

Suffering People, 1Peter 3:8-22

Irresistible #6

◆**Intro:** Some years ago I received an email from a seminary classmate named Rod Gorter. He had gone to serve in the Ukraine. He wrote: "One touching experience I had when I came to Ukraine 3 years ago. I went to a church that was being built almost completely by volunteer labor. That congregation was planning a big celebration--for completion of the church and for its 50th anniversary. They had a big board with old pictures of all their former pastors. The people there went down the line and told one story after another about which pastors were shot, which ones were sent to Siberia or imprisoned, which ones had their families killed, and which ones simply disappeared. I don't think I will ever forget those rows of pictures--a small martyrs' hall of fame (so to speak)."

◆These men were obviously loved. These men were remembered long after their leaving. Why do you think that was? Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that all those people suffered severely to proclaim the same gospel message you and I are celebrating in this building today.

◆In the last six weeks we have been considering characteristics of people and churches that perhaps would convince people of the reality God rather than push them away. We've observed that the first Christians were 1) new covenant or "Jesus" People, 2) they were Better People than they were without God, 3) lovers of Insignificant People, 4) Sacrificial People. (you can dig into any of those on our website if you're curious.) Today we culminate with

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a final characteristic. They were Suffering People. Let's back up. Upon reading our text you will right away notice that ...

◆ **1. God wants his people to fill the world with his goodness.** We saw this earlier in our series. It's one of the reasons God has you on the earth in your generation, and your place - to, as scripture writers put it, bring the Kingdom of God into the Earth. But what does true goodness look like? Far from simply telling the early church to "love everyone", Peter carefully defines what love looks like with a whole lot of phrases, that one might even call commands, since the verb tense he uses is the imperative. Commands to

- ◆ live in harmony, unity, be compassion, be humble, v8

- ◆ do good, v9, 11, 13, 17

- ◆ suffering other people's evil, sacrifice your own self, 14, 17

- ◆ have no fear, v14

- ◆ have a verbal explanation ready to tell people why you follow Jesus. And be gentle and respectful about it. v15

◆ I count at least 10 commandments right there that directly mirror OT teaching. Peter is finishing a sermon he actually started back in chapter 2:11. That's why verse 8 starts with "Finally". It's his last point. He's already instructed the Christians to be submissive, law-abiding, good behavior-ed people under 1) government officials, 2) under masters/employers (if anyone here isn't a slave), 3) with their husbands & wives. Now he encourages them to have good behavior 4) even when they suffer for it.

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◆ I think you'd have to admit, it is a radical, maybe irresistible characteristic for people to willingly suffer for doing the right thing. We certainly don't come by it out of our own human nature. Know why? 'Cuz it ain't fair! Conventional wisdom stomps it's foot and declares, "That's not FAIR! Why should someone doing the right thing and be sent to Siberia for it? Why should someone who was being a good citizen let other people walk on them?" It's also not difficult to conclude that it's not worth it to do something just because it's right. (Have you ever thought that?) If you've know a friend or family member that was sent off to war in another country to defend the suffering from tyranny, and that person came back missing a leg – you just might conclude you don't care about people over there enough to be OK with someone in your family getting hurt for them. Sadly this is a common attitude. Don't get involved if it's dangerous or you might suffer. Surprisingly, it is a Christian teaching to do just that; stand for the good and right even if it hurts you. One has to wonder why? And here's where it gets encouraging!

◆2. **Goodness in the face of evil radiates the beauty of God!**

That's right. Goodness toward evil people is just like God!

Anyone can pretend to be nice, helpful, good when circumstances are favorable for them. It's when we return good for evil , or

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when you overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21), that people begin to wonder, because that is crazy different, isn't it?

◆Your study guide will bring this up this week. In the *Between Sessions #6* spend some time discussing these:

◆When was the last time someone asked you about your goodness *in the face of evil*?

◆When was the last time someone asked about your hopefulness *when all seemed lost*?

◆When was the last time someone asked you about your patience *in a chaotic scene*?

◆When was the last time someone asked about your gentleness *when someone was rude*?

◆The common denominator in all those questions, and also how people know God is at work, is when you do a particular good specifically *in contrast with the opposite circumstance*. If any of those things actually happen, if you actually live that way, people down deep know something is up, because most people simply cannot do it. Guess what? The Spirit of Jesus can make you that way.

