

Rejoicing in Hope; Rejoicing in Suffering

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[0 : 0 0] page 1219 and in particular verses 15 and 16. But in your heart set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. And as we turn back there, let's seek the Lord's help.

Great God, the Bible tells us that you are a teacher to us. Your spirit teaches us the word of God, opens our minds and hearts, helps us to understand and applies the word to us.

So Father, we pray that as we consider these words from the apostle Peter written many, many years ago, that you would take them, you would shape us, mold us, correct us, rebuke us, train us in righteousness by them, encourages us, your people, to live as saints in this world.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, the story is told of a man called Fritz Kreisler.

Fritz Kreisler was a world-renowned violinist. When he would play at a concert, he earned a fortune. The money would pour in because of his talents. But he often gave most of it away to the poor and needy after it. One day, on one of his world tours, he came across a most beautiful and expensive violin. But just before that, he'd given all his money away to the poor, so he couldn't afford to buy this really expensive, world-renowned violin. Later, he raised money for it. He returned to buy the violin. And sadly, a collector had already purchased it for his extensive violin collection.

[2 : 0 4] Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin for a huge sum of money. But the collector said, it doesn't matter how much you offer. This is now one of my most prized possessions and I'm not going to sell it. Very disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when he had an idea. He asked the collector, could I play the instrument just one more time before it remains in silence in your collection forever? And the collector willingly accepted the offer.

And the great violinist started filling the room with such heart-stirring music that even the collector himself was moved to tears. And he said to Kreisler, I have absolutely no right to keep this instrument to myself. Take it, Mr. Kreisler. Take it to the world and let everyone hear it.

Take it to the world and let everyone hear it. This collector recognized the worth and value of the instrument after he heard it. It was so precious that he had no right to keep this to himself.

This instrument was designed to be played and not to remain silent. And I'm sure as God's people, you can see the application immediately. The good news of Jesus Christ is not news to keep to ourselves.

It's not news to keep to ourselves. It's news to tell everyone we meet about the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. The good news is designed by God, not just to be kept to ourselves, but to be taken to the world and to be taken to the far reaches of the world so that people from every tribe, every tongue, every language would hear about Jesus Christ and the good news of salvation. Because the good news is so precious. And it's far more worth and far more valuable than Mr. Kreisler's violin. That God tells us to take it to ourselves, yes, but then also to take it to the world so that others may know the good news and be changed by it as we have been. And what do we call this? Well, we call this, of course, evangelism. Evangelism. Evangel is the Greek word for good news. And if you add the ism to the end, it's just taking the good news out. Taking the good news and sharing the faith that we have.

[4 : 48] Evangelism is one of the marks of a healthy church. Some of the nine marks material is very good to go through. Evangelism is a sign of a church healthy, being healthy and reaching out to those who do not know Jesus. You know, it's so easy as churches to be caught up at different times and have our priorities put in different places. There's so many things vying for our attention. And you know, of course, in our own current situation, we've got a problem with our building. We're looking for new premises and that is going to take a huge amount of work and rightly so. But at the same time, a building is not the church. The Bible tells, in fact, Peter tells us the church is described as a building, but not a physical building. The church is described as a building of God's saints. We are the bricks in God's building. And we need to make sure that at the same time we focus on these things, our priorities are not taking away from serving our God in different other ways, such as evangelism, such as reaching out with each other, such as meeting up with one another, etc., etc.

And there are many texts in the Bible that we could go to, to understand evangelism better. One of the most famous is 1 Peter chapter 3, verses 15 and 16.

But in your heart set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do it with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of your slander. Now, we cannot exhaust the theme from this one text, but here are at least four things that Peter teaches us concerning personal and corporate evangelism, to take the good news out to those who do not believe in Jesus. First, we are to be God-fearing.

Second, we're to be always ready. Third, we're to act with gentleness and be respectful. Fourth, we're to be people who have a clear conscience before God.

So first then, let's consider being God-fearing. Peter says in verse 15, but in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Now, what does it mean to be set apart? Well, the actual word used there is holy. It's holy. But in your hearts, Christ is holy. It's holiness.

[7 : 23] In other words, we're to regard the Lord Jesus Christ as holy. And what Peter means by this is that in every single area of our lives, we're to honor God, to reverence him and to glorify him by obeying his word. And back in verse 14 here, Peter is actually quoting from the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah, as we know, was God's messenger, God's prophet speaking to King Ahaz of Judah. The prophet is warning King Ahaz because Ahaz had been making an alliance with the Assyrian Empire who had come sweeping down and defeated the northern half of God's people. Ahaz was terrified that the same thing would happen to him. So what does he decide to do? He decides to make an unholy alliance with the enemy. He decides to get in bed with the enemy, as it were. And Isaiah tells him, this is a crazy thing to do Ahaz. Rather than fear the enemy, you're to fear God. To fear God above all else. Isaiah is reminding Ahaz that it's the Lord that he is to fear and not human beings.

