

09-10-05 AM - Living for Blessing - 1 Peter 3:8-22

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, as many of you know, we moved to Brisbane as a family in late 1995. And when we were in Brisbane, we made many, many great friends, both within the Christian community and also outside of it.
- You see, being a Christian doesn't mean that we can't have quality non-Christian friendships. But some people, some institutions will react quite negatively to us if we seek to live a life that's pleasing to God.
- And that was the reality for the Apostle Peter's readers in the first century scattered through Asia Minor, which we know today as modern Turkey. And if you've got your Bibles open there, we'll be looking at the passage on page 985.
- But in the first chapter, in verse 6, Peter acknowledges that these Christians have indeed suffered various trials. Well, I've certainly encountered antagonism in the workplace for being a Christian.
- Not everywhere, not by everyone, but by some. In Melbourne, and also in that place that's described as beautiful one day and perfect the next.
- [1 : 1 4] Of course, that's describing the weather and not the people. Sometimes that antagonism has been direct. Probably more often it's been indirect. Whether direct or indirect, I've found it painful.
- But various types of hostility shouldn't surprise us if we're members of the Kingdom of God living in a sinful, hostile world. But what about within the Church itself?
- Remember back in chapter 2, verse 11, Peter wrote these words, Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles, that is, as Christians living in an alien world, abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.
- We each know as believers that there is a battle that rages within us because we haven't as yet been perfected in God's presence. And unfortunately, churches sometimes display those characteristics when believers in the body of Christ don't follow God's instruction as given to the Apostle Peter again in chapter 1, verse 14.
- Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.
- [2 : 3 7] For it's written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. See, even in Peter Beattie's Paradise, Christians don't always submit to such clear instruction in God's Word.
- Recall that during our stay in Brisbane, we quite regularly, semi-regularly, heard accounts of a church whose behaviour was, well, simply it was consistently un-Christ-like.
- In fact, this church was a bit like a graveyard for ministers. The power brokers in this church would nearly literally eat up and spit out one minister after another.
- We, in fact, knew a young man. He was the father of a disabled child who went there as his first ministry appointment. And this was some baptism of fire.
- I mean, what dishonour to the name of Christ. What a stunningly bad witness and ammunition for the small, surrounding, watching town community.

[3 : 41] So Peter says to the community of believers, scattered through Asia Minor, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart and a humble mind.

And if you've been with us in recent weeks, you recall that we've been looking at Peter's instructions on living as a Christian. The messages that Rob's been bringing to us, conducting ourselves in holiness in a variety of spheres of life, like our behaviour living under government authority, our behaviour in the workplace, and then what happens in our marriage relationships.

And now, today, as we look at this passage, and firstly the section verses 8 to 12, Peter concludes the section that was begun, in fact, back in verse 11 of chapter 2.

And he pulls together the qualities of character that are needed to sustain the Christian community as the Christian community responds in a godly way to the hostility of an unbelieving society.

Look with me then at page 95, verse 8. Because Peter starts off and he says, finally, all of you. You see, he's addressing this whole compass, this whole believing community, through Asia Minor.

[4 : 58] Not just wives, not just husbands, not just slaves, the whole community. The Christian community simply needs to be a place of support. It needs to be a refuge.

But in order for it to be that, it needs to have certain characteristics. And so Peter writes, finally, all of you have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart and a humble mind.

Five characteristics. Harmony. Harmony. Sympathy. Brotherly and sisterly love. Tender hearts. And humility. When we think about those instructions, I'm sure you agree with me, it's easy to see that if we exhibit those, we'll have smooth relationships within the church.

More than that, we'll have a powerful witness to a watching world. And these instructions, they apply to every grouping of believers, every community of believers.

See, the Holy Spirit wouldn't have inspired Peter to write these words if it wasn't the unfortunate reality. The churches are often prone to division and dissension.

[6 : 11] So the Lord's call to these suffering believers in first century Asian minor, the Lord's call to us as believers gathered here at Holy Trinity Doncaster is be harmonious.

Care deeply about the needs, the sorrows, the joys of each other. Love one another as brothers and sisters. Friends, we're members of the same family. Be compassionate to those who are experiencing pain and be of a humble mind.

A good test, I think, of whether we've got a humble mind is simply, are we seeing others as more important than ourselves? I wonder then as we think, excuse me, even of that first verse, I'll have a decent cough and then we'll be right.

I knew that would get a response from Brendan. I wonder then as we think of that first eight and we think about us as a community of believers here, how we would stand against those instructions.

