

Part 9: Keep Calm and Carry On

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In 1939, the British Government softly launched a poster campaign in areas of London which they thought would soon be heavily targeted by German bombers as WWII loomed in the air.

The posters, which were rediscovered in the early 2000's, have now become a sort of pop-culture fixture. They include the image of a crown boldly fitted over five simple words: "Keep calm and carry on."

One author captured what this phrase meant to the anxious Brits back then, and why it has such power today: *"There is something quintessential in the way the posters do not say 'Don't Panic' or 'We Will Prevail'... They say 'Keep Calm,' and what that means is, 'We may be suffering something of an invasion at the moment, but that's no reason to start acting in a rash and hot-headed manner. We may be a subjugated nation — temporarily — but we are not about to start acting like savages. And what of the 'Carry On?'... As a nation, we have been trained to look past the bad behavior of our rudest guests, especially the uninvited ones, and rather than cause a scene, we shall just go about our daily business as if nothing has happened."*

We are working our way through the book of 1 Peter and today we are entering what is a larger portion of his book written to Christians who might experience suffering and tension with the world on account of their faith. And in a remarkably simple way Peter is going to address both the hearts and our actions of Christians in the name of King Jesus.

Because the gospel of Jesus Christ has changed everything about us, and offered us a present hope and a future reward, Christians can view suffering, if and when it comes, as something able to be endured in a distinctly Christian way.

But, Peter is writing to churches who just like 1939 England, were not yet under the physical persecution which would soon come, but churches who nonetheless could see the storm clouds coming. Living in a broken world means that we will encounter the pains of sin. Living life in this world is to encounter situations which cause our hearts and our brains to say, "This isn't how life should be!"

In many ways the culture which Peter was writing to is not far from our own culture. Which means that we as the 21st Century church ought to pay close attention the rest of this book. How are we to respond, act, think, tweet and text when we might face pressure from the world on account of our faith?

You can say things like "Keep Calm and Carry On" all you want, but unless you have a comfort which brings peace in the chaos, our actions will always be up for grabs.

To help us in those moments Peter is going to encourage Christian conduct with Christian hope. The big point we are going to see today is that our hope in Jesus helps us to do what is good while enduring what is not.

There are three ways Peter is going to call Christians to carry on in the face of suffering. First he is going to remind the church that they are **Called to Each Other**, secondly they are **Called to Blessing not Evil**, and lastly they are **Called to Hope not Fear**.

Peter's first call to believers today not only builds towards his passage on suffering, but it summarizes what we've been looking at the last three weeks. In those passages Peter has been helping believers understand their personal responsibility to conflicts with the government, with their employers or masters and even their own spouses.

Why does Peter take so long to talk about interpersonal issues? Do you remember how Peter defined the church earlier in this letter? **1 Peter 2:9**.

Have you ever come out of a dark room into the bright afternoon sun? In those moments we often squint and stumble, and as God's church it's to be expected that as we are brought out of sin and into light there will be times where we too will stumble into one another.

To assume life as God's church will always be a storybook is to forget the fact that Jesus saves sinners. Look at what Peter says to those who are saved together as the church: **1 Peter 3:8**.

Here we see our first point today: **Called to Each Other**.

Peter is calling the church to a sense of real unity rooted in brotherly love. In all ways the church is to strive for a culture of encouragement, care and love towards one another. That's one of the things that we can to forget in a world where we many of us still need to watch church online.

We gather not only to hear the word preached and to sing, but to encourage one another while we are at it.

The author of Hebrews recognizes this essential component of the church: **Hebrews 10:24-25**.

Because the church exists to encourage one another in the gospel for the sake of gospel conduct, Peter now begins to call the church to care for one another in the same way.

He gives four ways in which we are to do this, all of which are defining the head idea of brotherly love. What does it look like for you to love your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Four things: unity of mind, or harmony. Is there peace between you and those around you? Sympathy. Do you actually care about the trials and the joys your brothers and sisters are going through? Compassion. Compassion is sympathy applied, are you willing to care for others as Jesus cared for us? And lastly humility, considering others as more important than yourselves.

When you becoming a member at Sovereign Hope you are pledging not only to love those around you with this kind of love, but you have the joy of knowing that this all these other people are pledging to love you like this as well.

Why is Peter reminding the church of this? Because he knows that this won't come easy. But that's why we must remember the foundation which Jesus' church is built upon. Remember the other illustration Peter used defining the church: **1 Peter 2:4-5**?

We are stones, lumpy, bumpy, edgy stones. And because of that we are going to weigh on each other, poke each other with our elbows, and feel each other's dead weight. And on any other foundation; a foundation of my preaching, a foundation of your preferences, a foundation of wonderful community, these stones will certainly fall apart due to their differences. But we are built on a cornerstone which is able to bear all of us and hold us in place.

The love of Jesus which establishes the church is the love which frees us from needing to see ourselves as the center of our own church life. It's only because we've seen what Jesus has done that we can trust God and lay aside our own preferences and privileges to serve others.

