GOD WITH US Part 11: LATER LETTERS

Message 9 – 1 Peter Hope Fixed on God 1Peter 3:18 – 5:14

Introduction

Our greatest testimony will often come through our greatest trials. This is the overall theme of this letter, as Peter was writing to encourage those who were suffering severely. He was challenging them to keep their hope fixed on God as they endured mistreatment by the world. While this world might mistreat them for their faith in Christ, the next world would surely reward them. While their persecutors deprived them of justice, their heavenly Father would honor their faithful perseverance.

Before we move into the commentary beginning at 3:18, we want to provide some notes on the passage concerning wives and husband (3:1-7), as Peter has some unique things to add to our understanding of God's plan for women and men.

Notes from Shirley on 3:1-6 concerning Wives

"Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear" (3:1-6).

There are 3 big ideas in this passage.

1. Wives are to live "in the same way" that Christ exemplified.

Peter was teaching Christians how to suffer trials and persecution, and how to respond. He used Jesus and His suffering as the example for us all. He submitted to the Father's will; took the cup of suffering, and died for our sins. As He suffered, He committed no sin, even as He

was insulted with contempt. He did not retaliate, but "kept entrusting Himself to His Father Who judges justly" (2:22,23). Jesus' hope was in His Father's justice. He did not take His own revenge. He entrusted Himself to a just Judge Who saw and knew everything being done to Him. (Note: 800 years before Christ, Isaiah prophesied as to how Christ would suffer. "He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet He never said a word" - Isaiah 53:7).

Peter used Christ's example to exhort wives and husbands. He began with wives:

"Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (3:1,2).

A husband could be a believer or a non-believer. The point here is that he is a difficult husband for this godly wife to live with. He is "unpersuaded" by God's truth. How should the wife respond?

"In the same way" as Christ (3:1). A wife is first to entrust herself to her faithful Savior and Judge. Second, she must choose to maintain a genuine and respectful demeanor. Third, she should not fight or manipulate her husband with her words. Finally, she should not give in to fear, rather, keep her hope in God (3:6).

For most cultures in history, women and wives have not been treated with honor and respect by men and husbands. Even today, this is still the case in many places. This is painful and hard. Even though she feels unseen and unloved by her husband, Peter brings comfort reminding a wife who seeks to keep her hope fixed on God that Jesus also experienced similar shame and dishonor. Her ultimate approval and vindication will someday come from Him. In Western culture, a healthy marriage is built on a relationship of mutual love, friendship and open and honest communication. Wives are encouraged to share their hearts with a gentle and respectful attitude, even with persuasiveness at times! There will be times where no compromise can be reached. Applying Peter's words, as wives, there is a time to "rank under" the husband and trust God with his decision. God is faithful. I have experienced it many times!

2. Concerning outward adornment and inner beauty.

"Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair, and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes" (3:3).

Peter is not saying that women can't adorn themselves with these things. The emphasis is on the imbalance that can result from focusing only on externals. God is always more concerned about inner beauty, a pure heart. The inner self, when surrendered to the Holy Spirit, has an unfading beauty that increases over the years. This is the "gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth to God" (3:4).

I remember when I realized that a "gentle and quiet spirit was not a "personality type." As a young wife, I tried to be quieter, even though I had an outgoing personality that was more talkative. Then, I learned that all personality types can display a gentle and quiet spirit, when surrendered to the Holy Spirit. It is a spirit of response. I love how the book of James describes this same spirit: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" (James 1:19). Similarly, James later says: "Wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure; then peaceloving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (3:17).

3. Sarah gives us an example to follow.

Sarah's story as the wife of Abraham is recorded in Genesis Ch.'s 12-23. She was a beautiful woman and twice, as she and Abraham needed to live in Egypt and Gerar, her beauty was noticed and she was taken into 2 king's harems (Gen. 13, 20). This happened to her because her husband, Abraham, did not trust God in these situations, rather, he resorted to his own schemes to protect himself. He asked Sarah to say she was his "sister" instead of his "wife" so that he would not be killed as the kings of these areas sought to take her from him. Thus, even Sarah's example comes against the backdrop of living with a husband who was not making good choices.