I'm not certainly the arbiter of that. My observation through the course of this year is that I believe that we regularly exhibit in this community those sorts of traits. But in light of our approaching annual meeting in November, the words of one commentator that I was reading this week caught my attention.

[7 : 33] He says, if yours is a church that has a members role and convenes business meetings, you'll know that there are always more potential dangers at that meeting than at any other event in the calendar of the church.

Words, I suspect, that have come from considerable experience on behalf of this person. Peter says, have unity of spirit, be sympathetic, love one another, have a tender heart and be humble.

And keep in mind that what Peter's doing here, he's concluding his remarks that he began back in chapter 2, verse 11. As followers of the Lord Jesus, we need to deal with sin.

We need to conduct ourselves in holiness. Some ways, easy words, but what if evil is propagated against us?

What if we're abused? What if we're abused psychologically? What if we are actually abused physically? I don't know about you, but I actually find it reasonably difficult to respond graciously in those sorts of situations.

[8 : 42] Soon after I became a Christian, I was reading 1 Peter, and the verses in chapter 2 have always just had a very special place in my heart. In verse 23, Peter writes, When Jesus was abused, he did not return abuse.

When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. More than that, Jesus prayed for his murderers.

Father, forgive them. That's our leader's response.

That's the approach that the Lord Jesus took even on the cross. And so Peter says in verse 9, Don't repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but on the contrary, repay with a blessing.

And that little expression there, repay with a blessing, means ask God to show his grace, to show his favour on those who respond badly to us, who oppose us, who perhaps injure us in a variety of ways.

[9 : 54] That's kind of a stunning instruction, isn't it? Repay with blessing. Sometimes when opposition comes because of our stand for Christ, I think it's fair to say that each of us, and certainly that's been the case in my life, we don't always respond in a Christ-like manner.

In fact, we respond in a fleshly manner. And so the self-control that we need in those situations is in fact a supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit. You might remember Jesus' words, Love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. Carl was a young soldier. He was a Christian.

He was living in army barracks. And each night before he'd go off to sleep, he'd read his Bible and he'd pray. There was a soldier just over in the other bunk in the barracks who just continued to heap insult and abuse on young Carl.

One night, in fact, the army boots were thrown at young Carl, the Christian soldier. The next morning, this hostile soldier, he woke up and he found his boots, in fact, were at the end of his bed.

[11 : 11] They were cleaned, they were polished, and they were ready for inspection. And over time in those army barracks, a number of the soldiers became Christians.

They'd seen blessing being returned for insult. And at the end of verse 9 we read that Christians are called to bless those who oppose us so that we will inherit a blessing.

That is, life in Christ, eternal life, our heavenly inheritance. I want you to note carefully that Peter doesn't say that we will earn God's blessing.

He says we'll inherit it. And you recall as Paul preached to us on the first chapter some weeks back, that Peter makes it very clear, as it's clear throughout Scripture, that we're saved by God's grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We don't earn it. We inherit it. But good works are the evidence that we are in fact truly saved.

[12 : 19] Well, verses 10 to 12 are closely tied to verse 9 and these verses come out of Psalm 34. And Peter just hasn't flicked through the Psalter and picked out a psalm at random.

In Psalm 34, the psalmist reminds his readers that the Lord rescues those who suffer, that the Lord judges the wicked. And in the meantime, the righteous display their trust, they display their hope in the Lord by doing two things, by renouncing evil and pursuing what is good.

If you just think about that message of the psalm, you'll see immediately that they're some of the great themes that Peter's already been talking about in his first letter. Notice in verse 10 that Peter speaks of life and he speaks of good days.

And for Peter, these terms most likely refer to our inheritance in heaven, not our earthly existence. You see, Peter wasn't expecting that these hurting Christians who were alienated, who were suffering verbal abuse, perhaps even violence, that all of a sudden that life would just become a bed of roses or to use another metaphor that they would just simply continue to go through this life as a velvet carpet ride.

Not at all. What Peter's doing, he's motivating his readers. The Holy Spirit is motivating those readers. The Holy Spirit is motivating us today as we read God's Word.

[13 : 52] Look to your inheritance. It's kept in heaven for you. You might remember a few weeks ago that Paul, and speaking of apostles, we're not speaking of the apostle Paul, we're speaking of Paul, he said to us, you won't be a bunny if you put all your eggs in Jesus' basket.

It's real, it's guaranteed, and it won't fade or fail. Look to your inheritance, live holy lives in the face of opposition.

