

## Hope PCA Sermon: February 25, 2024

### *1 Peter 3:8-12 "Called to Bless"*

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Well, this morning we continue in our examination, our study of, our learning from Peter's first letter to the church. We're in chapter three, coming to the end of this longer section about relationships in life, coming now to relationships within the church. So if you would, in honor of the reading of God's word, if you would please stand if you're able. We will hear this morning from 1 Peter 3, verses 8-12. This is the very living word of our living God.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. <sup>9</sup> Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. <sup>10</sup> For

“Whoever desires to love life  
and see good days,  
let him keep his tongue from evil  
and his lips from speaking deceit;  
<sup>11</sup> let him turn away from evil and do good;  
let him seek peace and pursue it.  
<sup>12</sup> 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.”

So in this reading from God's holy, infallible, inerrant word, may it be written upon our hearts, may it bear fruit in our lives. Please be seated. Let me pray once again briefly for us as we come to the Word.

Our Father, You have made a promise that when Your Word goes out, it does not return to You void or empty. Rather, it goes out and is successful in the things for which You have sent it. May that be true here this morning. May it be your Word that goes out and may that Word indeed be very successful in the things for which you have sent us. Again, we ask that we might get a glimpse of that as your people, that we might praise you and give you glory for the great work that you do in and through Jesus. In his name we pray, amen.

Back in the Old Testament, in 1 Samuel, David was going on until he became king. In that chapter, David is once again fleeing from King Saul. King Saul again is trying to kill David. And David ends up in all places in Gath, a Philistine city, where a man named Achish, sometimes called Abimelech, is the king. Now Gath, of course, is where Goliath was from, whom David killed. And the king's servants in Gath remember. And they remember what was sung about David: that while Saul killed his thousands, David has killed his tens of thousands.

David hears this talk and becomes very, very afraid. What does he do? What's he going to do? You may remember the story. He begins acting crazy, insane. He leaves marks on the gate, and

we think probably he was scratching it somehow. Leaves marks on the city gates. He lets the drool run down his beard. He's acting like a fool. The king is astonished and disturbed by this behavior and expels David from the city. And he ends up in another place of refuge for him, the cave of Adullam. It's a great story. It's a story that speaks of David's cleverness, how inventive he could be even under duress. It's quite impressive. And he must have had some pretty decent acting chops to pull that off. Now what's interesting is David writes Psalm 34 in the aftermath of this experience. It's a psalm of praise and thanksgiving that credits God with David's escape from the Philistines. David doesn't take the credit. He gives credit, so he gives praise and thanks to God.

Why do I bring this up? Well, Peter quotes from this psalm. In this passage, verses 10 through 12. They're a direct quote from Psalm 34, verses 12 through 16. Peter's also already referred to this psalm back in chapter 2 verse 3, where in the lead up to those verses, he calls upon us to put away sinful behavior, to crave instead the pure milk (pure spiritual milk, he calls it), so that we can grow into salvation. And then he says in verse 3: if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. He's calling to mind there Psalm 34 verse 8, where David says, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good." And maybe Psalm 34 was particularly easy for Peter to remember. It's an acrostic psalm. Each verse begins with a successive letter from the Hebrew alphabet. But Psalm 34 is also very, very relevant to what Peter is teaching. To whom are we to turn when times are difficult? When opposition arises to cause difficulty and persecution and suffering, do we turn to ourselves or do we turn to God?

This passage, beginning in verse 8 of chapter 3, is the final section of what many call a section on household codes, rules that existed in the culture back then for how to manage relationships with various people in society. And for Peter, he's teaching us about how to manage those relationships even in the midst of suffering and persecution. But it also continues that theme that we just heard from in the opening verses of chapter 2. Put off that old man of sin. Put on the new creation in Christ. Doing this is appropriate for those who have indeed tasted that the Lord is good.

Also, for the second time in this long section that begins back at chapter 2 verse 13, Peter points us to what God is calling us to as followers of Jesus Christ. Look back at chapter 2 verse 21. He's called us to suffer and endure, and that this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. Why? Because Christ suffered for you, leaving us an example to follow in His steps. And we talked about the exactness of that example, like the letters that you're to trace over to learn how to write, how we're to step in the very steps of the One who is providing us an example. carefully, precisely.

