

A Testimony to Hope

I Peter 3:13-17

INTRODUCTION:

This morning we will be reading from I Peter Chapter 3. In a few moments we will be reading from verse 8 through the end of the chapter before we look specifically at verses 13-17.

Does anybody here know who Dan Cathy is?

He is president of the Chick-Fil-A restaurants. He is also a believer in Jesus Christ. His dad, Samuel Cathy started Chick-Fil-A in Atlanta, GA in 1967. Samuel died on Sept. 14, 2014. The company gained notice for quirky advertising and polite service. Since 1995, it has marketed itself with billboards featuring a cow painting the words "Eat Mor Chikin." Order takers greet customers by saying, "How may I serve you?" and employees walk around asking visitors if they need extra napkins or drink refills.

The Cathy's have publicly made a commitment to run Chick-Fil-A in a God glorifying, God honoring way. One of the ways they do that is by having the company closed every Sunday. The company became embroiled in controversy in 2012, when Dan Cathy, made comments against gay marriage.

Dan said in an interview: "We are very much supportive of the family, the Biblical definition of the family unit. I think we have invited God's judgment upon this nation when we shake our fists at Him and say "We know better than you as to what constitutes a marriage"". Cathy said, " I pray God's mercy on our generation that has such a prideful, arrogant attitude to think that we have the audacity to define what marriage is all about."

It led to criticism and boycotts from gay-rights and liberal groups.

For example a man named Jim Kenney, a councilman from the city of Philadelphia, said this. "As an American you are legally entitled to your opinion regardless of how insensitive and intolerant it may be. But as a fellow American, an elected member of the Philadelphia city council, I am entitled to express my opinion as well. So please take a hike and take your intolerance with you! There is no place for this type of hate in our great city of brotherly love."

Ron Emanuel, the mayor of Chicago, said "Chick-Fil-A's values are not Chicago's values. They are not respectful of our residents, our neighbors, and our family members. And if you are going to be a part of the Chicago community, you should reflect Chicago values."

The mayor of Boston said simply "Chick-Fil-A does not belong in Boston".

Many of those and many others who are mayors and councilmen in various cities have threatened to refuse business permits to any Chick-Fil-A's in their cities.

That is all interesting, but what does it have to do with anything that Peter has to say?

May I suggest that when we read these words, particularly verses 13 through 17, you will see that this is exactly the situation that Peter is speaking to.

Dan Cathy held to his company's commitment to glorify and honor God and did what was right. All he has done is say that the Bible "**says**" and I believe God. And because he stood up for the good and because he stood up for what the scripture teaches, he came under attack.

He took the risk of suffering financial loss in order to stand up for the good. That was four years ago. But the conservative customer base was charged because of his stand and they rallied around the company.

The flap did little to derail Chick-fil-A's momentum, however, as it surpassed KFC to become the nation's leading fast-food chicken chain in terms of market share.

While you and I will likely never be in the same situation Dan Cathy faced, we may very well find ourselves in a similar position for standing up for the good or by defending biblical truths and being under attack.

Maybe it is because we have refused to lie to a customer or a supplier and we get fired because of it.

Or Maybe we get fined heavily because we refuse to provide health insurance through our business that covers abortion.

These are just a very small sampling of things that are happening in our country right now. We are doing the good, we are following Christ, and it brings harmful consequences from a world that hates Christ.

It is to that that Peter speaks!

From the scripture this morning, we will see three major headings.

1. The Safety of the Believer Amidst Persecution.
2. The Response of the Believer to Persecution.
3. The Confidence of the Believer in Persecution.

All Stand and Read Scripture

1 Peter 3:8-22 (NASB)

⁸To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; ⁹not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰For,

“THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS,

MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT.

¹¹ “HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD;

HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.

¹² “FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS,

AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER,

BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL.”

¹³ Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ 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, 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; 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. 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. ¹⁸ For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; ¹⁹ in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, ²⁰ who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water. ²¹ Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

Before we look at verses 13-17, let's pray.

Prayer

BODY:

I. THE SAFETY OF THE BELIEVER AMIDST PERSECUTION.

Look with me at verse 13 and first part of 14. Peter says

1 Peter 3:13-14 (NASB)

¹³ Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?

We could look at this question in two ways.

Peter could be saying, simply, "Guys, if you do good, who is going to want to harm you?" In other words, if we do good and follow Christ, and if we do good and are likeable, then people will be nice and kind to us.

OR...in light of the quote at the end of verse 12 where Peter is quoting, he says

1 Peter 3:12 (NASB)

¹² “FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS,

AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER,

BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL.”

and that follows with

1 Peter 3:13 (NASB)

¹³ Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?

It could be saying, "Listen, if God is for you, if God's eyes are upon the good, then though they might attack you, what ultimate harm can they do?"

Though they might be angry and seek revenge on you, what can they do if God is for the good?

I believe that it is this second understanding that is correct.

We live in a world of darkness. You know our unsaved neighbors that we say are good? They are not! They love their darkness. When adversity or challenges to their belief system confronts them, they do not like it. They become uncomfortable and it often brings persecution and attacks.

As far as I can tell, all Dan Cathy did was make a statement in support of the good.

What Peter is saying here is that they will attack. But if God has set His eyes to the good and He hears their cause then there is no eternal harm that they can do. There is an eternal safety in the hands of Christ.

So what is the sense of **safety** that we experience during our trials?

Romans 8:31-39 (NASB)

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who is against us?** ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written,

"FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;
WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If God is for us who can be against us?

1 Peter 3:14 (NASB)

¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.

What are our blessings?

