

# Unshrinking in a World of Slander

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're going to turn now to the Bible, to our scripture reading this morning, and you'll find it in Peter's first letter, continuing our studies here in 1 Peter, and we come to the second part of chapter 3.

We're looking this morning, chapter 3, verse 13, to the end, but I'm going to read from verse 12, where Peter is quoting from the Old Testament scriptures and says, The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

And so who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed.

Our translation says will be, but it's present tense. You are blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, or as the NIV translates, I think, in your hearts set apart Christ.

As Lord Christ alone. Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect or reverence.

[ 1 : 32 ] Literally fear means fear of God. Do it with gentleness and with reverence to God. Having a good conscience. So that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

For it's better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

Jesus was put to death in the flesh, but made alive, better to read, I think, by the Spirit, with a capital S. Jesus was put to death in the flesh by men, but made alive by the Holy Spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is eight persons, were brought safely through water.

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of filth from the flesh, but as an appeal or as a pledge towards God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers, having been subjected to him.

Amen. And may God bless to us this his word. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to 1 Peter chapter 3, page 1015 in our church Bibles.

[ 3 : 27 ] And we're looking at verse 13 to the end, which is all about being unshrinking in a world of slander. Following Jesus Christ in our culture today is increasingly hard, if we do it publicly.

That's because not only do we live in a fallen world that is pagan and that perverts God's patterns in life, but very often it is a world that wants to persecute God's people.

But that's nothing new. The Apostle Peter wrote to people in first century Asia Minor who faced all of these things and more. And he was very clear what the Christian's true calling is in all such circumstances.

In chapter 2, verse 21, he says, we are called to follow in Christ's footsteps. In chapter 3, verse 10, he says, we are called to turn from evil and to do good.

Because this, he says, is the way of blessing from God our Father. We are to shine justly for doing good, however trying things are in a fallen world, in fallen workplaces, and in fallen family situations, and indeed, fallen Christian fellowships.

[ 4 : 45 ] That's been our subject the last couple of weeks from chapter 2, verse 11. But from chapter 3, verse 13, down to chapter 4, verse 11, the focus, I think, is even more on the difficult circumstances of hostility and of opposition that bring suffering.

Suffering for righteousness' sake, as verse 14 puts it. In other words, not the suffering that is common to all in this fallen world under the curse, disease, and illness, and so on, but suffering that comes to the Christians specifically because they are following Jesus.

And Peter's message is just as plain for these circumstances. We are to go on shining justly for doing good, even when we may be suffering unjustly for doing good.

Now, the suffering that is in view here, mostly in 1 Peter, is not organized state persecution. That came later, often very severely. But there's no mention of widespread beatings and martyrdom, imprisonment, and so on in Peter.

But what does seem to be endemic is general hostility to the Christian faith in the culture. The prejudice, the scorn, the slander that makes a Christian feel marginalized and inferior and on the periphery.

[ 6 : 15 ] And generally, a bit of a public nuisance. So chapter 2, verse 12, people spoke against Christians. There was all sorts of ignorant talk about Christians.

Chapter 2, verse 15. There were lots of insults made in public about Christians. Chapter 3, verse 9. They were reviling them for their views and for their ways. Verse 16 of chapter 3 here says there was plain slander, there are lies about them, about their behavior.

And what's said here in verse 14 implies that there were real threats, things to make them fear, perhaps for their jobs, perhaps for their livelihoods. Not such a foreign situation to the one that we are getting to know in 21st century Britain.

We had the National Secular Society recently reviling Christians. Churches, groups like Scripture Union, reviling them for, in fact, all the good that they do among young people in our schools.

We've seen Christian adoption agencies have to close and stop acting. Just because their love for children meant that they wanted to place children in stable, loving marriages, where all the evidence suggests that they will do best and thrive most.

[ 7 : 34 ] We've seen teachers and others under threat for merely wanting to teach the truth about marriage in the classroom and being unwilling to promote so-called alternative sexual lifestyles as being normal.

People have actually lost their jobs or been demoted because they've dared to say that although they're all for equal rights, they just think it's one step too far to teach young children that, for example, a homosexual lifestyle is just the same or as normal as traditional marriage.

I think it's probably in this area of sexuality that the marginalizing of Christians is most acutely obvious today. Nobody dares question the so-called progressive sexual culture today.

If you do, you are immediately subject to a torrent of abuse, a great deal of reviling. And so people increasingly are scared to dare to do so.