Despite how powerful they may seem. And it doesn't matter how big the enemy is, God is infinitely much bigger than any enemy we can possibly face. And this is what Peter is wanting to remind the people here. That we're to fear God before we fear anyone or anything else. And this is the sense of, in your hearts, or as the older author spoke of, in the affections or in the emotions of your soul, set apart Christ as Lord, as the Holy One. You know, sometimes, maybe in our Scottish culture, maybe in our, I don't know, Scottish culture perhaps, we tend to focus a lot on the mind.

And absolutely, the Bible has much to say. Paul tells us to be renewed in your minds. Absolutely. But no less should there be a place for the emotions in the Christian life. And here Peter is speaking directly into the emotion of fear. And saying, your fear shouldn't be directed in our evangelism towards people, but it should be directed towards the Lord our God. We're to fear him before we fear anyone else. We should be more fearful as Christians of displeasing the Lord than of men.

And I think that's something we forget so easily as the church. We're so scared to displease men that we don't go about the Lord's work. We chop, we change, we adapt. Instead of saying, no, Lord, I am your servant. I'll proclaim your word. I will serve you because I fear you more than anyone else.

[10 : 20] The hymn writer sums it up well, probably based on these verses. Fear him, ye saints, and then you will have nothing else to fear. Make you his service, your delight. Your wants shall be his care.

Rather than fear our enemies, we need to remind ourselves that the Lord Jesus Christ is in control. We heard in one of the videos from one of the students in McHanlawiwai last night, she quoted from John chapter 16, Jesus has already overcome the world. He reigned supreme over all. Now we're to fear God rather than fearing men. It's quite a hard one to illustrate that, but let me have a go. When I was sitting at home writing a sermon when I was still at home with my parents at the time, I looked out the corner of my eye and crawling up my wall was a huge, gigantic, massive slug. And I got up from the chair, I ran away as far as I could, ran down the hallway and said, dad, you have to come and deal with this.

So my dad did. He came, dealt with it as dads do, and away the slug went. I was terrified of a little slug. But fearing God is as different. When I, that slug made me run away. It was a repulsive.

I ran away from it. But when it comes to fear God, it's a bit different. I was reading an author recently who described fearing the Lord. He was playing a game with his two daughters and they used to like, they used to like their dad pretending to be a lion. So their dad would get down on all fours. He would roar like a lion and the little girls would say, louder, louder, daddy. So he would go a bit louder. And then he kept on moving to different rooms and he was getting louder and louder and louder. And they were enjoying this game. And then he decided to really let rip. So he stood up as high as he could go and roar to the, he couldn't roar any louder. And his little girls started screaming because they were absolutely terrified. But they didn't run away from their dad. They ran towards their dad. Because although they were terrified of their dad at that moment, they realized that he was their father and that's the only place there was to run. And it's exactly the same with our heavenly father. It's an attractive fear that we have and not a repulsive one to fear the Lord. And we read from Deuteronomy in the beginning, which describes how we're to fear the Lord by keeping his commandments, by obeying them in every area of our lives. And that's the difference between fearing men and fearing God. Just like we would honor, respect and obey a parent, we need to do the same thing to our heavenly father. Because if we are honest with ourselves, the thing that keeps us from sharing our faith with other people is fear.

Deep down, it's fear. You know, there's a fear of, well, they think I'm absolutely crazy. Probably had that fear before. Will they think, will they stop being my friend? Will they get aggressive? I don't know the words I'm going to have to say to this person. What if they hit me with some kind of God particle theory or something I don't understand? What if they ask me where dinosaurs came from or where did they go? What if they ask me about the gap theory? What if they ask me about all these complicated things? And we get so caught up in that fear of the person that we forget to fear the Lord and to have a goal. Because the Lord can use anything that we say.

[13 : 49] Anything that we can say. There was once a story of a soldier who was a terribly unruly soldier. He was thrown into prison by his commanding officer because of what he was doing. He was a drunkard and causing havoc and everything else. And this old minister heard of this and he decided to have a go sharing the gospel with this person because he knew he needed Jesus. So he walked into the cell and the man put his finger in his ears and screamed and said, I do not want to know about Jesus.

So the minister turned to leave. And as he turned to leave, light shone from behind him. It caught him in such a way. The man was arrested in his steps. He stopped screaming and the minister said, the wages of sin is death. And he walked away. And the minister left that cell, but the word of God didn't leave that cell. And the next day, the man got down on his hands and his knees and confessed Jesus Christ as his Lord and as his savior. Because that man wasn't scared of this soldier, but feared the Lord and shared Christ with him. And Peter and Isaiah are encouraging us here to press on and to take the opportunity because God is much bigger than the opposition. And as God's people, we need to recover this and it's getting worse. Scotland is becoming an increasingly un-Christian country. And I think persecution is coming. Are we going to stand up and be counted for the Lord Jesus Christ by being faithful to his word? So let's pray for opportunities to God to share our faith and that he would give us the words to say, let's share our faith, not because it's a Christian duty, although it is a Christian duty, but because we know it pleases our father who is in heaven.

