

1 Peter 3:8-22 "The Good Life and Bravery"

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

There we go. Let's pray. Father, sometimes Your Word is really hard to understand, and we ask, Father, that You help us to be patient as we come to parts of Your Word that we don't understand. But most of all, Father, we know that Your Word speaks to us as we really are in the real world. And we ask, Lord, that You help us to hear the questions and the challenges and the comfort and the hope that Your Word brings to us this morning, to the real us in this real world. And so, Father, we ask that You would be kind to us and do this in the power of Your Holy Spirit. And we ask it in the name of Jesus, Your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.

So, just to be clear, I pray most days, I'd be a liar if I said I prayed about this every day, because some days I forget. But I pray most days that God would give me some opportunity during the day to bear witness to Jesus with my words. Most days He doesn't give me an opportunity like that, or if He does, I didn't catch it. But some days He does. But I'm not always happy when He gives me this opportunity. So, a couple of weeks ago, I had a lot to do. And I had a personal errand that I had to do, and I thought it's like a five-minute walk, maybe five minutes there, ten minutes there, five minutes back. But I need to do it. And I can only do it, you know, during sort of working business hours. So, I'm going to go get it done. And I go there, and within a minute or two, as I'm getting the task done that I have to get done, I get into this conversation with a man who'd grown up in a Muslim-majority country, in fact, overwhelmingly Muslim country. He'd left that Muslim country, come to

North America, and he was now an atheist. And for some reason, we just got chatting about things that were going on in his home country that I happen to know something about. And then before we know it, he finds out I'm a pastor. And then we go into an hour-long conversation about Christianity and religions and atheism and all of that type of stuff, and why he's left all religion behind.

[3 : 3 1] And I'm just, here's my business, me being honest. So, first of all, thank you for those who are praying as well that I would have opportunities to do this. But I pray that I'm a more holy person in the future, because I have to confess, after about five minutes, I started to resent it.

I was thinking to myself, I have all this work to do. I have emails to answer, amongst other things. And then it was like as if God said, okay, George, one moment, don't you pray for this all the time? Like, you know, one of the nice things about emails, they just sit there forever, right? You can always get back to them eventually. So, we end up having this, you know, very interesting conversation about a whole pile of things. And, you know, he talked to me a little bit about, you know, he challenged me and said, George, why is it if your religion is true that there are other religions? And I gave him a quick answer about how Christianity accounts for the existence of other religions. And I said to him, back to you, I mean, the real interesting question is, how does your atheism explain the fact that there's so many religions in the world? To which he'd never thought they had to think about that. So, he switched the topic, which is fine. That's fine. And we got into

other things about, you know, in particular, he, I guess he was recently talking to a Baha'i and he was a little bit fascinated with the idea that religions were time specific. Now, he would have also said, eventually, if it's time specific, you get to today where if you're enlightened, you don't believe in any God whatsoever. But he asked me a little bit about what I thought about that. And I, amongst other things, said to him, well, just because you say it's a religion doesn't mean that the law of non-contradiction doesn't apply. In other words, if religions and religious leaders say different things, seek different things, promise completely different things, they can't all be true. It doesn't matter if there's one time or another.

And we ended up getting into a very interesting discussion about that. And that all fits in, actually, to the sermon that we're going to look at today, which talks about, well, you'll see it, it's going to talk about different ways that people answer the question, a very, very good and important question. What does it mean to love life and see good days? Like, that's something you can ask people. You know, what do you think it means to love life and see good days? Like, that's what you'd like.

Everybody likes that, wouldn't they? We'd like to love life. We'd like to see good days.

Like, how did that, like, what do you, how do you think about that and understand that? And the text is going to talk about this in a very profound way, because it's going to introduce how does that, your understanding of what a good life is like, like, what is it, what, what does a really good life look like? And then the Bible is going to throw a curveball or a screwball and say, and how does that fit with suffering? That's something we don't normally think about. Anyway, let's look.

[6:13] It's 1 Peter chapter 3. We preach through books of the Bible, and we're going through 1 Peter, and it's 1 Peter chapter 3 verse 8. And just as you sort of turn to that and follow along, the words will be on the screen, but it's always good to have your own Bible with you, to read it for yourself and to look around what's going on. And for some people, they like paper Bibles to underline things and make little notes on the side, and that's really good as well.

