

May 11, 2008 by Steve Brandon



Suffering for the Sake of Righteousness

1 Peter 3:13-17

1. Isn't Natural (verse 13).
2. Brings a Blessing (verse 14a).
3. Doesn't need to Cause Fear (verse 14b).
4. Provides an Opportunity (verses 15).
5. Shames those who Persecute (verse 16).
6. Is Better than Doing Evil (verse 17).

I want to begin this morning by telling you the story of the Barnaul Baptist Church in Barnaul, Siberia. Their story is told in a book entitled, "A Song in Siberia," written by Anita and Peter Deyneka. [\[1\]](#)

During the days of Stalin's reign in Russia in the early 1900's, many Christians were exiled to Siberia for political reasons. As the Soviet Union scattered the gospel seed, "many churches sprang up across Siberia" (p. 35). One of those places of exile was in the city of Barnaul. The church began with a small cluster of Christians who would meet together for mutual encouragement and worship.

Because of the pressures of World War II in the 1940's, some of the religious restrictions were lifted. Stalin was worried that the Christians would welcome the Nazi invasion, causing the country to crumble. And so, in 1944, this little gathering of about ten believers in Barnaul was able to purchase a house, that they used for their church building (p. 36), which they called a prayer house.

After the death of Stalin, the new leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, "denounced Stalin at the 20th Communist Party Congress in February 1956" (p. 37). This gave much more religious freedom than had been experienced in the past. The religious freedom continued on.

Combine that with a political effort to develop a region near Barnaul agriculturally, the church in Barnaul flourished. "By 1958, there were over five hundred members in the Barnaul Baptist Church. Parents who had been terrified of severe Soviet legislation against Christian education during the first half of Stalin's reign now brought their children to church. [It was a flourishing congregation with some] seventy teenage believers among the Barnaul Christians" (p. 37).

But that all crashed in the early 1960's "Khrushchev's government launched a new offensive against religion. ... From 1959 to 1964 an estimated ten thousand Orthodox and Baptist churches were closed" (p. 37). In January 1961, the Soviet government came upon this church in Barnaul and "hung locks with seals on the doors of [their] prayer house. ... The act meant much more than the loss of a place to meet. It signaled the loss of official sanction. As far as the Soviet government was concerned, the Barnaul Baptist church no longer existed."

As you know, that's not going to stop Christians from gathering together for worship and fellowship and mutual encouragement. But, without the government sanction, the believers in Barnaul had to be careful how they gathered. "Wherever they met, the believers discreetly tried not to disturb the neighborhood. ... But despite their caution, their meetings in the closely-watched Soviet society did not go unnoticed. The police insisted that they were guilty of 'disturbing the peace and also meeting secretly.' These accusations were used as a pretext of prosecution," (p. 44) although the Christians were well within their rights to gather this way, according to the official law on the books.

"KGB representatives would visit people in nearby neighborhoods to collect damaging evidence against the Christians. ... Bribed by a bottle of vodka, some neighbors were willing to invent complaints against the Christians" (p. 45). But not all neighbors were willing to complain against them. One woman told police, "Their singing cheers our whole neighborhood" (p. 45).

Nevertheless, the persecution continued. The Soviet government levied fines against Christians who used their homes for meetings (p. 47). For a first-time offense, "the fine was usually fifty rubles--about half a month's salary" (p. 47). Repeat offenses only increased the fines. "In some instances, extended fines [were] deducted from a believer's salary" (p. 77).

People lost their jobs for their faith in Christ. For instance, one respected engineer "was arrested for organizing a 'harmful' religious meeting. After two years in jail, he was ... given a job sweeping streets" (p. 148 - picture).

Police officers would harass those coming to the meetings (p. 48). After meetings were held, the police would come and search the homes in which these meetings were held. "They even invaded the homes of believers who only attended the meetings. ... Any Bibles, hymnbooks, or other Christian literature that they discovered were confiscated" (p. 49).

Over the years, the Soviet government arrested many of the church members, bringing them into the police station for questioning and intimidation. They imprisoned some of the church's leaders, sometimes for only a few days and other times for weeks on end. Others were sent to prison camps, where they were cruelly treated.