She is noted to be a woman who put <u>her hope in God</u>. Her entire married life with Abraham was spent as aliens and strangers amongst the lands and peoples of Canaan. She could not have been Abraham's life partner in the adventure, if she had given into fear and taken her eyes off of God.

Sarah had an inner spirit that God commended, but we do get snapshots of her strong personality too! On at least three occasions we listen to her discussing with Abraham significant issues concerning their life, their family and their future.

1st She suggested Abraham take Hagar to bear children for her, since she believed the Lord had permanently closed her womb (Gen.16:1-4).

2nd Once Hagar was pregnant, she looked with contempt at Sarah and Sarah was angry and accused Abraham of causing her suffering because of Hagar (Gen 16:4,5)!

3rd Once Sarah finally gave birth to Isaac, when she weaned him, Ishmael was caught mocking Isaac. Sarah told Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away for good. This distressed Abraham, but God affirmed Sarah's words, and Abraham sent them both away (Gen. 21:1-12).

In *1Peter 3:6*, Peter notes a time when she called Abraham "My master" (Genesis 18:9-15). Sarah was musing to herself in her tent, after overhearing Abraham being told that he and Sarah would finally and miraculously conceive a son. She was so far beyond the child-bearing years, and was laughing to herself about the crazy promise she had overheard. She said to herself, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

Why did Peter bring this up? Because he was making the point that Sarah respected her husband's place in her life. We don't know if she ever actually called Abraham "Master" in person. I tend to doubt it. But, more importantly she respected him, and she was willing to hope in God without giving way to fear, and believe that God could do the miraculous as she chose to trust Him to conceive a son.

These 6 verses hold a wealth of wisdom for wives and, actually for all women and men. There are so many timeless principles here. I personally have been challenged by the story of Sarah; by the need to keep cultivating the kind of inner beauty that is of great worth to God; and most of all, to remember Christ's example of suffering without retaliating, choosing to remain faithful to God when I feel misunderstood by my husband, knowing that God is a just Judge.

Notes from Bob on 3:7 concerning Husbands

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (3:7).

The husband is only given one verse, compared to six verses for the wife. This is because of the overall theme of lPeter on suffering under difficult circumstances, and it seems that Peter's focus was on wives who were in difficult marriages as a specific result of their faith in Christ. Nevertheless, the one verse given to husbands is significant.

- Husbands are to "be considerate" toward their wives. This literally reads: "Live with your wives according to knowledge." As husbands, we should always be striving to know our wives better and better knowing their hearts, needs, desires, tendencies, fears, etc. A husband cannot love his wife well if he does not study his wife and know her deeply.
- Husbands are to respect their wives as "weaker partners." This has reference not primarily to physical strength, but to her emotional tenderness and her heightened sensitivity to relational disharmony. We've heard the saying, "a bull in a china shop." A husband who is not tender toward his wife can be like "a rhinoceros in a flower garden."
- Husbands are to grant their wives "honor, as fellow-heirs of the grace of life." Here is a key for the husband. He must realize that in God's sight she is a fellow-heir in this thing we call "life." She is on equal footing with the man, even if she is called to live out her role in a different way. Above all, husbands must grant their wives the honor of being equal bearers of the image of God.
- Husbands must realize that their prayers will *not* be heard by God *if* they are mistreating their wives. This is how much God is concerned with the proper treatment of women by men. HE will not relate with a man who is not relating well with his wife!

We now resume the commentary where we left off last section. Peter is focusing on how persecuted believers respond to trials. He has shown us how our *greatest trials can become our greatest testimony if* we suffer well. He will continue to show us that *in our greatest trials*, we need to keep our HOPE in God's vindication, not man's.