I don't know if any of you saw this week the latest reporting of the 10-year survey about sexual habits. It was all over the BBC for a few days. They love that sort of thing. They delight to tell us that we're so much more liberal now in our attitudes than we were 20 years ago.

[ 8 : 49 ] And so as I listen to the radio, with great relish, we were told by all kinds of experts that one night stands are now far more tolerated than they ever were before, that the acceptance of homosexual practice has doubled.

More than two-thirds of people think there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. Four times as many women are reporting same-sex activity as 20 years ago. And best of all, I think this was the one they liked the most, that men now have 50% more sexual partners during their life than they did 20 years ago and women 100% more.

Average for women is about 8 and for men, 12. But when I looked up the study, I found that there were things that the BBC was not highlighting nearly so prominently.

Some of it was there on the website. That couples, they're actually having less sex by a quarter than they were 20 years ago. That one in six couples reported real difficulties in their long-term sexual relationships within the last year.

And that many reported that pornography was becoming a substitute for sex such that their own marital sex life had become diminished. So the study seemed to be telling us that there's more sex everywhere, but there's quite a bit less good sex and healthy sex.

[ 10 : 14 ] But nobody was daring to say on the radio or on the television, no, wait a minute, isn't there perhaps a message here in our so-called progressive sexual culture? More partners, more pornography, more perverted sex is accompanied by more sexual problems and less healthy, satisfying, relationship-building sex within marriage.

Not to mention the epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases and the tragedies of relational breakups and so on. But not a hint that I heard anyway, perhaps I missed it, of any such thing.

Because, of course, anybody on the Today program daring to say any such thing would immediately have been crushed and trampled and squashed by those very, very clever but very cynical presenters.

But you see, that is the world that we're living in today as Christians. And to be Christian in public is becoming increasingly hard. And I don't think that's about to change anytime soon, do you?

So how are we to react to that kind of hostility? Well, Peter gives us the answer in these verses. Chapter 3, verse 13, down to chapter 4, verse 11.

[ 11 : 38 ] When this is the atmosphere all around, you see the great temptation is to shrink into silence, to keep your head down, to say nothing. If you put your head above the parapet, you will be shot at immediately.

But Peter says, no, don't shrink into silence. Don't be silenced by the world's slander. Keep speaking up for Jesus.

That's the focus in chapter 3, verse 13, down to the end of the chapter. And we'll look at that today. But then in chapter 4, verses 1 to 11, he goes on to say, at the same time, don't sink into sin either.

Again, the great temptation is for us to succumb to the culture all around us because being different is so very hard. But Peter says, no, don't slip back under the world's seduction.

Keep shining for Jesus. Now, there's overlap, of course, in these passages, but that's the message. Don't shrink and don't sink. Faith faces hostility in the culture not by escapism from the world nor by being engulfed by the world's ways, but by engaging with the world, speaking up for Jesus Christ, shining for Jesus Christ, unshrinking in a world of slander and unsullied in a world of sin.

[ 13 : 04 ] We don't privatize our faith. No. We keep publicly testifying to Jesus Christ as Lord through our lips and in our lives because, and this is crucial, we have confidence in the public triumph of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And that's Peter's message for us. Well, with that, by way of introduction, let's look in more detail at our passage for today, verses 13 to 22 of chapter 3 and see what Peter tells us about being unshrinking Christians in a world of slander.

It falls into two sections. Verses 13 to 17 give us the instructions for our conduct under fire and verses 18 to 22 give us the reason for our confidence under fire.

So first of all then, our authentic Christian conduct under fire is laid out in verses 13 to 17 and it's all about consistent testimony to Christ.

Peter's message in these verses is that suffering for Christ now is a sign that you're already blessed by God. So don't fear. Go on bearing consistent testimony to Jesus Christ the Lord.

[ 14 : 21 ] Look at verse 12 because that's the context for his statement in verse 13. Peter says the Lord is against those who do evil but his eyes are on the righteous and his ears are ever attentive to them.

And so he says in verse 13 who is there to harm you if you are zealous to do good? If you are living resolutely for Jesus. And the answer is of course no one.

No one can ultimately harm you if that is you. It's an echo of what Paul says in Romans 8 verse 13. If God is for us who can be against us?

And there too Paul is speaking about the present suffering of our lives as Christians and the great hope of glory that we still wait for but nevertheless which is absolutely certain in Christ.

