

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 16, 2019 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

1 PETER & 2 PETER
FULL of Hope FULL
HOW TO MAKE THE BEST OF TIMES OUT OF YOUR WORST OF TIMES

PREPARING TO SUFFER FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS 1 Peter 4:1-6

“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. ³ For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. ⁴ In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. ⁵ They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” -1 Peter 4:1-6

Are you... would you be prepared to suffer for righteousness' sake? The second question is how can believer be prepared or prepare themselves to suffer for righteousness' sake?

A poll finds that, in just two years, the number of Americans who think Christians are facing growing intolerance in the U.S. has drastically increased. Sixty-three percent of respondents in the LifeWay Research [survey](#) said they agree or strongly agree that Christians are facing growing levels of persecution, up from 50 percent in 2013. The bulk of that surge comes from respondents who said they “strongly agree” with the statement, a number that increased from 28 percent to 38 percent. A similar number, 60 percent, said religious liberty is on the decline in America, up from 54 percent in 2013. Although the poll shows higher rates of anxiety about the state of religious freedom, it also indicates that the issue is increasingly becoming polarized. A growing number of people in the survey said Christians “complain too much about how they are treated,” up from 34 percent in 2013 to 43 percent in 2015 – The Washington Times

“⁶All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for ¹⁶instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” -2 Timothy 3:16-17

Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 that the Word of God is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God maybe *thoroughly equipped for all righteousness*. The Word of God is useful to equip us to have a godly marriage, to be a good son, a good daughter, a good employee, a good employer, to become a follower of Jesus Christ, etc.

But another one of the good works that Scripture is given for is also to prepare us to suffer for righteousness. “Therefore” is the first word of chapter 4 that points us back to Peter’s discussion in chapter 3. Listen to what Peter previously said in 1 Peter 3:17-18, *“¹⁷For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit”*

It is better if it is God’s will to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. **This is a miraculous concept.** For these believers who are being persecuted for the faith, this, no doubt, would be an important lesson. **How can they be prepared to suffer for righteousness?**

But this is important for us to hear as well. In the Western church, by God’s grace, we have avoided much of the persecution that the rest of the world has encountered. However, in the last century alone, there were more martyrs for the faith than in all the centuries combined. Every day over 400 Christians die for the faith. In fact, in our Western church, we should not be surprised if persecution for our faith becomes more and more prevalent. Jesus promised that as we approached his second coming, persecution would increase. Look at what Christ said in describing the signs of the end times in **Matthew 24:9-10, “⁹“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. ¹⁰And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.”**

I can only speak as an American, but in my country, I feel as if we are not too far away from this. In our culture, if someone says something against gay marriage, they are boycotted, mocked, or persecuted. Our society is becoming more and more intolerant of Christian beliefs. It wasn’t this way only a few years ago. I am astounded by how far our country has gone in such a short time. It is coming. Even now, you should expect to enter the work force and find certain levels of persecution because you live differently, because you don’t get drunk on the weekend, because your integrity level is high, because you have a chaste and monogamous relationship with your wife or husband when cheating is becoming the norm.

How do we prepare for this? How should we prepare to be treated unjustly by friends, coworkers, and sometimes family because of Christ? Peter addresses that in this text. In this passage, we will look at *eight major principles* about how to suffer for injustice and be holy in this ungodly age.

Application Question: How can believers be prepared to suffer unjustly according to 1 Peter 4:1–11?

7 WAYS WE MAY BE PREPARED TO SUFFER FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE:

- 1. Be Prepared by Remembering that Christ Suffered** - Notice the first part of **verse 1**, *“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh...”* 1 Peter 4:1 Peter calls us to remember Christ both by pointing us back to Christ sufferings in 1 Peter 3:18 with the “therefore” but also with the rest of the first statement of chapter 4. *“Therefore, since Christ suffered.”* Peter is directing the eyes of these saints to Christ and his sufferings. This would be important for these Christians to remember as they were suffering unjustly. They would need to remember their Savior. In fact, the Christians in the book of Hebrews were also suffering for the faith (Hebrews 10:32–34) and the writer tells them to fix their eyes on Jesus as well so they would not become weary.

