

The Blessedness of Hope

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[0 : 00] Father, we thank you that you are one God in three persons. Thank you that it has always been this way, and because it's always been this way, the love that you have had for the Son and the Son that you've had for the Father and the Holy Spirit, loving both and emanating love, that is what our God is.

That is who you are. That you are a God of love. It always has been that way, and because of that love, you have invited us through Christ to enjoy that and partake of that and to be witness of that forever.

So Lord, as we open up your word, we pray that we will not have difficulty understanding your word, that it will not perplex us, but rather draw us ever closer to yourself, to the God of love.

Help us to see Christ more gloriously this morning, that we would treasure him in our salvation. And ultimately, Lord, we pray that by your Spirit, you would minister to us.

Lord, we come with arms open. They are empty. We can't bring anything to you that you would take from us and so love us more.

[1 : 19] But we come empty, open, ready to receive, because you delight to give. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Again, if you have a Bible, please turn with me to 1 Peter 3.

There are still a couple Bibles left at the back table. So you can grab that at any time or follow along on your phone. Before we get into it, just a bit of an introduction.

So during the week, we're not perfect with this, but we try our best as a family after breakfast to sing a hymn, read a chapter of the Bible, and pray together. I mean, it's a whole six minutes or seven minutes.

And seldom do we get through it uninterrupted. But it's wonderful. It's beautiful. That's the plan that we try to have every day. And a couple weeks ago, as we were going through the reading plan, we were in 1 Samuel.

And we read chapter 17. Fan favorite, David and Goliath. It was the first time I read it in a while.

And I was struck by how ridiculously David must have seen to the Philistines and also the Israelites.

[2 : 31] This small adolescent boy, man, still growing, definitely not a soldier, not in armor, no sword, but with a sling, who approaches this enormous, grizzled warrior.

And yet, to my kid's delight, but also to my delight, he slays Goliath. It's an incredible story. But I was... I was...

I really... It struck me at how ridiculous this scene must have been. And it made me think about how Christianity seems very counterintuitive, and it seems counter...

contradictory to the outside world. And I would venture to guess also to us as well. Apart from the story of David and Goliath, many such stories or teachings have this ridiculousness, so to speak, about them.

They seem irrational or counter to conventional wisdom. Think about Jesus' teachings. The last will be first. If you want to be great, you must serve.

[3 : 40] Or Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are you when others revile and persecute you. Even certain stories like God making a promise to a geriatric couple who are barren that through them and through their seed, the world would be full.

It is a crazy, ridiculous story. But yet the Bible is full of them. I mentioned Jesus' Sermon on the Mount where he says, Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Being cursed is a blessing, is what Jesus is saying. That seems so very counter-cultural and counter-intuitive to us.

And if you're saying, well, no, this is Jesus' teaching. This is what I believe. Of course there's this idea of the servant leader. That's only because the Bible has washed over our culture and your mind for your entire life and over generations and generations.

But the world over, that is a very irrational, counter-cultural thing to say. I would say that being cursed isn't a blessing. Being blessed is a blessing.

[5 : 00] So, as we enter into 1 Peter, and we consider how the Christian life is one full of blessings, and yet also full of being reviled, suffering, being persecuted, even death, we must ask the question, why is it a blessing?

And why is it not just a blessing for us, but a blessing, an invitation to the entire world, that we may enjoy divine blessing even though we suffer?

We're going to look at our text, verses 8 to 22. And I've broken it up into three parts. Verses 8 to 12, we'll take a look at the blessing of our call.

Verses 13 to 17, I'll take a look at the blessing of our suffering. And then finally, we'll take a look at the blessing of our victorious Savior.

We'll see how, again, this is all on one hand counter-intuitive, counter-cultural. It seems irrational.

[6 : 08] And yet, it is the greatest news for us and for the world. So, if you can jump into it with me, verses 8 to 12, we'll take a look at what the blessing of our call truly means.

So, just before we get into it, we're continuing 1 Peter. We're reading the concluding section of Peter encouraging the church to use their freedom in Christ for the sake of service for others, not from responsibility.

We've looked at that for a few different weeks now. He's addressed citizens. He's addressed servants or slaves. He's addressed wives. He's addressed husbands to bear up under unjust treatment as a part of their calling.

And now, he addresses how these same Christians are to interact with one another in the church.

So, look with me, starting in verse 8. We'll be in and out of the text the whole morning, but we'll just read verse 8 right now.

Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

We have been reminded for seven weeks, that's how long we've been in 1 Peter thus far, that Christians are resident aliens.