◆This I think is also key to the irresistibility of the early church, for the Christians of the first centuries were in fact greatly persecuted: burned as lamps during Caesar's garden parties, and along the Apian Way; thrown to lions and wild dogs in the Roman arena where they would be ripped and

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chewed to death while people ate popcorn and watched for sport (well if they had popcorn...).



◆Suffering and still giving love. Could it be that this is why Christians aren't always so attractive in today's America. We simply don't need to suffer much. And we don't take on suffering we don't need. We have everything in comparison with the rest of the globe. And when we share or give, it's really doesn't hurt us at all. We do it out of excess usually.

◆Now you may not have your head crushed in a vice for being a Christian, as has happened in Armenia. But there are other degrees of persecution that you could face for doing the right thing. How willing are you to take on suffering for the good. Would you lovingly stand for God's way in the face of

◆Ridicule? Pressure to conform? Loss of your job? Mob violence? Loss of opportunity? These are all opportunities for you to actually display the love of God in a negative circumstance.

◆Nijole Sadunaite was a Lithuanian Christian who was severely persecuted for her faith under Communism. Arrested in 1974 for publishing underground reports of the persecution of Christians throughout the Soviet bloc, she was eventually exiled to Siberia. A book about her, entitled *A Radiance in the Gulag*, reveals her character: she was a "radiance." How so?

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◆ Since Nijole's suffering became known by various Christian organizations in the West, a large number of believers knew of her plight. Consequently, Nijole received many care packages while she was in exile. Although it was against the law, the Communist guards made her pay to receive these packages. Prisoners in exile had to work, and they received a starvation wage of a meager 75 rubles per month. Their housing cost 20 rubles, and the prisoners were made to pay sometimes over 45 rubles to accept any packages sent to them. But time after time, Nijole accepted these packages, paid for them, and then re-packaged them and mailed them to Christians in other parts of the Soviet bloc whom she believed were suffering worse than she was.

◆ The Communist guards and postal officials could not make any sense out of this. It was a kindness and a sacrifice that utterly dumbfounded them. That's because it wasn't earthly, but of heaven. Now for a dose of encouragement!

◆ **3. Goodness in the face of evil ultimately results in victory because...** (his is also a theme in Peter's sermon) **Jesus is the ultimate victor.** Jesus is resurrected and alive (18). He declared his victory even in the spirit realm (19-20). And just like God washed the whole world in Noah's day, Jesus' resurrection is another washing off of sin (20-21). The water of baptism symbolizes that Jesus is the one who washes sins off! Your baptism/God's mark puts you in the house of the Victor.

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Finally, all spirituals powers are in submission to Christ, the Victor (22) **This** is why Peter can confidently promise blessing to Jesus' followers.

◆v9, 10, 14.

◆But more than that. Peter tells us why this is a spiritual principle. Suffering to absorb evil and to bring goodness is the very nature of God. I told you Peter started his sermon in chapter 2. Here's a piece of it.

◆*1 Peter 2:20-21 But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example.*

◆In spiritual economy, taking another's wounds brings healing.

◆1 Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

◆It's repeated in our text:

◆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,

◆**Conclusion:** The message is in the contrast. Jesus came down to bring us up. Jesus got dirty to make us clean. Jesus became human to make us God's forever kids. Jesus suffered to heal our woundedness, (sin). Jesus' love destroys our hate. Christ died, but resurrected anyway! You see? The irresistibility of Christians comes only from the unstoppable irresistibility of Christ.

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◆ Which brings us to one final thought about our becoming Irresistible in the world. Your testimony.

◆ [Please make a note; there are prompts in your study guide on page 87 for writing down what is essentially your testimony. It basically helps you think through the change Jesus has facilitated in your life. If you do nothing else in the small group guide, try to do this and share it with the others in your group! If you happened to grow up always knowing about Jesus, don't stumble over the idea of "before/after I met Jesus." Just change it to "when I ignore Jesus..." or "without/with Jesus I..."]

◆ My real testimony should point to the contrast Jesus makes in me. (V15) This is irresistible. Teaching your children that there is a holy book that you don't read is no testimony. Making your kids take Bible classes when you don't study it, is no testimony. Telling your friends there is a someone out there they can pray to, when you don't talk to that someone, and can't think of a single time he answered you -is no testimony. Attending church is not a testimony. Interacting with daily with God and discovering the change/contrast he makes in you -that is your testimony, and that is more irresistible than telling someone what they should or shouldn't do.