Ultimate Victory for God's Persecuted Ones: 3:18 – 4:6

By keeping the overall theme in mind, we are able to interpret some of the more difficult sections, in particular, 3:18-4:6, a passage that has generated many ideas about Jesus' activity during the time between His death and resurrection/ascension. The section begins with a simple declaration of the work of Christ dying for our sins, so that He might "bring us to God" (i.e., reconcile us to God).

"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit . . ." (3:18).

The comment that Jesus was "put to death in the flesh, but made alive

in the spirit" is key, as it ties in with a very similar comment at the end of this section. Many persecuted believers had been "judged in the flesh as men, but were now alive in the spirit by the will of God" (4:6). These two similar phrases provide bookends to this difficult passage, and the key to interpreting the section. The connecting idea is that although Jesus (and persecuted believers) were mistreated in the flesh by sinful men, they are vindicated (made alive) in the spirit by the will of God the Father. In keeping with the overall theme of 1Peter, this section will serve as additional encouragement to those who were suffering. Just as Jesus showed us how to suffer (2:21-25), so He showed us how to trust in God's ultimate vindication (3:18-4:6).

What follows is a parenthetical section in which Peter describes the work of Jesus "in the spirit" at some point after His death. Key here is the idea is that Jesus proclaimed victory over fallen angels who opposed God's will.

"... in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water" (3:19,20).

There is no indicator as to the timing of Jesus' activity in making some proclamation to the spirits now in prison. 2Peter 2:4-9 identifies these "spirits in prison" as the fallen angels who led humanity astray in Noah's day. The timing of Jesus' proclamation to these fallen angels is less critical than His activity itself. Jesus visited these imprisoned angelic spirits and proclaimed His victory over them. This is made clear in the last line in ch.3 which states: "Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him" (3:22). The fallen angels who inspired rebellion in the days of Noah were brought into full subjection to the victorious Christ at some point after His death and prior to His ascension. (We know from Genesis 6:1,2 that in some mysterious way fallen angels were involved in the rebellion of humans against God in the days leading up to the flood.)

We can begin to understand Peter's overall point in this difficult section: Jesus was persecuted in the flesh by humans, but vindicated in the spirit by God, as demonstrated by His declaration of victory over the fallen angels. In a similar way, Peter will go on to say that believers who are being persecuted in the flesh by humans will ultimately be vindicated in the spirit by God.

Note: There is nothing here that would indicate (as some have suggested) that Jesus proclaimed the gospel to the spirits of human beings who died during the flood, giving them a 2nd chance to believe (having rejected the preaching of Noah). This suggestion is an invalid inference based on a wrong interpretation of 4:6 (which we will come to later).

In a parenthesis within the parenthesis, Peter makes a comparison between Noah and his family coming safely through the flood waters because of their faith in God's Word, and believers who go through "the waters of baptism" to salvation.

"Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him" (3:21,22).

The teaching here is *not* that the ritual of baptism saves a person (which is why Peter notes that simple water washing is not the point); rather, what is important is that baptism symbolizes the heart attitude of a person who has made "an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus." Christian baptism symbolizes the repentant sinner's plea to God and dependence on Christ for cleansing from sin (i.e., a good conscience). Just as Noah made it safely through the flood waters because he trusted in God's word, so believers come through the waters of baptism cleansed because they trust in God's word concerning the saving work of Christ.

Peter next turns to admonish the suffering believers to live to please God, in spite of their earthly trials. On what basis? Just as Christ was ultimately vindicated, so too these believers, as they endure, will receive God's final vindication.

"Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead" (4:1-5).

The last line is important, and central to the entire section. God the Father is ready to judge *all* the living and the dead. God is a righteous judge. No action escapes His notice and, in the end, His justice will vindicate the righteous and recompense the evildoers. This allows us to properly understand the one verse that has caused the most trouble for interpreters:

"For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God" (4:6).

Peter returns to his opening thought (3:18) concerning judgment (i.e., death) in the flesh, but being made alive in the spirit. What, then, does he mean by saying that "the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead?" The answer is straightforward in context. The gospel was preached to people while they were alive; but having become believers in Jesus, they were subsequently put to death by their persecutors. Nevertheless, although they have been "judged in the flesh as men" they have been made "alive in the spirit" by God. The same thing that happened to Jesus has happened to believers – rejected by men, but vindicated by God. (The following page gives a visual diagram/overview of the passage. It is intended to help you see the connecting thoughts and ideas.)

