

God Will Vindicate His Suffering Loved-Ones

1 Peter 3:13-22 (text)

17 January 2021, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Perhaps you can still remember the college shooting of five years ago at Roseburg, Oregon (USA).¹

A 26-year-old student who had it against Christians came into that college and shot dead one lecturer and eight students while injuring eight others.

Survivors said that he came into the classroom and asked all Christians to stand. Then he shot and killed them one-by-one.

This is extreme! And, by God's grace, Christians in New Zealand have not experienced hatred & persecution to such a level.

However, despite the constant plea of our political leaders for New Zealanders to show tolerance to those of different race, culture and religion, *intolerance* is still very rife here!

And in our country, *Christians also* are often frowned upon, ostracised and mocked!

You see, I know of a young Christian man in Gisborne who is a fitter & turner in hydraulics. His boss is okay with this young man's faith, but not so the other young employees who work alongside him. They are into cannabis, drugs, heavy drinking and immorality. And they constantly mock him, and make life difficult for him for being so different!

Surely, *boys & girls*, some of you may have experienced something similar – especially those who are in state schools or into across-school sport activities with children who are not Christian.

And, surely, *because of their faith in Christ*, also some of our *adults* will have experienced some form of ostracising or social rejection in the workplace; or even as they were applying for jobs!

Well, it is exactly *for Christians who are suffering because of their faith*, that our text gives helpful advice and encouragement.

You see, also in Peter's day, the members of his churches suffered mocking, social rejection and even persecution because of their faith in Christ.

And so, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter wrote the words of our text to them (and to us).

And here, in a nutshell, is the main message Peter gave them: **Christians, are you at times suffering because of your faith? If so, then don't retaliate! Just keep on doing good, and be encouraged by this fact – that God who vindicated your suffering Lord (Christ), will also vindicate you (clear you from blame and avenge those who now mock, bully or persecute you for your faith)!**

Our text gives us the following three points:

¹ "The Umpqua Community College shooting occurred on October 1, 2015, at the UCC campus near Roseburg, Oregon, United States. Chris Harper-Mercer, a 26-year-old student who was enrolled at the school, fatally shot an assistant professor and eight students in a classroom. Eight others were injured. Roseburg police detectives responded to the incident and engaged Harper-Mercer in a brief shootout. After being wounded, he killed himself by shooting himself in the head. The mass shooting was the deadliest in Oregon's modern history" (For this and more, cf. among other, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umpqua_Community_College_shooting).

- **Reasons** (for Doing Good while Suffering for Christ)
- **Advice** (for Doing Good while Suffering for Christ)
- **Encouragement** (to Doing Good while Suffering for Christ)

Reasons for Doing Good while Suffering for Christ (13,14,17)

Boys & girls (brothers & sisters), why should you & I keep on doing good when we are being mocked & treated badly because of our faith?

Well, there are a few reasons!

Here's the first one: **evangelism!** You see, in many verses before our text, Peter has already explained how *doing good while suffering because of your faith* is a powerful tool for evangelism. Yes, your & my good behaviour is a great instrument by which the Holy Spirit can move even our mockers/bullies to repentance!² Peter explained this in the verses before our text!

But look, now (in v.13), he gives us another reason – and a very *pragmatic* one, too – for doing good while suffering because of your faith, i.e., **good behaviour could save you from being mocked, bullied or persecuted!**

Really?

Will that work? All of the time?

No, my brother & sister! Peter is not insinuating that being-kind-and-doing-good will *always* change your mocker's (or bully's) heart so that he will mock & bully you no longer! No, Peter is not so naïve. That's why (in verse 14) he clearly states the possibility that your kindness and good behaviour may not spare you from suffering for your faith!

And so, if that's the case – yes, *if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness*³ – then (in v.14) Peter gives a third reason as to why keeping-on-being-good-&-kind is still the best thing to do!

Here is that third reason: **You will be blessed!**

You say, “What!?” “How can Peter say that?” “How can anyone who suffers mocking or bullying or persecution, be blessed?”

