Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Finding Security in This Troubled World
Scripture: 1 Peter 3:13–17
Code: 80-407

Now this is a special day because it is Mother's Day. I've never understood that because every day is Mother's Day, so why...you know, limit it to one day? But I understand that. I understand the need to sell greeting cards and things like that. I get it. But we're always delighted and grateful and thankful for what the Lord does through precious and godly mothers and we want to note that.

And, you know, I really think that if, if there's any indication of reality, and I think there is, from the conversations that I've heard recently from mothers, some of the mothers in my own family and mothers outside my own family, there's a kind of a serious fear about raising children in the world in which we live, young women who are having little babies see a foreboding future. There's an elevated anxiety about that. Parents are struggling wondering what kind of world their children are going to awaken to in another five years, ten years, or so. There are people who are wondering whether they should have children. And then some of us who are grandparents who know what can go wrong through many years of a generation, maybe even have more concern and anxiety about what the future world is going to bring to bear upon our grandchildren. We hear these conversations all the time. A lot of fear; a lot of anxiety. I talked to a physician friend who said he's prescribing more tranquilizers to people than in the past who have these deep anxieties about what the future is going to bring on their children and on their families. And this is not just a day when we think about that because we're thinking about moms and we're thinking about children and families. But this is also a very special day because of seminary graduation. We had the graduation of the Master's College on Friday, about 250 young people receiving their degrees, and another eighty-eight men tonight, and we're launching these people into this very troubled world--very challenging world--very foreboding and threatening world.

You know, the planet has always been highly dangerous, highly dangerous from many, many angles. But it is as dangerous now as it has ever been in some ways, and more so. Graduates, along with parents, face a very, very troubled world and a very hostile world. Hostile to families, for sure; hostile to families for sure, aggressively hostile to families, hostile to marriage, therefore hostile to children.

We also are facing the fact that in our lifetime this is the first time that true Christians have become public enemy number one. And the system is coming at us with a fierceness. Never in the history of the world have we been exposed to as much trouble as today. Oh, there's always been trouble. In Job it says, "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation." There's always been trouble. But we never had to deal with so much of it in the past,

meaning men, people, humans. But now in this media-saturated age, we have to take on everybody's troubles, down to the minutest detail.

It used to be that the trouble you knew was the trouble you experienced. The trouble you knew was the trouble you saw. The trouble you knew was the trouble that somebody told you about. Or maybe when print came in, the trouble you read about. Now we have to carry all the troubles of the whole world in detail. It's more than a heart can bear, and it intimidates, and it frightens, and it creates anxiety and fear. Even the things that happen would be enough to cause apoplexy for most people. But we have to live with all the doomsday prophecies as well. We're being constantly warned about asteroids and floating bodies in space colliding with the earth, or some kind of explosion on the sun, incinerating us all.

And if the scientists aren't warning us about that, the theatrical world is by creating these massive movies about various scenarios for the end of the earth, the end of the universe. We have to deal with natural disasters, earth and sky. We're constantly warned about some kind of new flu, bug, or some kind of new virus or bacteria or some kind of strain of disease. We have precipitous social threats coming at us all the time against the things that we hold precious and valuable. There's general evil--seems to be escalating, evil men get worse and worse, corruption, moral perversion, crime, terrorism, and we're all exposed to all of it all the time. Not a happy planet right now. You might want to turn off the TV. We see it all. We anticipate more. We anticipate worse.

Now all this should be no surprise to Christians because we understand that this is what the Bible promises. Job 14:1, Job said, "Man who is born of woman, short lived, full of trouble." Psalm 22:11, David says to God, "Be not far from me for trouble is near." Isaiah 8:22, Isaiah declared, "Look to the earth and behold distress and darkness and the gloom of anguish." That's life on a dangerous planet.

Solomon in the second chapter of Ecclesiastes said, "I hated life." "I hated life." The richest man in the world and the wisest man. "I hated life for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me because everything is futility and striving after wind because all of a man's days, his task is painful and grievous and even at night his mind does not rest. I hated life."

