

The More Things Change, The More Jesus Stays the Same
Mission: Faithfulness in Life and Witness
1 Peter 3:8-22

Jeff preaches next week, then back to John.

Final call for Grace Connection

If you could be like anyone in Scripture – besides, Jesus, that is – who would you choose to be? Well, who would you choose to emulate? When it gets down to it, there are not many figures in Scripture without flaws, so while you might say, “I want to be like King David, a man after God’s own heart,” someone might ask, “So, what you are saying is that if you ever commit a grave moral sin, you may be willing to attempt to cover your sin with murder?” It is always good to remember that there is only one hero in the Bible, and he is Jesus. Today we will be spending time in 1 Peter for the third out of four weeks in the opening series of this new decade with the title, *The More Things Change, The More Jesus Stays the Same*. The focus for today’s sermon is “Mission.” This title may invoke thoughts of doing great things for God, but that is not the emphasis of today’s text, nor is it the emphasis of the majority of the NT Epistles, which is where, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we receive instruction for *Life Together* as a church family.

Michael Card has said, in so many words, “The surprising thing about the OT is to discover that God is kind.” God has always been merciful, and he will always be holy. He is not one God in the OT and another in the NT. Perhaps the surprising realization in the NT is how ordinary this life to which we are called, is. It must say something about our teaching that we feel inadequate when our lives are not marked by one magnificent achievement after another. In fact, the title for today’s message, which begins with Mission, surely conjures images of monumental events and praiseworthy successes.

It is, after all, the American way as well as the biblical mandate for Mission. The trouble is, we have difficulty distinguishing between the Great Commission and a version of the American Dream that is laced with religious implications.

To say that the life we live as Jesus' followers is more ordinary than advertised does not mean that it is unimportant. Indeed, the most important matters of eternity are at stake, so how are we to make sense of it all? Rod Dreher speaks for many of us when he writes, "Everydayness is my problem. It's easy to think about what you would do in wartime, or if a hurricane blew through, or if you spent a month in Paris, or if your guy wins the election. It's a lot more difficult to figure out how you're going to get through today without despair." Can you relate?

Today's text is 1 Peter 3:8-22. After reading the text I will jump into the outline, but it will be helpful for you to have your Bible or screen open to the text. As I read through the text, seek to absorb the full design of God's mission for his people, which calls for faithfulness in both everyday life and with witnessing opportunities, whenever and wherever they arise. It is our custom to stand as Scripture is read. Would you please stand for the reading of God's Word? ESV:

8 Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 9 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. 10 For

**"Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
11 let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.**

**12 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.

18 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.

Three primary points this morning, beginning with:

- 1. Be as serious about “life together” in covenant community as God is**

For twenty years as director of TVR Christian Camp and Retreat Center, I sought to create a sense of community for short-term “families.” There was serious long-term community at camp with full-time staff, several of whom stayed for ten years or longer, but community was mostly weekend community, or, week-long, at best. I always wondered what it would be like to live in close communion with a church family full-time, like I have had the privilege of doing over the last 21 and a half years. It has been wonderful – but wonderful does not always mean easy. Some of the most satisfying relationships have been the ones that have been challenged, at some point, but are stronger and better for the challenges and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We do life better together than apart, even when we must work through disagreements. As Bonhoeffer said in *Life Together*, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.” Amen!

It is almost certain that in the first two verses of our text, Peter is addressing two different types of relationships. In verse 8, he is writing about relationships and responsibilities within the body of Christ, and in verse 9, he is addressing the ways that believers should interact with those who are, not only outside the church, but, in many cases, are hostile toward the gospel message, which means the hostility is often directed at those who believe the gospel message, whether the believer says anything to them or not.

We could spend the rest of our time dissecting verse 8 and seeking to understand what covenant community should look like, but when you consider the design of verse 8, the meaning pops. Like other NT authors, Peter uses a chiastic structure to make his point with an A, B, C, B, A pattern:

Finally, all of you have:

A Unity of mind

B Sympathy
C Brotherly love
B' Tender heart
A' Humble mind

A corresponds to A, B to B, and C is at the center. Do you see how unity cannot be achieved without humility? Do you also see the benefit of sympathy and how it is difficult to engage one another's sorrows without a tender heart? Do you see where the tip of the arrow on this chiasm is pointing? Brotherly love. God is serious about his design for the covenant community in which we are all called to actively pursue brotherly love in the relationships we are blessed to share. If we are outstanding evangelists, effectively sharing the gospel whenever we have opportunity, and yet we fail in our relationships because we are too distracted by "doing great things for God," – well, we have failed. That is the first order of business in this text that deals with our witness. There is one more thing we need to address before we start sharing the gospel, though, and that is the focus of our second point:

2. Get about the business of loving, forgiving, and blessing your enemies

Now, you know that when I say, "Do this before you do that," that I do not mean to take a posture of, "Well, I would like to share the gospel with you, but unfortunately I am not loving my brother as I should, and fact is, since you are on the other side of the political fence to me, I don't love you very much and, so, I am unqualified to share the gospel with you." Truly, none of us is ever qualified to share the greatest news ever, but God has chosen to use us, anyway.

The direction for this point comes from verse 9 and following, and the benefit of the order in the text and, thus, the ordering of these steps in our minds, is that we are reminded that we are not about

the business of getting people on our side, but we are about Kingdom business, and our posture toward unbelievers is to be the same as Jesus' posture was toward us, even while we were in our sin. Unfortunately, we tend to associate with our kind and our kind only.

