

## **1 Peter 3: 8-17: The three keys to handle adversity.**

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### **Background:**

Just as a background refresher: The setting is around 65 AD. Christians were tolerated initially by the Roman Empire, but things started slipping more and more with Christians being flogged and killed for their faith under the evil emperor, Nero. Peter wrote this letter towards the end of his life.

The Auca Indians lived in South America and were known to be an especially violent tribe. They would kill foreign tribes who dared come into their territory, killing friends and family even in small quarrels. The fear of death was always hanging over this tribe. They had a sad and dark culture, ruled by Satan.

Jim and Betty were especially passionate in bringing the gospel to these people. They lived with friendly Indians just across the river from these violent Auca's, learning their language and praying that God would open a door for them to approach them. A small girl who fled from the Auca's lived with them and taught them the language.

Jim and a few missionary families who lived with them in the jungle decided to try and drop gifts with their small plane into the Auca village. They found a way to drop it on exactly the right spot, using strong fishing line and releasing the gifts from a bucket at the end of the line. Starting with a tin kettle, colorful buttons and all kinds of presents, the Auca Indians got used to the small plane flying over their village and ran out to meet them when they were flying over. One day when pulling the bucket back up, they found a head band woven with feathers in the bucket. The Auca's had actually sent them a gift back!

After about two months of this, they decided to approach the Auca's. The missionaries prayed with their families, and even though they knew it would be dangerous, 5 men set off in the plane to the Auca village. They landed close to the river, not far from the village and built a house in a tree. There they waited and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day after arriving, they heard a shout, and out of the trees came three Auca's - A man and two women. In their language, the 5 men invited the three over to their camp, telling them that they're welcome and wanted to be their friends. The man wanted to get a ride in the plane, so they took him on a trip over his village. Excited, the man returned to his village and for two days they didn't see any sign of the Auca's. On the Sunday, Nate Saint the pilot, was talking to his wife on the radio when he saw a big group of men approaching them. He told his wife that he would call back later to tell her what happened.

They never called back, and a few days later when a search party went looking for them, Jim Elliot and his 4 friends were found dead. Killed by the Auca's. They had guns with them but decided not to use them and rather be killed than to kill. A year later, the Auca's were approached again by another missionary group, and this time they listened. Many of the men who were part of the killing party became Christians.

Why can people like Jim Elliot and his friends face this terrible fear for the sake of spreading the gospel? What are the things that made them bear this burden without shying away?

Have you ever wondered what made Stephen stand up in front of the Jewish leaders and ask God to forgive them while being stoned?

Have you ever wondered what made those early Christians confess Jesus as Lord in public while they knew they could end up in the coliseum with lions?

Why could Paul and Silas face a flogging and sing praises to God while in a Roman prison?

What made Peter stand firm in confessing Jesus – ending up crucified upside down.

Let me take it closer to home: What did these men and women have, that I need today to face - not necessarily only suffering because I'm on a special mission in mid-Africa to tell people about Jesus - but would help me in facing day-to-day adversity and unfairness in people who accuse, cheat, lie and gossip. To act with blessing, when everything in me tells me to fight back and return what I'm being handed - Mostly in subtle, non-obvious ways.

In the preceding chapter Peter talked to slaves, husbands and wives about possible suffering that they may have to go through and their submission to whoever has been put to rule over them. In our passage this morning he is opening up to a broader audience and speaks to everyone. Peter is giving us a crash course in how to handle adversity. He is actually giving us a view into the keys on not just how to **bear** unfairness (or 'suffering'), but to **actively use** it as a means to bless. I would like to call it "turning defense into offence".

Here I'm talking about the kind of adversity you find every single day at work when someone else is taking credit for work that actually you did – and then being quiet about it. When someone else is on a higher salary scale than you but you're doing half his job - and you choose to accept this unfairness without complaining. When you are standing in a group talking about this 'Human Resources lady' who again, is acting strangely and does not care about the people who she is supposed to care about – isn't that what HR is for....? (I think you would recognize this example if you're familiar with the corporate

environment). And then, when you put your voice to the crowd, joining the discussion you have this heavy feeling of guilt because you know you took part in a discussion you shouldn't have. You should have been a blessing and you weren't.

The question is: How can we train our minds to act in blessing, when everything in you screams out for 'pay-back'? Let's walk through the keys that Peter is giving us in this passage:

Firstly, and most important:

### **1. In your hearts, set Christ apart as Lord (v15)**

This is the only real way to battle fears that the devil would throw at you from all directions: Fear of rejection at work; fear of not being able to live up to expectations; fear of failure; fear of not being one of the in-group; fear of not making A-grades. Any fear gets small when your focus is on an Almighty God. By confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord of the universe and controls even the worst outcome that you can imagine in the suffering you are going through. Nothing has ever happened that He was not in control of and nothing **will** ever happen that He does not control fully – and if you do not believe this in your heart, you will not be able to handle the tough times that will come over your family, your life and your work. This is absolutely the foundation of our faith. With our mouths we confess that Jesus Christ is the Saviour and died for our sins. We believe that our sins are forgiven and that we will reign with Him one day, but somehow when the tough times come, it is so hard to believe that He is in control. Not only that He is in control, but that He directs my ways and is intimately involved in my life. I encourage you to listen to the 10 minute clip of SM Lockridge's "That's my King - sermon" on Youtube. To believe everyday that He is the King of Kings, the Maker of heaven and earth – and that He knows your name. In fact, He knew you before you were born.