One of their members, Nikolai Kuzmich Khmara, was tortured and brutally killed in prison because of his testimony for Christ. He went

into jail, "in robust health and cheerful" (p. 109). He was returned to the Christian community in a casket. "When the Christians opened the casket, they found the tortured body of an old man. Chain marks scarred his hands. Burns scorched the palms of his hands and soles of his feet. The nails had been torn from his fingers and toes. A sharp, red-hot object had left gaping wounds in his abdomen. Both feet showed signs of puncture wounds, and the body was swollen and bruised. Khmara's mouth was stuffed with cotton. ... One of the Barnaul deacons stood by the coffin when the cotton was removed. He recalls, 'Nikolai Kuzmich's tongue had been torn out. Later we heard from other prisoners that our brother had spent his final breath telling the guards about Jesus. The authorities could not stop Khmara's testimony. But they tore out his tongue to stop him from talking about Christ.'" (p. 109).

Such persecutions continued for more than a decade in Barnaul, Siberia, but the Soviet government could never stop the church. In fact, this book is subtitled, "The true story of a Russian church that could not be silenced." The entire book talks about this church and the persecutions that it faced. And through it all, those in the church remained faithful to the Lord.

As we come to 1 Peter this morning, we find Peter addressing this issue of suffering for the sake of righteousness, which is exactly what the church in Barnaul, Siberia experienced. They were faithfully serving the Lord. They were doing what was good, and yet, they faced incredible suffering as a result.

As we have worked our way through Peter's first epistle, we have heard him allude to the suffering that Christians experience. He wrote, "Now, for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials" (1:6). Later, he wrote how "the Gentiles ... slander you as evildoers." He continued throughout chapter 2 and 3 with examples of suffering from government (2:15), from masters (2:19), and from disobedient husbands (3:1). Furthermore, in verse 9 or chapter 3, he talks of those who are on the receiving end of evil and insult.

But, now, for the first time, Peter will address this issue of suffering head on in verses 13-17. Consider what Peter wrote, ...

1 Peter 3:13-17

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, 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; and 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. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

My message this morning is entitled, "Suffering for the Sake of Righteousness." It comes from the main point of the passage, which is found in the opening phrase of verse 14, "Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness." This is the heart of Peter's message in our text this morning. He's seeking to give counsel to those who are "suffering for the sake or righteousness." In other words, Peter is talking about those who are doing good things, but are experiencing suffering as a result, from the hands of others.

Now, here in America, such suffering is few and far between. We are free to meet for worship. No government is coming to lock our doors. I don't know of any church that the government has shut down, merely because they were meeting for worship and proclaiming the gospel. I don't know of any pastors who have been imprisoned for preaching the gospel. I don't know of any Christians who have been arrested in seeking to do a good deed. Perhaps the exception to this might be those who have been arrested in conjunction with their civil protests against abortion. In some measure, those who are arrested in these cases bring their suffering upon themselves, as they intentionally disturb the peace to bring attention to the evils of what takes place with abortion.

And yet, there is some suffering that takes place here in America for the sake of righteousness. Usually, it's on the small-scale. Persecution can come at work. Your colleagues are constantly talking about things immoral or impure. As you refuse to join with them, but rather identify these things as sin, persecution often comes, "Who are you, Miss Goodie-too-shoes?" Doesn't the Bible say, "Judge not, lest you be judged" (Matt. 7:1). But, rarely does religious persecution ever come to the point of actually losing your job.

Persecution can come from your family, if you have converted from another religion. When a Jewish person embraces Jesus as his Messiah, he will often be disowned by his family. My wife and I knew a Jewish woman who came to believe in Jesus during her college years. The persecution that she faced from her family was very real for a long time. But, as they began to see and understand the fruit of her faith, eventually, the persecution lessened. However, I do believe that it's still present. Her parents still hold it against her that she believes in Jesus.

Those who grow up in Roman Catholic homes and then come to embrace the Protestant faith are often persecuted in their families, because they have forsaken the "true church," outside of which, they believe there to be no salvation. Similar experiences come from those who embrace Christ from Hindu or Muslim backgrounds as well.

Peter's counsel is primarily applicable to those who are living lives of righteousness and are experiencing persecution precisely because of the life that they are leading. As I think about those of us at Rock Valley Bible Church, it's the exception, not the rule for us. And so, Peter's message is a difficult message this morning for us to apply.

In general, we are not experiencing great suffering for our faith at this time. But, know that Peter's counsel is very applicable to all sorts of suffering as well. Whether you are sick, jobless, facing marriage difficulties or family problems, much of what Peter says ought to find encouragement in your soul as well.