Look at what he says in Hebrews 12 (**READ: Hebrews 12:1-4**), *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.”*

To “fix” means to turn our eyes away from the persecution, from the abuse, from the worries and give a concentrated look to Christ that would enable the Hebrew Christians to not grow weary and lose heart. In fact, tradition says that right before Peter was hung on the cross upside down, his wife went before him. As they were dragging his wife off to be crucified, Peter said to his wife, “Remember the Lord.”

Often in the midst of suffering, people become self-centered. We are worried about our future; we are worried about what people think. Scripture declares the best remedy for going through suffering is to become a Christ-centered people. We are to have our eyes centered on Christ. “Remember the Lord.”

What we must remember about Christ’s death:

- (1) Remember that Christ’s friends betrayed him in his time of need.**
- (2) Remember that false witnesses were gathered to lie about him.**
- (3) Remember that he was mocked, abused, beaten, and bloodied up.**
- (4) Remember that he was placed on a cross and separated from God as he bore the wrath of the Father for our sins.**
- (5) Remember that while being beaten up and mocked, Christ cried out and prayed for his accusers, “Forgive them, Lord, for they know not what they do.”**
- (6) Remember that he entrusted himself to the Father.**

In the midst of suffering for righteousness, we must remember the Lord.

Application Question: How can we practice a “fixed” look on Christ in the midst of persecution and trials so we do not grow weary and want to give up?

2. **Be Prepared by Having the Attitude of Christ—As a Soldier Willing to Die** – Notice again, Peter’s words in verse 1, “*Therefore, since Christ suffered ^[a]for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind...*” **Interpretation Question: What is the attitude that Christians must arm themselves with in 1 Peter 4:1?** Our previous point leads us to the second. Peter speaks to a discouraged audience and says that in order to be able to suffer for righteousness you must have the attitude of Christ. What attitude is he talking about? The preposition *therefore* in 1 Peter 4:1 points us back to what was said in the previous chapter. He seems to be talking about Christ’s willingness to die. Again, look at what Peter said in 1 Peter 3:18, “*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit*” (emphasis mine). **When Peter talks about Christ’s attitude in suffering, he is talking about his willingness to not only suffer but die.** Look at what Christ told his disciples in Mark 10:45, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (emphasis mine).

In fact, Peter uses the word **arm** when talking about Christ’s attitude. It is a military term used of soldiers. It means literally “**to arm oneself with weapons**” or “**to put on as armor.**”¹ Peter speaks about the mind-set of Christ as being ready for battle. Any good soldier goes into battle ready to die, and it must be the same for us as believers. In fact, Paul called Timothy to arm himself with this same attitude in 2 Timothy. All the other Christians had separated from him during his persecution (2 Tim 2:15), and Paul says Timothy must also be like a soldier. Look at what he said in 2 Timothy 2:3, “**Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.**” This is how it must be for all Christians in a world that is antagonistic to Christ. It must be this way because of the world’s *antagonistic attitude* toward Christ, Christians and the teachings of Scripture. Listen to what Jesus says in John 3:19-20, “¹⁹ **And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.**” Because the world loves evil it hates the light. This means the world hated Christ, and the world hated the righteousness that exposed their sins. If you live for Christ, you will receive the anger of those who love evil. This lifestyle of righteousness exposes their sins and pricks their hearts. It creates an animosity even if you have done nothing wrong. For this reason, you must be *willing* to suffer and even die for Christ. This is a necessary attitude for all believers. This will keep them from compromising with the world in order to avoid suffering and abuse. In fact, Christ demanded this of all who would come and follow him. Listen to Jesus’ words in Luke 14:26-27, “²⁶ **If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.**” When Christ called everybody to carry their *cross* in order to be his disciple, it was not spiritualization—it was literal. At this point, everybody knew the leaders of Israel were already seeking to kill Christ (Luke 12:31). He was claiming that God was his Father, which was a capital offense. He was on his way to Jerusalem to die. To follow Christ especially at that point in his ministry was dangerous, and it has been that way for

Christians ever since. **Obviously, in the last century more people have been martyred for the faith than in all the centuries combined.** Everyone who follows Christ still must take up their cross and be willing to die. Let us arm ourselves with this attitude, as every good soldier of Christ. The one who does not have this attitude will compromise with their language and actions around their worldly friends because they are not willing to suffer for Christ. Those who do not have this attitude will love the world instead of loving Christ. This will make them unsteady and unfaithful Christians. Do you have a war mind-set? Every good soldier does. Be willing to be uncomfortable, unliked and unfriended. Cherish Christ instead. He is worth it! This will enable you to be righteous and holy in this generation even when confronted with suffering.

