

Who Is There to Harm You?

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[0:00] 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.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So our gospel passage for this morning is what I find to be one of the most difficult passages in all of the gospels, and also the text on which I heard the worst sermon I've ever heard in my life.

That in mind, I'm really glad that I'm preaching the 1 Peter series, instead of preaching on that text today. So we're in 1 Peter chapter 3.

Now I have to say, for my sins, I recently stumbled into an online Anglican debate and discussion forum. If you value your peace of mind, I encourage you to stay far, far away from places like that. But as I looked at the posts against my own better judgment, I saw a post that lamented one of the pitfalls of the age that we live in. Someone pointed out that there seems to be an epidemic of Christians, as he put it, talking crap on the internet.

[1:33] Now have you seen that problem firsthand? Maybe even been guilty of it. Anyone? No one wants to admit to that. I see what you're doing on social media, everyone.

Social media provides an incredible opportunity for us to flaunt how smart we think we are, how stupid we find people who dare to disagree with us, provide the great opportunity to call other people names or revile them.

Now there is an application to be found from this morning's verses in 1 Peter to this very contemporary problem. In two short words, the application is this.

Stop it. But that is not a problem that is unique to our time and place. Christians have been running their mouths in churches, in the workplace, basically everywhere for a good 2,000 years.

The reason we know how to deal with the problem biblically is because Christians were doing it in the first century church. The apostles, granted, didn't address the problem only by telling people to stop it, although they more or less did do that.

[2:45] They reminded Christians of their calling in Christ Jesus, that Christians are called to live not as the world lives, not to live as they did before in their former ignorance.

Now even in their correction, the apostles did not stop at correcting. They reminded their hearers to live holy lives worthy of their calling. In our verses for this morning, we don't get the sense that Peter is directly addressing a problem, but those verses certainly provide a solution to a number of problems as they exhort us to live holy lives because of our gospel hope.

So in light of our hope in Jesus, let's look at what these verses tell us about how we're called to live. Think about why it is that we're called to live that way.

Start in chapter 3, verse 8. Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

As we look at that verse, let's start with unity of mind. I think it's fair to say that Peter included unity of mind and started the section with it because it's important and it's something that's easy for us to forget, isn't it?

[4:08] Throughout the ages, there have sadly been divisions in the church, even in the New Testament era. Divisiveness is a continual problem. Now, division over false teaching, which is sadly sometimes a necessary thing, isn't what Peter has in mind here.

He's talking about unity between those who share a common faith in Jesus Christ. And this unity can be damaged in all kinds of ways for all kinds of reasons. Let's be honest.

Sometimes we as Christians fight with each other about really stupid things. So where do we find our unity? And what causes disunity?

How can we repair unity? Recently in my reading, I stumbled across a passage from the Coptic Christian monk, Father Matthew the Poor, on the unity that believers have with one another.

Here is what he had to say. If you had received a greater proportion of Christ, then you could boast of being greater than I. But if you received the same Christ that I do, then there is no difference between you and me or anyone in the Lord Jesus.

[5:25] This is the true meaning of fellowship in the body, of communion, the sharing of our joint oneness in Christ. And what is it that causes disunity?

Isn't it allowing our ego to get in the way of our joint oneness in Christ? That's how it happens. So maybe we think of ourselves as better than others.

We think of ourselves as smarter than others. We insist on our own way, or we're jealous of the gifts that others have. How much sense does that kind of thinking make in light of our redemption in Christ?

Did God give us salvation in His Son because we were special? Better than other people? Or smarter than other people? Isn't it all a gift of grace to the undeserving?

As believers, we've all received the same Christ. We've all been washed in the blood of the same Lamb of God.

[6:33] There is no difference between us. None of us, none are greater than the others. We share a common hope, a common life, and we need each other.

Let's look at sympathy then and brotherly love. Quick word on brotherly love. We'd better learn brotherly love for each other now because eternity is a long time.

And we're stuck with each other. Think for a second about the example of brotherly love and sympathy that we have in Jesus.

We read of Jesus in Hebrews 3, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

The Lord, who knew no sin, who died the death that we deserve for our sins in our place, He sympathizes with our weakness. Isn't that amazing?

[7:44] If Jesus, who knew no sin, can sympathize with us, can't we sympathize with our brothers and sisters, even with their weaknesses, even if their weaknesses really annoy us?

