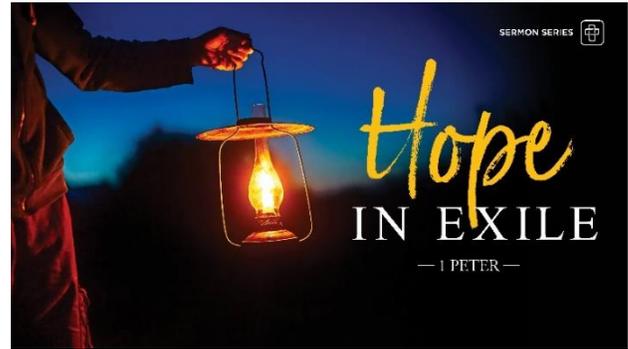


The Good Life

1 Peter 3:8-12

David Sunday June 28, 2020



Let's take time to express God's peace toward one another. Wave to the people beside you and say, "God's peace be with you." To those who are in the gymnasium, God's peace be with you, and to our church family gathered in homes throughout the community, God's peace be with you.

Let's open our Bibles and continue in worship, as our wonderful Savior reveals Himself to us in His Word, in 1 Peter 3:8-12. Please pray with me.

Heavenly Father, we bow in Your presence. May Your Word be our rule, may Your Spirit be our Teacher, and may Your greater glory be our concern through Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forevermore, we pray. Amen.

Let's worship God as we hear His Word, beginning in 1 Peter 3:8:

⁸ Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble, ⁹ not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing.

*¹⁰ For the one who wants to love life
and to see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit,*

*¹¹ and let him turn away from evil
and do what is good.*

Let him seek peace and pursue it,

*¹² because 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 what is evil.*

This is God's Word.

With summer upon us, it's a good time to ask, "How do you define the good life?" Back in the 1980s, a certain beverage company out of Milwaukee had a series of commercials that showed a bunch of guys going fishing in the summer at a beautiful lodge on a Northwoods Lake.

They would come back to the lodge at night, build a campfire, then invariably one of the guys would say, “Fellows, it doesn’t get any better than this.” That’s the good life in the eyes of many.

But the Bible has its own vision of the good life and it’s presented to us here in this passage. Do you see those words in verse ten? *“For the one who wants to love life and to see good days...”* That’s all of us. I don’t think anyone here would say, “Actually, I want to hate life and see miserable days.” So here in this passage, let’s consider how God’s Word defines the good life.

The good life is found in fellowship with a community of people who have been born again.

The first thing we see is that the good life is not a solitary life, but is found in fellowship with a community of born-again believers. That’s what’s being described for us in verse eight. It’s describing life together as Christians in the church. It’s about the kind of people God calls us to be, not just a list of things God is calling us to do.

As we look at the kind of people God is calling us to be, we recognize very quickly that this is impossible for us to do in our own strength. We can’t be this kind of people on our own. In order for this to happen, we must be born again, which is what Peter has been talking to us about since the very beginning of this letter.

Remember how it opened back in 1 Peter 1:3: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* Everything he’s calling us to do in this letter is predicated upon that new birth. Look at 1 Peter 1:22-23 once more:

Since you have purified yourselves by your obedience to the truth, so that you show sincere brotherly love for each other, from a pure heart love one another constantly, because you have been born again.

See, if you have not been born again, you can’t love one another from a pure heart the way God is calling us to. But when you’ve been born again into the Father’s family, you’ve received mercy from God and a new nature that results in a new way of relating to one another within the family. In verse eight, Peter gives us five traits of the new kind of humanity that’s produced by the new birth. They’re not random traits. They’re like five fingers on a hand, all radiating out of the same center and all working together.

There's also symmetry to these five truths. The first and the last—the thumb and the pinkie—have to do with how we think in our minds toward one another. Literally, it's talking about same-mindedness and humble-mindedness. To be like-minded, or to be of the same mind, does not mean we all think exactly the same. We'll have different political leanings, different preferences for food, different loyalties to sports teams, different talents and hobbies. But to be like-minded is to be united on how we think about the essentials of the faith: Who God is, what sin is, what salvation means, what Christ accomplished on the cross and through His resurrection, that He will reign at the right hand of the Father and His return again in glory.

These are the things we confess in the Apostles' Creed. When we say the Creed in our worship service, it's not just a way to remind ourselves of what we believe. It's also a way to affirm what unites us together as a body and what we are like-minded about.

Now, being united in the truth and having agreement on the core doctrines of Christianity doesn't necessarily mean we're going to be a beautiful community. There are a lot of churches that have high doctrine and lots of doctrinal unity who are not beautiful in their life together, because like-mindedness—the thumb without the pinkie—is not a very good combination. We need the fifth trait to go along with the first trait, which is humility of mind, humble-mindedness. These two together—like-mindedness and humble-mindedness—form the skeletal structure of life in the community of believers. A humble-minded person isn't someone who just acts like a servant. There's a certain kind of false humility that knows how to appear humble while on the inside having a very prideful heart.

