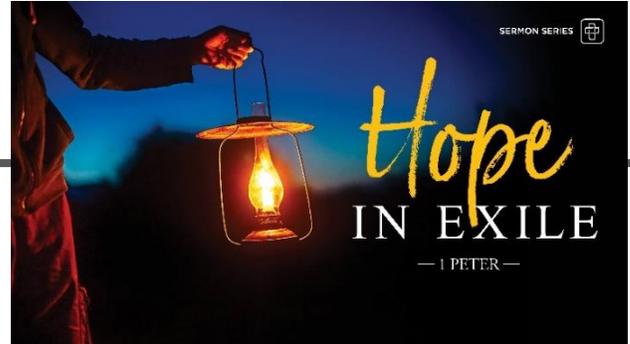


Be Ready to Answer for Your Hope

1 Peter 3:13-17

Joe Jones July 5, 2020



Good morning. Turn in your Bible to 1 Peter 3; we'll be looking at verses 13 through 17 this morning. As you turn there, I want to

remind you that our world today is in desperate need of hope. We as Christians—as followers of Jesus—have in our minds and hearts the only true and lasting message of hope for the world.

So the question that 1 Peter 3:13-17 presses on each of us this morning is this: will we, the church of Jesus, live out that hope through deeds of peace and justice, sharing that hope through words of truth and kindness—no matter the cost? That's the question 1 Peter 3:13-17 is asking us this morning. I hope that each of us can personally answer that question this morning.

Let's read these verses, starting at verse 13:

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.

Let's pray together.

Father, I pray that Your blessing would be on Your most precious Word now. This is a wonderful passage of Scripture and I pray that You would empower me, by Your Spirit, to do it justice. Give us soft hearts to hear and receive what You would say to us this morning through Your Word. We pray in the power of Jesus' name. Amen.

This passage is structured with a single point being made at the very beginning and the very end, then that point is fleshed out with some more detail in the middle of this passage. So

let's look at that main driving point Peter is making at the beginning and end. It's summarized in verse 17, where it says, "*It is better to suffer for doing good...than for doing evil.*"

We can expect to avoid unnecessary suffering.

As Christians, there are two things we can expect as we do good for the sake of Christ in our world. First, we can expect to avoid unnecessary suffering, and second, we can expect to attract necessary suffering. So, Christian, do good—that's pretty simple. Do good in the name of Jesus and you can expect to avoid unnecessary suffering.

Peter poses a very simple question for his readers. I think it's a question we want to consider and receive this morning, in the 21st century, as Christians. Here's the question Peter poses: "*Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?*" I don't mean, "What are the potential threats out there in the world?" I mean for you, for your life, as you are zealous for good—who is there to harm you?

Let me ask the question again and replace "what is good" with some specific acts of goodness:

- Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for a marriage of respect and love? Who's going to harm you for that in your life?
- Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for your kids' obedience?
- Who is there to harm you if you're zealous for respecting governing authorities, whether or not you agree with them? Who is going to see you doing that and repay you with evil or harm?
- Who is there to harm you if you're zealous for honoring and obeying your boss at work?
- Who is there to harm you if you're zealous for speaking gently and kindly with your neighbors? Who is going to see you doing that and bring you harm?
- Who is there to harm you if you're zealous for peacemaking?
- Who is there to harm you if you're zealous for hospitality?
- Who is there to harm you if you're zealous for adoption or foster care?

Who is there to harm you if you're zealous for these good things? Your answer to that question might actually be, "I do have someone in mind who would harm me for doing one of those things."

I also wonder if there are all sorts of good things we can be zealous for in the name of Christ and still—even in our world today—live peaceful and quiet lives. We should aim for that. That's a good thing. Christians should not be troublemakers and therefore trouble receivers. We should aim to be peacemakers, then what we'll often receive in response is peace. But the

Holy Spirit through Peter doesn't stop there, letting us assume we'll never suffer if we're committed to Jesus and His values. He goes on to say that sometimes the unbelieving world doesn't respond to peace. Sometimes, sadly, neighbors, bosses, government officials and even family members respond to good done in the name of Jesus with harm and evil.