Application Question: Do you have a soldier mind-set of being willing to die for Christ? Why is this so difficult for us, especially in un-persecuted areas?

3. **Be Prepared by Recognizing Our Deliverance from Sin in Christ's Death** – Notice Peter's words again in verses 1-2, ***"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God."***

Interpretation Question: In 1 Peter 4:1 the text says, *"He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."*** Who is the "he" who suffered? In what way is he "done with sin?"**

This text has brought considerable debate among scholars. The question is, when verse 1 says ***"he who has suffered in the flesh (the body)..."*** who is it referring to, Christ or to believers? If it was referring primarily to believers, it would not seem to fit since suffering does not make us "cease from sin." Some believers in suffering actually fall farther away from God. There is not the same inconsistency if it is referring to Christ's sufferings in his body because his death did pay the penalty for sin and break the power of sin over the believer's life. But clearly, in verse 2, Peter seems to be speaking directly to believers and not Christ since Christ never lived in sin. How should we understand this? **Peter seems to be referring to Christ's suffering in his body and the defeat of sin in believers in verse 1 and then speaking to Christians and how this reality should affect their relationship to sin in the verse 2.** This is the same argument Paul uses for believers to stop sinning in Romans 6. Look what he says in **Romans 6:4-6, *"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be ^{1a}done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."***

In Spirit baptism, which happens at salvation, the believer is united with Christ's body in his death (1 Corinthians 12:13). As it says in Romans 6:6, our sin nature died with him, and therefore, no longer has power over us. The believer still sins, but he is no longer a slave to sin. He is now free to live for the will of God because his sin nature died and was

buried with Christ. This is why a true believer is a new creation in Christ and old things have passed away (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is an important doctrine for all believers to understand. It is this doctrine that enables us to conquer all sin and stay holy in the face of suffering. It is our union with Christ in his death. We have died to sin, and now are alive to Christ.

Paul calls believers to think differently about themselves because of this. Listen to what he says in Romans 6:11, *“¹⁷ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* The word “reckon” or count is an accounting term. When the believer looks at his spiritual bank account, he sees that his debt to sin is paid in full. He is no longer enslaved to it because on the cross Christ died to sin, paying the believers sin-debt.

I might look at my bank records and see a company still charging my account even though I’ve paid off the debt. At that point, I would contact that company and let them know I paid that bill and give them proof through a receipt. I refuse to pay a debt that has already been paid.

Similarly, a believer needs to look at the Scripture and understand that his debt to sin has been paid. He no longer has to obey those urges. In fact, Christ used an accounting term on the cross. He said, *“It is finished,”* which literally means *“paid in full.”* Believers must now understand what has happened in Christ so they will not fall to sin when tempted, even when confronted with persecution. The sin debt has been paid, Christ has redeemed us from slavery to sin, and now we have become slaves to righteousness. As Peter says, the believer now lives for the *“will of God”* (v. 2).

God is the believer’s new master, and he serves righteousness instead of sin. Look at Romans 6:18-19, *“¹⁸ And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness ^[a]for holiness.”*

How can a believer suffer for righteousness? He must realize *sin is no longer an option because he died with Christ* and sin no longer has power over him. “I can take abuse from friends...I can be stepped over for a promotion...I can even die!” Why? Because sin is not my master, but God is, and he enables me to handle suffering without falling to temptation or sin. And if I do stumble, I go back to my checkbook and check my accounts. “Nope, I’m not a slave to sin anymore. I’m not paying that bill anymore. I am not staying on the ground depressed because of that stumble. I have a different debt to pay because now I’m a slave to God and righteousness.”