A humble-minded person is someone who knows and believes deeply within his or her heart, "I am utterly dependent on God for my life, my needs, my breath, my intelligence, my emotional stability. I'm fragile and vulnerable in myself—spiritually, emotionally, physically. If God left me to myself, I'd be a wreck."

A humble-minded person is someone who believes, "I am sinful and unworthy in God's eyes and don't deserve the least of all His mercies to me. I do not have and cannot have anything in the sight of God that does not come from the righteousness of Christ and His work on the cross on my behalf." So a humble-minded person is someone who is keeping Christ constantly in view, therefore he is wonder-struck by the love and mercy of God.

That affects how you treat other people. Peter is saying the good life is found in the fellowship of people like this—a people who have been born again. This new birth shows itself in like-mindedness around the truth of the gospel and humble-mindedness because of the grace of the gospel. These are the first and the fifth traits.

Now let's look at the second and fourth. These are like the muscles and sinews of body life together. The second and fourth traits—sympathy and compassion—have to do with how we feel in our hearts toward one another. When you're sympathetic, you take the time to listen carefully to others; you spend time in their presence. You get to know what other people are going through to such an extent that you can feel what they feel and respond sensitively to their situation. It's about being interested in the whole person, not just the highlight reel or their Instagram story.

Being sympathetic like this can be emotionally draining, because it means you show up at the funerals as well as the weddings, at the hospital bed as well as the birthday party. It can take a lot out of you, but it's possible because Jesus entered into our misery and bore our griefs and sorrows. He has sympathetic resonance with us, His body. He feels what we are feeling and because of that, we can have sympathy for one another.

Closely related to the trait of sympathy is compassion. The word for compassion literally speaks of the guts, the belly. It means to feel generous in your belly. That's why sometimes the King James Version speaks of "bowels of mercy." Thankfully, we don't use that wording much in the 21st century, but it's about feeling something in your gut that moves you to action.

It's like Jesus, when He saw the crowds being harassed and helpless—like sheep without a shepherd—He felt compassion on them. He was moved in His innermost being, causing Him to act in mercy to heal, teach, feed and deliver people from the dominion of Satan, sin and darkness. Peter is saying we are to let this love of Jesus fill us as the waters fill the sea, so that when we see the needs of people, we will be moved as He is moved and respond as He responded.

The thing I want you to notice about the second and fourth traits is that the Bible commands us to feel certain things. Being a follower of Jesus is not just about doing the right actions; it's about feeling the right feelings, having the right affections. We're not to be spiritual robots, performing righteous duties in a cold and clinical way. God wants us to feel deeply with sympathy and compassion. If we lack these feelings, we can cry out to the Holy Spirit to fill us with the heart of Christ and give us these kinds of affections.

Right at the heart of these five traits in verse eight is brotherly love, or "love one another." It's the word *philadelphos*. The church is to be a new city of brotherly and sisterly love. We're a family. We're not strangers. We're not mere acquaintances. We're not distant cousins. We are brothers and sisters, born again from the same womb, sharing the same Father, united in the same blood, filled with the same Spirit.

We need to view each other like that. A family can have lots of sharp disagreements and tensions, but in a family, you stick with one another. You bear with each other. You don't break up from one another. This is how we are to relate to one another in the church. Peter is saying the good life is found in a fellowship of people who live like this. We can't do it on our own, but we have the Holy Spirit, through the gift of new birth, and we are united to Christ. We've been born again into His spiritual DNA and are being progressively conformed into His image.

Yesterday while I was running, I prayed, "Lord, which of these five traits do You want me to pray for this week in my life?" At the end of this service, we're going to have a time of prayer and I want to encourage you to identify one of these five traits. I want you to be asking the Holy Spirit to form this more fully in you and ask someone else to pray with you for the cultivation of this trait in your life this week. Where do you see there's some work that needs to be done? Where do you need to ask the Holy Spirit for grace to grow? Is it in the area of like-mindedness?

Right now, we live in a polarized time, where everyone is divided sharply. Are you getting distracted by petty disagreements? Are you insisting on your own way? Are you letting lesser things divide you from brothers and sisters in Christ, instead of letting the gospel override and overwhelm you with the unity we have in Jesus?

Or maybe you need to grow in the area of sympathy. Have you been protecting yourself from the pains and problems of others? Are you too self-absorbed? Is there a lack of attentiveness or concern? Are you the kind of person hurting people are being drawn toward? That's sympathy.