[7 : 19] We are sojourners. We are citizens of heaven, even though we are citizens here on earth. And that that is fraught with challenges. That is fraught with persecutions, frustrations, and sufferings.

We are reminded that as citizens of heaven, the church then becomes an embassy of heaven, so to speak. It's an outpost of heaven. It's an outpost of heaven, where the culture of heaven, the fragrance of heaven, the ethos and the ethic of heaven is here on earth.

So, for the weary believer, who is, by God's grace, trying to live faithfully by Christ's call, the Christian community is a place of refuge and refreshment and support.

When we say to come to church, it's not because we have a role where we collect numbers for stats and growth charts and all that stuff.

We do. It's part of our bylaws. But we say come to church because six plus days of the week, you are working and you are interacting with other people.

[8 : 39] And that you are in the world and the world has an ethos and an ethic that on one hand, there's some good things about it. But common grace is a real thing. God causes the rain to shine on the just and the unjust.

There's a lot of good about our world, but there's a lot that is counterintuitive to the Christian faith. And that beats over you, beats over you daily, week after week, day after day.

And when you come to church, the idea, the hope, the prayer, is that we gather as God's people and we receive from him.

We encourage one another. We pray to him. We are built up. We are exhorted. We are filled up. We are equipped for the week ahead. And a part of it, it's like stepping out of Canada and stepping into heaven.

Listen, it's a gym. You guys are wonderful saints still growing into your sainthood. It's not quite heaven, but it's in part. It's a taste of heaven. It's like getting recharged.

[9 : 42] And here, this is what Peter is trying to remind the church of. He lists off five characteristics of what it means to be a citizen of heaven.

And what these five characteristics do, this unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind, these counteract our hyper-individualism in our day.

That was not as pronounced in the Roman world, but certainly existed. But especially in our world, it counteracts this hyper-individualism.

It does not... The hyper-individualism that we experience day in and day out, it does not promote communal stability and cohesion for very long for...

It sees the value of community only in what that community can do for me. And Peter here in verse 8 is saying, listen, this situation, you are to receive from God, but you are also supposed to give to those around you.

[10:53] And it's not about how you are to take, it is about how you are to give. Once again, we see our freedom in Christ is for service, not from service.

We need to be refreshed. We need to be equipped. Which means, ultimately, we need to be real with our shortcomings and our struggles. It does not do us a service to pretend like things are always okay.

And it's great if you've had a fantastic week, and you don't want to be fatalistic and see everything as a Debbie Downer, or everything, you know, shadowed with despair or struggle. But to be honest, that life can be difficult, and that you need help, and that you have no ability within yourself to help yourself in the way you need to be helped.

The church builds us up because Christ is in us, working through us by his Spirit. Verse 8, again, finally, all of you, unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, a humble mind.

That is a community that builds up, that does not tear down, that gives, that does not take, that seeks the betterment and the welfare of each other, and not for themselves.

[12:19] In order to faithfully live out verse 8, oh, sorry, it goes on to verse 9, that if we are to live in such a way, we are going to see some kind of pushback.

Again, the world, although a lot of good things in the world, a lot of good qualities, there's beautiful things happening in our city, but again, it's counter to the faith, and if we are to live as an outpost of heaven, Peter tells us to expect pushback.

In verse 9, he says it plainly. He says this, 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.

I'll say this, verse 9 can't happen unless verse 8 is going strong in the church. How on earth do we not retaliate when evil is thrown our way?

How do we not revile others if we are being reviled, if we are not being built up by each other through the Holy Spirit in the church?

[13:28] This is a hard, hard calling, but by God's grace, he has equipped us to do just that. So Peter is reminding us to live as citizens of heaven and not as pagans, to not seek out vengeance, to not go after our enemy, to not burn down their home, so to speak, but rather take the example of Christ.

And we saw that example of Christ in verse 21 to 22 of chapter 2. I'm not going to read it, but if you go back to it, this was Peter, in a sense, summing up all of Isaiah 53, of Christ laying down his life willingly for the blessing of others, for the salvation of others.

Consider how non-retaliation in the early church transformed Roman society. Retribution, revenge killings, coups, wars, started to regain or maintain honor.

All such behavior adding to the ongoing and increasingly evil cycle of death. It continues on, it continues on, it continues on. But in following Christ's example, which is verse 9, the cycle of death is broken.

So Christians repay evil with love. Right actions are done to those who look to malign us and to destroy us. To bless, in this case, means to speak well of, to invoke God's favor on somebody.

[15:01] The word bless here is the word where we get eulogy, to speak well of. It's calling us to speak well of those who speak evil against us.

Very hard, very difficult. How can we do that? We can't do it alone. Obviously we need God's help. But we need to have the encouragement of one another. And that's why we go back to verse 8 here.