Listen to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, *“¹⁸ Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought at a*

price; therefore glorify God in your body ^[a]and in your spirit, which are God's." The reason sexual immorality is not an option is because *God paid my bill and I now owe him my debt*. He holds my accounts. Therefore, the only option when being persecuted is to serve and honor him. I owe him my life. Because the believer has died with Christ in the body to sin, he can now live the rest of his life as a slave to the will of God (1 Pet 4:2). This is an important doctrine for the believer to recognize in the face of persecution and temptation.

Application Question: How can we better actualize, or apply, our death to sin on the cross in order to no longer spend our time in the flesh living for "human desires?" How should we better apply this doctrine?

4. **Be Prepared by Recognizing that We No Longer Follow the Ways of the World** - Notice Peter's words in verses 3-4 of our passage in 1 Peter 4, ³*For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.* ⁴*In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.* Not only can a believer suffer for righteousness because he has been delivered from the power of sin in Christ's death, but because he also has been delivered from living for the world. Peter says the believer's duty in following the world is over (cf. Gal 6:14). Listen to what he says in 1 Peter 4:3: ³*For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles (or world)—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.* He says each Christian has *spent enough of their past life living in the ways of the world*. It is enough and he should no longer go back. In fact, in verse 4 he uses the word "run" or your Bible may have the word "plunge", which can be translated "run after."

Verse 4 says (notice it again), ⁴*In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.* It's the picture of the world in a frenzied race to have all these pleasures, drunkenness, sexual immorality, drinking parties (carousing), etc. He pictures the world running after these different things in a frantic pace.

Observation Question: What were these sins that the world was running after and what do they represent?

Peter describes this frantic pursuit of the world's desires. Look at the list he gives:

Peter List of Worldly Sins:

- (1) **Lewdness** - all types of evil without moral restraint
- (2) **Lust** - any types of intense desires that control a person
- (3) **Drunkenness** - intoxicated with wine
- (4) **Revelries** - feasts given to sexual immorality
- (5) **Drinking Parties** - can be translated as "drinking parties"
- (6) **Abominable idolatry** - can be translated "lawless idolatry" *Lawless idolatry* is an interesting phrase since all idolatry is against God's law. Therefore, *lawless* is probably

referring to how *pagans break civil law* and not just God's law. Pagans, in their sin, would at times become so depraved they would routinely break civil laws. This could potentially refer to idolatry, such as human sacrifice; we see this still happening today within certain cults. Certainly, in our society this could be applied to the use of many illegal drugs where people are routinely willing to break the law. In many of our colleges today, it is strange to not indulge in this type of lawless idolatry. We can be sure that since demons are behind every idol (1 Cor 10:20), they are used as just another door for the devil to lead people into worse sin.

As Christians we have been delivered from these frantic pursuits of the world. Not only is sin not our master but neither is the world or the things of the world. Paul says essentially the same thing as Peter in Romans 12:2, "*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*" Paul says the same thing: "Stop it! Stop being pressed into the mold of the world. You should not conform any longer. He has to say this because many believers are still following the mold of the world. They follow the mold in their clothing, the way they think, their entertainment, their goals and ambitions.

Jesus taught that a person can only have one master. He will love one and hate the other. He says in Matthew 6:24, "*No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.*" Money is a common idol of the world and the believer is not to run after it or make it their purpose in life. Why? Because he now has a new master and it is not the world. Look at what John says in 1 John 2:15, "*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*" John, in fact, gives this as a test of salvation. Anyone who loves the world or the things of this world does not have the love of God within him. It was the rich man's love for this world that kept him from being able to accept Christ (Matt 19). Christ declares he must be our Lord and we must leave everything to follow him.

Peter, in this exhortation was probably reminding believers about their former sins because some in this church were being *tempted to go back*. They were being tempted to compromise so they could escape the mocking and persecution. I have had friends in the workplace talk to me about compromising their beliefs in such areas as the drinking parties because they were tired of being looked at as strange and different. Maybe these believers were being tempted to compromise to escape slander as well.

Listen to Paul's words in Titus 2:11-12, "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.*" Christ redeemed us from this world--why would we want to go back?

Application Question: What ways do we see the description of the pagan world in 1 Peter 4:3 still happening today? Is this still a fair description of the temptations of the world today?

