

RESILIENT HOPE // Courage & Conscience

Many people go through life believing that if they live a good life, if they're a good person, if they are generous, and volunteer, and contribute to society, then life will be easy for the most part. Peter is reminding us that a troubled world and daunting circumstances are not the exception to the human experience, they are the norm, especially for followers of Jesus. Hardship and suffering, brokenness and heartache, unfortunately, is not the exception to the human experience it's the norm. So, how do we find strength, hope, and courage to keep going, to persevere in the midst of the disappointments, toil, and pain of life?

Now, maybe you're thinking that your life is great, so this doesn't really apply. I would pose, I think the Apostle Peter would pose to you, that even though that may be the case right now, chances are your current experience will not always be the case. So, whether life is smooth sailing, or you're going through it right now, God is using the words of Peter to build into us an enduring hope for whatever circumstances we face in life.

1 Peter 3:10, "Whoever desires to love life and see good days..."

So how do we do that? Here's Peter's answer. If you'll do these three things, Peter says, you'll love life and see good days.

SEEK PEACE

1 Peter 2:8-12, "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 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. For

'Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him **seek peace** and pursue it. 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.'" (Psalm 34:12-16)

I recently heard the story of a soldier who was a follower of Jesus. Every night before going to sleep he would spend time with the Lord, study the scripture and pray. Another soldier in the barracks mocked him and said the most awful things to him and about him. On one of those nights, the soldier threw a pair of his muddy combat

boots at the Christian. The next morning, the soldier woke up to his boots cleaned and ready for inspection. Over time, other soldiers in the barracks became curious about this man's faith and several of them gave their lives to Christ, and the soldier baptized them. This is the power of pursuing peace, of not retaliating in the midst of hostility. It silences the ignorance of foolish people.

1 Peter 3:8, "...all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind."

This is hard work! The word for sympathy here means to personally experience the weight of what someone else is feeling; to put yourself in their shoes. To understand from their perspective as best as you can. And that's difficult to do when you are convinced that the other person's perspective is wrong or even just incomplete. Have you ever been in an argument with someone your close to? Have you cared far more about winning the argument than understanding the other person's perspective?

Peter is calling us to care far more about the relationship than about being right! If your goal is to win, you will ultimately lose because you'll lose the person. The question in conflict should never be: How do I convince them I'm right? But instead: Do I truly understand their perspective?

Often, someone facing difficulty will want to understand more of God's perspective on whatever it is they're facing. Occasionally, there will be a disproportionate, angry, or defensive response to what God says about a situation. And what's counter-intuitive in those moments, whether it's in a business meeting, or with an employee, with your spouse, or one of your kids, Peter is telling us what our response can and should look like in those moments: sympathy, humility, and compassion.

When anyone has a disproportionate emotional response to a suggestion, idea, or a topic, more often than not, there's a wound, a sore spot, a fear driving that. And seeking peace is seeing beneath the surface and recognizing that in those moments we have an opportunity to genuinely know and minister to the person we're talking with, or disagreeing with, or even in conflict with. Because the presenting problem is rarely the real problem.

I don't enjoy conflict, but I've come across a belief within the Church that the way we gain unity is by avoiding conflict. Or by pretending that relational problems don't exist. But that means that the perceived unity is a façade. It's fake. You don't gain unity by avoiding conflict. You gain unity by pressing into conflict in a way that prioritizes

the relationship above the conflict. Peter's addressing all of this because unity takes work.

In disagreements or conflict, how do people perceive you? Are you someone who is primarily concerned about getting their opinion out there, proving their point, being right? Or someone who is eager to listen? When you're in the midst of a disagreement, before you offer your opinion, make sure you can repeat back the point the other person is making in a way where they say, "Exactly!" Don't just listen so you can refute their arguments. Listen so you can understand them!

James 1:19, "...let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak..."

1 Peter 2:9, "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."

This is Peter's go-to theme. Be like Christ who never returned evil for evil. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return. When He was cursed, He blessed. When someone says something hurtful, harsh, condescending, or even untrue about you, don't respond in kind. Follow Christ's example.

Right now: Are you seeking to bless your enemies? Do you desire their good? Are you praying for it? LOOKING for ways to be good to them? In doing this, Peter says that you yourself obtain a blessing.

STAND FIRM (v. 13-17)

1 Peter 3:13-17, "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."

There are three specific commands that Peter gives us in this passage...

1. Have No Fear

This phrase is directly tied to our conduct. How we live. That's why Peter starts by saying, if you're living rightly, what is there to fear? In other words, if you're suffering because you're doing good, you're suffering with a clear conscience.

Proverbs 28:1, "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion."

If your conscience is clear, you can live without fear. But when you're living in sin, if you're hiding something you know you should not be engaged in, you'll constantly be wondering when you'll be exposed or found out, so of course you'll live in fear. You're constantly looking over your shoulder wondering how long you can keep going this way. Bad things grow in the dark and hidden sin will just continue to grow and get worse. It will eventually be exposed, and it brings destruction into your own life and into the lives of the people closest to you.