We need a unity of mind. We need sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, a humble mind. We need to be praying, which implies for sure praying for one another, walking with one another, saying no to maybe times of recreation because somebody has given us a call or sent us a text.

Hey, I need a call. Let's grab a drink. Let's grab a coffee, whatever. I need to run through some stuff. I need help. So it is no surprise that as Peter continues on, he quotes Psalm 33 in verses 10 to 12.

And he speaks about the power of speech. Interestingly, again, going back to verse 9, that we are called to bless those that persecute us.

[16:11] And that blessing is to speak well of invoking God's favor upon their lives. And then Psalm 33 is quoted in verses 10 to 12. And this is what it says. Whoever desires to love life and see good deeds, that idea of good deeds, or sorry, good days rather, it is like the end of the age, like the culmination of salvation.

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. Friends, right living always starts in the heart and continues in the mouth and then proceeds to a life lived.

We see again the call to live authentically, where our inner life matches our outer life. The Christian life is a call of authentic, godly living.

That is not that we have the outside of the bowl washed, so to speak, the outside of the vessel washed, but the inside is filthy. We have to make sure the inside is washed, and then the outside of the vessel, when it is clean, it's a beautiful vessel, worthy of use.

[17:40] Like husbands in the previous section, verse 12 reminds us here that our spiritual growth and vitality is directly connected with responding to the grace of Christ through faithful living.

If you remember the end of verse 7, when Peter is talking to husbands, right at the end here, he says, I'll just read the full thing.

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life. Here it is. So that your prayers may not be hindered.

How we live in secret will inform how we live in public, and it is very clear that our spiritual vitality hangs in the balance.

Therefore, friends, we must fight against harboring ill towards anyone, especially in the church, amongst our family, amongst those that are close to us that have hurt us, here, the blessing that Peter is calling for isn't thinking really nice thoughts about somebody, but it's actively seeking their good and lifting them up and blessing them, praying that the Lord would meet them.

[19:05] And sometimes, by the way, that means rattling their cage, opening their eyes like the wayward son in the story of the two sons, the prodigal son. But it ultimately is a call that our hearts would be turned towards their benefit, their good, their flourishing.

And how can we do that if we are harboring a bitterness in our hearts, resentment, anger, that is not dealt with, but is festering.

You can't bless somebody if you hate them. So we also see here that implied in this is that gossip and lying are also deeply, deeply problematic.

It says here in verse 11 to pursue peace. We serve the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, who has given us peace first in our souls and that is why we turn to him when we feel the struggle and we ask for help as many times as we have to ask for help.

As we are called to live such a life, by faith we will be blessed and be a source of blessing because we are mediating the very presence of Christ in our culture.

[20:31] And our culture is, much like in Roman times, becoming a culture where there's a cycle of death, a death spiral that has taken us, that we value not the things that promote life, but the things that promote death.

But like any formidable enemy, sin, death, and Satan will not go down without a fight. Therefore, Christians from every generation, not just under Nero in Peter's day, but today and in all times, should expect some kind of suffering, some kind of struggle, some kind of big pushback.

And this leads us to our next section, verses 13 to 17. And we'll see that there is blessing in our suffering. Again, another, seems like a contradiction or it's counterintuitive, but let's take a look at the text and see what it says.

We'll look at verse 13 and then we'll continue on. Now, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? This is a question rhetorically asked and the people in Asia Minor and here this

morning, we should say, no one.

But, my goodness, they're living under Nero. Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? The entire apparatus of Rome, the entire culture we live in.

[21 : 58] What do you mean that who is there to harm you? How can Peter say this to the church who has suffered so much but will suffer even more in the coming years, but especially in the coming decades, in the coming centuries?

Take a look. Let's continue on in verse 14. I'll read 13 again but we'll focus on 14 and following.

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.

Verse 17. For it is better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will than for doing evil. As a general rule, as a general principle, hope is essential for endurance and mental fortitude in the face of stressors and difficulties in life.

[23 : 10] Hope is so very important to the human existence. It's the very idea that tomorrow will be better than today. We see hope is essential.

But what is more important than having hope is who is or what is our hope in. If our hope is in Christ, he has conquered death.

The worst persecution that we may experience is death and nothing more. In the case of verse 15, but in our hearts honor Christ, the Lord is holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason of the hope that is in you.

This hope is a future hope that we have now that looks to the final salvation where we will experience in full what we have in part now. So we are saved.

We have hope now. But the hope that this envisions is the hope to come, the hope at the end of the age. When Christ will come back for his church to the dead in him will rise.