Now here in chapter 3 verse 9 he says we are called to bless rather than repay evil with evil or reviling with reviling. Reviling insults, insult with insult. Called to suffer, called to bless. In other words, it's not enough just to endure suffering, but in the midst of that suffering to bless those who are the cause of that suffering. This is what we're called to as Christians. That's different. That is not the world around us and their attitude.

We'll talk about this looking at the passage in three parts. It divides nicely. Verse 8, our character traits or virtues belonging to members of the Christian family, Verse 9 is how not

to respond to evil treatment versus how we are to respond to evil treatment. And then verses 10 to 12, this quote from Psalm 34 and what it teaches us.

So first, verse 8 in these five virtues or characteristics of Christians. Peter begins it by saying, "Finally, all of you." This is an indication that this is the last part of this long section, again, on relationships with others. First, he's taught us about human authorities. Next, about slaves and masters. Then in marriage, be subject to human authorities. Be subject, slaves, to your master, or workers, to your boss. Wives, be subject to your husbands. And as we saw last week, that applies to all of us as the bride of Christ. Now finally, all of you, with each other, be subject.

It's not really there as it has been in the past. There's, in fact, no Greek *there in*, or no verb *there in* in the original language. "All of you" is followed by five adjectives. Again, no verb in the sentence, but I think grammatically it can certainly be implied. Be these things or have these characteristics. And that's what he's describing. Christian character within the church. And this is, again, similar to Paul in Ephesians. He begins his section on household code by calling upon us to be subject to one another, and I think that applies here as well. This is character within the church. All of you, unity of mind, brotherly love, these are things within the body of Christ.

At the center of those five virtues is brotherly love. Again, that's with one another. So we're not here dealing with persecution or hostility in verse 9 outside the church primarily. Our first attention in what not to do (which we'll get to) is within the church itself. The first and fifth virtues or characteristics relate to how we think about things, especially how we think about one another. The middle three really are all different expressions of love and love within the body.

So again, five adjectives. You could translate them. They're not really translated as adjectives in really any translation that I looked at. Pars says, unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, tender heart, humble mind. More like nouns than adjectives. Adjectives might be something like this. Like-minded, sympathetic, fraternal, compassionate, humble.

And we can stop right there. Is this how other people would describe you and I? Is this how other people would describe us as Christians individually? Is this how non-believers outside the church would describe how Christians treat one another? Is this the characteristic of the church? Like-minded, sympathetic, fraternal, compassionate, humble. Particularly with the latter, the church is a corporate body. I think that would be a rare acknowledgment by others. And honestly, in the things that I've seen, whether as an elder or in public communications of the church, I mean, I've been interacting with other believers online since 1995. An old Ligonier discussion forum. And some of the most bitter, sarcastic, biting, degrading, spiteful, demeaning comments and interactions I've seen have been among Christians. In public. that anybody can access and see. I don't know what we're not supposed to look like. What are we supposed to look like? Let's go through each of these, hopefully quickly.

1. *Like-minded or having unity of mind.* What Peter is not saying here is that we need to agree on everything. This is a term that contains a word that, when it's used as a verb, describes

a way of thinking. Paul uses it that way in Philippians 2 verse 2. Having the same way of thinking, the same mind, and in Philippians that's a mind of humility toward one another. The same mindset of mutual love. The same mindset of a desire for unity. We can disagree on things — that's normal. But I may have shared this with you before. A former pastor years ago used to say to married couples when they talked about how they disagreed on things, he said, well, if you agreed on everything, one of you would be redundant. We're going to disagree, that's normal. But can we do so in a way that demonstrates our overarching unity and love for one another? With respectful treatment of one another, respectful dialogue over our differences? We do have one Lord. We do have one faith. Is that our goal? When we interact with one another as believers? Here at Hope, we need that goal for sure. But even beyond our congregation as well, other sister congregations, other denominations of the visible church of Christ, And again, would others see this kind of behavior in us? What adjectives would they use to describe Hope or to describe Christians? Sarcasm, put-downs, name-calling. These are rampant in the society around us. Rampant. Look at virtually any sphere of society around us. Entertainers who are biting and backbiting against one another. Sports talk shows, whether on TV or on the radio, athletes to one another, the aggressive displays of one-upmanship, politics. My goodness, the things that candidates say that are absolutely juvenile and disgusting. And I'm not pointing to one person. It's across the board. And it seeps into the church. Well, that's how they do it. We like these people. They're celebrities. We follow them. They're influencers. That's the wrong kind of influence. It should not be seeping into our behavior as the church and body of Jesus Christ.