Let's be God-fearing as his people. Be attracted to him because he's so precious that we want people to know Jesus as we know him. We've got treasure to give away as Christians and let's give it away.

And the wonderful thing is when you give it away as Christians, you've actually got more treasure in heaven because it's stored up for us. The second point Peter reminds us of is to be always ready, to be always ready. After telling his original readers to honour and to fear Christ above human beings, Peter continues, always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. You know, some Christians, and this is a genuine belief that they hold, that faith is something personal to ourselves and should be kept private.

Well, that kind of teaching is absolutely alien. If you can show me anywhere that's in the Bible, I'm glad I can see the point. I can find that nowhere in the Bible. Yes, we exercise a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not someone else's faith that saves us, but it's not something that we should keep to ourselves. It's for sharing with other people. We need a personal relationship with Jesus, but because of that personal relationship, we desire that others should have that personal relationship. The Bible instructs us to tell others about the good news of Jesus.

[17 : 10] In fact, the good news itself calls to be shared. When you have received good news, what do you do? You go on WhatsApp, you go on Facebook, you go on Twitter, you write a letter if you're inclined to write letters, you go on the telephone, you shout, you tell people, you meet people, guess what happened?

This is such good news. It spreads. And whatever the good news is, it spreads like wildfire. Well, how much more should the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ spread? Because this is the best news.

The best news that sinful human beings who are at war with a holy and a righteous God have a way to be set free. This is what the Bible tells us is good news. And the church took it forward in the face of terrible, terrible persecution. And it was taken forward because they believed and trusted in it with all their hearts. We should always be ready to share. This is the best news. And if we really claim to believe this, if we take count and think about it, we should be proclaiming Jesus from the rooftops and any opportunity that the Lord gives us to share this. I remember once hearing about someone who was not a Christian and they came to church or they heard it from a Christian about hell and where unbelievers were headed. But the good news that they were saved from that if they accepted Christ.

And this person said, why has no one told me about this before? Why has no one told me about this good news? This really is good news. I think I could believe in this. I think I could take this and throw my life behind it. The context Peter is writing into is actually suffering. God's people were suffering because they were sharing the good news and being persecuted for it. And Peter is writing into this context. And what they're to do is they're to fear the Lord and to keep going.

Here's their strength. Here's their song and to keep going. Now the principle here of suffering, that's the principle of the specific one. But generally we should always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks us. And I don't think we expect people to ask us about Jesus. And it does happen. It does happen. We should be prepared like a cannon loaded and ready to fire. We should be prepared to share our faith with whoever asks. And it does happen. Now I think this is where many of us get a bit scared and nervous. You know, you can say, well, Alan, Colin, you're the guys who are trained in theology. You're the ministers. You know, you're supposed to know these kind of things. What can I share?

[19:58] How can I be ready to share the good news? Well, you don't have to be steeped in a degree or two from Edinburgh Theological Seminary or wherever else to share your faith. Advice I was given as a young Christian was, share your own testimony. And we can all do that. About how Jesus broke into your life. About how you serve the Lord Jesus Christ because he has called you to serve him and serve him in that way. You can share your testimony with others. And you can't go wrong with that because that's how the Lord has worked in your life. How the Lord has broken into your situation.

We're to share in that way through hope. So how can you be prepared? Well, think through your testimony. Think through how the Lord is working your life, not just when you were saved 10, 15, however many years ago. But how the Lord is working in your life right now. How you're trusting and depending on him. What the Lord is teaching you at the present time. How Jesus is working in your life today. And then be ready to share that. This can be an excellent way into a conversation with someone else. So let's always be ready to share the good news that we have. Peter also tells us thirdly, to be gentle and to be respectful. After Peter tells his readers to fear God, to always be ready, he says to them, but do this with gentleness and respect. We're to be a gentle people and how we share the good news. You know, many opportunities have been lost to Christians, not because of the gospel, but because of how we have shared it. I once met a man on the street and he was so aggressive in his sharing of the gospel with me. He stood to me and jumped in my face and said, you need to believe in Jesus. You're a sinner. You're going to hell. You need to believe in Jesus. And I said,

I'm already going to heaven. And I walked away from him. That is not a good way to share the gospel. And I don't think it's being faithful either. We're to get to know people. We're to build relationships.

We're to, yes, take the opportunity, but do it with gentleness and respect. Because that put even me off. And I love Jesus. But how much more should we take the time to share with others who do not believe?