But God is in control of this planet. We read in Psalm 96, and I read that because of its connection to this. We read that the sea can rejoice, the planet can praise, the trees can sing for joy because they are under the control of their Creator. This world as we know it, this planet as we know it, this natural ecosystem as we know it, isn't going anywhere until God comes to bring it to an end. He alone created it. He alone will end it. It is in God's control.

And even further, God is in the trouble. God not only is in control of the trouble, He is in the trouble. He is in the trouble effecting His purposes. Isaiah 14:24, "The Lord of hosts has sworn saying, 'Surely just as I have intended, so it has happened. Just as I have planned, so it will stand.'" Or Isaiah 46,

“My purpose will be established, I will accomplish all my good pleasure. Truly I have spoken. Truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it. Surely I will do it.” And then Amos bores down on that broad reality in Amos 3:6, “If a calamity occurs in a city, has not the Lord done it?” God not only is in control of the trouble, but He is in the trouble, doing His will, fulfilling His purpose.

It is also true not only that God controls the trouble and God is in the trouble effecting His will, but we do not necessarily know the will of God because it is hidden. Be confident that God is in the trouble but don’t necessarily expect to know what He’s doing. Isaiah 45:15 gives us a very important principle. It says this: “Truly You are a God who hides Yourself.” “You are a God who hides Yourself.” The specific purposes of God are not known.

For example, Job had no idea why what was happening was happening. God was controlling the trouble. God was doing His will in the trouble, but God never told Job why. The Bible tells us only what we need to know and God determines that. And most of the trouble that we experience in the world, God remains hidden and silent.

But we do know what He wants from the trouble. We don’t know His purposes exactly in the trouble, but we do know what He wants from the trouble that comes into our lives. And James gives us a hint of that. “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials because they have a perfecting work.” They wean you from the world. They burn the dross out of your life. They drive you to prayer. They drive you to dependence on God. They make you able to comfort others in their trouble. There are lots of things that are the effects, the positive spiritual benefits of trouble.

Now we’re just talking about trouble in general, but let’s get more specific. We expect trouble. We know God controls the trouble. God is in the trouble. God hides from us the actual purposes but the trouble has a positive effect if we yield to God’s purposes as they unfold. But let’s bore down into one specific category of trouble, persecution. Because as I was saying earlier, there’s a new kind of trouble for us in this country and in this generation that we haven’t known in the past in America. It’s been known in many parts of the world non-stop, but for us we had a bit of a reprieve for a few hundred years from persecution. Now true Christianity and the true gospel is the top of the list of offenses against this free society, and this immoral society.

So the question for us is, “How do we respond, not just to trouble, but how do we respond when the trouble becomes persecution?” In John 15, in the Upper Room, Jesus told His disciples, “They hated Me, they’ll hate you. They persecuted Me, they’ll persecute you.” You can’t expect any different. If that’s how they treated Me, that’s exactly how they’re going to treat you. In this world you will have trouble, but I’ve overcome the world.” He even said in that sixteenth chapter of John, “John, they’ll arrest you, they’ll take you to court.” Jesus even went so far as to say they’ll take your life. That’s how it’s going to be. As I said, for a while we’ve had a reprieve here; rapidly coming to an end.

To understand how to deal with this persecution kind of trouble, turn in your Bible to 1 Peter 3…1 Peter 3. Take a little break from our study in the gospel of John for this special weekend. First Peter chapter 3. Now the beloved apostle Peter is writing this letter, this rich letter five chapters long, to believers who are suffering. In fact, in chapter 4 verse 12 he calls it a fiery ordeal, a furnace. And the kind of trouble that they're suffering is persecution, persecution. Not just the sort of generic, run-of-the-mill, common, ordinary, garden variety of trouble in the world, but persecution, aggressive persecution--persecution for righteousness sake, as he refers to it.