We can expect to attract necessary suffering.

Secondly, follower of Jesus, do good and attract necessary suffering. You ask, "What do you mean by necessary suffering?" If you look at verse 17, there is a little phrase there that's very important. It says, "*...if that should be God's will...*" You see, God only brings into our lives what is necessary for our good and His glory. The suffering and persecution we face for doing good is necessary. It's not accidental. It's not like we've mistakenly fallen into this suffering or hardship. God Himself is behind the suffering we face and is using it to accomplish His greater purpose, His will, as Peter says.

In God's providence, doing good as Christians not only helps us avoid all sorts of unnecessary suffering, it also will at times attract suffering. It will bring suffering into our lives. Peter is explaining that there are times when we will need to endure suffering for the sake of righteousness, for the sake of standing for Christ.

The Christians who read Peter's letter were socially ostracized. They were "on the outs" in their society. But on the horizon for them was even greater suffering to come. I wonder if we as Christians today are in exactly the same position. We're socially marginalized today as Christians. We should be bracing ourselves for the real possibility that more and more we're going to be pushed to the side, misunderstood, accused of wrongdoing and evil, mistreated and persecuted for the sake of Christ. That very well could be coming to the church in America—and we ought to prepare for it. So you say, "What could this look like?"

If you have friends who practice homosexuality or support gay marriage, and you speak honestly and graciously about your faith in Christ—what that means and what that implies for issues of gender and sexuality—you may well be repaid with evil. It might be shunning or shaming, or even worse.

Or if you talk to your neighbors about how you're choosing to raise your kids to know God and to be shaped by His Word, you may be viewed with suspicion. You may not be invited to the next neighborhood get-together.

Or if you take a stand for the sanctity of life, publicly showing support for the pro-life movement, you may be looked down upon or even slandered.

The point is that we're called as Christians to stand firm for righteousness, justice, peace, and for Christ in this world. We're to stand strong in that as Christians. There are times when we're going to suffer shame for this stand. As we do, we can be confident, as verse 14 beautifully says, *"If you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed."* You're blessed if you suffer for righteousness' sake.

I want to pause here and encourage you. Maybe there are some in this room, or listening from home, who very recently have suffered shame or other persecution for the sake of Jesus and for doing good in His name. Maybe you're feeling a little worn out and wondering, "Is it worth it to go against the strong tide of the culture, to stand for Christ in a culture that's increasingly moving away from Him?"

I say to you this morning with all the authority of God's Word: yes, it's worth it. You are under the blessing of God in that and His favor is all over you. Jesus, your Savior, your King, said, *"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:10). You are blessed in that spot and it's so worth it to follow Christ, even through that kind of suffering. So keep being faithful, Christian. Keep standing strong. Keep living for Jesus.

Now I want to turn to the details of what it looks like to suffer well for Christ in this world. Can we flesh this out a little bit and dig into the details of what it looks like to follow Christ? Peter, by the Spirit, gives us such helpful and wise instruction in this. What does it look like to suffer for doing good?

There are two commands in this passage that are like two sides of the same coin. The first command, or set of commands, is found in verse 14. I like the way the New American Standard Version translates it: ***"Do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled."*** Then the second command in verse 15 literally says, ***"In your hearts, sanctify Christ the Lord."*** So on one hand, don't fear what man can do to you; on the other hand, do sanctify—set apart as holy—Christ as the One to be honored above all else. Or to put it more simply, "Don't esteem the approval of people; do esteem Christ supremely."

The church in America desperately needs this message today—and I need to hear this message. Freedom from the sin of man-fearing and man-pleasing, and freedom to live for the approval of One, Christ the Lord. There is such freedom in living for the approval of One, living under the gaze of One, living for the smile of Jesus.