By way of outline this morning, I want to pick out six observations about such suffering. Here's my first observation. Suffering for the sake of righteousness, ...

1. Isn't Natural (verse 13).

You can see this in verse 13. Peter asks the simple, rhetorical question, "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" The obvious answer is "nobody."

Peter had just written some words of exhortation, calling us to a life of harmony (3:8-9) and to a life of purity (3:10-12). He had encouraged walking in a sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble manner, not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but watching our words and our actions and our relationships. And when you seek this sort of life, there is no natural reason why people would want to harm you.

Those who walk this earth with love and compassion are generally loved by others. There are philanthropists, who give millions of dollars to their charities. They are loved by the many who benefit from their generosity.

There are celebrities, who donate their time to various causes, such as United Way, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, or The Red Cross. Such deeds are recognized by the world, and rarely criticized.

Who can't help, but to be encouraged by the example of former President Carter, who has devoted much of his life after the white house in promoting humanitarian needs. Who can't help, but to marvel at the sacrifice that mother Theresa made for the poor in Calcutta? People like this are recognized by the world as they receive the Nobel peace prize. Now, certainly, such people are criticized, as their leadership is known on a global scale. But, this criticism is rarely because of the good deeds that they do.

"Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" Nobody ought to harm you. And yet, it happens. It may not be natural that you are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. But, there are times that it does happen.

Those who lived in Barnaul, Siberia in the 1960's knew about this all too well. They knew that they were being unfairly treated. "Through every lawful channel, Christians in Barnaul and across Russia tried to make their desperate situation known. They pled with their own government to enforce clauses already in the Soviet constitution and laws that would halt persecution and ensure religious freedom" (p. 128), but their pleas were constantly ignored. It wasn't right that they were being persecuted for their faith, and they appealed to the government, who would know that such things were wrong.

In some ways the extent of the persecution surprised them. Five years after their prayer house had been padlocked shut, the government came with a bulldozer to knock the building down (p. 155). In response to this, the Christian wrote a letter, which read in part. "Such actions were a great surprise both to us believers and to the unbelievers of the whole town--and especially to those who were actually present at this operation of brutal violence upon us believers unlike anything done since 1937 [the height of Stalin's purges]. It was the sort of thing you would not believe, even if someone told you about it. ... It is difficult to avoid the fact that the courts, police, the press, radio, and all government agencies are obedient executors of the policy of suppressing all religious belief" (p. 156).

The premise of the letter that they wrote is that all alike see how unnatural such persecution is, even the unbelievers in Barnaul recognized this.

Though suffering for the sake of righteousness is seen by all as unfair, it still may take place. This is what Peter brings up in verse 14, ... , "Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness." The possibility exists.

For a Christian, not only does the possibility exist, but we ought to anticipate suffering for the sake of righteousness. "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (4:12). When suffering and hardship comes upon us, we ought not to be surprised at what is taking place. Rather, in some measure, we ought to expect it.

The Christian life is one of hardship! Paul promised, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 4:12). To those new Christians in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, Paul strengthened their souls, encouraging them to continue in the faith, saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Suffering for the sake of righteousness may not be natural, but, we ought to expect that it will come. After all, were are merely following the example of our Lord, who was hated by the world. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

Who was more righteous than Jesus? Nobody. And who was hated more than Jesus? Nobody. "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master" (Matt. 10:24-25).

And so, we ought to anticipate that persecution would come upon us. We who believe in Christ have come to embrace life in another world. As such, the current world isn't too thrilled with the life that we lead. Jesus said, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you" (John 15:19).

There's my first observation about suffering for the sake of righteousness. It isn't natural (verse 13). Second, suffering for the sake of righteousness ...

2. Brings a Blessing (verse 14a).

Consider the first half of verse 14, "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed."

Now, this is a strange point that Peter makes. It's contrary to what we naturally think. When we think about suffering, we instantly think, "Bad!" We'll do almost anything to avoid suffering. And yet, there is a benefit to you in suffering for the sake of righteousness. Peter said that those who experience it, "are blessed."

This isn't some strange teaching of Peter. First, he learned it from Jesus, who said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are these who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12).