We must love our brothers and sisters and sympathize with them because Jesus has been loving and sympathetic with us. We share a common hope, a common call, a common mission, and a common destiny.

We are bound together by the blood of Jesus Christ. So we have to ask, do we love those that He loved enough to shed His blood for them?

What about a tender heart? Each of us received a new heart when we received a new birth. It's what we see foretold in Ezekiel 36.

And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

[8:54] If we are in Christ, we have a new heart, a loving heart, a tender heart, a loving heart of flesh rather than stone.

So are we living like it? If we're not, we should be. Why is that? Consider for a moment the tenderness of God to us and His Son Jesus Christ.

the tender heartedness of God to us. His love, His grace, His mercy, His generosity. He has lovingly dealt with us, not according to what we deserve, but according to His goodness, which we didn't deserve.

In light of that, why wouldn't we be tender hearted? Why wouldn't we have humble minds for that matter? Think about the humility of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It was, we read in Philippians, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

[10:10] And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. My brothers and sisters, Jesus humbled Himself for you.

The perfect, eternal Son of God condescended to take on human flesh for you. He was beaten for you. He was crowned with thorns for you.

He was crucified for you. He humbled Himself for you. And you now have the gift of eternal life through faith in His blood. And now, the One who humbled Himself to save you calls you to imitate His humility.

And we still tempted to think of ourselves as smarter than others, as more important than others.

If so, we need to remember that God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

[11:21] That's us. It's not all. Peter tells us 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. Now, due to our sinfulness, we're pretty much wired to seek revenge, aren't we?

Somebody gets us, we want to get them back. As I thought about this, the words of one character in that great work of theology, the Princess Bride came to mind. Any Princess Bride fans out there? You know exactly what I'm going to quote, don't you? Would someone like to go ahead and do the honor for me? Quote on revenge?

There are so many you can choose from. Inconceivable is one. How about, you killed my father, prepare to die. I am the main point.

[12:25] That's right. What did God do when we rebelled against sin? When we fell into sin? He would have been justified in taking vengeance on the whole lot of us, but what did He do?

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. He sent His Son to live the perfect life that we could not live, to die the death that we deserve, to defeat death by rising again, so that in Christ as a free gift, all who believe in Him have the promise of eternal life.

That is how God responded to our offense. How does the world respond to offenses? By getting even, right? Let me ask you this.

Would we have any hope if God had treated us that way? None at all. So we're to be forgiving as God in Christ has forgiven us.

Now, we're called not only to avoid returning evil for evil, we're called even to bless those who curse us. Isn't that what Jesus tells us?

[13:46] But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. How in the world do we do that?

That's really hard. Well, in our own strength, we can't. But if we're believers, we have God, the Holy Spirit, dwelling in our hearts, changing us from the inside out, changing that heart of stone to a heart of flesh.

flesh, we can't do it, but He can do it in us and through us. Peter then cites Psalm 34 to flesh out his points.

Now, Psalm 34, I think, is a psalm that all believers can relate to. In it, we read in verses 4 and 5 before the section that Peter cites, I sought the Lord and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

Those who look to Him are radiant and their faces shall never be ashamed. Brothers and sisters, has that been a living reality in your life?

[15:00] Did you seek the Lord and did He answer you? Did He deliver you? If you believe that, if you've experienced then and only then, you start to live according to what the psalmist writes in the verses that Peter cites.

Because these verses call us to a heavenly way of life, a life that is only possible through the grace of God, a life that is only possible through the Holy Spirit living in us.

Let's look at what Peter cites. What he cites in verse 10. For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.

These words are addressed to those who desire to love life. What does it mean to desire to love life? Isn't Jesus the way, the truth, and the life?

Isn't that what He said? doesn't that mean that He is life in the most meaningful sense? These verses then are addressed to those who long to go ever deeper into the joy of knowing Jesus, of really knowing Jesus, of having an intimate, personal relationship with Him.

[16:23] Is there any greater joy than that or any greater hope than that? No. These words are addressed to those who desire to see good days.

It should be said here that we are not promised perfect earthly happiness. happiness. What we're talking about is an eternal joy and an eternal hope which endures through all the hardships of this life.

What Peter described earlier is an inheritance kept for us in heaven. Is that your desire? So then these words are for us.

We're told to keep our lips from speaking evil and our tongues from speaking deceit. Why should we avoid those things? Well, because Jesus has redeemed our lips and our tongues, hasn't He? They're for His service now. When I distribute communion to you in a few minutes, I'll do it with these words. The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for you, preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life.