Well, just as we read it, this is a letter that was originally a circular letter to a group of Christians who'd come from paganism in an area that we now call Turkey. And Peter is one of Jesus's closest disciples. He was the man who denied Jesus on the night that he was captured. He was a witness of the resurrection. And this has been written about 30 years or so after the death and resurrection of Jesus. And it's written a year or two before Peter will die a martyr's death. And in that martyr's death, he could have avoided it if he had just said that Jesus really didn't rise from the dead.

If he had just said that, he would be able to live. But he's going to die a martyr's death all because he would not deny that truth. But let's see what he has to say. Verse 8, chapter 3, finally, all of you, 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 this, to this you were called that you may obtain a blessing.

Now just sort of pause here for a second. What does he say about finally? Well, what he's talking about is just before this, he's talked about how Christians, so Christians are a sort of a minority, an unpopular minority. The general culture sees them with some suspicion. And he's talked a little bit about how you relate to the emperor and authorities in general. Then he's talked about how Christians who are slaves are to relate to their masters. Then he's talked about husbands and wives. And I've talked about these in the last couple of weeks. And when he says finally, he's sort of finishing up this section about how you talk, how you think through these things.

And you can go back and listen to my sermons. But one of the things I said is that I said sort of two things which are relevant here. The first is that words like submission are like a dimmer switch, not an off and on switch, or an honor. Those are like dimmer switches. And what's required is that Christians need to be able to have good conversations with each other to be able to help each other figure out what that means in their context. You need to have those face-to-face conversations where you cry together, you give high fives together, you pray together, you read the word together, and you need to be able to have these conversations to figure this stuff out. And so when Peter says finally, he's bringing this section to a close. So if you look again at it, it's very interesting. He's talking about how do you have those good conversations in churches. Like how do you have them? And what he's going to do is he paints a picture of seven types of virtues, or seven aspects of it. And the way to understand the seven is, once again, it's like an ancient arch, where there's no, they don't have rebar to hold things together. They have to cut the stones in such a way that when all the stones, gravity sort of pushes the stones down and creates this very powerful, strong arch. And all seven of these stones have to be together. You take one out, the thing falls apart.

[9 : 56] And so here's what he says. Here's what you have to have this type of conversation in your church and between churches as well, actually. It's very interesting. Look at it again, verse 8, have unity of mind. And what that means, it's not calling us to groupthink. It's not calling us to be an echo chamber. It's not calling us to have an algorithm, so we only get outraged at the same things and delighted by the same things. It's nothing like that. And underneath it is an idea that you've got to think out of the same truths. You've got to think out of things, the same ideas, or the same basic content. I won't go into it. You can just sort of think about it. But it's actually more important what you think from than what you think to. Because at the end, over the course of your life, what you think from will determine more things than what you think to. So it could be that an atheist, for instance, and a Christian, for different reasons, come to maybe believe that,

I don't know, like something like taking a life in the womb is wrong. But they're going to think about it from different premises, which means that there's going to be a whole lot of other areas where they don't, or they might actually both come to the conclusion that it's a human being, but the atheist then might go further and say you can do this and that. And what you argue from is more important. And so this unity of mind is really calling us to think from the same basis.

It's to think from the scriptures and the gospel. And to think from that. And if you think from that, then that's going to be hopeful. Hopefully you can come to some type of harmony in how you think. And then, you know, when you think, to think together with sympathy, that means really having a sense of the struggles that somebody else is going through, and maybe how that's going to mean that they have blind spots to certain types of things.

And you need to have sympathy as you're talking and trying to figure that out. At the same time, maybe because you haven't had those hard times, you have some blind spots. And the person who has had the hard times needs to have some sympathy to you. And you're going to have a different type of conversation if you're studying the scriptures together and you have that sympathetic heart to each other. And then to have brotherly love is that you're to talk as if you take an ideal of what a really good family or really good marriage looks like. And that's how you're to talk to each other.

Because you understand that your family is going to continue on into the years and have relationships on into the years. And you want to have that good type of conversation as if you're almost like a family. And then a tender heart, that's a different thing than sympathy. It's really more that you can be convicted of wrongdoing. Like that when you're having this conversation and somebody says, you know, I think what you just said is out of line. Rather than saying, how dare you say that I'm out of line? I'm not out of line. Like, no, no, no, that's hard-heartedness.