My brother & sister, look, Peter is simply saying the same as what Christ said (in Mt 5:10), “***Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***”⁴

See? See how when we suffer mocking or persecution for our faith, we have to cling to the promise that, if not already in this life, then eventually on the Last Day, *God* will be the Judge! He will vindicate His loved ones! He will clear them from blame (and avenge their persecutors) in that final & ultimate court case!

My brother & sister (boys & girls), are you suffering for Christ? Are you mocked or rejected or even bullied by school mates because you show your love for Christ in righteous living?

What about those school parents and children who have spoken up against the abuse of God's Name at their children's school – and against teaching their primary school children that it's okay for a man to marry a man, and for a woman to marry a woman?

² Cf. e.g., 1 Pt 2:11-12, 14-15; 3:1,2,9,10-12

³ Cf. v. 14a

⁴ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Mt 5:10). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

What about them? Will those parents and children eventually get ostracised – socially shunned and rejected, and teased & mocked?

And what about the high-school girl who openly professed her faith in a Christ-centred poem she wrote and read out before her teacher & class? Will she lose friends because of that? Will some children in her school now start avoiding her?

Well, boys & girls (brother & sister), if you are mocked & bullied because you love Christ, then remember: your ongoing good behaviour/character finds favour with the Ultimate Judge – God!

See why already in chapter 2:20 Peter said, “***For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favour with God***”?⁵

Indeed, “...if you do a real bad thing and someone then harms or bullies you, you have only yourself to blame. But if you do good and then get mocked, ostracised or bullied, God stands next to you to strengthen you.”⁶

Why does God (the Ultimate Judge) promise that He will bless His loved ones who do what is right – who live righteously?

Well, because, when you & I do what is right, then we are on God’s side, for, after all, is it not so that God Himself is righteous?⁷ And so, too, is Christ! I mean does not v.18 of our text say that *Christ, the just (righteous one) died for the unjust (unrighteous)*?

See why the man/woman or boy/girl who does good while being bullied, rejected or persecuted for Christ – why he/she is blessed?

It’s because God promises to vindicate us (to avenge our bullies/persecutors), if not in this life, then eventually in that final court of law!

See why v.14 says as much as, “Don’t fear those who mock/bully/persecute you because of your faith!”?

See why also our Lord Jesus once said, “***Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul...***”⁸ (Mt 10:28a)? Don’t be afraid of those who ostracise you; don’t fret when work colleagues, or school mates or members of your rugby/swim team make fun of you because of your Christian life! Ultimately, they cannot do anything to your soul! Besides, what is better: to have work- or school-mates on your side, or to have the Judge of heaven & earth on your side?

Well, so far, regarding Point 1: *Reasons for Doing Good while Suffering for Christ* (and those reasons were: 1) evangelism; 2) possibly saving yourself from being bullied/persecuted; and 3) being blessed)!

Here is point 2...

⁵ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (1 Pe 2:20). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁶ My adaptation of the well-said words of Kistemaker, S. J. 2004. Exposition of James. (*In: Kistemaker, S.J. ed. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Books. p.132*).

⁷ 1 Pt 1:17, “***If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth...***”

Heb 6:10, “***God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.***”

⁸ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 10:28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Advice for Doing Good while Suffering for Christ (15,16)

We have just heard that we should not fear those who mock, ostracise, bully or persecute us for our faith in Christ.

Well, what should we then do instead? Yes, how will we ever manage to doing good while suffering for Christ? What guidelines (helpful advice) does our text give us?

Well, here's the first piece of advice – and, surely, without this, you & I will never be able to do good while suffering for Christ! Here it is (v. 15), “...**Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts...**!”

What does this mean though? Yes, what does it mean to *sanctify Christ in your heart*? I'll explain it this way...

Many people are very happy to say that they have received Christ as their *Saviour*. But the question is: Have they also, in their heart of hearts (and in their lives), made Him their *Lord*!?