For Peter, this point is an important point when we consider how the church might encounter suffering. When we are grounded on the love of Jesus we have the ability to calm each other, comfort each other and carry each other.

Just a few weeks ago I was really wrestling with a sort of spiritual melancholy and during I worship I was kind of throwing a pity party for myself.

But when I looked up, I saw Aric sitting right there, worshipping God while his mother was dying in a hospital bed that he couldn't access due to COVID-19. And in that moment I was so encouraged that if the gospel is good enough for that, if Jesus' love comforts even in that, then certainly I can worship in my own trials.

The Christian life is too difficult a life to live if we are unable to work as a functional part of Jesus' church. In light of this, Peter now turns to the trials this unified and loving body will face in the world.

Let's read, **1 Peter 3:9-12**.

Here we see Peter's second point, Christians are **Called to Blessing not Evil**. In a world where he assumes Christians might be reviled or treated in an evil way, he calls Christians not to return evil for evil, but instead to bless those who harm them. Why? Because Christians themselves have received God's blessing.

I had the opportunity once to go out to a sandbar in the ocean called Stingray Island. It was a shallow sandbar where fishermen historically cleaned their fish and had attracted a resident population of stingrays.

While on the boat the guide explained to us how the stingray's stinger works. It doesn't shoot it like a dart, or swing it like a sword, instead it's a defense mechanism for when something is chasing it. When it feels endangered it runs, and then suddenly stops so that whatever is chasing it runs into the barb.

So the guide said, when you're in the water and the stingrays start gathering at your feet, don't panic. Whatever you do, don't pick up your feet and try to kick away, the more you panic, the more you're prone to kick into a stinger. Everything about this explanation made perfect scientific sense to me.

But as soon as I entered the water, and as soon as one of those massive stingrays started heading straight for my legs, all I wanted to do was kick and get away. Everything in my brain said, "This is not normal," move, swim, kick! In that moment I had to trust what promised safety even when it seemed counterintuitive.

When Peter here calls Christians to not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but instead to bless we understand it on paper, but in experience we know how unnatural it feels to not kick!

It's here where we begin to see the nature of persecution Peter's churches are going through. I actually think there is great similarity between Peter's churches and our churches today. Formal, imperial and violent persecution wouldn't take root until the beginning of the second century which is around 40 years after Peter wrote this letter.

But what we see here is that even though persecution wasn't formalized by the government, there was a tension believers were beginning to experience in culture. They were being reviled, which is to be mocked or verbally mistreated, and later on we will see they are maligned, which is to be publicly spoken ill of.

Part of the ways in which sin affects us is that it makes us so quick to repay evil for evil and harsh words with harsh words. But born again believers must learn to resist that urge.

In fact look at what Paul says of his ministry as an apostle: **1 Corinthians 4:12b-13a, 16.**

Both Peter and Paul go so far as to not only call us to not return evil for evil, but to actually bless those who revile them.

How are we able to do this? Because we ourselves were called to a blessing. To show this, Peter quotes Psalm 34 where David himself is wrestling with his conduct as a follower of God in the face of those who want to harm him.

1 Peter 3:9-12.

What does it look like to live as a blessing? It looks like the turning from evil, not leaning into it. It looks like laboring for peace when there is division instead of digging trenches, it looks like holding your tongue instead of loosing it. It looks like standing still and petting the sting ray when all you want to do is kick at it.

Why are we willing to act in such a counter intuitive way? Because God favors the righteous. For those who believe in Jesus, we are made righteous because Christ is righteous. Jesus' work on the cross wins us back into God's favor and encounters like this remind us that God himself is for us.

In these moments we are afforded a unique, but difficult, opportunity to show our trust in God. In those moments turning to God reminds us that because of our faith in Jesus, God is not far from us even in these moments. He like a good father is guiding, listening, and caring for us even when it seems he is most distant from us. If God ordained the cross for good, he can ordain this for your good too.

We don't need vindication as comfort when the cross has given us the God of comfort. Jesus makes it possible to do good even when things are not.

Peter is going to continue to develop this theme as we look out our next point today: Christians are **Called to Hope not Fear.**

Read with me **1 Peter 3:13-17**.

Now Peter opens up this section with a bomb of a rhetorical question. Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

Given what we've seen so far in his letter you can imagine that the first answer we could give to his question is: everyone! Governments, masters, sinful husbands, revilers, maligners, those who speak against us, the same people who struck, hit, and murdered Jesus.

And yet Peter also assumes a second answer: Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? No one!

The tension of this question is resolved as we begin to work through this text. Because what Peter is actually doing is helping us understand the kinds of suffering we can experience in this world and how suffering as a Christian fits into this.

What is suffering? Suffering is a kind of discomfort, or pain which is we incur in our bodies or minds.

But we have different kinds of suffering don't we. And we respond to that suffering in different ways depending upon our context.

Every year, thousands of people pay money, to line up in the August heat in Missoula, to run 26.2 miles, on roads they can normally run on for free.