Additionally, Peter mentions this on several other occasions. "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (4:14). Peter also said, that rather than "returning evil for evil, or insult for insult," we ought to "[give] a blessing instead" (3:9). Then, Peter comments, "For you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing" (3:9). In both of these verses, Peter makes the connection between our persecution and the blessing that is received. Believe it! When you are suffering for the sake of righteousness, you will be blessed.

The key question to ask at this point is this: "How is it that we are blessed when we suffer for the sake of righteousness?" It seems so counter-intuitive.

One of the keys comes in our text from the last two weeks. If you remember the point that I made in those texts, it was that the good life is found when you experience the sustaining grace of God **through** your trials and hardships and difficulties. We ought to pursue harmony and purity because (as verse 12 says), "the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer." God looks with favor upon those who are experiencing suffering and trusting the Lord through it.

Peter gave the same thought in 4:14. The blessing comes through the persecution, because "the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." In other words, the blessing comes, because you receive an experiential experience of the nearness of God upon your life.

A great example of this is the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 12, he described his experience with a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7). We don't know exactly what it was, but he describes it as "a messenger of Satan" who "tormented" him (2 Cor. 12:7). I suspect that it was probably some false teacher, who was constantly resisting the work of Paul.

Paul wrote, "Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me" (2 Cor. 12:8). And yet, three times, God refused to take this thorn in the flesh away. Rather, the Lord told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). And upon hearing of God's promise to sustain him with power through his sufferings, Paul then wrote, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (12:9).

Think about Paul's experience in terms of "blessing." In the midst of his being tormented, Paul had no resources in and of himself to sustain him. Rather, all that he had was the sustaining hand of God. Consider that last sentence again, "All that he had was the sustaining hand of God!" What more could you ask for? What a blessing! And so, Paul rejoiced and received gladly the difficulties that came through this thorn in the flesh.

In that way, we are greatly blessed through our sufferings!

Hudson Taylor, that great missionary to China, experienced this blessing through troubles. When going through many troublesome times in China, Hudson Taylor wrote to his sister, "You ask how I get over my troubles. This is the way ... I take them to the Lord. ... I don't know how it is, but I seldom can read Scripture now without tears of joy and gratitude." [\[2\]](#)

Here's blessing! When you are suffering, you have no where to turn, but the Lord. And when you discover that "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1) you have a great blessing. It's the blessing of the awareness of the presence of God, which is never obtained through ease. This sort of assurance is always obtained through sorrow and suffering.

Suffering for the Sake of Righteousness, ...
3. Doesn't need to Cause Fear (verse 14b).

This comes in the last half of verse 14, "And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled." How easy is it to fear when you are facing the persecution of others.

Peter knew this pretty well. On a dark night, some 2,000 years ago, Jesus was arrested and standing trial before the Sanhedrin. And Peter was merely watching it from a distance (Luke 22:54). It was a cold night, and so, Peter drifted near a fire that had been lit in the middle of the courtyard (Luke 22:55).

After a bit of time, there was a servant-girl, who was looking at him. Finally, she said, "This man was with Him too" (Luke 22:56). But, Peter denied it, saying, "Woman I do not know Him" (Luke 22:57). A little later, another saw Peter and said, "You are one of them too" (Luke 22:58; Matt. 26:71). But again, Peter denied it saying, "Man, I am not!" (Luke 22:58). About an hour later, again, the same thing took place. Another man was insisting, saying, "Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too" (Luke 22:59). Yet a third time, Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about" (Luke 22:60). And then, of course, a rooster crowed, just as Jesus had predicted (Luke 22:34).

What caused Peter to deny Jesus on these three occasions? It was fear. He was fearful of the persecution that would come, if he would do the righteous thing and confess himself to be a follower of Jesus. And so, Peter can relate to the fear that comes when we suffer for the sake of righteousness. He can relate to the fear that comes when you are tempted to keep your mouth shut and seek to skirt the issue at hand.

And yet, when Peter wrote 1 Peter, he had overcome his fear of man. After Jesus had been raised from the dead, Peter was in Jerusalem boldly proclaiming Jesus to be the Christ. The Sanhedrin called him in to give an account for his activities. They said, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Peter boldly said, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:30). Before being released, Peter was flogged and ordered once again not to speak in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:40).

Some time later, Herod had imprisoned Peter, intending to kill him, just as he had done with James, a few days before (Acts 12:2). And yet, the Lord protected Peter through his trial in the jail.