Maybe you're carrying the shame of hidden sin today. Jesus says, "The truth will set you free." The truth of the Gospel will set you free. There's something powerful that happens when we bring what is hidden into the light, when we confess our sin, when we simply say what's true.

And maybe you're living in fear of some hidden sin being exposed. Maybe you're escaping the pressure and stress of life through alcohol, and you know you've gone too far. Or maybe, you've been medicating loneliness through pornography or excessive spending. Or maybe you're in the habit of losing your temper on those closest to you, and you know it's wrong, but you can't seem to change. And the pain of confessing and then putting in the work to actually change feels insurmountable.

But if you confess it, whatever it is, and agree with God, call sin "sin", repent, change your mind, put in the work, the freedom of a clear conscience before God and others is infinitely better than a life carrying the burden of shame and the fear of being found out. Live without fear. Live with a clear conscience so that you can stand firm.

2. Honor Christ as Holy

There is a courage and a calmness that comes from recognizing the holiness of God. When we pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name," we're acknowledging that God is ultimate! That God is ultimately good, and He is in control, He's sovereign, eternal, outside of time, yet entered into time, that He is ruling and reigning over all

things, and that you and I, finite, fickle, fragile human beings belong to Him, and we get to call Him our Father! I pray that truth never becomes mundane to us.

If we recognize Him as the ultimate King and Creator, the Author, Perfector, Redeemer of all things, and we're living with a clear conscience before Him, not only do we have an other-worldly type of courage, but we carry the peace that passes understanding into every room we enter.

Alexander Maclaren wrote,

"Only he who can say, 'The Lord is the strength of my life' can go on to say, 'Of whom shall I be afraid?'"

- Alexander MacLaren, *Hallowing Christ*

3. Prepare a Defense

1 Peter 2:15, "...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..."

We don't isolate from the culture or assimilate into the culture. We engage faithfully in the culture while remaining distinctly different from the culture. If we're engaging faithfully with unbelievers in the culture, inevitably, someone is going to look at us and ask, "What's up with you?"

Peter says not to wait until that moment to be able to articulate why you believe what you believe. He says to always be prepared for that moment! Prepare ahead of time so that when an unbeliever becomes curious about your life, as you engage in the mission of Jesus, when the questions come, you have an answer for the hope that you have.

CELEBRATE THE GOSPEL (v. 18-22)

1 Peter 3:18-22, "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, in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 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. 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, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him."

1. What is Peter talking about when he says Jesus preached to the spirits in prison?
2. What does he mean when he says, "Baptism saves you"?

"...in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared..."

- Multiple interpretations here:
 1. After Christ's death, Jesus took a victory lap. He's essentially spiking the football in front of a bunch of spirits, demons, principalities, and powers that had been at work in the days of Noah, and it was a foretaste of their final judgment.
 2. The other option, and the one put forward by scholars like Matthew Henry, [I lean toward] is that Peter is saying that during Noah's day, Christ was working through Noah to proclaim salvation, just as Christ's spirit works in us and continues to proclaim salvation in our day.
 - Noah preached for 120 years to his generation, and no one listened, and Peter is saying, "*Don't be discouraged if sometimes we get the same reaction that Noah got.*" God eventually kept his word to Noah and brought salvation from judgment upon sin; We can be confident He will keep His word to us, too.
 - By that reading, you'd read vs. 19 this way:

"In His Spirit, Christ went and proclaimed (through Noah) to the spirits (the people) [who are now] in prison, (in hell) Mt. 5:25; 2 Pt. 2:4, 5 ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, (they rejected salvation God was offering through Noah) when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared..."

God's desire was to save. The people in the days of Noah only ever did evil. They were unbelievably wicked to one another, and Noah's faith in God, his willingness to obey God in the midst of rejection, mockery, and persecution brought salvation to him and his family.

Peter is telling Christians in this passage not to be discouraged when others don't believe the message of salvation today either because the day of ultimate redemption that came in Noah's day is coming to you as well.

What does he mean when he says, v. 21 "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you"?

What Peter is teaching here is not that you must be baptized in order to be saved. Peter's also not saying that baptism is like taking a bath in front of an audience. It is...

1 Peter 3:21, "...an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.."

An appeal, a pledge, a commitment **of a good conscience toward God**. Baptism is the outward sign of what has already occurred in the heart and life of the person who has trusted in Christ for salvation. In the same way, Noah trusted in God for the salvation of his family, built the boat amidst ridicule because of his faith in God, and his faith saved him, which is what we're declaring when we're baptized! Our faith in Christ for salvation.

CHRIST WINS. Just like He won in the days of Noah when everyone thought Noah was a fool. And so, He will today. He wins!

There's one winner to this whole thing, and it is Christ. Keep preaching Him. Even when it feels like no one is listening. Even when it feels like the world is coming unraveled and falling apart. Keep preaching, because just like He brought salvation through Noah, so He is going to bring it through our sharing of the goodness of God in our day.

Noah was saved from judgment by the ark. Jesus Christ is our ark. Through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father, we've been saved from ultimate judgment and have now been clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Today, may we be a people who seek peace, stand firm, and always celebrate the victory that Christ has won for us, seeking to glorify Him in all we say and do.

Amen.