A tender-heartedness goes, you know what? I think you're right. I was out of line when I said that. I was too harsh. I was being too, I was attacking when I shouldn't have been. That's what tender heart means. And then humble mind, well, that's the most wonderful of all. Humble mind doesn't mean gullible. In fact, if you have a humble mind, you'll never be gullible. A humble mind means that you really desire to look, you're not thinking about yourself. You're looking out to see what's really there. And you really want to learn. And you really want to grow. You want to see what's the truth and what's real. And you're willing to set aside your own preoccupations, maybe your own party politics, your own philosophy. You're willing to set that aside, look out, see what's really there, and learn. That's a humble mind. A humble mind is an active mind, not a passive mind. It's not gullible.

[13 : 50] It's not stupid. It's looking out. And then the other two things, do not repay, verse 9, do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless for as you were called, that you, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. These last two things are very important as well. I've shared this illustration before, but I'll share it again. I had two boys, then a girl, and then two boys. And then of course I had some other kids. But here's the thing. You have four boys relatively close to age. And I have great boys, by the way. And they're wonderful men.

I'm very proud of them. But there was a certain age where the two boys would be sitting together or something, and yet one pokes the other. And then the one who gets poked pokes the other one back. And then the one who got poked back pokes that. And then they poke back. And then there's a slug.

And then there's a slug back. And you can imagine what can happen, the chaos that can assume when you have several boys. And I would, of course, attempt my best to discipline them and all that.

But at the end of the day, I realized when they reached a certain age, I had to have a bit of a conversation with them. More than once, by the way. By the way, you know, Louise never has to say things to me more than once. I just instantly get it and always just immediately repent. I'm just... Sometimes many of us need to be talked to more than once, right? Anyway, but I would say to them, listen, here's the issue. You guys need to decide what type of family you want to live in and what type of home you want to have. You need to make a decision because you see that if you want to make sure you're the last one to do the poking, and if you want to never have it that you're the last one poked, you're just going to have poking and punching all the time.

[15 : 37] And you won't want to come home. And you won't want to do things together. And the only way to break that cycle is if someone says, I will be the last one punched in the shoulder. There's no other way around it. Somebody has to actually say, I'll be the last one poked.

And you need that if you're going to have some peace and harmony. So there was a Christian a long time ago who said, whenever two or more Christians are gathered together there, there is friction.

And that's always true. And so if you're going to have good conversations in a congregation and between congregations, on top of thinking out of the same thing and having sympathy for others and understanding what they're going through and having an understanding that you're talking like a family, a good family, and having a tender heart, you're praying that you'll be convicted of sin and open to confess it, that you also will realize that when things get heated, because sometimes get heated and you say this and then you say that and then you say this and then you say that, and what happens when that's going on is each of you forget the first things, all the other things that you've said, all you remember are the things the other person said. And at some point in time, if you want to stop all of that, you just got to stop it. You got to let the other person have that last angry word, otherwise there's going to be no peace. And that's a very, very beautiful vision about how you have good conversations in a congregation. And it's something that we should pray that would happen to us as a church, that these are something that we'll grow in. But now, Peter goes in a very, very interesting direction. And he, so, you know, this is all really good. Here's how we're going to have good conversations. And now he's going to get really realistic. Because some of the people in the congregation are suffering. We already know that he's talked about husbands and wives. And if we know anything about families, and it includes, it means sometimes the husband's going to suffer, sometimes the wife is going to suffer, slaves always suffer. And that's separate from the fact that sometimes you're going to suffer because the local authority is demanding you do this, your boss is demanding you do this, and you can't do it because you're a Christian. And he's now going to sort of bring suffering into the mix of all of this. But he does it in a very curious way. He begins, in a sense, by assuming that we ask, we all can, that we ask this type of question. What does it mean to love life and see good days?

What does that look like? If you were to ask Canadians, what does it look like to love life and see good days? Well, for a lot of us in our culture, a lot of Canadians in our culture, a good life is a life filled with pleasure. It's filled with material things and other non-material pleasures. And for others, it's all about maybe having power and applause. And for others, it might be about having their political party win.

And if you get away from North America or aspects of, you know, those are perennial things that the good life is a life of pleasure and lots of material things. But if you get beyond that in other cultures, honor-shame cultures, is the good life is where you bring honor to your family and to your group.