5. **Be Prepared by Expecting Abuse and Suffering from the World** – Notice Peter’s words again in verse 4 of our passage, *“⁴ In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.”* One of the ways the believer will be able to suffer for righteousness is by *having a proper expectation*. They should expect to be looked at as *strange* or be attacked by the world for being different. It seems very clear that in this context many Christians were surprised by these attacks. Look at what Peter says later on in 1 Peter 4:12, *“¹² Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.”*

Let us remember being considered strange was the common lot of the saints before us. Paul was declared to be crazy by Festus. *“At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. ‘You are out of your mind, Paul!’ he shouted. ‘Your great learning is driving you insane’”* (Acts 26:24). Even Jesus’ family said he was crazy. *“When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind’”* (Mark 3:21). Often it seems that the medium of this abuse is through words, but clearly many times it is physical abuse as well. It was the three Hebrews in Daniel 3 who were considered strange in the Kingdom of Babylon. Because of this, they were thrown into the fiery furnace. It was Daniel who was set up by the wise men in Babylon because of his favor with the king (Dan 6). Eventually, he was thrown into the lion’s den. We even saw this persecution for righteousness from the very beginning with Cain and Abel. Cain hated Abel not because he did something wrong but because he was good. This led to his murder.

Again let us hear the verdict, John 3:19-20, *“¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”* The light exposes the sins of the world and condemns even without words. Therefore, the world hates the light that is represented by the life of the believer. Your righteousness will cause the world to hate you. Maybe it will come in the form of others thinking you’re strange, maybe you will be the topic of ungodly slander and gossip, or maybe you will receive a more intense form of suffering for Christ. If this is the case, do not be alarmed, for this has happened to those who were righteous before you.

Listen to what Christ said in Matthew 5:10-12, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ‘Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before.’”* By putting suffering for righteousness sake in the final beatitude, Christ effectively declares *this will happen to all those who are part of the kingdom of God* (v. 10). If the people of this world do not persecute us, then maybe ours is not the kingdom of God. We should expect suffering, but also we should realize we are in good company. The prophets that came before us also suffered, and Christ declared our reward is great in heaven. What are secrets to being able to suffer for righteousness’ sake? We must expect it. People will commonly think of us as *strange* because of our beliefs and lifestyle and this may lead to more intense persecution. When Christ came, he was not surprised by his sufferings; he predicted it would come from the beginning. We should not be surprised as well.

Application Question: In what ways have you experienced suffering for righteousness or specifically for your faith in Christ? How did you respond to it?

6. **Be Prepared by Recognizing that God Will Bring Justice at the Judgment** – Notice 1 Peter 4:5 and what Peter says, “⁵ *They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*” Here in this passage, Peter encourages the believers who were suffering abuse by saying that ultimately *the world will give an account to God for their sins*, which in this context includes their persecution of believers. The reality of the world’s perceived prosperity and sometimes persecution of the righteous, has confused and frustrated many including some biblical writers. (READ: Psalm 73:2-18)

Asaph said *this reality plagued him*. He couldn’t understand it. It made him question if he should remain holy. Was it really worth practicing godliness when those who did not prospered? No doubt, these believers were also being tempted to doubt God and possibly compromise to be like the world. Peter encourages them with the same truth that comforted Asaph. It may seem like the world is carefree as they enjoy sin and mock the righteous, but *the ground they stand on is slippery* (Ps 73:18). It’s not stable, and their final destiny is ruin.

This is the same truth that Peter comforts the believers with. He says in 1 Peter 4:5, “⁵ *They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*” Not only will God judge them for their sin, but he will specifically judge them for their abuse of the righteous. Their mocking, their cursing, their murder will all be held accountable by God.

This should comfort the believer in a world where it looks like there is no justice, where things are not right. This concept of God’s righteous judgment should enable believers to be prepared to suffer for righteousness’ sake. In fact, Paul encourages believers who are suffering with the same truth in Romans 12:19-21, “*Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*” Paul says *the believer can return good for evil in part because God will take revenge*. He is the one who will repay the world with judgment for their mistreatment of believers. This may not always happen during one’s life time, but it surely will happen at the judgment, if they will not repent. It is for this reason that the believer can serve and bless because revenge is not the lot of the believer. It is reserved for God. In fact Paul, also, encouraged the suffering saints in Thessalonica with God’s justice. Look at what he say 2 Thessalonians 1:4-6, “*Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you.*” Many times, believers are tempted to get angry at God. They were mistreated; they were stepped over for a promotion; they were slandered. Many times they want to get mad at God and mad at people. The believer must understand this: God does not pay his accounts on our time schedule. Ultimately, this will take place at the judgment.