And that kind of preaching does put them off. Well, what is gentleness? It's not about rolling over and taking all the hits that come or being a doormat as a Christian, but it's having a true estimation of who God is and having a true estimation of who we are. It doesn't mean to let people to walk all over us, but it does mean putting other people before ourselves and to die to ourselves. We're never to try and overpower someone or to accost them with the truth, but rather we're to trust that God will take his word and plant it in their hearts and to sow the seed. And you know, as Christians, as what we believe, our confessional standards teach us so much, God does that work. All we do is to share the word. We're not responsible for how someone responds.

[23 : 03] So in gentleness, we can leave it with the Lord. And the greatest example for that is the Lord Jesus Christ himself in Philippians chapter two. Well, lastly, we're to be people with a clear conscience.

Part of our God-given makeup is that he has given us a conscience. This is the part of us that tells us right from wrong. Of course, our conscience has been corrupted by sin. It's a bit wonky, but it's still to be a guide to us. And if our consciences ever prick us, it's not a pleasant thing. And the sense here is to please God by knowing what is right and what is wrong. We're able to know this by reading the Bible and living our lives by its standards. We may not be able to keep people from making up falsehoods against us, but we should not be supplying them with ammunition at the same time. I once heard of a very godly Christian lady who said to me, you know, Alan, you might be the only Bible that your family ever read. And what she meant by that was we should live our lives in such a winsome way as to win people over for the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we don't just live our lives that way. We should be sharing with them by our lips as well, testify to Jesus. But how we live our lives, there's no point telling people all about the good news, and we're going and living a life that's so contrary to that, and vice versa as well. There's no point living a really good life, but then never telling people about Jesus. The two come hand in glove together. We're not, we are not perfect. And our talks can never perfectly match our walks. And I think too, Peter's context here is suffering. It's suffering. Whatever that suffering, particularly it's persecution, but whatever that suffering may be. And sometimes as Christians, I think we don't give people opportunities because what we do is we put on a mask. And you know, people say, how are you feeling today? I'm fine.

When deep down inside, we're not fine at all. Now, it doesn't mean we go about sharing our woes with everyone, but actually to take the opportunity and to say to someone, you know, well, actually I'm not fine.

I'm really struggling at the moment, but you know something? I have a great and a wonderful God, and my strength is in him. That gives an opportunity to share the gospel. Not to say it's all fine when it's not. You don't have to. You can take it away from yourself immediately by saying, but God is good.

God is great. I'm plodding along because he gives me the strength to do so. And there's an opportunity to share the gospel with people as well. Not to be hypocrites about it either. You know, society does not like those who are too bad, but equally it doesn't like those who are too good because it shows people up. And by our Christian behavior, we will eventually show up wrong behavior in others.

[26 : 00] We can't help it. And sometimes people see that and mistake it for other things. For example, think of the Christian in the office who's being obedient to God and refuses to carry out some kind of shady practice. You're ridiculed, you're sidelined because you won't get on board with what they're trying to do. This Christian has not created the problem, but they've revealed sin in other people.

For a time, I was a special constable in the police force and one of the officers beside me said to me, right, I've been trying to catch this person for such a long time. Are you prepared to lie? And we'll just say that we saw him do something so we can jail him tonight. And I said, no, I'm not prepared to tell a lie about this person so we can just jail him tonight. And that person wouldn't work with me again because I wouldn't tell a lie about this person. But what God tells us, we are to keep a clear conscience by living according to his standards, a clear conscience before God, knowing that we're obeying him and fearing him above all else, practicing a Christian life of repentance and prayer before God and taking the opportunities. And they do come. They do come when we pray to our God. And the thing is, as Christians, we believe as God's people that as we take the seed out, God will save those for whom Christ died. That's a guarantee according to scripture. We don't have to worry about it. But are we sharing Christ? Am I sharing Christ in my life? If people look at me, can they look at my life and say, he serves Jesus? Can they look at that and say that of you? Can they look at that and say, as is Glasgow City Free Church? Just questions to think about and to ponder. Let's pray.

Our great God and Father, forgive us for when we fear other people and men above you. Fear the Lord and then you will have nothing else to fear. Lord, grant to us that holy reverence and fear above you that we would be far more fearful of displeasing you than displeasing other people. And Lord, we know that it's very hard as Christians today to share the word of God in workplaces. But even there, Lord, you're with us and grant us opportunities. Heavenly Father, we pray for Christian teachers, Christian workers in so many different businesses where perhaps it's not seen as good practice to share Jesus Christ. We pray for them, that you would strengthen them, that you would lead them, you would guide them, you would give them wisdom and help them live such winsome lives that people would see Jesus at work in them and they might be moved to ask the reason for the hope that is within them, that they too might come to know Jesus as Lord and as Savior. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray for your glory and praise. Amen.