Well Peter is just as certain. we have a living hope of glory to come at Christ's revelation he says so we can rest assured that no harm can befall us no harm can ever rob us of that great inheritance.

[ 15 : 28 ] But verse 14 that doesn't mean that suffering will not come to us now. Peter's already made that very plain it's a reality for his readers. accusations and gossip and insults now in verse 14 real threats in verse 16 painful slander.

Don't think that words can't be more damaging than the sticks and stones that can break your bones. Now he doesn't say that it will be unrelenting that it will be constant he just says if you should suffer the implication is surely that it's always around and that it might emerge at any time in the lives of his listeners.

But what if it does? It is not a sign says Peter of your abandonment by God look it's a sign of your blessing.

Now that sounds perverse doesn't it but Peter is just repeating the words that the Lord Jesus himself had spoken to him and that he'd heard in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5 blessed are you said Jesus when others revile you and persecute you on my account rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven for so they persecuted all the prophets who came before you.

It's a blessing when that happens to you because it proves that you belong truly to Jesus and his people. It's a mark of the genuine people of God who have always been opposed and always been slandered.

[ 17 : 07 ] It's an assurance that you will share in his glory to come. Peter says the same thing down in chapter 4 verse 14 it's the only other place he uses this word blessed the beatitude.

He says it's when you are insulted for Christ's sake that you are blessed because the spirit of glory rests upon you then. That's the sign according to Peter of being a spirit anointed believer.

Not that you're healed by a miracle from Jesus but that you're hated with malice for Jesus' sake. I didn't see that message on any of the posters for all these prosperity gospel churches by the roadside in Nigeria.

But according to Peter it's the bond church not the booming church that is the spirit anointed one. when you're slandered for Jesus it's a sign that you're blessed.

And so knowing that he says go on being a consistent testimony to Jesus. Don't be scared don't be silenced and don't be shamed.

[ 18 : 22 ] Don't be scared he says in verse 14 have no fear of them or be troubled fear only God. In your hearts he says set apart Christ the Lord as holy or set apart Christ alone as the Lord.

He's quoting from Isaiah chapter 8 he's already alluded to that when he talked about Christ as being the rock of offense. And the situation was one of great enemies coming against God's people and God said don't fear them regard the Lord of hosts alone as holy.

Fear God alone. That's a great biblical theme that's repeated so often all through the Bible as in Psalm 34 that again Peter already had quoted from where it says fear the Lord you his saints for those who fear him have no lack.

We sang it in our hymn earlier on the beginning fear him ye saints and you will then have nothing else to fear. That's what Peter's saying here. And notice by the way that in quoting those words from Isaiah about the Lord of hosts he is saying to these people that the Lord of hosts Jehovah the Lord of the armies of heaven is none other than Christ your Lord.

By the way remember that one next time a Jehovah's witness comes to your door because they don't believe that Christ is the Lord of heaven. You show them that verse Peter the apostle tells us that Christ is the Lord of hosts the God of heaven.

[ 19 : 55 ] So don't be scared when you face real hostility. If you revere only the Lord Christ in your heart you need fear none other on this earth or in heaven.

Don't misunderstand me it doesn't mean we can be flippant there's good reason to be fearful these are real threats he's talking about ultimate. But Peter is simply saying to us that our perspective as Christians must always be ultimate not just temporal.

He's not saying we don't need to fear any harm in this world. He's just saying exactly the same as Jesus in Matthew chapter 10 where he said don't fear those who can only kill the body and not the soul but fear him who can cast both body and soul into hell.

Fear the Lord. He says that because real hurt may come to us as Christians. Physical harm but also real hurt from words, slander, reviling, insults, they sting, they hurt.

Sometimes much more than physical abuse. But they can never bring ultimate hurt to God's people. sin.

[ 21 : 21 ] And only if we believe Jesus and believe Peter in that will we do what Jesus said there in Matthew chapter 10. Go on proclaiming the truth from the housetops. Go on publicly testifying to Jesus, knowing that as Jesus said, he will acknowledge you before his father in heaven if you acknowledge him on earth before men.

God's people will not. But those who do not, he will not. So don't be scared. And verse 15 says Peter, don't be silenced.

Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. There is a huge temptation to go quiet about our faith in a hostile climate.

in the school playground when you're teased, when you're mocked. Why do you go to that stupid SU group? Why do you go to that stupid church on Sunday?

Why don't you do all the things we're doing? Or in the university common room, or in the work staff room, or in your business perhaps where things are done and said that you know are wrong and you know you ought to say something because you're a Christian?