[24 : 22] He will judge the living and the dead like it says in our creed and we will be with him glorified for eternity. That is our hope. We are saved. But we have that in part now.

But not in full. Peter is telling us to be ready to explain what our hope is. That future hope that we have in the here and now.

And it would stand to reason then that verse 13, this rhetorically asked question, now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good, would appear that Peter is saying, listen, you are eternally secure.

They can attack your body, they can imprison you, they can slander you, you can lose your job, you could not have a promotion, you can suffer in a myriad of different kind of ways, but the most they can do is harm your temporal body.

But they can never touch your soul. Eternity is secure. Verse 14, though, nevertheless, says, listen, you might suffer for righteousness' sake, but know that you will be blessed.

[25 : 33] Why will you be blessed? You'll be blessed because you are united with Christ and you are walking in His ways. That, like Christ, you are suffering because you are choosing to proclaim the goodness of the gospel of God.

That righteousness and light and life, it is far greater and more powerful than death and despair and darkness. This hope animates our life so that our existence becomes impenetrable and imperishable because it's in Christ.

Christ, He draws us into Himself, blessing us with this eternal hope that is to come, but that we have in part now, and we get to proclaim this hope to others.

And notice the language here in verse 15, that as we proclaim this hope, giving a reason for this hope, we are to do it with gentleness and respect.

And we hearken back, it harkens back, rather, to the previous section where, with husbands and wives, where we are to share our hope with those around us in the pattern as women are to show gentleness.

[26 : 54] In verse 2, let me read this really quick so I'm just not stomping on anybody. Apologies.

Oh, sorry. Here it is. Do not let your adorning be eternal, verse 4, but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.

We're seeing that this is not just for women in verse 3, but it's connecting, Peter's connecting it to all Christians here in verse 15. And that we then are to seek people out, sharing them the hope that we have in a way that they can understand, that it is articulated to them in language that they can grasp, so that they would understand the universal human need for forgiveness and meaning and love, and that where they're searching for it, they will not find it, for it is only in Christ.

And yet Peter reminds us once again that doing good may very well result in suffering, and that is God's will. So what this isn't saying, though, is that suffering is certain, and that God delights in us being persecuted, or being hurt, or being maimed, or martyred, but rather that it is God's will that we may do good, and that very well might lead to suffering.

Remember, this is an encouragement for us, and it's a blessing for us. It is something that should build us up and not scare us. Ultimately, everything is under God's sovereign control.

[28 : 37] No one can persecute God's children apart from Him permitting it, but He has severely handicapped, kneecapped our enemies through the passion of Christ, so that all they can really truly do is affect our temporal life.

Our eternal hope is secure in our Savior, who has conquered all and is victorious over all. And this leads us then to our final point, verses 18 to 22, the blessing of our victorious Savior.

Let's take a look. 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 of 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 and authorities and powers having been subjected to Him.

This section marks the third time Peter has a big Christological vision of Jesus, which is to say this big description of Jesus connected to Old Testament prophets and different allusions.

[30 : 19] In the case of verses 18 to 22 here, we see that Peter is describing Christ as the victorious one, the one who has conquered all, that our blessings are in Him because He has destroyed our foes.

I'll just say this at the outset. This is quite possibly, if not, the most difficult passage in the New Testament to interpret. It is tough with the reference to Noah especially.

Over church history, there has not been consensus about the interpretation of this. Tertullian, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, contemporary scholars, they've labored and poured over this text with great difficulty and still there is not a consensus on what this means.

So as we enter into it, I humbly ask you for some grace because it's a tough one. It really is a tough one. But I'll suggest to you that that this is not some kind of proof text for the harrowing of hell, so to speak, where Christ descended into the hell and preached the gospel to the dead that died before him.

It doesn't work for a couple different reasons. A big reason is that hell is not mentioned here. It doesn't seem like that there is any flow to Peter's argument for that.

[31 : 55] There's also the hypothesis that the pre-incarnate Jesus somehow preached through Noah to the sinners before the judgment came.

Again, hardest text in the New Testament to figure out. Okay, so that sounds kind of crazy. It might be. I don't think that's where the text is going either.

Once again, because it seems like it's a bit of a stretch and it doesn't work out in the original language or again in the flow of 1 Peter. Rather, and again, this is, I'll throw this out there, we can wrestle with it over food at the potluck.

It seems that Peter is using a well-known Jewish tradition around the Noah story to communicate that Jesus' victory on the cross was a cosmic victory.

That it wasn't just him atoning for our sins, although it certainly was that, which is incredible, it's our salvation, won on the cross of Calvary.

