging them to be zealous for what is good. Do what is right & good in God’s sight, conducting your life in such a way that others may be pointed to Christ. Then he said, “But if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed.” That’s a promise that God sees your suffering, knows your plight & is w/you in it. He will help you; He will bless you. He will balance the scales, always in His time & way. So, be zealous for what is good & have no fear of those who cause suffering. That phrase is literally, “do not fear their fear (intimidation).” “Don’t be troubled,” Peter wrote. “Don’t be stirred up or rendered anxious or distressed or even perplexed. God knows, sees & is at work. II) **God has a purpose in the suffering of His children.** In the midst of suffering (specifically here caused by another – oppression, persecution – but I think it applies to all suffering by believers) we are to do 2 imp things. 1) “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.” That means to set apart/sanctify Christ as Lord. Put your mind on that, let that be what motivates you, what drives you – Jesus is my Lord, I belong to Him, I’m here to serve Him, I want to honor Him in all I do. In the midst of suffering let your life point those who are observing you to Jesus, even those who cause the suffering. They need to see & know, too. Listen, how you & I as Christians handle the suffering that will come into our lives, that will either point others to Jesus or away from Jesus. As said last week, the world is watching us. How we handle suffering should set us apart from the rest of the world – God wants it to; that’s part of His purpose. Not that we should be tougher, more self-sufficient, w/a “I can handle this on my own” mentality, but we should be trusting in God & dependent upon Him, following Jesus. 2) “Always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you...” “Always” – “perpetually, incessantly, at any & every time when according to the circumstances something ought to be done.” “Make a defense” means to give a “reasoned statement or argument.” It is “a verbal defense.” How others see us handling suffering is a practical witness, pointing others to

Jesus. But that needs to be followed by a verbal witness. “Why are you not melting down? How is it that you are being mistreated & you’re not angry or seeking revenge?” We have to be honest – “I had a meltdown; you just didn’t see it.” “I’ve been angry, but I know that won’t lead to anything good.” “I want to honor Jesus, who is my Savior/Lord.” “I have hope in Jesus, who is w/me & helps me. He will make it right in due time.” A reason is again a verbal account, embodying a truth. Hope for the Christian is not wishing, but surety – a joyful & confident expectation of not only eternal salvation, but of God being God – faithful, our refuge & strength & present help in trouble, our defender & provider & guide. Times of suffering may offer opportunities to share the gospel as people see the confident trust in our hearts & our quiet following of Christ. Note, tho, that Peter adds some admonitions to his exhortation. “Do it w/gentleness & respect, having a good conscience...” Gentleness is “mildness of disposition.” We’re not to bowl people over w/our defense for our reason for hope but gently speak the truth. Respect is reverence – 1<sup>st</sup> for God & our representing Him, but also respect for those who are seeking real answers. Having a good conscience means being able to distinguish “between what’s morally good & bad, prompted to do the former & shun the latter.” Don’t use what others do give you an excuse to do what is wrong. Stay aligned. Don’t give the devil or others a reason to revile you or accuse you. Rather let them be put to shame when others see you doing what is right & their slandering you unfounded & uncalled for. If you & I are going to suffer, let us suffer for doing good, not evil. If we suffer for doing good, we can rest in the truth that it is God’s will. He is working out His purposes – perhaps teaching, shaping you, making you more like Christ, or using the situation to give opportunity for you to shine as a witness for Christ. Rest in Him. III) **Christ is our example of suffering w/hope.** Some translations have it, “Christ also died once for sins,” which He did, but the word is suffered, the same root as is used throughout the passage. Christ’s death was only part of His suffering but it was the major part. His was indeed suffering w/a purpose – God the Father’s purpose for

sending His Son – to pay for our sins & provide our redemption & reconciliation to God. The righteous One suffered for the unrighteous, “that He might bring us to God.” There’s the purpose for His suffering. Isaiah 53:10 – ***“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him; He has put Him to grief; when His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.”*** It was part of the plan all along, that Christ would humble Himself to become like us, that He might redeem us. He became our servant, our substitute, to bring us to God. Jesus had the sure hope that as He gave Himself to do the Father’s will, He would triumph & bring “many sons to glory” (Heb.2:10). As Hebrews 12:2 tells us, it was ***“for the joy set before Him [that He] endured the cross, despising the shame, & is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*** Jesus was “put to death in the flesh” – died a horrible death & suffered much, but He was triumphantly “made alive in the spirit” – raised w/a physical yet spiritual body, resurrection body that cannot die. In Him we have the sure hope of eternal life when we will be raised or changed into His likeness, w/the same resurrection bodies that will never die. We shall reign w/Him in the eternal kingdom, the ultimate hope for the believer. I’m sure you’re wondering what in the world Peter was referring to when he wrote about Jesus going in the spirit & proclaiming to the spirits in prison. You may disagree but I think it’s simple. When Jesus died & rose again, His very work of atonement was a 2-fold proclamation. It was a proclamation of condemnation to those in the OT era who “did not obey” – the obedience of faith, like those in Noah’s day. God patiently warned them through Noah’s building the ark – thought by most scholars to have taken years. Yet they did not heed the warning but kept on in their sin. The flood destroyed them but their eternal judgment still awaits them & all who do not believe. Jesus’ death & resurrection proclaimed their condemnation. At the same time it proclaimed the eternal salvation of those in the OT era who believed God & were looking for the Messiah – like Noah & his family who believed & obeyed, preparing the ark, which brought them “safely

through water.” Peter likened that to baptism, which is an act of professing one’s faith in Christ as Savior/Lord. The act of baptism does not save you, but it represents one’s “appeal to God for a good conscience,” which we gain thru faith in Christ, being washed in the blood, so to speak, & forgiven & justified by faith in the work of Christ on the cross & believing that He rose again. Romans 10:9 – “***...if you confess w/your mouth that Jesus is Lord & believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.***” Jesus is our example of suffering w/hope. Having died for us, He rose again in triumph & “***has gone into heaven & is at the right hand of God, w/angels, authorities & powers having been subjected to Him.***” Hope does not disappoint. Tho as exiles in this world we may suffer, & we will, God has a purpose for our suffering – to point others to Jesus & give us opportunity to give reason to anyone who asks for the hope that is w/in us. This surely takes faith – faith in exile.