[ 22 : 33 ] But it's hard, isn't it? Or just in general conversation about some of the issues that are in our society today where the gospel teaches a very, very different way from the way that is espoused by our culture all around us.

It is hard to speak up, isn't it? But Peter says, don't be silenced. There may be more than a hint here that some of those who are being asked these things are doing so in a very hostile context.

People want to harm them, want to trap them. It may even be that some of them are being put to public trial as Peter himself was back in Acts chapter 4 where he exemplified here his very own words.

We can't help but speak about what we've seen and heard. We're not going to stop. We obey God rather than men. Remember Jesus himself said that several times he said that these occasions will be in themselves opportunities for witness.

Witness to our hope. That is pointing people to what is ultimate. The hope and glory that we have in Christ at his coming. Not the condemnation that we fear from Christ as judge.

[ 24 : 00 ] You see, that is something that people do not want to hear about in our world today. They do not want to hear about a God who judges anybody. But that is Peter's point.

And verses 16 and 17 make it very plain. Even as you speak, says Peter, don't be shamed. Verse 16. Do it with gentleness. That is, with humility, which is the mark of a heart truly touched by God's righteousness.

It's the same language he used in verse 4, of a wife's conduct. It's the manifestation of genuine respect, of genuine reverence for the Lord. We've seen again and again that word refers only to God.

It's fear of God that Peter means. And when you have fear of God, you will be someone who is humble and who speaks gently. In other words, he's saying to us, don't be shamed by falling away from God and his ways yourself in the midst of hostility.

Keep your own conscience clear so that you can speak genuine Christ-like witness from a pure heart, he says. Not the self-righteous condemnation of the Pharisee who is just a hypocrite.

[ 25 : 13 ] Remember, Jesus called them whitewashed tombs, all lovely and white and clean and proper on the outside, but inside rotting, fetid, putrid bones and decay.

Now, there is a kind of moralistic condemnatory speaking about the world that is just that. Alas, there are many modern-day Pharisees who claim to speak for the Christian church, very ready to speak, but not with a shred of gentleness or humility.

That shows they're just full of themselves, not full of the Lord Jesus Christ. And sadly, these things are often those which come to the fore about some of these sexual matters.

People picketing buildings with horrible banners, God hates faggots, and all that sort of disgraceful thing. Let me say, I have a great deal more respect personally for somebody like Peter Tatchell than I do for people who do those kinds of things, so-called Christians, even though I disagree with him about everything.

He's a brave man. That is not the approach that Peter is calling us to. It's not aggressive protest, it's not punch-ups that he wants, it's godly persuasion from pure hearts, full of gentleness, the gentleness of Christ.

[ 26 : 39 ] And if we suffer, he says in verse 17, let it be for our good behavior, not for us falling into evil. Least of all evil that we might have tried to convince ourselves is somehow good.

No, don't be shamed. Rather, so represent the Lord Jesus in his words and in his ways that opposition to you from this world is so clearly opposition to him that your opposers are condemned by their own conduct, verse 16, that they are put to shame.

I don't think he means here that they will feel ashamed of themselves and turn. He uses this phrase put to shame in chapter 2, verse 6, about the last judgment.

He says, believers will never be put to shame, but those whose hatred of Christ has been manifested in their hatred of Christ's people, they will be put to shame.

That's what Peter is saying. It's what Jesus says, remember, so clearly in Matthew chapter 25 in the story of the sheep and the goats. What you did or did not do to the least of these my brothers, said Jesus, you did to me.

[ 27 : 56 ] You showed your hatred of me in your hatred of them and by that you are condemned. So, verse 16 here is really the very opposite outcome of that in chapter 2, verse 12.

Do you remember there he said that some may see your good conduct and your witness and on the great day of visitation they'll glorify God because in fact they did respond to you and they repented and came to Christ.

But here Peter says alas, others on that day will be met with shame. They just reviled you. They did not repent.

See, the words and the witness of Christ's people to his gospel are always divisive, always divisive. in people's response to that witness.

The verdict of the last day is being brought visibly to light in the present day. So, verse 17 is a real warning to all.

[ 29 : 02 ] It's better to suffer now for doing good for righteousness sake under God's good hand of grace than to suffer forever for doing evil under God's terrible hand of judgment.

What did Jesus say? It's better to enter life crippled than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. So, don't be scared under fire for your hope.

Don't be silenced. And don't you be shamed, but go on being a consistent testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is authentic Christian conduct under fire.