The Connecting Idea in 3:18 – 4:6

3:18. For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, HAVING BEEN PUT TO DEATH IN THE FLESH, BUT MADE ALIVE IN THE SPIRIT

JESUS was judged in the flesh (suffered death at the hands of men); but was made alive in the spirit (vindicated by His Father).

- **3:19-22** is parenthetical. Jesus, having suffered physical death, was made alive in the spirit. In this spiritual form, <u>He went and made a proclamation of victory over those fallen spirits</u> who inspired Noah's generation to rebel against the voice of God. (See 2Peter 2:4-9 for a parallel discussion of God's judgment on these fallen angels.)
- **4:1-6** picks up on the thought that God, the Judge of both the living and the dead, will make a final proclamation of victory over those who are persecuting and killing Christians in this life . . . as well as a proclamation of vindication over those who have suffered well according to the will of God.
- 4:5. Everyone will give an account to HIM WHO IS READY TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.
- 4:6. For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are JUDGED IN THE FLESH AS MEN, THEY MAY LIVE IN THE SPIRIT according to the will of God.

CHRISTIANS heard the gospel and believed when they were alive. They were subsequently judged in the flesh (they suffered death at the hands of persecutors); but they live in the spirit (vindicated by their Father in heaven).

The central thought for the suffering Christians Peter was addressing is that their suffering is not in vain. God, the final Judge, will settle all the scores. He will vindicate believers who have suffered in this life according to His will and purposes. He will also judge those who have brought about the sufferings of His beloved children. Thus, those who are suffering persecution (and even death) in this life, can take heart. Just as the Father vindicated His Son, Jesus, after His suffering, so He will vindicate all of His children who have faithfully suffered loss in this life. This central idea is at the end of chapter 4.

"Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right" (4:19). 4/11/21

Having dissected this difficult passage, let's get practical and apply it. What situations have you been in where you have been wrongly judged, persecuted, or attacked? Have you served God with a clear conscience in the situation? Can you stand before Him knowing that, although none of us do things perfectly, you conducted yourself with a clear conscience, seeking to honor God? If so, can you rest your case with God, and HOPE in His ultimate vindication? Can you resist the desire to have your 'day in court' here and now, instead, deferring your HOPE to His final judgement? This is what Peter was asking these persecuted believers to do: to HOPE in God's eternal vindication, rather than to try to find justice and vindication in the here and now (which was absolutely not possible for them as a persecuted group in the Roman world).

Admonitions to Godly Living: 4:7 - 11

Admonitions to godly living are scattered throughout this letter, rather than being organized all into one section.

"The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (4:7-11).

Prayer. Loving one another. Practicing hospitality. Exercising our spiritual gifts for the glory of God. These are things that Christians should occupy themselves with. "The end of all things is near" points to the early Christian expectation that Jesus would return within their lifetime. They were not wrong in living with such immediate expectancy, for Jesus taught His disciples to live as if their Master might return at any moment. Christians in every generation should live with the eager expectation that Jesus might return. In the broader sense, "the end of all things IS always near," since we WILL meet Jesus soon whether we go to be with Him through natural death, OR, He comes to take us home at His 2nd coming. Either way, we should always live with the expectation of meeting our Lord and Savior soon.

Does the idea of meeting Jesus soon have an impact on how you live your life today? To put it differently, if a doctor told you that you had only 6 months to live, how would that change your life, your actions, your values? What would you prioritize? What would you stop doing? We do not know when we will meet the Lord; but we should always live as if we might stand before Him soon, and very soon!

Share the Sufferings of Christ: 4:12-19

This section culminates Peter's emphasis on suffering well, for the glory of God. Believers should not be surprised at "fiery trials" that "test/refine" their faith (similar idea in 1:4-6). Instead, they should rejoice (see James 1:2,3 for same idea).