Do you need to grow in brotherly/sisterly love? Have you been treating the church like a social club or an intermural sports team, where as long as it's meeting your needs and serving your desires, you're fine to be a part of it, but if something better comes along, you'll bolt? Do you keep yourself from getting close to a family of believers? Are you striving to know one another deeply and to be known by the church family? That's brotherly love.

Maybe compassion is lacking. Maybe you're suffering from compassion fatigue, feeling like the needs of others are emotionally draining. Could that be a sign that you're operating on your own strength instead of being filled up with the love of Jesus? You can't give from an empty cup.

Lastly, is the Holy Spirit prompting you that you need to grow in humble-mindedness? This is the one I want to hone in on myself this week. Do you look at the problems and sufferings of others and think, "I can't identify with them. I never struggle with something like that. It's really their problem, because if they thought better or acted better or worked harder

like I do, then they wouldn't have that issue." Are you forgetting the mercies and grace of God toward you, thinking more highly of yourself than you ought?

Which of these five qualities will you ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow in this week? Who could you ask to pray with you about the cultivation of these qualities in your life? The good life is not a solitary life. It's about being part of a community of born-again believers who are living like this and who are helping one another live like this.

The good life is forged through bringing blessing in a world full of strife.

The second main thing I want us to see today is that the good life is not a trouble-free life, but is forged through bringing blessing in a world that is full of strife. We see this in verses nine through 12. Look at verse nine: *"Not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing."*

It's clear right here that the good life Peter is talking about in verse ten isn't about being in a world that's free from strife, because there is evil in this world. What is evil? You've got to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden to see the essence of evil. We discover there that it's seeking your satisfaction and putting your trust in someone or something other than God. It's pledging your allegiance to something or someone other than God. It's exchanging the glory of the one true God for things, objects or people who are not God.

This world is full of people who are doing that. It's full of people who are seeking their satisfaction in something other than God. And guess what? This room is full of people who have don't that or are doing that as well. We're all sinners. We've all been corrupted by evil. We're all vulnerable to it. So as long as you live in this world, you're never going to be able to create a utopia. You're never going to be able to find that kind of good life in this world, because you take yourself with you wherever you go.

When we're on the receiving end of evil treatment, our sinful condition hardwires us to strike back, to pay back evil for evil. Peter is saying to us in verse ten, "Do you want to love life? Do you want to see good days? Then don't do that. Don't pay back evil for evil." He's echoing the teaching of Jesus here on loving your enemies and turning the other cheek.

Look at what Peter says in the middle of verse nine, because this is a key to the passage: *"On the contrary, give a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing."* What's our calling, Christians? It's to bring a blessing wherever we go in this dark

world of strife. How do we do that? We bring a blessing by cultivating the kind of gospel culture in the church that we see in verse eight. That's the first way we do that.

The second way we bring a blessing is by not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but rather seeking peace in a world that's full of strife. Now, if you've been listening to 1 Peter, you're noticing that this is the second time this theme has come up. Obviously, God thinks this is very important but we're slow to learn, so we need to have this repeated. Look back at 1 Peter 2:20 and you'll see it there: *"For what credit is there if when you do wrong and are beaten, you endure it? But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God."*

So there it is in chapter two, verse 20. Then look at this phrase in verse 21 which is the same phrase we see in 1 Peter 3:9: *"For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."* What was His example? *"He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth; when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly."* That's what we looked at two weeks ago.

What I want to do today is highlight two things from 1 Peter 3:8-9. First, I want you to notice the connection between these two verses. What is verse eight dealing with? Our life together in the body. In verse nine, most commentators think Peter is switching gears and talking now about our life in the world, which is full of strife, right? But if you've been a Christian long enough, you know that sometimes the church can also be full of strife. When you experience evil for evil in the church, or when you experience insult in the church, it's very painful. We need to be ready to demonstrate verse nine behavior in the church as well. What I want you to see is that living verse nine in the world is a lot easier if you have a community of believers like verse eight to return to week after week after week.

If you're part of a church family that's like-minded, sympathetic, full of brotherly love, compassionate, humble, fellowshiping week after week with people like that and God's grace is filling you up in the church, it's a lot easier to go out into a world of strife and return blessings for evil and not to return insult for insult. So we need the church—we need the community of believers—in order to live the way God is calling us to live in the world.

The second thing I want you to see about verse nine is that there is a connection between our being a blessing in a world of strife and our inheriting a blessing from God in this life and in the life to come. Look at that verse again: *"Giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing."* There's a connection here between giving a blessing and

inheriting a blessing from God. Peter is not teaching that we earn or deserve a reward from God if we give a blessing in this world. He's not teaching that if we bring blessing to others, we merit blessing from God. That's not at all what he's saying.