And we can be consistent under fire in our public testimony to Christ because, Peter says, because we have confidence in the public triumph of Christ.

And that's where Peter grounds these instructions in verses 18 to 22. It's our authentic Christian confidence under fire. And it's all focused on confidence in the triumph of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 30 : 12 ] He tells us that suffering for Christ now means we will certainly be blessed by God forever. That we'll be saved, that we'll be brought home to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus which is already accomplished.

And that's why we mustn't fear. We can go on being confident in the triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now this is not an easy passage, certainly not on first sight and it's led over the years to all kinds of strange interpretations about what it means, the so-called harrowing of hell as though Jesus went to hell between his burial and his resurrection, led to all kinds of ideas about purgatory or even ideas that after death people have a second chance to hear the gospel all over again.

That is all a lot of nonsense. We don't have time to go into it in detail. I think that's perhaps just as well because actually if we keep our eye on Peter's main theme and follow his logic, it's much more easy.

These verses, look at them, they justify Peter's claim in verse 17 that it's better to suffer for doing good than for evil. And that is because, verse 18, for this path of suffering that Jesus followed did not end with suffering, but in the glorious triumph and vindication of his resurrection.

salvation. And so it will end for you, is his point. Because verse 18, Jesus died to bring you to God, to the same heavenly glory with him.

[ 31 : 51 ] And that is where he already is. Look at verse 22, he is at the right hand of God with all earth and heaven subject to him. Now that is Peter's main point. Do not lose sight of that.

Let me try and help us see it a little more clearly if I can. The focus is both on the final destination of Jesus' path through death and resurrection, and on the final declaration that that makes to the world.

The final destination of Jesus' path through death and resurrection is that he is living forever now at God's right hand. Verse 18, he suffered, was put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the spirit, and he went.

He went where? I'll jump down to verse 22 where the sequence is picked up again. Verse 21, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has went.

Pardon my grammar, but it is exactly the same word as in verse 19. He went where? Into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God with angels and authorities and powers, all spiritual beings subjected to him by his triumph.

[ 33 : 06 ] in his death and resurrection. That's the destination of the path of Jesus suffering on earth, and that is the destination of everyone who follows him in that path.

How can we be sure of that? Because that final destination is assured by the final declaration of Jesus' resurrection.

resurrection. Jesus' resurrection is a declaration by God, both about Jesus and about every creature in earth and heaven, alive and dead.

Remember, Paul says in Romans 1 that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead. That is, he is declared to be both Lord and Christ.

He is the one that God has set at his right hand to judge all his enemies. The picture of Psalm 110. He is the anointed son of Psalm 2, whom God has set as king over all earthly powers.

[ 34 : 19 ] That is what Peter himself declared in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ. He quotes from those Old Testament scriptures.

scriptures. Why? Because that is what the scriptures promised. And God proves it by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

He has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ, therefore you must repent, said Peter. Why? Because he is the judge of all the earth. And God's resurrection of him declares that judgment day has been announced.

That's what Peter preached to Cornelius in Acts chapter 10. He is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead. He says exactly those same words here down in chapter 4, verse 6.

He's judge of the living and the dead. And that is what verse 22 in our passage here means. He sits at God's right hand. He is declared the judge of earth and heaven. That's what the resurrection declares about Jesus.

[ 35 : 25 ] God has fixed the judge and the judgment day for heaven and earth. And he has given proof of it by raising Jesus from the dead as Paul says in Athens in Acts 17.



And because the resurrection declares that finally about Jesus, his resurrection also makes a declaration about every created being.

A declaration either of final justification in God's sight or of final judgment in God's sight.

Jesus' resurrection declares final judgment on all his enemies. Every dark power, verse 22, is subject to him, both men and angels.

And that explains verse 19, this odd verse. Jesus' resurrection declared final judgment upon every rebellious spirit in the heavens, even those going way, way back to the beginning of history, the time of Noah.

[ 36 : 34 ] Remember, Genesis 6 tells us that evil angels invaded the world of men and sinned with them and caused them to sin. Jesus' resurrection proclaims, it says here, declares their judgment forever.

That's what Peter's saying. But Jesus' death also wonderfully declares the justification, the saving of his friends, those he died for, to bring them to God and to glory.

Remember Paul in Romans 4 25, he was raised for our justification. So we have this assurance that if we trust in him, then like him, we also will be finally vindicated by our resurrection from the dead on the last day.