1. It causes personal growth. When we endure persecution, our faith is tested by fire and makes us more resolved to serve Christ and causes our faith to mature.

2. It provides an opportunity to be used by God. When people see how we react to adversity, they see that we are different and wonder what causes our faith to be so strong.
3. It leads to a heavenly reward.

In Jesus' sermon on the mount, He said

Matthew 5:10-12 (NASB)

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The adversity that we go through now cannot even compare to the reward that awaits those who endure to the end.

This does not mean that we will enjoy the suffering and pain. It is not that the suffering itself is the blessing. But it is through suffering that blessing comes.

Jesus was our example of this. He has provided salvation for us. He has revealed His grace to us. He has redeemed for Himself a people to worship Him for all time. **But what was the road to get there????** Agony and Suffering. He left the comfort of Heaven to come to earth and live among sin, humbled himself, and did the will of His Father even to the death on the cross.

We have a sense of safety because we know who is behind us and that no one can cause us eternal harm..

II. THE RESPONSE OF THE BELIEVER TO PERSECUTION.

ILLUSTRATION:

There is a theory that has been around for some time now about “How to boil a live frog”. The theory states that you can boil a live frog in a pot of water, if the water is heated slowly enough — according to the story, if you place a frog into boiling water, it will immediately jump out, but if you place it in cold water that is slowly heated, it will gradually acclimatize itself to the increasing temperature and be unable to jump out before it is too late.

Whether or not that legend is factually correct – I believe it is clearly being demonstrated in the growing immorality of our society and not just the apathy and indifference towards Christianity, but the outright hostility and opposition being demonstrated on a number of fronts towards the Christian faith.

Had the enemies of Christianity in this country, back in the 1940's and 50's, and perhaps early 60's instigated a full frontal and radical attack to

- ban public displays of Christmas
- call for the removal of “In God We Trust” from our money
- pass laws for removal of the 10 Commandments from the court houses,
- demand acceptance and legitimizing of homosexual marriage,
- enforce recognition of pedophilia as a constitutionally-guarded "personal freedom".

There would have been an immediate, massive, and passionate rejection of these views by the greater majority in this country and such a plan would have been relegated to only a mere handful of proponents on the lunatic fringe.

So rather than throw “the frog” into a pot of boiling water, they have been willing to bide their time and just ever so gradually turn up the heat to the point where the frog has become complacently comfortable in the water without realizing that it’s death is imminent.

There comes a point of no return in this process where the frog loses control of its ability to save itself and control is then in the hands of the one turning up the heat. It would seem in many respects that we have already reached that point in this society.

The environment in which Peter wrote his letter was certainly one that was hostile to Christians and so it is as applicable to us now as it was to his hearers almost 2000 years ago in the Church.

1 Peter 3:14b-16 (NASB)

…AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, 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; 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.

Verse 14 reads AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,

Lest we become like the frog and slowly lose our moral compass, we must be fearless and not cave in to their intimidation.

Dan Cathy was willing to sacrifice possible financial losses to do what is right. We must have that same response to the world that is trying to defy God.

Verse 15 reads 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;

To sanctify means to "set apart". We are to give our hearts fully to Christ. We are to make Him Lord of our lives. If He is Lord of your life, then you are no longer your own, you belong to Christ, Who has purchased you with His blood.

As Paul said

Galatians 2:20 (NASB)

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Just as Christ came to do the will of the Father, we to must do His will in our lives. We are to be able to proclaim the Gospel to others and be able to tell others why we have the hope that it within us.

We proclaim the Gospel with

- gentleness (or humility).
- reverence (proper fear to God or a proper respect to the person).
- a good conscience (not being a hypocrite).

III. THE CONFIDENCE OF THE BELIEVER IN PERSECUTION.

1 Peter 3:16 (NASB)

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.

Peter notes that those who persecute those who do good by claiming that their actions are exhibiting intolerance and hate will be put to shame.

This may occur in this life. It may be that they realize their foolishness and become ashamed of it and come to repentance and faith.

Peter holds that hope out to us in Chapter 2.

1 Peter 2:12 (NASB)

¹² 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.

Some people will be brought to repentance and faith because of our good deeds.

But we know that that is not always the case. Most of those who revile and attack and experience no shame in this life will one day be ashamed.

For just as those who do good will one day stand before God and inherit a blessing and great will be their reward. Those who revile will also stand before God and on that day they will be ashamed.

Galatians 6:7-9 (NASB)

⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

It may appear that men who mock God today is getting by with it. But one day they will face God and they will experience God's wrath for eternity.

When we think of those councilmen and mayors who pass laws and demand activities that mock God, our emotion should not be hate toward them, it should be sorrow and pity.

They may make personal attacks against us and cause us financial setbacks, but in the end we have the confidence that we are the ultimate winners.

CONCLUSION:

Are you living a life that is worthy of being persecuted?

Is there a notable difference between your life and the world? Or do you respond to adversity just as the world? We **MUST** be able to distinguish between the temporal things in this life and the events that have eternal significance? May the Lord help us in that discernment!

Can people in the world look at your life and see a living hope in you?

Are you able to defend the hope that is within you when the opportunity arises?

John 10:27-28 (NASB)

27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

If **you** are one of His sheep, **you** will hear his commands and follow them. **We** follow Christ because He first loved us and taught us how to live. When **you** live according to His plan, **you** will **KNOW** that you are one of His sheep and you will receive the blessing of eternal life with Him!

If you have not accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, do it today. Don't wait until you have cleaned up your life. **You don't clean yourself up to come to the Christ; you surrender yourself to Christ, to let Him clean you up!**

God be with You.