2. *Sympathetic*. This is an outward caring for others. Feeling what others feel. This is what's described elsewhere as mourning with those who mourn and rejoicing with those who rejoice. As the word indicates, we're with one another in what each other is going through in life.
3. *Brotherly love*. It's a hard word to turn into an adjective in English and the best I could come up with was fraternal. It's that word related to Philadelphia, brotherly love. It's what Jesus prayed for in his high priestly prayer in John 17: our unity as his people. He wanted it to be a reflection of his unity with the Father. It's not agape love, that highest form of Christian love, but it is a communal love for one another. Later in his second letter, 2 Peter 1 verses 5 to 7, Peter calls upon us again to add various qualities to our faith, and among them he lists again brotherly affection. Same word as used here except in a noun form. This matters. It's a question, again, to ask ourselves. When you meet another Christian, a fellow believer, is your first reaction brotherly affection? Oh, here's another one of us. Or do we begin probing to find out what hot button theological or other issue we might disagree with them on so that we can get right down to arguing and debating, criticizing and correcting? And again, it's one thing to show brotherly love in person, but again, much of life today is lived on the Internet, sadly. And it's no secret that people behave differently in their online persona. Shouldn't be different, should be the same. Brotherly love.
4. *A tender heart or compassion*. This tends in scripture to be descriptive of an intense feeling, true pity, true sorrow for another's sufferings or misfortune. Jesus is described as having this kind of compassion toward a leper in Mark's gospel, chapter one verse 41. The

ESV puts it this way: he was moved with pity for this man with leprosy. Paul refers to this, telling us we are to have love for one another. Again, this is within the church. Ephesians 4 verse 32: be compassionate toward one another.

5. And fifthly, *a humble mind or humility*. Now interestingly, this was not a Greek virtue. Greeks may have, you know, got on board with the other four, but humility was generally quite inconsistent with the Greek ideal of self-sufficiency. Nor obviously is it an American virtue. We are not a humble people. But the New Testament introduces it as a particularly Christian virtue. Kefim of Paul's letter to the Philippians, humility that's modeled, and he brings up examples: Epaphroditus, Timothy. He points even to himself before finally pointing to Jesus himself in chapter two, who humbled himself for us and for our salvation. He says very explicitly in Philippians 2 verse 3: count others more significant than yourselves.

Now, none of these is easy. In fact, none of them is even possible in our own strength and by our own effort. We can't will ourselves to be like this. And it's hard to hear these virtues and realize how far short we fall of them. And quite honestly, if we're honest with ourselves, we do. But remember also that Peter has continually pointed us to Christ Jesus in this long section about our relationships with others. Christ is our model for suffering, but not just suffering in general, but our model in that He suffered for us, for us, and for our salvation. On the cross, paying for our failures in these areas and for all of our sins in all areas. He dealt with our sin once and for all. We're no longer guilty before God's throne of justice. So now these virtues should become attractive to us, appealing to us, reflecting the character of our Savior to us. Our motivation to display these virtues shouldn't come from a place of guilt or shame, but a deep sense of gratitude for what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

That leads us into verse nine, the *do not*. Do not repay evil for evil, reviling or insult for insult. Here's a call to follow Christ again, as Peter showed him to us back in chapter 2 verse 23. When he was reviled, when he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten. That's the example to follow. Again, that exact copy, tracing over letters, stepping in the place where he has stepped. Commentators like to refer to this verse as containing the principle of non-retaliation. Daryl Charles calls it the true test of Christian character. When evil is done to you, when you are insulted, when wrong is done to you, how do you respond? A test of Christian character. Dan Doriani says it fits with the idea of not putting ourselves first, but others instead. The first should be last.