[19 : 16] And a bad life is where you cause any type of shame to your family, any type of shame in some cultures to your ancestors as well. You want to honor your family, you want to honor your unit or your regiment, you want to honor your family, you want to avoid all shame at all cost. And then, of course, if you get even more sort of philosophical about it, in certain religions, the goal of life is to live such a life that the cycle of reincarnation ends and you can merge with the one. And a good life is a life that ends with that, that you've achieved nirvana and the whole cycle of birth and rebirth ends. Buddhists would say that the whole problem, the good life is a life where you kill all desire because suffering is connected to desire. And once you've stopped that, then that's the good life when you no longer suffer. In fact, actually, here's the very interesting thing throughout all of these things. And Buddhists, in a sense, help Canadians to ask this type of question is, where does suffering fit in with your good life? And for the average consumerist Canadian, the average soccer mom or soccer dad in a suburb, suffering always just, if you start to suffer, that's just the end. Like,

suffer has no meaning. You have to do everything you can to try to avoid suffering and to maximize pleasure. And that sounds like a very attractive philosophy, and it's what advertisers push, but it's actually only a philosophy that works when you're young and good-looking and have a job and making lots of money. And once those things start to go, once you have some physical illness or once you have not enough money and all those other types of things, you realize that all the promises around having a good life centered on possessions and getting stuff and pleasure, that those things fall apart. It's the ideology, it's the type of belief of the good life that only really works for those years that you're young and good-looking and healthy and successful and making piles of money.

And once those things start to come undone... There's a man, he was one of the richest people in Ottawa. Well, no, he wasn't one of the richest, he was a very rich man who'd done a lot of things in Ottawa. And he became a Christian through our church very, very late in life. And one of the things about him is he regretted that he had lived his life according to that philosophy, especially as his body fell apart and his family relationships fell apart.

And he realized, in a sense, how it's like that old thing, nobody on their deathbed wishes they'd spent more time at the office. Like nobody on their deathbed wishes they'd spent more time watching Netflix.

Like nobody thinks that once things come that are very, very hard. Well, what's the Christian answer to having a good life?

Well, that's what he talks about now in verse 10. And it's setting up this other issue, which is very important. Look at verse 10 and following. He says, whoever desires to love life and see good days. [22 : 33] Now, here's a very different thing. 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. Now, that little thing there, you can see it maybe on the screen, it's poetry. And the way the poetry works from there's a connection between turning from evil and doing good and seeking peace and pursuing it. And because this is quoting a poem written by David a thousand years earlier, so three thousand years ago now, the word for peace in the original language is shalom. And what that word shalom has added is a type of balance or harmony. But it's a balance in harmony that not only is a balance in harmony within the individual, it's a balance in harmony between individuals. It's a balance in harmony between the individual and other individuals in the created order. And it's a balance in harmony, most importantly, between the human being and the triune God. It's a balance in harmony with the triune God.

So it's saying here, then what is the good life? The good life is one where you don't speak evil and you're not deceit, which is lying. You're turning away from all types of evil, not just speaking it, and you're pursuing to do that which is good. And you're seeking peace. In other words, it's going to define the good, not in terms of how our culture defines good, but in the fact that there has to be this internal harmony or balance within you that also is connected to other people, but most importantly is a harmony and balance with God and that you're to pursue this. And then in verse 12, it goes even deeper, for it says, 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. And that's a very, very interesting set of things because the word righteous here has two particular aspects to it. It means not only doing right things, but it also means being right with God. That's what the word righteous means in the Bible, doing right things and being right with God. And so the good life, to love life, to have a good life is one where you are pursuing a life where you are right with God and doing right things, knowing that as you do that, his ear is open to your prayer, that he has this relationship with you, which is close. And then this final thing, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, which is a very, very shocking type of thought. It means that every time you do something which is wrong, and that, and doing wrong, by the way, it, it, it, it has two different senses. It means either doing something which is wrong or turning away from doing something which is right when you should do what's right. So in other words, there's two types of wrong. One type of wrong would be if I slander Bob. And if I slander Bob, say lies about Bob in such a way that everybody's going to look down their noses at Bob and not like Bob, that's slandering Bob. But the other way that I can do evil is that I might hear Andy and Sue slandering Bob. And I happen to know that Bob is innocent of all of those things. And I, I have the knowledge to know that he, they're, they're, they're not telling the truth that, that he's actually really innocent. And if I say nothing, then that's also wrong.