And so, he's giving instruction to these believers as to how to survive this persecution. Look at chapter 2 for a moment, we'll kind of sneak up on chapter 3 and verse 9. And here you get sort of the background that sets up the scenario. Writing to believers in chapter 2, verse 9, he identifies us: "You are a chosen race." Now that sets us apart. "You're a royal priesthood." That sets us apart. "You are a holy nation." That sets us apart. "You're a people for God's own possession," and that also distinguishes us from everybody else in the world. We are a nation within a nation.

You know, it was the history of Europe that culminated in the horrors of the massacre of the Jewish people both by Stalin and Adolf Hitler. And when you look back and dig down a little bit into why that happened, that all began to happen because of the Jews' inability to assimilate. And there's much literature that's been written on the fact that the Jews were always a nation within a nation, and they had these quirky kind of cultural identifying marks. They had a different kind of diet, a different kind of dress. They were fastidious about their laws and their traditions. And they ended up always being a nation within a nation. And for that they were feared, they were seen as a threat--they didn't integrate, they didn't amalgamate and, of course, they were doing everything they could to preserve their own ethic identity, not knowing that God was in that preservation till they would eventually be saved and acknowledged their Messiah yet to come in the future. But it was that growing hatred and animosity and fear and the unknown element of this nation within a nation that led to the hostility that broke out in World War II and massacred millions of them. The world turns on those that it can't absorb.

And if that was true of the Jews, how much more true is it of us because we are a nation within a nation, and it's not simply because of some traditions and some external behaviors. It's because we announced to the whole world that we are the chosen race, we are the royal priesthood, we are the holy nation, we are the people of God. And that takes it to another level, that we're not only different from them, we're far above them in terms of our relationship to God, and they have no such relationship. This is what sets the stage for hostility, animosity, and persecution. Here we are, a holy people in the middle of an unholy world. Here we are, people who belong to God surrounded by people who belong to the devil. Here we are priests of God, rubbing shoulders with priests of the kingdom of darkness. And consequently, Peter says in verse 11, you are "aliens and strangers," you are "aliens and strangers."

Given that scenario, survival would be a kind of triumph. Just to survive, just to survive the hatred, the bitterness, the animosity, the rejection because of who we are would be an accomplishment in itself. But to make it even more difficult, we--back to verse 9--are who we are in the world so that “we may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

What is that telling us? Listen to this. We are trying to survive the animosity and hatred of Satan and the kingdom of darkness and the world that he possesses, and not just survive the threatening and the unholy, persecuting forces that are set against us, but while surviving at the same time reaching them with the gospel of love and grace and mercy and forgiveness. It would be one thing if we could fight the enemy, but we have to convert the enemy to our side.

From chapter 2 verse 13 on to chapter 3 verse 12, Peter talks about relationships, all kinds of social relationships. And he shows how that in every relationship in society, we are to live evangelistically--evangelistically. The purpose for every relationship is to proclaim the excellencies of the One who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. It’s evangelistic.

Look, we don’t like the world the way it is, do we? And we don’t’ like the way things are going in our world today. We don’t like that. We don’t like the attack on truth. We don’t like the attack on honesty, dignity, morality; we don’t like the attack on the family. We don’t like that. We don’t like the elevation of moral perversion. We don’t like that. We don’t like the escalating crime. We don’t like the horrors of terrorism. We don’t like any of that. We resent it. We resent it with a holy resentment.

But we can’t cross a line where all of a sudden our resentment of that becomes the resentment of the people who are captive to the kingdom of darkness, who are propagating that, because our purpose for being here is evangelistic. In the future after the Rapture of the church, angels during the time of the Tribulation will preach the gospel in the sky. But until then, it’s us. And so here we are trying to survive persecution and not fight the enemy and defeat the enemy, but win the enemy. We have to survive, we have to secure ourselves against the hostility of the present, increasing wickedness coming at us from all sides. We have to protect our families. We have to protect our children. We have to protect our congregations as pastors. But at the same time, we have to be the light of the gospel to the very ones that persecute us.