I mean, is not the Bible clear on this – that our faith is not just a head knowledge (it's not just intellectual assent/agreement)!? No, faith is also a heartfelt commitment and reliance!⁹

After all, does not Proverbs 4:23 say, “**Above all else, guard your heart** (the control centre of your life), **for it is the wellspring of life!**”¹⁰

See why v. 15 says, “...**Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts...**”¹¹ Set Christ apart as Lord of your life! My brother & sister – and boys & girls – look, when your heart is controlled by Jesus Christ, it means you dedicate your entire life to Him!¹²

As Carolyn Noel's hymn says...

*“In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue all that is not holy, all that is not true...”*¹³

(We will sing this after the sermon as our closing hymn).

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts – well, that's the first (and vital) piece of advice to make our own if we want to succeed in doing good while we are mocked, bullied or persecuted for our faith!

Here's a second piece of advice (v.15b): **Be always ready to make a defence to everyone who asks about your faith!**¹⁴

Well, I want to focus on the word *ready* and on the word *everyone*!

You see, once, when I was pastor of the Reformed Church of Foxton, a seller of insurance policies came and knocked on the manse's door. We did not need any new insurance policies, but we invited the man in, and we went and sat around the dining-room table. Very soon it came out that he was a Muslim by the name of Ahmed. And

⁹ Remember faith's three components: knowledge, assent and reliance (or in Latin: “notitia, assensus et fiducia”).

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Pr 4:23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹¹ Note: We also pray to the Father, saying, “*Hallowed* (Sanctified) be Your Name!”

¹² Cf, Kistemaker (ibid:134) for, “When the heart is controlled by Jesus Christ, the believer dedicates his entire life to Him.”

¹³ Stanza 4 of “At the name of Jesus ev'ry knee shall bow...”

¹⁴ 1 Pt 3:15, “**but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defence to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;**” (NASB; Emphasis mine).

so, the whole conversation shifted to a comparison between his faith and our Christian faith. The more he talked, the more it became clear how warped his views about our faith were. And it was extremely tough to make to him a good *defence about the hope that is in us*, because he just would not accept some basic Bible doctrines! He just would not understand the doctrine of the Trinity – that God is three Persons in one Godhead. Neither would he accept the doctrine of the two natures of Christ – fully human (without sin) and fully God. Then he said something shocking, i.e., that in the New Testament, Jesus Himself had said that He would send Mohammad to reveal to mankind God’s final word!!

When I asked him where in the New Testament Jesus had said that, he said he did not know.

So, I told him I can assure him that nowhere in the New Testament did Jesus say any such thing!

Well, several days later, I could kick myself when I clicked that what Ahmed was possibly referring to must have been a misconception among Muslims about Christ’s promise to send the Holy Spirit – the Comforter!

Oh, if only I was better prepared to field questions thrown at me by Muslims! I mean, then I could have served Christ better in that debate with Ahmed.

You see, whereas I had learned to answer to the critique of agnostics and atheists, I had never learned what Muslims think of our faith – and how to defend our faith before them! And, yet, it has become very urgent that Christians in New Zealand (and the West) should do this!

Our text says (in 1 Pt 3:15), “...*Be always ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you...*” – and I was not *ready*; and not ready for *everyone*!

My brother & sister, we live in a country which houses people of many different faiths! Your & my neighbour across the fence may well be of the Hindu faith, or a Buddhist, or Muslim, or atheist or agnostic!

Our text says, we must be ready to make a defence to *everyone* who asks about our faith.

This means that, at least, you & I will know our Bible doctrines well – and fluently defend them!

Be ready... for everyone – that was the *second* piece of advice as we do good while being mocked/bullied or persecuted for Christ!

But verse 15 gives a *third* piece of advice: **defend your faith with gentleness and reverence (respect)**.

Colossians 4:6 says the same thing in different words: “*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*”¹⁵

Well, as for my debate with that salesman, Ahmed, here’s another thing about which I still feel sad – i.e., that the more he (with the assertiveness of a salesman) attacked my faith, the more my initial nervousness went over into irritation. And he must have sensed that, for at one stage he said, “Don’t talk to me as if I’m an unbeliever!” “I’m not an unbeliever!”