They're both wrong, right? You can be wrong by what you fail to do when you should, and by what you actually do that you shouldn't. And what the Bible here is saying is that every time a human being does that, it's as if they're waging war on God himself. So that when I slander Bob, I'm not just slandering Bob, I'm waging war, fighting against the triune God. And when Andy and Sue slander Bob, and I know that Bob is innocent, and I don't say anything to defend Bob, I don't stand up for Bob. Once again, I'm in effect fighting against God himself. I'm choosing to fight against God, whether I'm conscious of it or not. That's a very, very interesting whole way of describing what it means to live a good life. But now here's the problem.

Some of you might have seen the whole controversy that's going on around Sir John A. McDonald's, the house that he lived in for a couple of years in Kingston. I think it's the only place that they can commemorate Sir John A. McDonald, the founding prime minister of our country. If you haven't followed it, if you're not on the right algorithms to get outraged. And it's all about how racist and colonialist and pro-slavery and all this, like there's a whole series of slanders against the man. But, and it's a very common thing in our day and age right now to speak these types of slanders against earlier generations. And the great problem with all of them, apart from the fact that they're saying untruths and it's slanderous, but there's an implied type of moral virtue signaling about themselves that implies that if I lived back then when there was slavery, I would have been an abolitionist. When I, if I had lived back there when this was going on, I would have spoken out. I would have been one of the people leading to fight against all of those types of things. Now here's where the Bible is very, very subtle and very, very clever because it asks the question, what does the good life look like?

[28 : 22] How do you live a good life? How do you live a life that's very satisfying? And you could get lots of Canadians who could give you answers and, and by and large, like the, the most common answers about seeking pleasure and having lots of material possessions and being well-liked and having good relationships and all of those things. And the Bible isn't saying any of those things are wrong.

It's just going to say that these things are incomplete. And then it asks the question, what's going to ask the question over the next couple of weeks is how does that view of the world handle when you suffer? That's not the question it asks right now. What it asks is, does your view of the world lead you to be brave enough to suffer for what is right? In other words, if your view of what the good life is, is having lots of possessions and having good relationships and having good money and good health, would that lead you to be a Martin Luther King?

Would that lead you to be another Harriet Tubman? Would that lead you to be a Dietrich Bonhoeffer who worked to try to defeat the Nazis and by direct order of the Fuhrer was killed shortly before the Fuhrer took his own life because he hated him so much?

Would that view of life lead you to be like one of Corrie Ten Boom and her sister and her dad and hide the Jews? Would your view of life lead you to that?

We all know that if your view of life is that the good life is having as many possessions as possible, you are not going to endanger it. And this is a Christian problem, not just a non-Christian problem. If you ever read, it's a brilliant letter by Martin Luther King, his letter from a Birmingham jail, where a whole pile of white pastors condemned him for making too much of the evil of segregation from their comfortable pulpits and their comfortable pews and not being willing to shake up the establishment.

[30 : 37] And he just, it's a very powerful letter, well worth reading even today. Letters from a Birmingham, a letter from a Birmingham jail by Martin Luther King. Now, you see, this is what the Bible says here, and this is where the Bible's understanding of the good life is so profound, because as the Bible's view of the good life grips you, it will lead you to bravery and heroism, even if it's just small acts.

And it's so wise and profound, because it not only, if you have this understanding, and you realize there's problems with that, that you're not brave enough, etc. Everything about what follows is to build into you, well, let's look, verse 13.

Now, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good, right? The thing is just set before you, that the good life is doing what you should be zealous for. And it's not a stupid, naive question, because what he's going to show, he's going to show you how, if you grasp that last little bit, that if you do wrong, you're actually waging war against God, what it's doing, it's relativizing the power of the corporation, it's relativizing the power of the Supreme Court, it's relativizing the power of the state, it's relativizing the power of your family, it's realizing, making you realize that God is way

more powerful than all these other things.

And why are you worried about them when you should really be thinking about what God thinks about it all? See, verse 14. But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sakes, you will be blessed.

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. And we're going to see down in verse 17, it's going to say even more. And what it's saying is this, that if you are pursuing, it's not that God wills that you suffer.

[32 : 28] He wills that you do that which is good. You do that which is just. You do that which is merciful. You do that which is beautiful. You do that which is good. And if you pursue to do that which is good, it will sometimes mean that you will suffer for doing good.