Peter knew what it was to suffer for the sake of righteousness. He knew that there was nothing to fear from the intimidation of others. Because, God is in control of the government. God is in control of those seeking to intimidate you.

Jesus said it well, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

This is one of the things that I so appreciated about the church in Barnaul, Siberia. They had within themselves a greater fear of God than of man. At one point, the persecution in their church was so bad that they sent twenty-one men and women to Moscow to appeal to the Kremlin in person.

"The Christians planned to leave Barnaul on Saturday, May 16, 1964, to fly to Moscow--1,800 miles away. They would try to see the government officials on Monday morning. This meant they would be absent from their jobs and perhaps dismissed when they returned. But they had to take the risk, since it was impossible to request prior permission to be absent. If the local authorities had any inkling of their real mission--to protest at the Presidium--they knew they would never get past the city limits" (p. 131).

And so, on they went, with their plan. They knew that such a protest could easily mean a prison term for all twenty-one of them. Reflecting upon what was taking place, one man, Grigorii, recalled, "That morning we each asked ourselves, Am I willing to die for Christ? Is there anything in my heart preventing fellowship between me and any other Christian, or between me and God? Am I willing to do anything that the Lord asks? Am I willing to give my life?" (p. 131).

"The next morning the Christians walked to the Kremlin and ... presented themselves at the prestigious Presidium--the executive council of the Supreme Soviet of the federal government" (p. 132). Why did they do this? Because they feared God more than they feared the intimidation of man. Suffering for the sake of righteousness, doesn't need to cause fear. Fourthly, suffering for the sake of righteousness, ...

4. Provides an Opportunity (verses 15).

Particularly, it provides an opportunity for evangelism. Look at verse 15, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, 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;"

As people see you persevere in your righteousness, having the joy of the Lord upon your heart, even when facing unjust suffering, it will cause them to ask you questions. Particularly, the question here is this: "What is the hope that is in you?"

Perhaps you remember when Paul and Silas were in the Philippian jailhouse. They were in prison on trumped up charges. The masters of a fortune-telling slave-girl were angry with them for casting the demon out of this slave-girl. What was good for the slave-girl, wasn't good for them, as they lost opportunity for profit. Paul and Silas were beaten without a fair trial and thrown into prison.

While in prison, they were "singing hymns of praise to God" (Acts 16:25). Their fellow prisoners were listening to them sing and pray (Acts 16:25). Obviously, something was different about these men in prison. They should have been sorrowful. And yet, they were rejoicing!

When an earthquake shook the foundations of the prison house, and all of the doors were opened and their chains were unfastened, rather than fleeing, Paul and Silas (and the other prisoners) remained in prison. Do you remember the response of the jailer. He asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). The question might easily be phrased another way, "I see that you were falsely accused of bringing harm to this city. I see that you were mercilessly beaten without a proper trial. I see that your bodies are bruised and bleeding. This jail isn't the nicest place to be in the middle of the night. And yet, I see that you have a joy about yourself, which I don't have. I want this joy. Sirs, could you please give me an account of the hope that is in you? Can you tell me what I must do to be saved?"

At that point, they preached Jesus to him, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). That very day, both he and his household believed (Acts 16:34). What provided for this evangelistic opportunity? Suffering for the sake of righteousness with joy in the heart.

Do you remember Winnie the Pooh's companion, Eeyore? He was the eternal pessimist, always thinking the worst of the situation. If Paul and Silas had suffered from "Eeyore" theology, they never would have been asked about the hope with them. But, it was their joy in their suffering that gave them the platform to witness for their faith.

John Piper has written an article entitled, "Don't Waste Your Cancer." He wrote it on the evening before he was to have surgery for his prostate cancer. In this article, John Piper gave ten ways that you might waste your cancer, if you would be so afflicted with the disease. His tenth point reads as follows, "You will waste your cancer if you fail to use it as a means of witness to the truth and glory of Christ." He then explains, ...

Christians are never anywhere by divine accident. There are reasons for why we wind up where we do. Consider what Jesus said about painful, unplanned circumstances: "They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up

to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness' (Luke 21:12 -13). So it is with cancer. This will be an opportunity to bear witness. Christ is infinitely worthy. Here is a golden opportunity to show that he is worth more than life. Don't waste it. [\[3\]](#)

When people see you suffering from cancer and yet still having a joyful attitude on life, people will take notice, especially if your cancer is terminal! Anybody can rejoice with good news! "The surgery went well! We think that we got it all!" It is right to rejoice at such good news! Being cancer-free is a good thing. The world can rejoice at these things. But, the world cannot rejoice at bad news, because they have no hope.