And so, Peter having focused on the godly behaviour that's necessary in different spheres of life, from verse 13 on, and in fact, his focus now all the way into chapter 4, and we're going to look at that in two weeks' time, his focus is very directly on the unjust suffering of Christians.

And we're looking at this last part of chapter 3 today, and a good way to remember this section is just broken into two parts. Verses 13 to 17 speaks of the fact that suffering is the pathway to blessing, don't fear it.

And 18 to 22 says that suffering was the pathway to blessing and triumph for Christ. Well, in verse 12, Peter, when he quoted Psalm 34, stated, the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

[15 : 17] And he immediately goes on into verse 13 and says, and so, who will harm you if you're eager to do what is good? It's a rhetorical question. You see, we have this heavenly inheritance.

It's being kept by God for every believer. And this promise of our inheritance, it guarantees, it absolutely guarantees that the distresses of this life are not the final word.

That's a tremendous message of comfort, isn't it? It's a great message of encouragement, motivation, because the reality is suffering for Christ is actually never far away from any believer, any follower of the Lord Jesus.

It's always a threat, it can erupt at any time. But having said that, friends, be careful that we don't develop a martyr complex.

That is, that we don't take every offence as actually being persecution. But God's call is clearly to persevere in godly living, suffering for our faith is really at worst it's only temporary.

[16 : 32] and God's vindication is for all of eternity. And Peter, when he gets to verse 14, he effectively just restates what he said in verse 13.

But even if you do suffer for doing what's right, you're blessed. That is, as believers, you live under God's blessing. And I suspect that Peter is very much harking back to the Lord's words in Matthew 5.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. You see, for Peter, living for Christ, suffering for him is nothing less than a blessing.

It's, in fact, a sign of God's favour. It's evidence of our salvation. And so it's then given that reality that Peter simply gives two instructions.

First of all, he gives a negative instruction, then he gives a positive. And the negative is just two very basic commands. What does he say? Don't fear, don't be intimidated.

[17 : 37] Don't fear, don't be intimidated. And then the positive side, at the beginning of verse 15, in your hearts, sanctify, or set apart, Christ as Lord.

that is, remain faithful to Christ. And heart, of course, is being used there in the sense of the origin of human behaviour. So, we remain faithful to Christ, demonstrating Christ-likeness in our response to opposition.

And if you're following the text there, you'll see that that last part of verse 15 is often pulled out of chapter 3, somewhat in isolation of the context of the passage.

And having said that, it is good for us always to be ready to give a defence for, to give an explanation of the hope that we have. But I want us this morning very much to remember the context of which this rather famous verse is spoken of so regularly.

See, the context is when people see your godly life, when people see that our response to trials is due to our hope in God, not our earthly circumstances or any material possessions, when they see that, they'll take notice.

[18 : 59] In fact, some might even ask you about your hope. I wonder if you've had that experience. If you've had, I'm sure you'll agree with me, it's a great privilege.

But Peter warns us, as you respond, don't respond harshly. Don't defend your faith by attacking your opponents. He says, you need to respond in gentleness, gentleness towards other people and reverence before God himself.

We live in the presence of God. Hence, we must not respond in anger with a sense of revenge in a sinful way when we're called to defend our hope.

Christians that will live in fear and humility before God so that as we read in verse 16 when you're maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

Now, I think it's fair to say that some antagonists in this life may take notice of your good conduct. But Peter's focus here in the context is very much on the end side, the last day of judgment.

[20 : 15] And on the last day, the opponents of Christ will be shamed and they'll be shamed by who? By God himself. And they'll be compelled to acknowledge that believers live righteously.

I wonder how much these words connect with us. I suspect they connect very deeply with the majority, in fact, of Christians around the world who suffer great persecution in many of the countries that have been spoken of this morning in that region of the world by Andrew and Helen, in countries that last night suffered devastating earthquakes through Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Those who have brought great opposition will be compelled to acknowledge that believers lived righteously. But Peter's covering lots of bases here because in verse 17 he's saying, but listen, be sure that you suffer for living righteously not because you yourself have done evil.

You see, we have to guard against a mindset that simply says, well, all of the suffering that's come my way in the sense of evil coming against us is an indication of our righteousness.

We're sinners that are saved by grace. And if we don't go back and repent and turn around from our sinful desires and then the actions that flow out of those sinful desires in our hearts, then in fact some of our suffering may be deserved because of our sins.

[21 : 52] Opposition, if it comes to us, should come to us because of our good behaviour, not because of our sinful way of life. And so we've seen then in verses 13 to 17 that there is no need to fear suffering.

it's the pathway to blessing. And now Peter comes to verses 18 to 22 and he argues that Christ also travelled on this pathway and it was a pathway from suffering, in fact, through to glory.

