

THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD

1 PETER 3:13-17

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INTRODUCTION

We're continuing our series "What does the Bible say about..." certain cultural topics. In the previous sermon on the *Church In The World* we looked 1 Corinthians 10 and 2 Corinthians 5 to help us understand how the church is to function in the world. Tonight's message is a natural extension of that topic as we shift from the church as an organization, to the individual believer. We'll look at two questions after we look at the Word:

- "How should the Christian live in a world that is increasingly more corrupt and evil?"
- "What should characterize our relationship with the world?"

Some circles of Christianity demand that we take up every social cause or fight for personal freedoms; while the world demands we get in line and conform to its expectations. If we're not careful, we'll start with this as our foundation and they will shape how we view Scripture in unhelpful ways, and the result will be a life based on the theories and purposes man and not God's written in Scripture. Let's first approach Scripture and listen to what it has to say, and then we can think through the practical applications in our lives.

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 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, 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 is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

— 1 Peter 3:13-17

As we come to our passage in 1 Peter tonight, there's a few things we should keep in mind. First, the letter was written around 63-64 A.D. By this point in history, a good portion of the New Testament had already been written and was likely being circulated around the churches. As Peter is writing to the believers dispersed around a fairly vast region, the good news of Jesus (the gospel) has been growing and expanding for several decades.

Second, suffering was a major theme in the lives of these believers reading this letter from Peter. He mentions “suffering” roughly 17 times in this short letter. The governmental leadership was corrupt, and persecution was heavy. Have you ever heard of a Roman ruler named Nero? Around the time of this letter, he was roughly 10 years into his 14-year reign as emperor supreme. The list of Nero’s evilness is extensive, perverse in many ways and continues on at length...and honestly it gets too vulgar for me to want to share. Not to mention the horrific torture and mass murder of Christians he is well-known for. Suffice it to say, this is the emperor at the time of Peter’s writing.

Lastly, this passage is surrounded by and draws from more Old Testament references than I can deal with in this message, but a key one is the quote just before our passage tonight, Psalm 34. In this Psalm, David is writing about the time he acted like a madman in front of an evil, enemy ruler named Abimelech (See 1 Samuel 21) by scratching nonsense on the doors and dribbling spit all over the place. You see, David was on the run from King Saul (another evil ruler) who wanted to kill him, even though David had been righteous towards him. And, here he stands in front of *another* evil ruler. David was known for trusting God in the midst of harsh and difficult persecution which led him to live righteously towards Saul while he was relieving himself in a cave. David had an opportunity to kill Saul, but he did not, instead cutting a piece of his clothes off. David then called to Saul from a distant hilltop showing him what happened, and Saul responded with praise to God. This is the biblical story that frames our passage tonight. This hopeful, God trusting man. David entrusts himself to Yahweh living righteously, even though he was the “rightful king”.

THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE IN THE WORLD

Since suffering is such a key theme for the believer that Peter is writing to, it’s important that we look at how Peter directs these believers to live and think.

THE RIGHTEOUS RULER

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? (v13)

Peter asks, “who is there to harm you for doing good?” **THE EVIL GOVERNMENT MAN!** This is an obvious answer to the question, so why would Peter ask it? Well, let’s go back and consider the Psalm that comes immediately before it. David is on the run against a rebellious, unbelieving king and instead of lashing back with evil, David commits himself to righteous living by putting his ultimate God-ward hope on display. David’s faith and trust in God meant that he didn’t put his hope in what he could accomplish on his own, but rather realized that God was ultimately working in the situation and he fulfilled his responsibility of righteous living.

Peter is pointing out that a believer’s hope is not to be in this life and this world. If our sights are set on eternity, then the question becomes, “Can any earthly situation harm the eternal inheritance I have in Christ?” Yes, we can be slandered, maligned, attacked, punished, tortured and killed in this brief life...but

when we are fixed on our king who has saved us from much greater eternal suffering, how does this world compare? In fact, Peter goes on in the next verse...

BLESSED BY SUFFERING

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. (v14)

Peter is encouraging the believers that are spread abroad to do what is righteous, and he seems to be addressing a temptation to think, "If I'm going to suffer for doing what is right, what's the point?" Peter adjusts their perspective and expectations that sometimes they will suffer for obeying God.