How do we secure ourselves in this kind of world? Let’s go to chapter 3, verse 13 now, and Peter gives us some very, very practical instruction from verse 13 down through verse 17, very practical instruction. You’re not going to hear anything that’s new, but I hope I’m going to put you in touch with some things that are renewed in your thinking, cause I’m watching Christians become anxious, fearful, afraid, angry, irritated, hostile and I’m telling you, if you’re that way now, you’re going to have a problem down the road a few years when the persecution escalates.

So here's the heart of our serenity. Here's the heart of our comfort. Here's the heart of our confidence. Here's the heart of our hope. Here's the hope of our peace in the midst of persecution as it escalates. Here is where we find our security. Here are attitudes necessary to fortify us and to enable us in the midst of all of this to keep on extending the gospel.

I agree, there are plenty of things to alarm us at a pace that we've never seen before and at an exposure level that's never even been imagined. We need to hear what Peter says. Let me give you several things.

How do we secure ourselves and maintain our comfort, our peace, and our position as the only light the world has in this era, the only light of the gospel? How do we do that?

Number one, Peter says you need a passion for goodness, you need a passion for goodness. As the persecution escalates, Peter says, verse 13, "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" This is the first line of defense against persecution, against evil aggression. It's just an axiomatic idea. This is not some profound heavenly doctrine. This is just axiomatic, proverbial, a self-evident truth. People have a hard time hurting those that are good. It's difficult. It's unusual for folks who are hostile to mistreat people who are passionate about doing good. The world is slow to hurt people who are a benefit to society, who are helpful, compassionate, kind, caring, merciful.

Peter says start there. A good life is hard to harm. Don't get bitter. Don't get defensive. Don't get self-protective. Don't get angry because things are impinging on your freedoms and on your possessions and on your comfort. Just keep doing what is good. And that's in a very broad sense. Keep doing what is good. Maybe I can add a little light to what that is by reading you 1 Thessalonians 5:15, "See that no one repays evil with evil." All right, they're doing evil to you, don't give it back. What do you do? Always seek after that which is good, both for one another, believers, and for all people. Just find the path of goodness. It's very hard for people to harm you, to do evil to you. The word "to harm" comes from that Greek root which means evil. It's hard for people to do evil to those folks who literally become passionate, they become zealous for goodness. Start there in your life.

Don't let the persecution, don't let the hostility, don't let the anti-Christian attitude, don't let the terrible overwhelming, overpowering corruption that's happening in our world direct you toward vengeance, animosity, hostility, don't return evil for evil. Let your passion be what is good.

Sir John Sealy was right when he said, "No heart is pure that is not passionate." And that's why he uses the word "zealous" here. You have to have a passion for goodness that literally rides right across the persecution. Fall in love with goodness. Commit your life to what is good to all people. That's a great place to start.

When people see you as a benefactor, compassionate, caring, generous, very hard to condemn you. The opposite of that would be scandalous behavior, self-centered, self-aggrandizing, manipulative behavior by people who name the name of Christ--you know the kind. We need to be known as those who do good.

There's a second thing that Peter says, and these are again just very basic. You need not only a passion for goodness, but a willingness to suffer, a willingness to suffer because in verse 14 he introduces this: "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed." So let's assume you're doing righteousness, you're doing what is good, you're a benevolent person, you're kind, you're generous, you're totally unselfish. It could still happen that you would suffer for the sake of that righteousness.