[32 : 57] But that in dying on the cross, being buried, and rising again, Christ is victorious over all powers, all spiritual forces.

That there is nothing, no one, no being, no corner of the universe that is somehow unconquered by Jesus, that he doesn't have dominion over. It's a cosmic victory that this text is proclaiming. And in the flow of 1 Peter, it would seem like this fits, because again, the church is going through persecution and is struggling to maintain a faithful witness to the world around it, to faithfully live as God's people, mediating the presence of God wherever they're going.

Nero is strong. Rome is strong. Opposition is strong. And it would make sense that Peter is trying to encourage his people by saying, but Christ is stronger.

He is stronger than Rome. In fact, he is stronger than any spiritual force that has ever existed, the scariest boogeyman, the biggest devil.

[34 : 10] The scariest giant. The dragon himself is nothing compared to Christ and his victory on the cross. And you are in him, church.

That's what Peter is saying. And I would say this to us, we are in him. And if this is our savior, and if this is the one who has secured for us eternal salvation, I mean it says it right at the beginning of verse 18, chapter 3, 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 being made alive in the spirit.

If he is the one who has won us salvation on the cross, then he's in our corner, he's got our back.

They can take our body at most, but they can never take our soul.

It is hidden in Christ. So the whole bit about Noah, and this is where it can be a bit tricky, so again, this is just what I'll put forward to you, that in the same way that Noah, that the Noah story communicates a salvation through an ark, Christ becomes an ark himself, that if we are in Jesus, we pass through judgment.

Judgment does not have any hold upon us, we are saved, and God has made provision for us to be saved in a very similar way as Noah, that through Christ, his life, death, and resurrection, we are baptized into him.

[35 : 55] Christ is the new ark. He shields us from judgment, he brings us to God, we are saved.

This bit here that talks about salvation, that we can be saved by baptism.

This doesn't mean that baptism, regardless of one's faith in Christ, grants salvation. We are not called to splash all we see.

Remember, we are called to give the hope to everyone that we have, not to try to baptize everyone we have, and I'm being a bit facetious, but just to make the point that baptism itself alone doesn't save.

Peter, he qualifies this statement by saying baptism saves, by saying that there must be active faith in Christ once and for all, work on the cross through his life, death, and resurrection.

We see this in verse 3, verses 21 and following. 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.

[37 : 05] In our prayer book, in the original baptism liturgy, it says that baptism regenerates the soul, it saves. And that can be a tricky thing to read, because in our church, we, and I would set forward in Anglicanism, that's not what we believe.

That would be more akin to maybe some Lutheran views or even some Roman Catholic views. But that baptism is, it is God's declaration upon us that we are his.

In this case, though, in this case, Peter is saying that it is actually, in addition to that, even though he's not touching that, he is saying it is our pledge made to God that we are obediently following him all our days.

That we are looking to the cross of Christ for our salvation and nothing else. And that through baptism, we are united to Christ. Not only that, but it stands to reason that the majority, if not all, of the original recipients of this letter were Christians already, and therefore are already, that we're already baptized.

So, also, there's a call in this to remember your baptism. to remember that God has on you promised to bring you through this life into eternal salvation with him.

[38 : 35] Through the ark that is his son. Lots to talk about over a lunch. If you are struggling, this has been one of the hardest texts to wrestle through.

But, again, if we see this, remembering that this is a section to encourage us in our faith, as we suffer for the gospel to faithfully live out the Christian life, that even when we suffer by the hands of strong forces, we seek to live this life in the cosmic victor, the one who has conquered all, the one

who is the ultimate champion.

we must see, friends, as we wrap things up, we must see this life of faith as eternal blessings that begin now, that come through our calling to love and serve Christ, through the suffering that will inevitably come as we seek to serve him in righteousness, and because, ultimately, Christ's victory on the cross, once and for all, won us our eternal freedom, and now he is enthroned in heaven, and there is no power that is even coming close to kicking him off the throne.

That's who we serve, that's who we are in, that's who our hope is found. Let us pray. Father in heaven, thank you for your word, thank you that it is an encouragement to us, even though it is difficult at times to figure out and to discern and to wrestle through, but Lord, you've given us your word not to perplex us, not to confuse us, not to divide us, but to unite us and to encourage us and to equip us and to give us strength to endure and to obey and to lift up your name and proclaim your goodness wherever we may go.

Lord, remind us afresh that this is good news, this is balm for our souls, this is the very gas in our tank to keep us running. Lord, help us to see you and to see the victory of your son as no small thing, that this wasn't just some blip in time, but all of time now revolves around the cross, for Christ is the truly victorious one.

[41 : 02] Thank you. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.