There is also freedom when we no longer live in anxiety or fretting or nervousness wondering, "Does this person like me? Does this person approve of me? Is this person going to

harm me?” The more we see Christ as a great treasure, the less we’ll need the approval and praise of people. The more God’s Spirit works within us to show us the value and greatness of Jesus, Who is Lord of all, the less we’ll be troubled by the threats and intimidation of those who oppose us.

The Holy Spirit says in verse 15, *“Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”* This verse isn’t teaching that we should do something like go home today and write out a manuscript of our defense of the gospel. It’s not teaching us to imagine in our minds, “Well, if this person came into my life and asked me this question, or tried to catch me in this area, then I would give this response.” I don’t think that’s what Peter is teaching us to go through the scenarios in our heads beforehand. Often when we do that, who’s the hero of the story? It’s us. “I would say this. I would say that. I would come back with this response.”

Every gospel-sharing opportunity is different and unique, so we need to use wisdom to speak into that unbeliever’s life about Who Jesus is and what He means to us. Further, Jesus said in Mark 13:11, *“When they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.”*

Then what is the preparation? When Peter says, “Be prepared to give a defense,” what is he talking about? What is he referring to? I believe the primary way we prepare to give a defense is by obeying the command to honor Christ supremely, to honor Him as holy. Now, this doesn’t negate the need to study and really understand the gospel message, getting it engrained in our brains.

In this passage, the primary way we can prepare to make a defense for the gospel is by esteeming Christ above all else in our hearts. See, it’s not primarily a mind thing—getting all our theological I’s dotted and all our biblical T’s crossed. It’s mainly a heart thing—learning to treasure Christ above all else. This leads us to not be ashamed of the gospel, to not be ashamed to go by the name “Christian,” to know how great Jesus is, to not be embarrassed of Christ and of being with Him.

Instead, we are to be ready—even at a moment’s notice—to explain to others about Jesus, clearly and boldly, because He’s the One we want to please. He’s the One we want to honor in that situation. We know we want to honor Christ, knowing that as we do, we’ll be ready to share with others about Him when asked. You never know, do you, when you’re going to be called

upon to share your faith. You never know who's observing your life, who's watching—either with antagonism and anger, or with curiosity and interest.

My brother is about three and a half years older than I am. He was converted during his years at Hope College a few years before I was converted. It was a radical life change. He was a new creation—just a totally different person. I quietly watched the change happen and it was beautiful. As a person who was not living for Jesus at all, I observed his life and it caused me to ask some questions. My brother's change of life—simply the way he lived his life now—was a vital aspect in my journey of coming to know Christ.

Again, you never know who's watching your life and you never know when they're going to come to you and say, "What makes you tick? What is it about you?" Then, as we're cultivating this honoring of Christ in our hearts, we'll be ready in that moment to share, "It's Jesus!"

What's that message we share in that moment? Peter tells us in verse 15 with one word. He sums up the gospel message with the word "hope." The message we have to give to the world is a message of hope. If you were to read through the whole book of 1 Peter right now, you would realize that hope is a central theme in this letter. The reality is that Jesus died on a cross for our sins 2,000 years ago, then He rose victoriously from the grave, conquering sin and death and Satan. Jesus, our King, is alive today, and as the reigning King and Lord of all, what He gives to His church and to the world through His church is true and lasting hope. Hope.

Yes, Christ gives you and me full forgiveness from our sins right now. Yes, He frees us from judgment, condemnation and God's wrath. Yes, He also gives us a hope that lasts beyond the grave, a hope that lasts forever, a hope that no one in this world can touch, a hope that is better than anything this world has to offer. It's all a free, undeserved gift of His grace. Isn't that good news? We have hope! We have a bright future as Christians, and that is the message we have to share with the world.

I was listening to a podcast recently about the rising rates of depression and anxiety among young people today. That doesn't just go for young people; that's true for adults as well. Despair—deep despair. As our world and culture spiral downward in darkness and despair, hope is going to become a rarer and rarer commodity. People feel hopeless today and they're searching. But the good news is that hope is a commodity Christ has in abundance and He's very good at sharing it. Christian, you can live with hope in your heart today—and boy, do we have a message to share with an increasingly hopeless culture.