I love how it begins, "But even if." That is in Greek what's called an optative possibility without a definite time. The old English word for that would be "perchance." I mean, there's a chance you could get persecuted anyway. Lots of folks have done nothing but good and been persecuted. The people that Peter wrote were in fact suffering this. It was happening to them. They were suffering for the sake of righteousness, upright, godly behavior. And if you go over to chapter 4, verse 12, he says, "Don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal." Yeah, it's harder to harm someone who does good, but it can happen, it does happen, and it has happened to you, so don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you which comes upon you for your testing from God's standpoint. God is in the suffering, testing to strengthen you, as though some strange thing were happening to you. It can happen. It's not a strange thing, it's not a foreign thing, it can happen. In fact, it's really a privilege, verse 13, because you share the sufferings of Christ. So keep on rejoicing so that the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exaltation. If you accept the suffering when it comes, the persecution when it comes, and you rejoice to be able to suffer for Christ, you will be rewarded in heaven; that's the point.

Yes, you need to have a willingness to suffer. Go back to chapter 2, verse 21. "You've been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who when He suffered committed no sin, nor deceit was found in His mouth. When he was reviled, he didn't revile in return. When He suffered He uttered no threats. He kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteousness." Now that's the example. Christ's death, of course, was an actual atonement. It was redemptive, but it was also exemplary. He not only died in our place, bearing the punishment of God for our sins, but He showed us how to suffer unjustly. He gave us an example. Don't get angry, don't get hostile, don't become vengeful, commit yourself to God, utter no threats, and you're blessed.

What does it mean "you are blessed?" Well, it's not so much happy as highly privileged. First of all, because you're suffering for Christ. Like Paul said, "I bear in my body the marks of Christ." What an honor to take the blows meant for Him. You know, when they persecute you, they're really not after you; they don't know you. And you're not that important; neither am I. But when they come after us,

who are they coming after? They're coming after Christ. It's Christ they hate. And we're bearing in our bodies the marks of Christ. What an honor. What a privilege to take the blows meant for Him.

So to say they're blessed means highly privileged. But it also means heavenly honor. You are blessed because you have been privileged to suffer for the sake of Christ who suffered for you redemptively, but also you're going to be blessed in eternity because you're going to be receiving a reward. How do I know that? Because that's one of the earliest things we have in the New Testament, the words of our Lord Jesus in the great Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:10: "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, persecute you, falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great." And then He adds this wonderful statement: "In the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

So you are privileged to take the blows meant for Christ. You are promised an eternal reward. And you've just been added to a pretty elite group of people, the prophets who suffered before you. You're blessed, you're blessed.

So how do you face the hostile world ahead of you? You face it with a passion for goodness, and that's going to make it more difficult for people to persecute you. But if it comes--and it does for many--if it does, be willing to suffer because the eternal outcome is so wonderful. And the end of verse 14, "And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled."

Huh--don't fear, don't be anxious, don't be shaken, don't be disturbed. Another way to say it, "Stay calm, stay calm." Literally in the original language it says, "Do not fear their fear," "do not fear their fear," or the fear they try to get you to fear. Don't fear their making you afraid. Don't fear them. Don't be troubled. Face it with courage.

John Bunyan was in the Bedford jail, and that's where he wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* and could have walked out any day he recanted the gospel. He never would do that even though he had a wife and children. He said it would be...it would make of his conscience a slaughterhouse to do that. This is what he wrote when he was in prison: "This prison very sweet to me has been since I came here and so would also hanging be if Thou didst then appear."

We need Christians who are courageous, bold, righteous, holy, zealous for good. And if persecuted, will rejoice in the special glory that God bestows upon them, both now in giving them the honor to suffer for Christ in perfecting Him through the suffering, and one day rewarding them in heaven.

There's a third attitude, a third perspective that secures us. It is necessary to have a passion for goodness and a willingness to suffer, and thirdly, it's necessary to have a focus on Christ, focus on Christ, verse 15. "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." Now it could stop at that point.

Sanctify means to set apart. Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Rather than being afraid, rather than fearing the persecutors, or fearing Satan behind the persecution, simply venerate Christ, honor Christ, adore Christ. Recognize He is holy, He is sovereign, He is glorious, He is majestic, He is to be the object of your love and loyalty as we sung about this morning. Give to Christ the awe and the reverence He deserves.