I actually looked up quotes on running a marathon. One three time winner of the NYC Marathon said that running a marathon is like bullfighting, but then he goes on to say that all the great matadors end up dead or mauled.

Then there was another quote by an author who said this: "You're running on guts. On fumes. Your muscles twitch. You throw up. You're delirious. But you keep running because there's no way out of this hell you're in, because there's no way you're not crossing the finish line. It's a misery that non-runners don't understand."

To run is to suffer. But for a runner, it's a suffering worth it because of the finish line.

If humans are able to suffer that discomfort for the simplicity of an earthly finish line, how much more should believers be willing to suffer for the glory of a heavenly one?

He tells us to not fear those who want to harm us, but instead to set apart Christ as holy. That word "set apart" is literally the word, "sanctify." That's what sanctification means, to set it apart.

For a runner all the suffering is no suffering at all because the reward of the finish is so set apart in their minds. So too for the Christian does Peter call us to understand all our suffering as worth it because Christ is set apart in our hearts.

In chapter 1 Peter outlined this hope of Jesus for us so clearly. Jesus was the ransom payment for our own sins, where our sin demanded death, Jesus paid that in his own body by dying for our sins on the cross. But more than that he promised us joy and love in the now as we trust him, and a final,

imperishable, undefiled inheritance in the future when he comes again. For those who repent and believe in this Jesus, death can no longer kill you, the world no longer needs to satisfy you because Jesus has lavishly loved you and drawn near to you.

Look at how David puts this in **Psalm 84:10-12**.

What is it that makes us more content to be exposed to the elements as a doorkeeper in the house of God than shielded by the tents of the wicked? The God whose warmth and comfort is of greater effectiveness to shield than anything in the world.

Why will we not fear what man fears? Because Jesus is worth it. He alone can provide what we really need, and has already proven that on the cross.

And it's the nature of this Christian hope which shapes our Christian conduct: **1 Peter 3:15**.

In talking with some people over this passage this week, we discovered that more times than not this one verse is taken out of the context of 1 Peter. We read this text and we think that it will be normal for people to just come up to us and say, "Hey man, tell me about this hope you have in Jesus."

Most of the people I talked to had never had anything like that happen in life. But this is where we need to remember that the context of this passage is Christians looking foolish by cultural standards.

When the world sees our Christian conduct and tries to squeeze it out of us, our resistance to that will be met with a sort of inquisitiveness. For example, Eric Liddell was an Olympic gold medalist who turned down lucrative sponsorships and a plush life as a Scottish celebrity to move to China as a missionary.

He was constantly being harassed for turning down this life of comfort and one time he was asked in an interview why he was unwilling to accept this fame which was handed to him. He said: **"Oh well, of course it's natural for a chap to think over all that sometimes, but I'm glad I'm in the work I'm engaging in now. A fellow's life counts for more at this than the other. Not a corruptible crown, but an incorruptible [one]."**

He was asked for his hope when his hope was visibly distinct. It's one thing for a Christian to have their faith be seen. It's quite another to have their hope be seen. Suffering doesn't expose our faith as much as it exposes our hope.

Many people believe that Jesus satisfies, we sing it all the time. But Peter makes it clear that seasons of suffering and mistreatment have a unique ability to display the hope that Jesus satisfies.

Make no mistake that Peter is saying that sometimes the easiest evangelism comes at the moments of greatest cost, moments when people see clearly a hope which captivates.

Do you understand the hope that Jesus brings you? It's one thing to affirm that Jesus died for your sins, but is that sacrifice the hope on which your life hangs?

Now let's be a bit realistic here. There are many of us in here who have suffered as Christians. There's cancer, loss of loved ones, chronic pain, all of these things happen to Christians. But few of us in America have suffered for being Christian.

I also know that for some of us when we truly ask ourselves is my faith a hopeless faith? We wrestle with the answers. But this is why we need the encouragement of this text. Because what Peter is saying is that for those who have true faith, suffering will expose the wonderful reality of hope in your faith.

When you continue to walk out your Christian life and pursue good even when the world finds you foreign, that hope will affect your words and your conscience. Worldly pushback to your Christian conduct might be God's way of working this hope deeper into your year. Why? Because that's part of God's plan for your good.

Read with me this again: **1 Peter 3:14-17**.

In the opening pages of this letter Peter compared suffering to a refining fire. Here the Bible says that the same suffering which the world uses to remind you that God is not good, is the same suffering that reminds us that God is so much better than everything else.

In the moments of suffering as a Christian what is exposed is not the might of culture or the stamina of self but the love of Jesus strong enough to endure the worst but gentle enough to comfort the weak.

Why would we do good and endure what isn't? Because being loved by Jesus is worth everything.

In closing let us consider a similar passage by Paul in **Romans 8:31-39**.

When we have this hope, it will show up in your words and in your actions because it's already captivated your heart.

What do we do with this text? We together as a body of believers refuse to hide or fear responses to our Christian conduct. But in moments where the world might, if God wills is, rise against us, we continue to do good and trust the Jesus who laid down his life for us.