Suffering for our faith isn't a sign of God's displeasure. Those who suffer for Christ in fact will be glorified just as he was. Now when we come to these verses I need to very quickly say these are very challenging and you can pick up commentaries and there will be 6, 8, 10 pages just devoted to the intricacies of these verses.

I'm not going to go through that detail with you this morning but I do want you to see and not miss where these verses sit in the overall context of the chapter. As followers of Christ we know that suffering is not the final word.

And maybe you've been your home group or in your own time you're reading through such a commentary and you're getting bogged down. Remember the big point of these verses 18 to 22. We, believers in Christ, we share the same destiny as the Lord and the Lord suffered and secured victory over all hostile powers.

[23 : 26] But I want to just as we finish show you three big points that come out of these verses 18 to 22. The first one is just a marvellous verse of scripture Christ suffered for the unrighteous to bring you to God.

That is such a clear explanation of Christ's death. Look what's just packed into those little words. Christ suffered, Christ died for sinners.

Christ died as a substitute for us. He bore our punishment. His death was once for all.

That stunningly marvellous phrase so often used in the book of Hebrews. Once for all, definitive, unique, never to be repeated, never needing to be repeated.

And the ultimate purpose was to bring you, was to bring me to God. Sinful men, sinful women reconciled to a holy God. What a great verse.

[24 : 31] Christ suffered for the unrighteous to bring you to God. And then in verses 18 to 19, Peter makes another big point and it's simply this.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was raised from the dead and he proclaimed victory over demonic spirits. He was raised from the dead and proclaimed victory.

And then in verse 22, the third main point. Jesus is now exalted on high. He's exalted as the resurrected, as the ascended Lord and he has subjected all demonic powers to himself.

Well, as believers, as followers of Christ, in some ways, we might see ourselves as a little bit like Noah. We're an embattled group. in a hostile world.

Maybe we don't feel that way so much in Australia now. You probably don't have to be a prophet to see an increasing trend even in our own community. But we, we can be sure, just like Noah, that our future is secure when judgment comes.

[25 : 43] And so Peter, having used this example of Noah, he then uses water at the end of verse 20 to provide the link with baptism. And he says, just as water saved Noah and his family by bearing them above the flood, so water in the form of baptism saves us now.

But note, if you like, immediately that Peter makes it clear that it's not some magical quality in the water itself. It's what the water symbolises. It's repentance towards God.

It's faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. And after the resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven and that is a great message of encouragement.

This would have been marvellous encouragement to these suffering people scattered through what we know today as Turkey. I trust its motivation for each one of us who are gathered here, who name the name of Christ, a motivation to live godly lives, yes, even in the face of opposition.

Live for blessing, the blessing of an internal inheritance. Christians. And so as we conclude, the question that comes to each one of us is, what are you living for?

[27 : 04] What is it that you're living for? On Friday, the Australian newspaper launched a wonderfully glossy insert.

It's called Wish. You can buy the Australian once a month if you don't regularly do it. And on the Friday, this magazine comes out. This is a very expensive, very glossy production.

It's full of success stories. If you've got enough money to buy a Scottish castle, you'll relate to some of the stories in this book. And there are some great ads, and there are ads of lots of luxury items.

And the editor-in-chief writes, and he describes this as a precious resource for readers wanting to be enriched in their life. And the aim of this magazine, this monthly magazine, seems to be for people to find fulfilment in life.

And in this inaugural edition, last Friday, there's a poll. It's a poll that was conducted on the internet over the last couple of months. 50 ways, 50 of the most popular ways that people have found to enrich their lives.

[28 : 07] Things like swimming with whales, visiting Antarctica. My wife will enjoy this. Slow cooking in Tuscany. I mean, there are 50 ways.

50 ways. And you can go through that list, borrow my copy if you like, and you will find nothing, nothing in that list of 50 that speaks about a moment by moment personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the living God, the maker of heaven and earth.

There's no mention of the extraordinary privilege of being a follower of Jesus Christ. And yes, as a follower of Jesus Christ, you will face opposition if you're following the Lord in some form at some time, maybe multiple times.

And Peter says, don't fear, don't be intimidated, but live as God's people, live in unity, be sympathetic to one another, love one another, have tender hearts and a humble disposition.

salvation. We just simply sum that up in saying, live for blessing. So that's God's word to me, and that's God's word to each one of us as we gather here this morning as God's people.

[29 : 28] Amen.