And it's not that God desires that you suffer. He desires that you do good. But he knows that if you desire to do that which is good, you will sometimes be forced into a position where, like Martin Luther King, you will be kneeling and praying on a street corner while you're beaten by batons, and fire hoses are fired on you, and dogs bark in your faces.

It means like Harriet Tubman, you have to live underground as the authorities try to capture you as you're leading slaves out of bondage in slavery into Canada and the Underground Railway in Canada where they can be free.

It means you hide the Jews, even in a profound anti-Semitic time. We are living in a profoundly anti-Semitic time right now, deeply anti-Semitic, where most of the brightest and best in Canada are showing a disturbing moral equivalence between anti-Semites and what is the right thing to do.

Do we have the courage to speak into it? Are we willing to lose an election over it? Are we willing to lose customers or church members over it?

[34 : 15] So God knows that if you pursue the good, there will maybe be times you have to suffer, but this whole thing is he said you should do good anyway. And then people might say, George, but I don't have your courage.

I don't have those. You see, here's what, so George doesn't have the courage. Here's what Peter is going to talk about very, very briefly in the words that follow, and I'll try to do it very, very briefly.

I need Jesus to make me right with God because I do wrong things and fail to do the right things.

And I don't only need Jesus to make me right with God.

I need Jesus to remake me. Every day I need him to remake me.

And the wonderful thing about it is that Jesus loves me so deeply that he died on the cross for me.

He died so that he could bring me to God.

[35 : 19] And he doesn't just sort of bring me to God and forget about me, but that he has triumphed over sin. He has triumphed over death. He has triumphed in a way that makes us right with God.

And he has triumphed over all authorities, even hostile spiritual powers. And he stands over them all, which is why we can pray to him. Everybody who prays assumes that God is sovereign enough to act.

And that's what the rest of it says very briefly. Let's just look. I have to, I've, well, let's just look.

Verse 15. So at the last part of verse 14, have no fear of them nor be troubled.

This is not an invitation. This is not to be condemned if we are fear. It's an invitation to grow in fearlessness. The fearlessness to do that which is right. How do we do that?

Well, verse 15. In your hearts, honor or set apart Christ the Lord as holy. That's part of the reason why we gather together in church on a Sunday morning.

[36 : 21] And whatever we're going to think out of or talk out of, it's a matter of encouraging each other and praying for each other and hugging each other and crying with each other and celebrating with each other as we encourage people to remember that Christ is the Lord and that he is over all.

And that continues. Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason of the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect. You can pray that I can do that in my sermons.

That as I help us to read the Bible together, and as we read the Bible together by ourselves in our small group, that we're learning how that even if a person from a Muslim-majority country who's now become an atheist and has rejected all religion and you get into a conversation that maybe you have some little way of beginning to describe to him what your hope is in Christ.

And when you fail like I fail all the time, that you can say, God, forgive me for failing. Do some work in that man's life, even if I have not spoken as I should, and give me some other opportunity. Because you know that Christ knew about your failures.

He knew about your lacks. He knew about your inadequacies. He still uses ordinary people, fallible people like you and me, to speak the truth about who Jesus is.

[37 : 35] Verse 16, having a good conscience so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. In other words, just as within the church you want to try to avoid, you know, casting mud back and forth with each other, just try to do that.

Be always, the more a person dislikes you, to try to be the one who's the calm one. The one who doesn't lose their temper. The one you call out to Christ and ask for his help, to be the one who speaks clearly and simply.

And then here there's verse 17. I've already hinted at it. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. Right? The good life is doing that which is good.

Martin Luther King looks at the segregation. Harriet Tubman looking at the slavery. The tenbins and Bonhoeffer looking at the evil of Nazism, and you're still called to do good.

The good life is doing good. And even if it's going to cost you to suffer, you do that which is good.

And then here, where do we get that strength and power to do it?

[38 : 41] Look at this, verse 18. It's so beautiful. 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.

And that should be capitalized to the Holy Spirit. By the way, did you see yourself in the text? I see myself in the text. Did you see yourself in the text? You say, no, it doesn't mention your name, George. No, it does.

Look again. For Christ also suffered once for sins, just once for all. The righteous for the unrighteous, that's George. You can put down there, the righteous Christ died for George.

The righteous Christ died for Elias. The righteous Christ died for Rachel. The righteous died for Lisa.

That he might bring George to God. Ross to God. Elias to God.

[39 : 44] Rachel to God. Lisa to God. You're there in the text. That's you. Oh, but does he know how, does he know how I don't have any bravery?