¹⁵ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Col 4:6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Well, at that stage, I shut my mouth, for if I were to respond to that statement, my irritation might have clearly crossed the borders of gentleness and respect. That incident taught me a lesson: I have to get a better knowledge of what Muslims think about our faith so that I can be ready (as our text says), and being ready could have helped me to stay calm and not become irritated, but to talk with gentleness and respect – respect & reverence for God and respect for the human being to whom I was making a defense of the hope which is in me.

So far, regarding **gentleness & respect!**

Here's a final piece of good advice for every Christian who is mocked, bullied or persecuted for his/her faith (v.16): "...**keep a clear conscience...**" In other words, my brother & sister (boys & girls), in everything you say or do, make sure that, for the sake of Christ, you do not say or do anything bad!

Why?

Well, so that those who mock or bully or persecute you will have to lie if they were to say anything bad against you! And such lying on their part will, eventually (either in this life or on the Last Day) put them to shame!

Well, thus far regarding point 2: "Advice for Doing Good while Suffering for Christ." Here is the last (small) point...

Encouragement to Doing Good while Suffering for Christ (18-22)

Perhaps you say, "It's tough!" "The message of our text is too tough for me!" "I mean, how can anyone cope with doing good to those who mock, bully or persecute you?"

My brother & sister, that's why (in the Holy Spirit) Peter has added verses 18-22! With these verses, Peter gives, as it were, a huge encouragement to all who suffer for their Christian faith.

This encouragement says as much as: "Look at Christ!" "Is not His whole life of suffering, followed by His resurrection & ascension – is that not an example and reminder for us of how God vindicated someone who suffered for God's cause!?"

I mean, is it not so that Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection!?¹⁶ And is it not so that God's Word says we will be like Him!?¹⁷

My brother & sister (boys & girls), just as Christ suffered as a righteous Man and was vindicated, so too if you & I live righteously, will we be vindicated (cleared from blame) and sit with Jesus in the presence of God!

I mean, just look at how God vindicated His suffering Son...

God raised Him victoriously from the dead!

Then, after He was raised from the dead but before He ascended back to heaven, Christ, who did good while He was suffering, went and *announced victory* even to the spirits of those who once were disobedient to God when they mocked Noah! At the same time, Christ also *announced victory* to the spirits of other God-rejecters who were held in the prison in the upper regions¹⁸ of binding!

¹⁶ 1 Cor 15:20 ***But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.***

¹⁷ 1 Jn 3:2 ***Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*** (NIV84; Emphasis mine).

¹⁸ Yes, not yet in hell, but in the upper regions of binding. Of the three interpretations of 1 Pt 3:18-22, I prefer the view of McKnight, because this view seems to be the most Biblical: "The view that Peter is here describing

My brother & sister (boys & girls), are you at times mocked or bullied or socially rejected because of your faith? If so, then don't retaliate! Don't give "tit for tat" to those who do that to you! Just keep on doing good, and be encouraged by this fact – that God who vindicated your suffering Lord (Christ), will also vindicate you!

AMEN (2,839 words excluding footnotes)

a triumphal proclamation of Jesus Christ after his resurrection and prior to his exaltation assumes a Jewish context and takes the following views: (a) "through whom" refers to some kind of spiritual existence of Christ after his resurrection (as the chronology of the text suggests), (b) the "spirits" refer to the fallen angels of Genesis 6:1–4, (c) the "prison" describes the upper regions of binding or, in the words of 2 Peter 2:4, the "pits of darkness," (d) "he went" refers to an *ascent* of Jesus, and (e) "he preached" describes the proclamation of victory that Jesus announced over the spirit world as he ascended to the right hand of God. Once again, the compatibility of this view with the theme of 3:13–17 is obvious: Just as Jesus was vindicated before his opponents, so also will the Christians be, if they, like Jesus, remain faithful and righteous to the tasks God has called them to do" (McKnight, S. (1996). [1 Peter](#) (pp. 211–222). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).