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Living as Exiles in a Hostile World – The Epistle of 1 Peter

Part 23 – The Wicked Will Hear Christ Preach to Them One More Time

January 22, 2017

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 3:12 - 22

Scripture Reading: 2 Thess 1

1 Peter 3:12-17 For 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." (13) Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? (14) But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, (15) but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, 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, (16) having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (17) For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

1 Peter 3:18-22 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, (19) in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, (20) 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. (21) Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (22) who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

We have two large portions of Peter's letter to consider this morning, though we will not be able to look at them in real detail and will need to return to them again next week. The second one, verses 18-22 has some particularly difficult portions that have been the subject of much discussion, even all through the history of the church.

This morning, we are going to consider two major, very practical doctrines drawn from these two sections of 1 Peter 3 –

1. Why it is vital for the Christian to keep a good conscience
2. The wicked will hear Christ preach to them one last time – not for their salvation, but for their final condemnation.

The Christian and a Good Conscience

Listen again to our first section:

1 Peter 3:12-17 For 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." (13) Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? (14) But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be

troubled, (15) but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, 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, (16) **having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.** (17) For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

God created human beings with a *conscience*. It is a wonderful gift, and a terrible prosecutor meant to drive a person to repentance. Our conscience can *commend* us, or it can *condemn* us.

Romans 2:14-16 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. (15) They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them (16) on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

The conscience is, we might say, that internal witness for the defense OR for the prosecution which all human beings have. How does a person like what we call a *psychopath* come to the point of apparently having no

conscience? Perhaps Paul gives us some insight into that mystery as well

Romans 1:28-32 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. (29) They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, (30) slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, (31) foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (32) Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

But in regard to the Christian, the Bible tells us more than once that a wonderful and remarkable thing happens when the Lord saves us and renews our minds:

1 Timothy 1:5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a **good conscience** and a sincere faith.

Hebrews 9:14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, **purify our**

conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, **with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience** and our bodies washed with pure water.

Now, I do not pretend to grasp completely all of these truths. They are profound. But it is clear that when the Lord saves us, he cleanses our conscience. He removes the condemning voice because in Christ He has dealt with the demands of the Law against us. *There is therefore now, NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

And therefore, not only does the Christian have a cleansed conscience, but we are instructed to carefully guard it. To keep it. And this is what Peter wrote about to us-

(15) but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, 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, (16) **having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.** (17) For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

This is what we want to talk about now. The importance of the Christian keeping a good conscience. What does it mean and why is it so important?

First, *keeping a good conscience means being real and authentic. We are to hold to our faith genuinely.* You see this in a Paul's words about the qualifications for an officer in the church -

1 Timothy 3:9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

This means not being a hypocrite. Not pretending. The visible church has far, far too many such people – dressed in wool but in fact wolves.

Second, *keeping a good conscience means obeying the Lord, turning away from sin, walking in righteousness.*

This is vital. It is fundamental to our ability to function as Christ's people and to have credibility in a world that hates Christ. A good conscience, Peter says, puts the revilers of Christ to shame. It discredits them and shows their accusations to be false. Christians, says Peter, will suffer in this world. BUT, we must make certain that we suffer for doing right, for obeying Christ, rather than simply reaping a harvest due for sin.

Now, in this matter of us keeping a good conscience, we must consider a favorite tactic of Satan –

Revelation 12:10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

The accuser. Follow the devil's activities through the history of creation and you will find him accusing God, accusing God's people. *We must be sure not to give him a basis for accusing us.* A violated conscience *dis-empowers* the Christian. It gives ammunition to the enemy to fire at us. It robs us of our confidence.

Psalms 32:1-5 **A Maskil of David.** Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. (2) Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. (3) For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. (4) For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah. (5) I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions

to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

The Lord forgives His people when we repent and confess in Christ. But it is always better to never sin in the first place. Every Christian will sooner or later experience the pangs of conscience reminding he or she of some past sin. I don't know if Satan is involved in that accusing or not, but I suspect he is. And this is a chief reason Peter writes here as he does -

(15) but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, 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, (16) **having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.** (17) For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Let's move on then to a second vital truth that Peter gives us here -

- **The wicked will hear Christ preach to them one last time – not for their salvation, but for their final condemnation.**

Listen again to this rather intricate and difficult part of this third chapter –

1 Peter 3:18-22 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

(19) in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, (20) 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.