In your heart – set Christ apart as Lord. Put Him again on the throne of your life and live this.

Winnie and I love going for a walk with the kids and normally they would run ahead until we get to a street crossing, or they see a dog. They would wait or run back to take our hands. Why? Because they know I'll protect them – and that I WANT to protect them. With God, the trick is to hold His hand even when we do not see the dog or go through an insecure street crossing. If you would believe in His closeness in good times. So much more in bad times.

I have to add Paul's life as a reminder to us. His strength was found in Christ (2 Cor 12:9,10). He has been through so many ordeals for the sake of the Gospel, and He still says "Christ is my strength"

## **2. Bless and be blessed.**

Verse 9 says we were called to be a blessing to others so that we may inherit a blessing. I don't think anybody needs a reminder that this does not come by itself. It needs a conscience decision. Not once, but every time we face adversity. Peter goes on and quotes Psalm 34, which is actually a summary of what he said in v8-v9:

"Whoever desires to love life  
and see good days,  
let him keep his tongue from evil  
and his lips from speaking deceit;  
let him turn away from evil and do good;  
let him seek peace and pursue it."

"Turning away" from evil and "seek and pursue peace" needs active and consistent decision making. To turn away from what we want to do, and deciding to go against our first reaction.

To inherit 'Blessing' in V9, means to be happy or content. "Whoever desires to love life and see good days...." Don't we all wish to be happy and content in life? To wake up in the morning and feel excited about everything the day might hold for us. To go to bed at night and sleep like a baby, without the pressure of the ever increasing 'to do list' at work and with a clear conscience. With the overwhelming sense of closeness to the Lord who is in control of everything. ... and note that all of this is not depending on circumstances. Real blessing, is to experience God's closeness in times of trouble – and to experience the peace that surpasses any logic – in the midst of a storm.

## **3. Turn your focus away from yourself (v8-9)**

Peter emphasizes in v8 that we should have sympathy, love and compassion with others. Instead of having sympathy and compassion for others, I normally tend to have this great need for attention to my own problems. Especially at home (and us men are very good in this). The need to tell everybody about the tough times we had today. How busy it was at work; how I've been wronged – to simmer in my own self pity!

The best way to handle unfairness and suffering is to start caring about others. Focus on their needs and not your own – even if they don't deserve it. Husbands - if you start addressing your wife's needs, you will be blessed. For once, give up the rights that you have a claim on. Give them up for someone else's advantage. If you're managing people in your company, stop thinking about climbing the corporate ladder and start focusing on the reason why God has put you in that position in the first place –with the people to manage that you have. Forget

about the things that you are not getting out of a deal and start helping others to succeed in what they do. I have seen numerous examples of this, and unfortunately, it is not limited to the corporate world. It spreads across Christian and non-Christian environments. And pardon me if I am a bit blunt in saying this: Stop fussing about your own illnesses and shortcomings, and give your life to lift someone else out of the dark pit they're struggling to get out of. Winnie's grandmother was such a good example of this. In the elderly people's home you would hardly ever find her in her own room. She was always up and about, caring for the ill. Nobody had to say anything about the blessings she spread across that elderly home. It was visible everywhere. Her name would bring smiles to people's faces. Isn't this the heritage you would like to leave behind as well?

I would like to elaborate a bit more on the concept of 'compassion':

To have compassion for others, only come from the one source, God himself. In Psalm 103:13, David wrote that

*"As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him" -*

Jesus mirrored His father's compassion: *"When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."*

In closing:

These things: To speak in blessing, when everything in me says 'no'. To have compassion and sympathy with others even when they do not deserve it – These things do not happen naturally. Let's not fool ourselves and think we will one day wake up and have all these nice virtues branded into our souls. You know your own shortcomings. Nothing will change in my life unless I admit that there are things in my life that I need to change. People say the first step to changing bad drinking habits, is to admit that you have a problem. The same with any other weakness. If you are short in temper, quick to anger, boasting in being a direct person who does not beat around the bush - Maybe it is time to admit this and lay it before Christ. Ask Him to renew your mind and heart (Rom 12) so that streams of living, life-giving water will flow out of your heart and mouth. Companies these days are taught to focus on their employees strengths and not their weakness. Full potential is only realized when you are doing the things you are good in. I absolutely agree with it and also believe there are too many people doing the things they hate, and then they wonder why they don't get job satisfaction – but here we need to find the balance. In Christ we need to free ourselves from the things that pull us back. Recognize and admit what you need to confess – and change.

Therefore:

I have been wronged and treated unfairly. My guns are loaded and ready to shoot – with good justification. What is going to make me holster my guns and speak blessing instead of insult? Have compassion and sympathy for those around you and set Christ apart as Lord in your life.

This is not an easy job, and this is where we as Christians fail to make a difference in the world. It is not by 'not swearing', not drinking, not drugging, not cheating my wife, not abusing my children that separates Christians from non-Christians. It is when we speak out in blessing, when we have justification not to and everyone is expecting you to retaliate.

You may not be exposed currently to suffering or hardship. Your faith might not be tested and your family threatened at this moment, but the day to day struggles to speak blessing will never go away. May God grant us the wisdom and control to speak blessing in this broken world. This is what we are called for.

Amen.