It is human nature, sinful human nature, to retaliate. It comes to us naturally. Think of cultures with revenge killings or the saying that vengeance is a dish best served cold. Let it linger. Let it wait. It'll feel better. But our Lord says quite clearly, and we heard it earlier in the service: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay". It's repeated three times. Repetition matters. Deuteronomy 32 verse 35, as we heard from Romans 12 verse 19, and again in Hebrews 10 verse 30. "Vengeance is mine", says God. "I own vengeance." Are we God? Do we steal from Him what is His? Vengeance and retribution? Jesus Himself, the Son of God, did not. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return. So who are we to think that we can or that we should?

And again, note, this is within the context of the church. Brotherly love, one another, unity of minds. We will do evil to one another. We will, because we're struggling with our remaining sin. We will revile or insult one another. In fact, maybe I shouldn't put it in the future tense. We do. We do sinful things to one another. We don't want to, but we do.

And just as in the positive virtues of verse 8, we need the Spirit's help in this area as well. First of all, to gain a deep apprehension of, a realization of, the depth and extent of the saving work that Jesus has done for us, and the gratitude that goes with us, to be motivated to put off that old self of evil works and insults, words and put-downs and demeaning and cutting remarks. But we're also shown a better way. Instead of returning the favor, so to speak, we're to bless.

And, he says, this is our calling. To this you were called, to bless. God is summoning us to do this. I tend to think of callings as things that we do in life, or positions we might occupy. I'm called to be a spouse, I'm called to be a parent or a child, a boss or a worker, a student or a teacher. I'm called to various occupations in life at various times, or I'm given certain talents that I'm called to put to use, and that's all good. We need to understand our vocations and how to, in them, glorify God, serve Him.

But this characteristic of Christians Peter points out here is that we are called to suffer as Christ suffered but also to bless those who mistreat us. First within the body of Christ, but I think of course this also applies to those outside the church as well. Romans 12:14, which we heard earlier: bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. God's Word of command to us. Jesus himself speaking to the crowd says, "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you." I don't do that very well. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. He says this to those who hear. Do we hear our Lord? Will we follow his example in his steps?

How do we bless? Well, it's to say a good word or to wish good for someone else, to hope for, maybe even pray for their good, up to and including their salvation. Edmund Clowney in his commentary says this is how Christians get even. Pray for your enemy's good. Pray for their salvation. Seeking the good of those who oppress us. Who has done you harm? Who has persecuted you? Who has done evil to you? Who has insulted you? Who has made you suffer? I think we can all think of at least someone. And the longer we live, probably multiple someones. I know I can. And here's the lesson. Will we resolve to bless them as Christ commands us to? Will you and I seek their good, even if only in prayer to the Father? The relationship, if it's been broken, may never be repaired, but we can and must forgive. We pray the Lord's Prayer every week, and we can and must seek their good. Wouldn't it be wonderful, (maybe you thought of someone as I was asking those questions), wouldn't it be wonderful if that person came to Christ? That would fix things, but not to.

We bless that we may obtain a blessing. That's a terrible translation. Other translations say that we may inherit a blessing, and that's appropriate. It's the same word Peter used back in chapter 1 verse 4, as a noun, where he talks about how we've been born again to an inheritance that's imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. "Obtain" implies somehow earning

it or deserving it, but an inheritance is a gift. It's unearned. It's just given to us. And that's how Peter means it here. We gift others with our blessing because we have been gifted an invaluable inheritance in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Every time you sin, remember that you are forgiven. Every time you remember that you're forgiven, remember to forgive and to bless those that have sinned against you.

And that brings us to Psalm 34. And just quickly make some comments about this. A lot of ground to cover in verses 8 and 9. David, remember, has been saved by God. He offers praise and thanksgiving, and he gives in this psalm words of wisdom. In fact, the latter part of the psalm is almost like a collection of proverbs. He asks, or makes the comment, "whoever wants to see, or whoever wants to love life and see good days". Is that something that we want? Do you want to love life and see good days? I think that's a rhetorical question, isn't it? Of course we all do. We want to enjoy life. We want to see good days. David's advice, which is a wonderful appendage in addition to Peter's teaching on how to live with others, really fits.