The picture being painted here is not necessarily of someone coming and politely asking, “What is this hope that you have? Why do you live with such hope, even in the midst of suffering?” The picture is probably a more combative one. It’s a person who’s mocking or accusing Christians of their connection to Christ. It could even have the idea of Christians being put on trial and asked to give a defense before accusers, even as Peter—who wrote this letter—experienced himself. In the book of Acts, we see him being put on trial and he’s giving a defense of Christ and His resurrection. So it’s vitally important that Peter goes on to say we’re to respond to people who question us and ask us about our faith with gentleness. Not harshness. Not, “Hah, I got you! I’m in the right.” It’s not just what we say, but how we say it, that matters to God.

I was at a conference a few years ago and after one of the sessions I was walking with some friends. There were some street preachers on a corner who were boldly preaching—even yelling at people as they walked by—about the condemnation for their sins, He was telling them they were on their way to hell and they needed Jesus. Those are all true biblical realities, but there was something off in the way in which he was speaking them. Peter says here that the key ingredient they were missing was gentleness.

When gentleness flavors and marks our response to the world that’s asking us about the hope we have, it becomes a beautiful picture of the love and gentleness of our Savior, Who came not to condemn this world, but in love to save this world. Then, as we live this way—seeking to do good for Christ and answering in gentleness with a word of hope—we can leave the results with God. We can leave the results in His hands.

Look at verse 16: *“Having a good conscience”*—as you speak with gentleness and the fear of God—*“so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”* Let’s be encouraged that these things would mark our lives. As we commit to the good in Jesus’ name, as we refuse to fear the threats of man, as we choose to honor Christ above all, as we tell others when asked about the hope we have—doing it all in a spirit of gentleness—it will become increasingly clear is that we Christians are not the ones who should feel foolish or embarrassed or ashamed. Rather, those who accuse Christians will be put to shame, Peter says. They’ll be shown to be the ones in the wrong.

Where are you at this morning? How are you doing with these truths, with these realities? What does it look like for you to put 1 Peter 3:13-17 into practice in your life, even in this coming week?

Maybe you're thinking, "It's been revealed to me that I actually don't know the Lord. I see people around me who are living for Christ and see that to be a beautiful thing, but I don't think I know Christ." I would encourage you to go and talk to that person. Ask that person you see who truly knows Christ, "What makes you tick? What is that hope that's in your life?" Seek the Lord for His salvation.

Maybe you're thinking, "I'm pretty bold to share the gospel." Maybe you have the gift of evangelism and are bold to share the gospel with those who ask—and with those who don't ask. You're courageous in the words you speak, but your life is lagging behind that a little bit. The area where the work needs to be done by the Holy Spirit in your life is in those good deeds backing up the words you speak.

Or maybe for you it's, "I'm striving to live for the Lord. I'm striving to be a peacemaker. I'm striving to be zealous for good deeds in the name of Jesus. Yet, I lack that boldness to share Christ." Maybe that's the area where you need to press in and ask, "Lord, would You give me that boldness? When that gospel opportunity presents itself, help me to step into it and speak about You to that person."

Wherever you're at, we can go to the Lord and ask, "Lord, would You graciously enter into this place of need in my life and do Your work as I seek to be salt and light in a world that desperately needs hope."

In that spirit, let's go to our God and commit ourselves to Him as we pray.

Lord, we do commit ourselves to You. We thank You that You care for us day in and day out, week in and week out. You are with us. You love us. You are for us in Christ and there is nothing we can do to cause You to love us more or less than You already do because of Jesus. So we rest in that today,. We want to live in the joy of living fully for Christ, both in our deeds of goodness for Him and in our words of boldness and gentleness for Him. I pray that You would empower us to live this kind of life. We are weak and cannot do it on our own. We ask for Your strength, by Your Spirit, and we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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