By the way, that verse in the middle of verse 14, the last part, “And do not fear their intimidation and do not be troubled,” comes from Isaiah 8:13. Peter quotes from Isaiah 8:13 right there. But there’s a second half to Isaiah 8:13 that Peter doesn’t give, but he paraphrases in verse 15. When he says, “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts,” Isaiah actually said, “It is the Lord whom you should regard as holy.” So that’s a paraphrase of the back half of Isaiah 8:13. So instead of being intimidated by enemies, simply regard as holy the Lord. It’s kind of like casting all your care on Him, “in all your ways acknowledge Him, He’ll direct your paths, commit your way unto the Lord,” from Proverbs.

We are to recognize His glory, His greatness, His perfection, and submit ourselves to His purpose. In the midst of trials, in the midst of suffering, you don’t focus on the persecutor, you don’t focus on the persecution, you focus on Christ. Deep, loving, loyal, confident submission to is will as He gives us great courage Hihis sHis will as He gives us great courage in the face of this kind of hostility. You set apart Christ in your life, you venerate worship, submit to love, adore and be loyal to Christ, submissive to His will, and you will secure yourself in safety in the midst of trouble.

Well, there’s another principle. We’re secured by this focus on the Lord Jesus Christ and then one final one that I would give you, we’re secured by a promise of glory. Well, no, I’ll give you one more after this, a promise of glory. This is four; I’ll give you one more.

A promise of glory, and that you find in verse 15. This could be taken apart many ways, but I’ll give it to you sort of in a simple understanding, “always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” When people say to you, “Why won’t you recant? Why do you insist on preaching this message? Why won’t you go along with the culture? Why won’t you accept what the culture accepts? Why are you taking a position, for example, against abortion? Why are you taking a position against gay marriage? Why are you taking a position against homosexuality? Or why are you taking a position against fornication--people living together without being married--why do you take these positions? Why not just roll into the culture and make life easy for yourself? What do you gain from this? Why is this all important to you?”

Peter says, “Whenever you have to defend what you believe, whenever you have to defend why you live the way you live, whenever you have to defend why you follow the Word of God, submit to the lordship of Christ, why do you acknowledge Him as the sovereign of your life, why you follow the

prescriptions of the Bible, why you restrict your living to those things which are allowed in the Bible and you stay away from those things that are disallowed? Why do you live that way? Go ahead and make a defense."

The word for "defense" is *apologia*, an apologetic. That word, by the way, can refer to a formal or an informal defense. In some cases Christians have had to make a formal defense. Some of them are doing it now right now in Arab countries where they're standing before magistrates and judges and having to defend the fact that they will not recant the gospel, embrace Islam. And they're staying in prison because they will not do that. Sometimes this word is used of a formal defense in a legal situation. Other times it's an informal defense, somebody might ask you, "Why do you live the way you live? Why do you conduct yourself the way you do? Why do you have the moral views you do? Why do you honor Christ? Why do you follow the Bible?"

Give them a defense, anybody who asks you, and notice where the defense focuses. "Give an account for the hope that is in you." Everything drives--everything we do as Christians, everything we believe drives at the reality of our hope. And what is our hope? It is eternal life, it is heaven. Whatever sacrifices we make now are made in the light of what God has prepared for them that love Him. Whatever deprivations we accept now is in light of the full riches and blessings of glory to come.

So when people say to us, "Why do you live the way you live?" We don't say, "Oh, because I want my best life now." We don't say that. We don't say, "Oh, I live this way because it makes me, it makes me able to meet so many nice people because so many nice people are in church and I like nice people." Or, "Because I feel better about myself when I kind of clean up my act a little bit." None of those things is a defense for what we believe at all. The defense for what we believe is that we know there is life after death and that God has prepared in the glory of heaven a kind of life that is so glorious, so wonderful that it's defined as "pleasures forevermore." You know, we're going to be eternal hedonists: "pleasures forevermore." And the monumental, dominating attitude of heaven is going to be joy, pleasures forevermore. Why we do what we do, why we restrict our lives this way, why we stand, why we let you cut off our heads before you recant is because of the hope that is before us. Because that hope includes "an inheritance undefiled, reserved for us which fades not away." Peter says that in the first chapter, a promise of glory. We have a passion for goodness, a willingness to suffer, a focus on Christ, and we live in the hope of glory.