This verse dredges up a question, how is it possible that suffering and blessing can happen at the same time? How is it possible that I do what is right before God, then suffer for it, and there be blessing? These are good questions to ask. But first, do you believe it? Are you willing to believe this difficult truth? Scripture says it right here, that even if we live righteously and we suffer for it...there will be blessing. Even Jesus suffered being the only truly righteous person to walk this earth.

But, what kind of blessing is worth the injustice of doing right and suffering for it? How about... *"...an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you..."*. (1 Peter 1:4)

We know from other Scriptures like Ephesians 2:8-9 that what we do, does not save us. It's only through the gift of faith in Jesus' death on the cross that we receive our eternal inheritance. But is that it? Is that the only blessing in view? If it is, then it would certainly be enough since it is eternally minded. However, just a few verses later in chapter 1, we see another blessing. That in the midst of suffering and trials...

...the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. — 1 Peter 1:7

Is that the kind of perspective we have? Are our eyes so fixed on our king and our eternal destination that we can't help but obey God's word and live to please Him? We are blessed when we go through trials and suffering because it refines us. This world is a brief pit stop to our eternal home. But, if you know anything about racing, pit-stops aren't taken lightly, every moment counts. It's a highly intentional, practiced and planned out set of actions to for maximum effectiveness during a race.

When we go through suffering and are willing to continue in righteousness, it shows the genuineness of our faith in Jesus for our salvation. As Peter mentions, God refines believers through suffering. But the ultimate point doesn't end with a believer's refinement. All of this is leading to more praise and greater glory given to God. Yes, even suffering and difficulties are opportunities for God to receive praise and glory. Is this how we think? Do we look up and see our gracious heavenly Father tenderly and gently

refining us? Or are we fearful of him because we mistakenly believe he is out to get us, or an angry ogre, or simply missing important information. Perhaps, we need our view of him refined?

RESPONDING TO THE WORLD

Our passage doesn't just stop there. In the midst of suffering, we have a responsibility and a goal. We are commanded to respond to this world in a particular way. Our hearts and minds are fixed not on our this world, but on something greater.

CHRIST-MINDED

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy... (v14b-15a)

Fear. Peter instructs us not to fear. More importantly, we notice that this instruction isn't just about not fearing in general, but not fearing what people can do to us. We are not to fear those who can harm us in this world. We are not to let this kind of fear to keep us from doing what is good. Nor should we be shaken or trembling in doing what is righteous. It's easy to look around and be fearful of the people around us and over us, and that fearful, troubled living will shape our lives away from the righteous living believers called to. It doesn't take much to keep us from doing good: fear of what others might think, or fear of a little bit of gossip about us is all it might take to prevent us from living how Christ would have us to live.

This is why Peter directs us to set our hearts towards Christ. That we should honor our perfect master. We should be looking to please him. Not those around us, or even ourselves. The more we fix our hearts on the eternal destiny we have in Christ, honoring him as supreme, the more He becomes larger and more magnificent as our king. When we compare how short and insignificant this world is compared to our immeasurable inheritance in Christ...living different from the world becomes easier. It becomes easier because our hope is rightly focused. And this is exactly where Peter brings us next.

WITH A HOPEFUL ANSWER

I like the way the New Living Translation handles this verse...

And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. (v15b NLT)

This is the crux of the issue. This is the central importance in these set of verses. This is our fuel for living righteously: our hope. Everything before is of no importance if we are not hope-filled. Our hope must affect our actions, demeanor, and character in such a way that can be seen by others. Our actions should be evidence of our hope in what Jesus has done for us: how he has saved us and is preserving us for an

eternal inheritance in himself. A mind that is constantly living with this truth as it's end goal, will always be able to share it. It's sort of like the fuel you put in your car. If someone asks what makes your car get from home to work, you can tell them about the gasoline (or diesel for some) you fill your tank with. It's the same idea here.

Peter warns the scattered Christians, not to be caught off guard when people ask you. This different living provides opportunities to share their hope. They were to be ready to confidently explain the hope behind their actions. And the same goes for us. When someone asks you why you spend every Sunday evening at church, or why you submit to your husband, or why you help out your neighbor, or whatever good you do...you should be ready to explain your hope. But there is a way we should explain it...