Listen to the story about this farm community: The story is told of a farmer in a Midwestern state who had a strong disdain for “religious” things. As he plowed his field on Sunday morning, he would shake his fist at the church people who passed by on their way to worship. October came and the farmer had his finest crop ever—the best in the entire county.

When the harvest was complete, he placed an advertisement in the local paper which belittled the Christians for their faith in God. Near the end of his diatribe he wrote, “Faith in God must not mean much if someone like me can prosper.” The response from the Christians in the community was quiet and polite. In the next edition of the town paper, a small ad appeared. It read simply, “God doesn’t always settle His accounts in October.” Our God may also choose to not settle accounts until the judgment. Let us not be discouraged now, but live in hope. Our God will make all things right.

Application Question: How does God’s righteous judgment on those who persecute you make you feel?

7. **Be Prepared by Focusing on the Gospel and the Faithful Before Us** – Okay notice verse 6 of our passage, “*For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.*” Another reason that believers can suffer for righteousness is because of *their focus on the gospel and remembering the faithful saints that were persecuted before us*. It is the gospel that should enable believers to suffer for righteousness as it has many martyrs throughout the history of the church. In fact, this has been one of his main themes and encouragements throughout the epistle. Remember what Peter said back in chapter 1 in 1 Peter 1:2-5, “*Who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*”

He starts off the book comforting these believers with election, being chosen by God for salvation. He says they have experienced the new birth and have an inheritance being reserved in heaven. This is a *tremendous comfort* for the believer in persecution. But it is also a *strength* that enables the believer to suffer and even die. It is the gospel that allows the believer to *take up his cross and die for Christ*. He knows that he *is* going to heaven. This truth has enabled many believers from the beginning of the church to give their lives for Christ, since they knew they would immediately be translated into the presence of God and eventually be resurrected. Therefore, in this verse Peter comforts this church with *the gospel and the testimony of previous saints* who had been persecuted and now were dead. He says: For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit. 1 Peter 4:6 This is a debated text, but Peter seems to be saying it is because of God’s coming judgment that the gospel was preached to previous believers who are now dead. Those who responded to the gospel were *judged according men in the body*, which means they suffered and possibly even died for the faith. However, they now *live according to God in regard to the spirit*. This means that they are now in heaven, living as spirits worshipping God. We probably get a picture of this in Hebrews 12:22-23: But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose

names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, *to the spirits of righteous men made perfect* (emphasis mine). The writer of Hebrews speaks of not only angels in the city of God, but of the church and the spirits of the righteous men made perfect. These believers now worship God in spirit and await the rapture of our human bodies. Peter writes to these scattered believers and calls them take comfort in the gospel and the faithful, persecuted saints before them. If they died, they would go to heaven, just as the many suffering saints before them who are now living in the spirit. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Understanding this reality will help prepare us to suffer. The best is yet to come.

Application Question: Are there any deceased saints' lives that really encourage you in the midst of suffering (Heb 11)? If so, who and in what ways?

CONCLUSION

We are living in a time where persecution towards the church is increasing daily even in Western nations. How can the believer be prepared to suffer unjustly?

1. **Be prepared by remembering that Christ suffered.**
2. **Be prepared by having the attitude of Christ—as a soldier willing to die.**
3. **Be prepared by recognizing the believer's deliverance from sin in Christ's death.**
4. **Be prepared by recognizing we no longer follow the ways of this world.**
5. **Be prepared by expecting abuse and suffering from the world.**
6. **Be prepared by remembering God will bring justice at the judgment.**
7. **Be prepared by a focus on the gospel and the faithful before us.**

Application Question: In what ways have you seen the increase of persecution towards saints in society? How can you apply the truths in this lesson to be better prepared?