Here's what he says. *Keep your tongue from evil.* Don't slander. Don't insult. *Keep your lips from speaking deceit.* Don't lie. Don't make false accusations or give false testimony about others. That includes things like gossip. *Turn away from evil and do good.* Boy, isn't that a summary of the ethical teaching of Scripture? We talk about the Ten Commandments. Don't do this also means do that — two sides of the same coin. *Turn away from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it,* especially within the household of God, especially in our families, but also everywhere where we work in broader society, where we live and move as exiles and strangers.

And then verse 12 is a reminder that God is watching. This is the God who sees. This is the God who hears. And the psalm tells us his eyes are on the righteous. The idea there is observant care. Like parents at the park, their kids are playing on the playground. They may be talking amongst themselves, but they're constantly looking and checking. Are their kids okay? Observant, watchful care. That's God toward the righteous. That's God toward you and me, who are righteous in his sight by grace through faith in Christ.

But he also hears our prayers. His ears are open to their prayers. He answers them. It was so fitting that we got that last part of the Heidelberg Catechism this morning in our Confession of Faith. He knows our prayers and he is desirous to answer them for us. But on the other hand, as the quote from the psalm ends: *The face of the Lord is against those who do evil.* That's an idiom of God's judgment of evil. To turn his face away is to reject the one. I'm not looking at you anymore. To more harshly judge them, to more harshly condemn them. And that's a good reminder from Peter.

So we come to the end of these relationship rules, these character traits of Christians from chapter 2 verse 13 through chapter 3 verse 12. They're not meant as rules for how we are saved, but rather they're the calling upon those who have been saved. Peter's writing to believers. He's describing the fruit of that salvation, the evidence that we are who we say we are, that as followers of Jesus who have put our hope and trust in Him for salvation, not in what we do, but what the Son has done for us. If we say we are a Christian, we ought to be recognizable as a Christian. Good trees bear good fruit, Jesus teaches in Luke chapter 6. Trees

are known by the fruit that they bear. We are known by our fruit, and Scripture tells us about that fruit. You might be thinking of Galatians, right? Chapter 5 verses 22 and 23. Love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. Against such there is no law. You're free to exercise those. You're free to display that fruit in your life. Here, five more: like-mindedness, sympathetic, having brotherly love, compassionate, humble. Later in this letter, in chapter 4, verses 8 to 10, Peter is going to describe forgiveness and hospitality and generosity. And there are so many more elsewhere, as we saw even from Romans 12 this morning. May we pursue this fruit and see it in our lives as we seek to follow Jesus Christ, our example, following in his footsteps. And may others see this fruit in us, that as we claim to be Christians, we'll actually look like Christians, because we bear the fruit of Christians.

And in the midst of this, Peter's reminder is throughout this letter. Remember that calling in life to suffer, but also remember the calling to bless others who cause us that suffering. But we can't forget that our first and primary calling is to come in repentance and faith to God in and through Jesus. trusting that our bad, evil, rotten fruit has been completely, once and for all dealt with when Jesus paid the penalty for our sins on the cross. That we receive complete forgiveness from him. And so may that burden be lifted off your shoulders. Just take it off and set it aside. of trying to earn God's favor. Let it free you to serve God and bear fruit with freedom and with joy. And in doing so, may the desire of the psalm that's quoted here be yours.

Brothers and sisters, may you love life and may you see many good days. Let me pray for us.

Dear Lord, our God and Father, your Word places before us demands that we cannot in our own strength even hope to meet. For in our sin we do not desire them as we ought. Create in us new and clean hearts, O Lord. Renew a right spirit within us. Grant that we might, by your Spirit, will and do the things that you would have us will and do. May they bring you pleasure. May they bring you glory as we seek to honor you in all that we do. Again, grant us your Spirit to teach us, to give us the strength and the desire to do these things that you've called us to do. Forgive us when we fail to. Remind us of our forgiveness in Christ. Take the burden from our shoulders that we might serve you in love and joy and freedom. We pray it in Christ's name. Amen.