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange things were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right" (4:12-19).

In some special way, the Spirit of God rests upon believers as they suffer for the sake of Christ (4:14). This coincides with Jesus' teaching to the effect that believers should not worry in advance about what they will say in the face of persecution; the Holy Spirit will aid them in what they are to say (Matthew 10:19,20). Again, the final judgment of God is emphasized (v.18), where God will rightly judge between those who have obeyed the gospel of God and those who have created hardship for believers. Peter constantly calls these persecuted believers to put their HOPE in God's ultimate justice and vindication.

Admonitions to Elders and Young Leaders: 5:1-6

"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder

and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (5:1-5).

Elders serve as under-shepherds on behalf of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus. There are a series of juxtaposed statements describing HOW elders should shepherd the flock.

Voluntarily – not under compulsion. Eagerly – not for selfish gain. Exemplary – not lording it over.

And there is a special reward – a crown of glory – for those who shepherd the flock of God in this manner. Notice again Peter's emphasis on God's final judgment and His ultimate reward. Even elders and church leaders need to serve with their HOPE firmly fixed on God's ultimate reward and approval.

Do you live for the applause of people here and now, or the final approval of God? This is such an important question as it speaks to our deepest motivations for how and why we live as we live. Take some time to ponder this deep question. Whose approval are you seeking? Your life will be determined by the approval you seek! Can you say that you are 'living for an audience of One?'

Trusting God to carry you through Suffering: 5:6-11

As he concludes this letter, Peter returns one more time to his central theme of suffering well. Here, however, the focus is not so much on the testimony the persecuted believer might have toward unbelievers; rather, the focus is on the believers *hope in God* and *wariness of the devil's schemes*.

"Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by

your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen" (5:6-11).

This passage encourages suffering believers in several ways. The big idea is that *God is in control, even when it feels like evil is in control.*

- Walk humbly with God even in your trials, knowing that He is able to lift you out of those trials (exalt you) when He is ready to do so. Just as the Father raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to His right hand in heaven, so the Father will raise up His persecuted children at the proper time, exalting them to His glorious presence above.
- Cast all anxiety on Him, even as you suffer, because He loves you. Yes, our Good Shepherd has gone through earthly suffering. He knows what it is like. Bring your fears to Him, even as you suffer well.
- Be careful! The devil would like nothing more than to turn your trials into your defeat, rather than allowing those trials to become your brightest testimony.
- Know that you are not alone in suffering.
- When the sufferings of this life ("a little while") are completed, God will take you home to his eternal glory.

Final Greetings: 5:12-14

"Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ" (5:12-14).

Silvanus (Silas) was Peter's secretary for this letter. Interestingly, Silvanus was the name of a Roman god (god of the countryside). I wonder how often Silvanus had the opportunity to explain to his fellow Romans that although he was named after a Roman god, his faith was in Jesus Christ, the one true God. The reference: "She who is in Babylon" is likely a reference to the church scattered throughout the city of Rome, where Peter often ministered. The reference to Peter's "son," Mark is precious. This is the same John Mark who had a difficult time on the first missionary trip with Paul and Barnabas. He later became Peter's assistant and secretary, recording Peter's sermons in Rome . . . turning those notes ultimately into "the Gospel of Mark."

Discussion Questions

- 1. How does the teaching of 1Peter shape your understanding of suffering, and your response to suffering?
- 2. Why is it often difficult for us to place our HOPE in God's eternal justice? Why do we so often 'want our day in court' here and now, longing for vindication in the court of human opinion?
- 3. How does it inspire you to know that Jesus not only modeled HOW to suffer well; but also, HOW to trust God for ultimate vindication?
- 4. Of all the ideas we have covered in 1Peter, what stands out most to you? What will you take away from this study?
- 5. Wives/husbands: What challenges have you taken to heart from these verses in Ch.3:1-6, and v.7? See additional notes in the notes on wives written by Shirley, which accompanied her video on "Wives".