Martin Luther knew our sinful tendency to desire only peace and tranquility once we have gotten a taste of it. Although Luther rarely spoke candidly (jk), here is what he said about the believer's calling, quote: "The Kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people but with the devout people." Close quote.

When we mingle with those who hate the gospel, we will suffer persecution at some point, although the intensity of suffering will be different for individual believers and for different groups of believers. The tendency for believers in our culture is to be angry with those who mock our faith and to either shout them down or ignore them entirely. But we are called to treat them pretty much the same way we are called to treat our brothers and sisters – loving, forgiving, and blessing them, although we cannot expect reciprocal behavior. That's okay, we are not living for benefits in this land.

It is almost certain when Peter referenced Psalm 34, not for the first time in his letter, he was making the connection between David's suffering when he was running from Saul and his readers, who were suffering minor persecution but would soon face intense suffering. It is also likely that the life promised in verse 10 was of an eschatological nature – the promise of eternal life for those who know Jesus. Although the Kingdom has already come with Jesus in his First Advent, it will only come in full power at his Second Advent. Those who know Jesus must live as the Lord commands, and that includes being careful with what we say – about the lost, as well as believers. Well, that's convicting. Not because we want

to avoid thinking more deeply about this, but, indeed, because we *do* understand, let's move to our last point, which has two subpoints:

3. Understanding what is at stake, take advantage of every opportunity to share the gospel with those who do not know Jesus

In Jesus' last days before he ascended back to heaven, he left clear instructions for his disciples to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. It is right that we understand the Great Commission to be binding on us, as well. The book of Acts gives many examples of men and women taking the gospel to the world at great cost, both those who were commissioned directly by Jesus and many who were not. That is one reason it is surprising that the letters written to the churches by Apostles and Prophets have so little to say about bold gospel conversations with the lost. That does not mean we should forsake intentional and active evangelism, but it does provide a model for many of our brothers and sisters who live with the constant threat of violent opposition to even their acknowledgment of belief in Jesus. That may be us one day, and even now we are often restricted in what we can say at work or in other public settings. That is only one reason 1 Peter 3:15 provides such encouragement to us.

There is so much going on in 1 Peter 3:13-22 that it would take weeks to sort it all out, so I apologize for not attempting to explain what can be quite confusing. To give an example, in verses 14-15, Peter is likely referencing Isaiah 8:12-13, although he does not give a direct quote. In making the allusion, Peter affirms Jesus as equal to Yahweh, and, in fact, he says that Jesus is Yahweh. We are told to honor Christ in our hearts, rather than fearing those who oppose us. Such faithful obedience leads us to love them and to be ready to give a meaningful witness when asked why we believe as we do.

In his letter written to a people on the brink of serious persecution, a point at which believers must stand or fold, Peter wrote of the eternal stakes for believing or rejecting Jesus – no one has the choice of being neutral. How might we be prepared when opportunities arise to share the life-changing truth of the gospel? Two quick thoughts – first:

A. Know the gospel – remember your baptism

I am not about to get into the details of what the latter part of 1 Peter 3 means when the Apostle states that baptism saves us, other than to say he quickly affirms baptism as a *symbol* of the washing away of our sins. Interesting that he uses baptism to picture God’s redemptive work in our lives. Presbyterians often talk about going to church and “remembering their baptism,” which is amusing when you think that most Presbyterians most certainly *do not* remember their baptism as infants. But we miss the point in our haste to seek to discredit their belief about pedobaptism by making a joke. Baptism is a beautiful picture of, not only Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, but of our identification with Christ in dying to sin and being raised to walk in newness of life.

Furthermore, in connecting baptism to Noah and the ark, we are reminded that the stakes could not be higher when one is called to believe or reject Jesus. Those who believe will be saved, those who do not will be judged. When we set our hearts and minds to know and understand the gospel at deeper levels than we currently do, we will be much more prepared to share the gospel with those who are lost. It is only one benefit of reading through the Bible, year after year, and of studying at a deeper level, such as we do in home groups or by taking an SWBI class or attending the Women’s Bible Study, or by small group studies of Scripture.

In verse 15, Peter says to be ready to give a defense, or, a reasoned explanation for our – hope. Interesting that he encourages us to

defend our “hope” instead of the “faith,” like Jude does. Peter is, again, emphasizing the eschatological nature of the Christian life. We are to have hearts that are looking for the return of Christ when all will worship the Lord with pure hearts. It is not the case now that everyone believes, which is why the last thought is so important:

B. Proclaim the gospel – explain the hope that is in you

The more you know about a subject, such as the gospel, the better you will be able to speak to it. The focus of this last point is an encouragement to be ready to *verbally* share the gospel. Our lives should provoke others to inquire about our hope, but we must be willing to share the truth of the gospel with unbelievers, whether we are asked or not. Most of us are not in a place where our freedom or our lives are in danger if we share the gospel. Even so, we are called to live in such a way that others will be curious about the difference in our lives. When the opportunities arise, speak up!

Let me remind you that you do not have to share the whole gospel every time you engage someone with eternal matters. Furthermore, once you have already shared Christ, saying less may take you further than saying the same things over and over. The challenge for most of us, though, is to say something – to say anything! We will be better prepared to speak as we live consistently and faithfully together with hearts and minds trained on Jesus, who we long to see. Now! May God give us the strength, wisdom, courage, and love to share Jesus as the opportunities arise, as they surely will, even in a land that is increasingly opposed to the truth of the gospel. May we be faithful in all we do and say, and may the Lord’s will be done in our lives and in our witness. Let’s pray.