When the doctor open you up, only to find that the cancer has spread to all of your internal organs, and closes you up just as quickly, how will you respond? That's the time to shine! Say, "Doctor, I know that my prognosis doesn't look good. But, I have a hope in the bad news. I have a hope of dying and being with Jesus some day." And then, die well. In so doing, give testimony to the world that you have a greater hope than this life.

This past Friday, one of our neighbors lost his mother. She was a godly woman. Her testimony was that she was sweet until the end. She wasn't bitter at life. Rather, she only wanted to be with Jesus. When she could no longer speak, all she could do was point to heaven, where she wanted to be.

At this point, let me ask you, "Have you ever been asked this question?" Why not? It may just be because you haven't lived any different than the world lives. See, the world is happy when things go well for them. And, the world is grumpy when things don't go well for them. However, the world isn't happy when things don't go well for them. And so, when things aren't going well for you, it's your time to shine. It's your time to live with a genuine joy about you.

What is it that gives Joni Eareckson Tada such a platform to speak in our generation? It's forty years in a wheel chair as a quadriplegic and then writing a book entitled, "The God I Love." Chapter after chapter after chapter, Joni gives testimony of her love for God. She finishes the book by recalling the time that she traveled to Israel and was sitting in her wheel chair at the Pool of Bethesda, where Jesus had healed a paralyzed man some 2,000 years ago. She wrote, ...

It wasn't often I could presuppose God's motives, but I could with this one. He had brought me to the Pool of Bethesda that I might make an altar of remembrance out of the ruins. That I might make an altar of remembrance out of the ruins. That I might see--and thank him for--for the wiser choice, the better answer, the harder yet richer path.

Ah, this is the God I love. The Center, the Peacemaker, the Passport to adventure, the Joyride, and the Answer to all our deepest longings. The answer to all our fears, Man of Sorrows and Lord of Joy, always permitting what he hates, to accomplish something he loves. And he had brought me here, all the way from home--halfway around the earth--so I could declare to anyone within earshot of the whole universe, to anyone who might care, that yes--

There are more important things in life than walking. [\[4\]](#)

That's the sort of thing that's going to catch peoples' attention! Forty years in a wheel chair, afflicted with incredible hardship. And yet, through it all saying, "I love the God who put me here!" See, when you so live above your circumstances, others will notice.

The closest that I have ever gotten to anybody asking me this question was a few months after we moved to Rockford. We hosted a foreign exchange student in our home over the Thanksgiving break. Over the course of the weekend, I had the opportunity to tell him how I had quit my computer job and had moved here to Rockford to pastor a church. To him, it didn't compute. He didn't understand why I would leave a well-paying job with a measure of stability, to move and be a pastor of a church where I would encounter difficulties and uncertainty.

Though we had talked about it on several occasions, there was a point in our weekend together when he asked me, "So, tell me again why you moved to Rockford!?" Once again, I was able to tell him of the hope that I have in Christ, that compelled me to forsake a secular job to take on the life of a pastor. It's not quite "suffering for the sake of righteousness," but it is making a sacrifice of sorts, which arouses the interest of those in the world.

And when you live different than the world, the world will take notice, and you will have an opportunity to speak forth the gospel of Christ, which is your only hope. You can tell the world of how God mad Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

Do you want someone to ask you to give account for your hope? Live a radical Christian life. Or, perhaps better, live a Christian life. Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). Living that way will cause others to take notice of your life. When you give half of your income away to help others, the world will take notice. When you splatter your refrigerator with all of the missionaries that you support, the world will take notice. When you forsake your vacation to take a short-term missions trip, the world will take notice. When you revolve your life around Christian activity and devote yourself to serving others in the church with whole-hearted love, the world will take notice. When your mouth can't stop speaking of the wonders of His grace toward you in Christ, the world will notice.

When you live this way, people will ask. And when they ask, be sure to respond with a proper attitude. Don't be proud of your commitment. Don't lift up yourself as a great example. Rather, do so "with gentleness and reverence" (3:15). If someone is asking you about your hope, you already have a platform to speak. Let the Holy Spirit persuade their hearts. You simply need to humbly explain your hope.