In fact, this word "inherit" a blessing speaks of a gift you receive. An inheritance isn't something you work for; it's something someone else worked for and it's given as a gift to you. Through the new birth we receive an inheritance. One of the evidences that you've been born again, that you have this new life in you, is that your instincts are being transformed. Instead of the natural instinct to fight back—to return insult for insult and pay back evil for evil—there's a new instinct that's taking hold of your heart and taking hold of the hearts of all who've been born again. It's an instinct to show others the same mercy that you've received from God the Father through Jesus Christ.

You know that God in His great mercy has not returned evil for evil to you. When you insulted the glory and majesty of the infinitely holy God, when you pledged your allegiance to something or someone other than God, how did God respond to you? He redeemed you, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of His own Son (1 Peter 1:18-19). Your greatest hope is that in the future, when you stand before God, He will not return evil for evil to you or insult for insult, but instead in His mercy He's going to lavish everlasting joy on your head. So you choose now, based on a new instinct because of the mercy God has shown you, not to respond in kind when evil is done to you.

There's a living illustration of this truth in Psalm 34 which is what Peter is quoting in verses 10-12. That's a psalm David wrote when he was fleeing from evil king Saul, insults were being hurled upon him and he was being persecuted. There were two times when David had the opportunity to return evil for evil. Once was when he was hiding in the cave, King Saul went in and didn't know David was in there. David could have gone up from behind and slit his throat. But instead, he snuck up and cut the corner of his robe. Saul went out unharmed and later David showed him. "See, I did not return evil for evil. I'm blessing you, even though you're cursing me."

The second time was when Saul was asleep in the camp with his soldiers. David got inside the camp and was able to take Saul's spear and helmet, then later showed them to Saul. "I could have killed you that night. I could have returned evil for evil. But instead I'm blessing you." So David is an example of someone who's living this kind of life, and Peter wants us to see that God does bless the righteous, that God does give goodness and mercy to those who follow Him and don't return evil for evil. So Peter quotes these verses from Psalm 34:

¹⁰ *For the one who wants to love life
and to see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit,
¹¹ and let him turn away from evil
and do what is good.
Let him seek peace and pursue it,
¹² because 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 what is evil.*

If you read Psalm 34 in its entirety, there are lots of descriptions of how God is so good to the one who trusts in Him. But if you were to summarize it, the good life is not a trouble-free life. It's a life of trusting and obeying the Lord. It's a life of not returning evil for evil or insult for insult. Rather, it's a life of giving blessings to everyone in this world of strife. That's the kind of life that inherits God's blessing—and it's all by grace.

King David is a living example of someone who lived like this, but he's pointing forward to an even greater Son and Lord, our Savior Jesus Christ. Through His sufferings, He gives us not only an example to follow, but a salvation to rescue us. Psalm 34 ends with these words in verse 22: *"The Lord redeems the life of his servants, and all who take refuge in him will not be punished."*

So how does the Bible define the good life? It's not a solitary life. It's a life that's lived in fellowship with people who have been born again. And it's not a trouble-free life. Rather, it's a life of trusting and obeying the Lord Jesus Christ, Who returned good for evil and blessing for insult, and Who is a Savior Who redeems the life of His servants and blesses, not punishes, those who take refuge in Him. Trust in Him and you will find life at its best.

I love this quote by a guy names Charles Bridges and I leave it with you: "I found more in Christ than I ever expected to want." I think that's a beautiful statement of what it means to trust in Jesus. We find more in Him than we ever expected to want.

So let's bow our heads for a moment, bow in His presence, and ask Him to complete His work in us today. As we have heard His Word, let's respond to what He has said to us.

Heavenly Father, we bow in the presence of Your holiness, thanking You that we can come before You, not because of any merit of our own, but because of Jesus, the righteous One, Who lived on our behalf the life we had failed to live and Who died in our place as payment and forgiveness for our sins. We pray, Lord, that we would embody more of His life in the way we

live with one another. Father, we're asking You to work these gracious qualities into us more fully.

Right now, talk to the Lord about the trait that You want Him to be working into you this week. It could be like-mindedness, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion or humility.

Lord, apart from You, we cannot live this way. We cannot be this kind of people. Even with those who love us, we can be so proud, so self-absorbed. And then You call us to go into a world of strife and live like Jesus. O Lord, would You get ahold of our hearts and fill us with the love of Christ. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit, so that as we go into the world this week, we will be people who bring a blessing, for You have called us to this and You have destined us for this.

Thank You for the blessings that will crown the heads of Your righteous people, all by grace, not through our own merit, but because of what You've done for us in Christ. So now I pray, Lord, that the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God our Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit would go with us all as we go into the world, in the holy name of Jesus, Your Son. Amen.

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