(21) Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (22) who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Listen to this portion of the London Confession of Faith (from chapter 32)

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Paragraph 1. God has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, by Jesus Christ;¹ to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father; in which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged,² but likewise all persons that have lived upon the earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an

account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.**3**

1 Acts 17:31; John 5:22,27

2 1 Cor. 6:3; Jude 6

3 2 Cor. 5:10; Eccles. 12:14; Matt. 12:36; Rom. 14:10,12; Matt. 25:32-46

Paragraph 2. The end of God's appointing this day, is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of his justice, in the eternal damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient;**4** for then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and glory with everlasting rewards, in the presence of the Lord; but the wicked, who do not know God, and do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast aside into everlasting torments,**5** and punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.**6**

4 Rom. 9:22,23

5 Matt. 25:21,34; 2 Tim. 4:8

6 Matt. 25:46; Mark 9:48; 2 Thess. 1:7-10

Do you see the two reasons God is glorified at the final judgment? For His *mercy* in our salvation, and for His *justice* in His condemnation of the

wicked. The gospel concerns BOTH truths.

John 3:16-18 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (17) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

(18) Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

See it? A dual message preached. Salvation for all who believe. Condemnation and judgment for all who refuse to bend the knee to Christ. And this is ALL good news, because it is all to the glory of God – to His glorious justice AND to His glorious justice.

Many professing Christians today do not believe this, and in fact do not even like it.

I am learning to do the same. I practiced an exposure of evil last week with one who chooses to live blindly. The response back to me was her attempt to verbally discredit me from many angles. I

did not back down, but stated I anticipated her response before I spoke. I explained my boldness was intentional because I knew she would not be hearing truth from anyone else in this matter. She also asked if I could train myself to speak in a less bold manner. My reply, "On this subject, no, because there is fire in my bones".

The subject was a 'neighborhood' minister who is caught having spiritually, sexually, emotionally abused selected women throughout many years as a senior minister. It is now out in the open.

Her comment that she knew he loved Jesus ignited my fire.

Understand? That lady was denying the gospel because she was blacking out half of it. She does not find God's justice glorious. She does not find God glorious. She detests this –

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— (6) since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, (7) and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels (8) in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do

not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, (10) when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Peter tells us that Jesus preached to spirits in prison. Look again at vs 18-20:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

(19) in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, (20) 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.

This is mysterious, but let me suggest what it is telling us.

After Christ died on the cross, and before His bodily resurrection, He in spirit went to the place (prison) where the wicked and ungodly await their final resurrection and judgment. He "proclaimed" to them.

Who are these spirits? Peter tells us. They are the people who, in their time in this world, rejected God's command to repent and to turn to Christ.

Peter uses the group who mocked prior to the flood while Noah was building the ark, which is a type and picture of Christ. They had the gospel proclaimed to them by Noah and by the ark itself, but they would not repent. I suspect that this group is not the only one that Christ preached to but is representative of all the wicked who died prior to the cross.

So Christ went to them in their prison (Hades?) and preached again to them, showing them that HE is what the ark was pointing to all along, but they would not have Him.

Christ proclaims His gospel then to the wicked, for His glory, showing them that He is indeed Lord, that He did warn them and call them to be saved, but they would not and therefore He is perfectly righteous and just in sending them to hell.

It is similar to what Abraham told the rich man in Hades –

Luke 16:22-31 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, (23) and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw

Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. (24) And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' (25) But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. (26) And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' (27) And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— (28) for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' (29) But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' (30) And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' (31) He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

If you think about this carefully, you will see that this is the same pattern played out over and over in Scripture. The two messages, you might say, of the gospel. The glorious grace of God in salvation and the glorious justice of God in condemnation.

Peter's next words seem to confirm this –

(21) Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (22) who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

This in fact could be the very “proclamation” Jesus made to the spirits in prison, only in the sense of something like this – *I am the baptism which could have saved you, just as the ark would have brought you through the flood of judgment. You see My resurrection and My ascension to the right hand of My Father. But you are condemned because you hated Me, and your condemnation is just, which you now must admit yourself.*”

Listen to the OT Commentary by G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson on this –

“However one decides what is meant by Christ making proclamation to the imprisoned spirits, the flood in the days of Noah is a type of God’s catastrophic judgment after a long period of self-restraining and patience with respect to the anarchic rebels. But the flood waters also ‘save’ Noah and his family, thus becoming a type of

Christian baptism, which regularly stands as a symbol of salvation.

The same flood waters that destroyed many saved the few; the same visitation that brings catastrophic judgment on unrepentant sinners brings glorious salvation to the relatively few in Asia Minor [in Peter’s day]. Even when the numbers are small, God is perfectly able and willing to save his people.

The pagans of Noah’s time did not repent, and it should come as no surprise that many in the first century will similarly remain unrepentant.

In other words, the reference to Noah and his family, not least the mention of small numbers, is meant to be a substantial encouragement to small numbers of believers in Christ Jesus who are facing ridicule from unbelievers in their own time. After all, they experience grace from the same God who showed grace to Noah.”

And that should all be wonderful encouragement to us here.