[17 : 39] Jesus purchased our bodies with His very blood and they belong to Him now. And Jesus tells us that what comes out of the mouth if it is sinful defiles a person.

Our bodies and our souls belong to Jesus. So we have to ask, are we going to use them for His glory or use them to defile ourselves?

He goes on in verse 11. Let Him turn away from evil and do good. Let Him seek peace and pursue it.

Let Him turn away from evil. Now in the Teen Sunday School class, we've been talking about repentance. Teens, here is a biblical example of the call to repent.

let Him turn away from evil. Now I think as we think about repentance, our call to turn away from evil, we can think of it as applying to both initial repentance and the daily repentance that's part of the Christian life.

[18 : 52] By initial repentance, I'm talking about when we first commit our lives to Christ, when we confess our sins, when we ask for forgiveness and commit ourselves to following Jesus as Lord.

The thing is, we keep sinning. So it's not a one-time thing. It is a lifelong thing, a daily battle.

As the theologian and reformer Martin Luther put it, the entire life of believers is to be one of repentance. So let us turn away from evil daily to what is good.

We're to repent as the second half of the verse tells us to seek and pursue peace. Question, where do we find peace? Jesus, yes.

Can we ever find peace in the things of this world? No. No. Aren't they all passing away? All of them.

[20 : 03] The church father, St. Augustine of Hippo, spent his early life seeking his joy and peace in the things of this world. Tried to find it through the lust of the flesh.

He tried to find it through empty and vain philosophy. He tried to find it through position and being highly thought of. He tried to find it through having luxurious things, nice possessions.

Tried all those things and he couldn't find peace. But one day, he found peace in the only place it can be found.

He describes his experience in the form of a prayer to God when he writes, I was in the external world and I sought you there. And in my unlovely state, I plunged into those created things which you made.

You were with me and I was not with you. But you called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent.

[21 : 10] You put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you and I feel nothing but hunger and thirst for you.

You touched me and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours. Peace is only found in God, only found in Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And we are promised that if we seek peace, where it can be found, the only place where it can be found, we will find it and it will change our lives both now and forever.

So we are to repent and to seek the Lord, seek peace, to seek joy, which is only found in God. Why?

Verse 12, 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.

[22 : 24] The eyes of the Lord are on those who are washed in the blood of his son. The eyes of the Lord are on those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the living breath of God.

So we have access to come boldly before the throne of God through the blood of Jesus. And we have the calling to live holy, righteous lives because the Holy and Righteous One has claimed us as His own.

And the Father hears us. He hears our prayer because we are in Christ Jesus, the perfect, righteous One. We have the assurance that God will hear and never cast out those who come to Him in repentance and faith in Christ.

As we see in 1 John 1, we confess our sins. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. but it's also clear that apart from repentance and faith in Christ, we will perish in our sins with no hope.

But if we know that the eyes of the Lord are on us, that our sins are forgiven, that He hears our prayer, what reason do we have to be afraid?

[24:03] Is there anything that we have to fear? Peter writes in verse 13, Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

So you know what? We can proclaim and live out our faith without fear. Why? Because if God is for us, who can be against us? Who can harm us?

Didn't Jesus purchase us with His blood and crush the devil under His feet forever? Can death harm us? Didn't Jesus trample death under His feet too when He destroyed death by rising again? Does death have any power over those who are in Christ? Can death snatch us out of His hand? No, absolutely not. What about the sinful powers of this world?

Can they harm us? Or can they take our worldly possessions? Sure, they can do that. Can they even take our lives? Sure, they can. But even if they do, our Lord Jesus Christ will raise us up on the last day.

[25:11] Who is there to harm us? No one. So looking back at what we've talked about in our passage, if we know that there is no one to harm us because of what Christ has done for us, we are free to love one another, free to seek unity, free to have tender hearts and humble minds, free even to bless those who curse us, free to keep our tongues from evil and our lips from deceit.

So let's continue to strive after holiness, to strive after true daily repentance, loving one another, blessing those who curse us, seeking peace and pursuing it, seeking humility, seeking unity, trusting with absolute confidence that our sins are forgiven, that we share in Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil, trusting that God will finish what he started in us, and that for eternity we will find and will have the peace that we seek.

who is there to harm us? In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.