Let me give you one final and very important reality. If you want to secure yourself in the midst of persecution, have a pure conscience, a pure conscience. And this is in verse 16. "Keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame."

You know, it's kind of like people will try to make you feel bad, make you feel guilty. But if your conscience is clear, they can't succeed. I always go back to 1 Corinthians...2 Corinthians where the

critics had just shredded Paul's reputation in the Corinthian church, and I believe they were demonic and they were very successful with supernatural power. And Paul writes a letter and basically says, "I have a clear conscience," "I have a clear conscience." Horrible things have been said about me; lies have been propagated about me. I have a clear conscience. My conscience is not accusing me. That is the ultimate earthly court in the life of an individual. Romans 2 says, "Conscience is a device that either excuses you or accuses you." It either validates your behavior as consistent with truth, or invalidates it as inconsistent with truth. Live with a clear conscience so that your conscience doesn't condemn you. And when it doesn't condemn you, you can take whatever comes and you can be calm, at ease, at peace, and even experience joy. And when your enemies see that in you, when they come at you and slander you and revile your good behavior in Christ, they end up feeling shameful. This is like heaping coals of fire on your enemies' heads.

If there's sin in your life, you're not going to have a clear conscience, and you're not going to be at ease before God when trouble comes and persecution comes. You're going to be like David in Psalm 32 who had so much guilt that he was in agony. His life juices dried up at physical results, fears and anxieties. But if your conscience is pure, if your conscience surveys your life and finds nothing by which to condemn you, then when persecution comes, and you respond with trust, and faith, and peace, and joy, and hope, your enemies will be ashamed.

So in the end, verse 17, "If it comes, if this suffering comes, if this persecution comes, it is better if God should will it that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong," right? Basic. If it's going to come, let it be for doing what is right. We're right back to where we started.

I can't tell you precisely what's going to come in the future against us, but it's going to come and it's going to escalate. For how long? I don't know. And in what forms? I'm not sure. Persecution is going to come against you as an individual, if it doesn't already come, because you're an outspoken Christian. Here you are in the world, an alien and a stranger, and your task is not just to survive, your task is not somehow to defeat the enemy, your task is to win the enemy to your side. You do that by keeping your behavior honest and excellent. You do that by being a shining light in the world so that men can see your good works and glorify your father in heaven. You do that by proclaiming the gospel and loving your persecutors and showing kindness to them. You do that by doing good, having a passion for goodness, being willing to suffer, focusing on Christ, looking to eternal glory and keeping your conscience pure.

If we live our lives like that in the face of this, we will be at ease in comfort and confidence in the midst of the worst that comes, whatever it is. And we will send the testimony to our enemies that God wants us to send so that they can see our transformed lives and be interested in the gospel that does that transformation.

Father, we are again, this morning, so grateful for a wonderful time together. Just being together in fellowship is in itself a benediction and a blessing. Then to be able to sing and worship and express our hearts to you in prayer and praise is a profound joy to us. And now to have sat under the Word and to have heard from the beloved apostle Peter, the same instruction that he gave to persecuted believers long ago, to know that there have been many since them all the way to us who have applied these principles in triumph through persecution, to Your glory and to the spread of the gospel. Enable us to do that, we pray, to remain faithful.

Father, we ask now that You would take the truth and pull it out of our heads into our hearts and into our behavior, that we might live to Your glory, for You have given us all things. We could repay You with no less than everything we are and have. Enable us by Your Spirit, we pray.

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