Suffering for the sake of righteousness, ...
5. Shames those who Persecute (verse 16).

This comes right from verse 16, "and 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."

The idea here isn't that you are attempting to bring harm against those who are persecuting you. Rather, the idea is that your behavior will bring those who are harming you to shame over what they are doing. And then, their slander will be silenced.

Just as a "gentle anger turns away wrath" (Prov. 15:1), so also does a good conscience in continuing to do what is right, help to silence those who seek your harm. When you return their insult with a blessing, it has a way of reducing the severity of their hostility toward you.

Peter has already mentioned this on several other occasions. He said, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation" (2:12). Peter wrote, "Such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men" (2:15). As foolish men observe your consistent character, they will be silenced, as they recognize the authenticity of your behavior.

One of the believers in Barnaul, Siberia used to persecute those Christians who were working for him. "He personally disrupted their worship services and oversaw the arrest of some believers" (pp. 67-68). "In the process of interrogating and persecuting the Christians, ... [he] gradually heard the Gospel. When he condemned the Christians, they often replied with Bible verses. Slowly the Scriptures changed the director's heart. One day he [went] ... to disband a meeting. But at the door he discovered he could not bludgeon the believers. Instead, he fell on his knees in front of the startled Christians and cried to God for salvation. After his conversion he personally went to every Christian he had persecuted to ask forgiveness" (p. 68).

It's the good conscience of the Christians that shamed this man and eventually convicted him of his own need for a Savior. That's the sort of thing that takes place when you are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, and you respond appropriately.

The church in Barnaul modeled this. After the martyrdom of Nikolai Kuzmich Khmara, the church wrote a letter to their fellow Christians to give their perspective on what took place. They wrote, ...

Brothers and sisters, ... by this letter we do not want to create in you a feeling of hatred toward our persecutors. Even though this evil is done by wicked people, they did not do it on their own. They have been led and encouraged to do evil.

No less guilty of this murder are those who unceasingly publish lies in the papers on the basis of which court proceedings are begun and wild hatred is stirred up against believers. This is a collective sin of our world.

Let us look upon our persecutors as Christ has taught us: 'But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you' (Matthew 5:44).

Our Lord says: "'Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven. ...' (Matthew 5:12). We are being condemned not for evil works, nor for breaking laws, but for good deeds" (p. 108).

Such a response will shame those who persecute you. Your response will silence them and possibly bring them into a state of repentance.

Finally, let's look at my last point. Suffering for the sake of righteousness, ...
6. Is Better than Doing Evil (verse 17).

This comes in verse 17. "For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong."

Notice, first of all that your suffering is under the sovereign hand of God. Those who suffer, suffer "if God should will it so." When your suffering is coming, it is coming because God wills it so. And right here is where you will find your comfort and joy in your affliction.

Peter tells us that it is better to suffer inside the will of God than it is to turn to evil which would relieve you of your suffering. There are many opportunities for us to do evil, and so avoid the suffering that comes at the hands of others. It is better than we continue to do what is right.

Earlier, Peter had spoken this way. He said, "What credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?" (2:20). The answer obviously, is that you receive no credit from the Lord in such things. Rather, God's favor is upon you, "when you do what is right and suffer for it" (2:20).

And so, if you are in a situation where you are suffering for the sake of righteousness, press on! Continue to walk in your righteousness. Continue to do good. God will help you through it.

Do like Job when he was afflicted. Do you remember what he did when he was afflicted? he pressed on. His wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). Job's response was a righteous response. He said to her, "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10). Earlier, Job had said, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

If you are suffering for the sake of righteousness, walk like Job. Don't speak against God. Don't slander Him. Don't do evil to get outside of

the persecution. If your friends want you to go someplace that you know that you ought not to go, don't go along with them to escape their persecution. Rather, do what is right and face their wrath, because in doing so, you will be blessed. Remember, "It is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 11, 2008 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Peter and Anita Deyneka, "A Song in Siberia." As I will be quoting often from this book often in this message, I'll merely reference with end notes. Peter Deyneka was the founder of the Slavic Gospel Association, which has it's headquarters

[2] Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, "The Growth of a Soul," p. 230.

[3] John Piper, "Don't Waste Your Cancer." You can read the article here:
http://www.desiringgod.org/resourcelibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2006/1776_Dont_Waste_Your_Cancer/.

[4] Joni Eareckson Tada, "The God I Love" p. 357.