Does he know how much of a coward I am? Does he know how much I can resent people and have unforgiveness and how lack of generosity can consume my heart?

Yes, he knows all of that. He knew that when he died for you. But did he know how, I'm just really, I'm a coward. Yeah, he knew that when he died for you.

And then it goes here. This is, by the way, from the verses 19 and 20 are the most hard passage in the Bible to understand.

Scholars will say that. I read, anyway, here's what this means very briefly. In which he went and proclaimed, so he's risen, so he dies on the cross, the Holy Spirit raises him from death, 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.

[41 : 02] You go, what? It's using cultural imagery from the day which we've lost. And basically what it's saying, the word spirits there mean evil spirits. And what it's saying is that partly what happened is the time, the greatest time that evil spirits thought they triumphed was when they put God, the Son of God, to death on the cross.

And the time before that, which was the greatest time of their triumph, was just before God destroyed the ancient world with a flood. And then God went and surprised them.

He not only defeated those demons, he saved eight people, recreated the created order, and created a new thing out of Noah. And this is Jesus going to proclaim, you think you've won, but you lost.

You think you won, but you lost. Up from the grave he arose with a mighty triumph for his foes.

That great old hymn. We should sing it right now. And then it mentions verse 20, in baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal from dirt from the body, but an appeal to God for a good conscience to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[42 : 16] All that means is it's making a connection that the waters of the flood, which were God's judgment on sin and evil, and then there was this little ark that carried that new seed of a new humanity, which still was fallen, but would be another sense and a chance for the human race.

And we now understand that there is a far greater ark, and his name is Jesus, and that in a sense the waters of baptism over us are illustrating both death and God's judgment, but we understand that we have put our faith and trust in Christ and we are carried through death and judgment, and it's because of his resurrection and his triumph, his death upon the cross and his resurrection, that we are made right with God.

And then it ends with who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers having been subject to him. And so this text is saying, you know how we said that if you fight against evil, if you do evil, you're really waging war against God.

And if you do that which is good, you're doing that which pleases God immensely, and it's also exactly what you were made for. God made you to do that which is good. He made you to know the truth.

He made you to know that which is just and merciful and beautiful. He made you to know that. He made you to want to know that. When you know these things, you're fitting in with your nature, not only your nature, but what heaven is going to be like.

[43 : 40] And that's what you should do. That's what you should pursue, even if it means going and you're having to suffer. Just look at Jesus. He died so you could be made right with God, and he's defeated all powers and all authorities, and he is in heaven.

And your suffering might be a moment, but heaven is forever. And he is sovereign even over the hardest times in your life, and you can call out to him in prayer.

And he looks at you, and he loves you, and he delights that you would be willing to suffer for doing that which is good. And so this Christian understanding of the good life, to live a life which means being right with God and doing right things, it fits so deeply with us.

And it's a philosophy of life that not only is a good life to live, that the softest pillow in the world is a clean conscience. Softest pillow in the world is a clean conscience.

It knows our weakness, and it makes us brave. I love it. It's over and over again. Lech Valencia, who defied the communists, brought, it was the beginning of the work which brought down the communist empire of the Soviet Union.

[45 : 05] It was said by people. He and those other Polish people would get on their knees before God so they could stand defiant before tyrants.

Let's stand and pray. Please stand. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Father, we're so frail, and we're so frail, yet you love us, and your son took on human flesh and walked amongst us and lived the life that we could not live but we should have, and he died the death that he did not deserve but we deserved, and he did it all to make us right with you to not just to do something symbolic, but when we put our faith and trust in him, Father, he brings us to God. He brings us into this new heaven and the new earth. He brings us to be born again in this new life. Father, he does it all. He did it all for us, and so, Father, we ask that you would grip us deeply with this profound truth, that you would help us as a congregation, whether it's in the women's ministry or the men's group that we'll start up or our small groups or Sunday school or church service or just friendships, Father, that you would help us to talk about the Bible and talk about prayer and talk about Jesus in such a way that we can figure out how to live a good life in this context and how we can be brave, and we thank you, Father.

We don't do it all by ourselves, but that you, Father, look over us as we have these conversations and as we celebrate with each other and commiserate with each other. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you love us and watch over us and help us to be a church that does these things well and help us to live well, to do good, to be brave, all for your glory, and we ask this in Jesus' name.

[47 : 04] Amen.