So you see, in God's final act of judgment upon sin, in the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, he finally declares two things, that his enemies are defeated forever, judged for their sin, and that his people are saved forever, justified from their sin, through the great substitution that verse 18 speaks of.

Do you see, he suffered uniquely, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us, not to grief forever, but that he might bring us to God forever.

[ 38 : 02 ] Just as the Passover's great judgment, when that happened, those who pledged themselves in covenant faith to God, they were saved from wrath by the blood of the lamb, the Passover lamb, their substitute.

And just like in the other great saving judgment of God on man in Noah's flood, when those who pledged themselves to God in covenant faith were saved in the midst of a great judgment upon the whole world in the ark of salvation.

Sometimes people have wondered what Noah's doing suddenly appearing in the middle of this passage here, but actually Jesus speaks about Noah and the judgment of that day as being a picture also of the last judgment to come.

Do you remember? And it may have actually been particularly opposite to Peter's first readers here since apparently the scholars tell us that in that part of Asia Minor, northern Turkey, Noah was a very well-known figure.

There were all sorts of stories about Noah. They even had Noah apparently on some of their coins. So it may be that that's why he's speaking about him here, but in any case the parallels are obvious, aren't they?

[ 39 : 11 ] Here they are surrounded by godlessness, surrounded by hostility, surrounded by mockery for their faith, just as Noah was in his day. And Noah heralded God's righteousness to his world, 2 Peter tells us that.

But they ignored him and they just reviled him. And many in that day did not obey God, just like the fallen angels. And in the end, God in his judgment destroyed them.

But, verse 20, do you see? A few who did pledge themselves to God and were saved through water, that is through God's great act of judgment upon sin, which both judged the disobedient and justified those who cast themselves on his promise by faith.

He saved them through water. And so now, says Peter in verse 21, you who also might feel like you're just a few, you're very isolated, you're reviled, you're slandered, but you who likewise have pledged yourselves to God in covenant faith, you also will be saved through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that is through God's great ultimate act of judgment upon sin, that judges sin forever and that justifies those who are Christ's forever.

So fear not, he says, he will bring you to God and you will be saved by your baptism, that is by your unashamed pledge of yourself to God in faith and faithfulness, despite all the suffering that it might very well bring upon you.

[ 40 : 51 ] And we don't in this country today understand that nearly so well as we should do. Many parts of the world today just to be baptized will guarantee your suffering, your physical beating.

We were hearing that just the other week about our brothers in India. But baptism saves you, says Peter. It doesn't destroy you.

Not by some magic, he says, not literally by the removal of filth from the flesh, not as though baptism somehow saves you once for all and guarantees you a ticket to heaven so that your conduct now is irrelevant.

He's saying the exact opposite of that. He's reminding them of what he's been saying all the way through the letter that they are to be true to their baptism.

You were purified, he says in chapter 1, through obedience to the truth of the gospel. And you must go on being true to the gospel that you believed, trusting in God's saving mercy in Christ, the mercy that has brought you cleansing.

[ 41 : 59 ] Not slipping back, not shirking under all the pressure and the slander and the suffering. You might feel very isolated, just a few, so weak.

But keep living your faith. Keep doing good and not evil, even if you suffer, even if you suffer unjustly, even when you want to give up.

Keep true to the true grace of God, says Peter. Stand firm in it, because this is the only path to the glory of God in Christ, the only path home to God forever.

But you're on it, and he will keep you on it. Friends, following Jesus today publicly in our culture is very hard, and I fear it's going to get harder still for our children and for our grandchildren.

And we will all be tempted very, very often to slip back into silence, in our personal witness and in our witness together as a church.

[ 43 : 16 ] We all get fearful, don't we? And church leaders, believe me, are not exempt from that. That's why in the next chapter Peter speaks especially to them. He knows that even strong leaders are very often fearful and touched by the sting of slander and insults and reviling, as we all are.

We need to help one another, not to be scared, not to be silenced, not to be shamed or to bring shame on our Lord.

We will keep our conduct under fire if we keep our confidence in the right place, not in ourselves, but where Peter points us, in the risen, living Jesus Christ, who is now at God's right hand, and whose risen life declares to us and to the world that we shall be saved, just as surely, as his enemies will be scattered.

If we stand firm under fire, if we stand in his true grace and are not moved from it. So it's very opposite that we come this morning to the Lord's table that proclaims to us his death until he comes as promised to bring us at last to God forever and to share in his risen life.

So we're going to go.