ANSWERING LIKE CHRIST

yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience (v15b-16a)

When unbelievers ask us about the testimony of our lives, our response should be gracious...filled with gentleness and respect. It is not to be filled with an arrogant or rude attitude. No, our response should be that of Christ. It should be without sin. It should be driven with compassion for a person who doesn't know this hope and is currently headed toward unimaginable suffering for all eternity in hell. We are not responsible to argue them into conversion, but lovingly present the reason for hope-filled view of eternity. But there's even more reason for righteous living...

THE REASON FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (v16b)

History tells us that Christians of this age were wrongfully blamed for the wildly destructive actions of the emperor.

Peter's begins his purpose statement starting with "so that". This is the reason they were to live with their hope on display. So that **when** (not if) they were insulted and slandered for their good works, Christ's goodness and greatness will shine through the slander. Literally when they're attacked for the 'good' things they've done, their character and behavior will ultimately humiliate their accusers. Peter is saying that our conduct should be so pure, holy, and Christ-like that it will put our accusers to shame. It's not our job to shame them...our pure and righteous actions will do that.

You may ask, "But who will see my behavior and make it worth suffering for doing good?" Christ. We aren't guaranteed that this world will understand us...because we are not of this world. In fact, we know from John that the world will hate us and our lives. We are to be Christ-focused because of what he has

done for us. And...God may actually use that kind of living to soften the heart of an unbeliever and prompt them to ask you.

ALL THIS FOR CHRIST

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (v17)

Peter continues with the theme of righteous living. If the scattered believers are going to suffer...they should not suffer for doing evil. They were to model the life of their Savior. The same goes for us. If we are going to suffer, let's suffer for doing good...for living in the righteousness of Christ. Otherwise, we will lose opportunities to share our hope.

LIVING IN THIS WORLD

As we close our time on this topic, let's revisit the key questions we opened with and keep in mind the how 1 Peter sets our foundation in our ultimate hope...in Christ and not this world or anything it could ever offer.

“HOW SHOULD THE CHRISTIAN LIVE IN THIS WORLD THAT IS INCREASINGLY MORE CORRUPT AND EVIL?”

1. Remember that the world around us will continue to spiral down into greater evil and deeper corruption. This is expected and follows the New Testament description as we draw nearer to the blessed return of Jesus (Matthew 24). Do you live with that understanding?
2. As believers, we must expect suffering. In America, we have had it easy for hundreds of years. The general morality and values of culture have been not been terribly hostile to Scripture, but as culture degrades, we will begin to bump into greater and greater suffering as we follow God's word in our lives. Are you ready to suffer? Will you compare this light and momentary affliction against the immeasurable, eternal suffering that Jesus has saved you from?
3. We are to do good. The New Testament gives us great liberty in living righteously for Christ. Over and over again, we are to live in ways that are different and stand out among the evils of culture. When we suffer, let it be for doing good and not for doing evil.

“WHAT SHOULD CHARACTERIZE OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE WORLD?”

1. Peter tells us that our lives can and should be lived to provide hope-sharing opportunities. Do you live in a way that the world could even see your hope? Perhaps you don't have hope in Jesus as your savior at all, and you're still trying to earn your salvation. Or worse, perhaps you are staring at Jesus and rejecting his gift of salvation because “there is no way I could be saved”. Repent! Fall on your face at the feet of Jesus. Confess your sin. Humbly cry out to him for salvation. Make him the king of your life.

2. Perhaps you are a believer, yet you live in fear of what the world will think of you. Or, maybe your hope has drifted away from an inconceivable eternity with Jesus, saved from the immeasurable suffering in hell. Is your life shaped more by this world and its values, media, friendships, than by Scripture's hope? Repent, turn from this idolatry and refocus on the true hope we have in Christ.
3. If you are living your life with your hope on Jesus, and it's easy to see. If someone were to ask you why you are, the way you are...are you prepared to tell them? Are you *ready* to defend your life? Are you *willing* to tell them? Prepare now what you would say and pray for opportunities...then take them. Be ready to share how your hope is in the Christ and your eternal home with him, and how that overshadows anything in this world. Work to develop a compassionate view of them. Cultivate gentleness and respect in your response.

Hope. This is central theme of this 1 Peter passage, and the answer to how a Christian will live in this world. A hope that drives us to do good. When the opportunity arises, we are ready to share our eternal perspective. Let's live righteously. Let's be ready to answer.