

Suffer for doing good

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 July 2024

Preacher: David Wilkins

[0 : 00] May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be yours, O Lord. Amen.

Amen. Right, so, most people, when they're looking at this particular chapter, will jump straight! If I've heard this one once, I've heard it a thousand times whenever I've been talking to people who want to do outreach or people who want to talk about dialogue, at some point they'll read you half, only half, of this verse. Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect. What's wrong with that? Well, nothing really. If we don't give a clear answer to anyone who asks the reason for the hope that we have, what makes us different? What makes us special? What shows that Jesus' way is different to every other way. Well, nothing really. And if we don't do it gently and respectfully, why should people listen?

And why will they come back to us with any questions that may arise later if they start to have doubts? One of the wisest things I once heard about speaking to people from different cults is, it's all very well for you to have all the problems with their systems. All the issues is what they say, but did they leave you feeling loved? And if the answer is no, I guarantee that if they do start to doubt what their cult says, they're not going to come back to us to ask us questions. They'll go and find someone else.

They won't go and find someone who decided to show them that their faith was stupid, their ideas were rubbish, and everything they thought was rubbish. You might argue it's true, but with apologies to people who may not like this phrase, no one really likes a smart arse. So let's unpack this a bit and go back to the beginning. Verses 8 to 11 look fairly clear, where Peter explains, to begin with, how you're supposed to live, finally, he begins. He's explained how you should live as a slave when things are difficult, how wives and husbands ought to live together. That was covered last week and I wasn't there for that, but that's what he's been talking about. So after talking about those things, he rounds it up with, live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble, do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called, so that you may inherit a blessing. In other words, if you want a blessing from God, you have to live this particular way. Now, it sounds fine, but this isn't the way that we want to live.

And it's not the way society thinks we should live either. Have you ever driven in a car and there's some idiot in front of you who just won't move?

[3 : 34] You think he should move and he seems to be waiting for you right on the crossing where you want to drive? And when he finally gets out of your way and you move, if you haven't honked the horn at him already, is it tempting to give that superior, I'm a better driver than you look over your shoulder at him or in your mirror?

Now, the only reason why I can't do that is because I can't drive. But if I could drive, I'm pretty sure I'd be doing it. Look at social media. How often do people rightly want to talk about an experience that knocked them back, but they overcame? But how often is there an element in that post of, take that you horrible person or see, I don't need you. I'm better than you.

It's there. It's not something we're proud of. It's not something we'd like to admit is there, but it is there. If we're going to look different, if we're going to show people we are different, we have to be different.

Which is why Peter then quotes as Psalm 34, saying that he who would live life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.

We live in a polarised world where deceitful speech, being rude to each other, having a go at people who don't have the same views as we do, is commonplace.

[5 : 08] And if you should criticise it, I guarantee you'll either be told something like, well they did it first, or, but I'm right, or, but it's only a bit of banter.

Lots of Americans are seeing what happened at Trump's rally last night, whatever we may think of him, as something that was a direct cause, a direct result rather, of the nasty talk that's been going on on social media, on megaphones, on YouTube and everywhere else.

That's an extreme example. And there are huge arguments about who did it more, which I'm not going to go into, but the point is how you talk can affect what happens next.

And we can't really discount it by saying, well it was only a joke, or I didn't really mean it, or even other people did it first. And essentially Peter goes on to say, God is watching you to see how you behave.

He will listen to prayers from the righteous, not from people who do evil. Hang on a minute David, are you saying that I can't be saved if I do X, Y and Z?

[6 : 31] No, I'm not. But I am saying, why would God bless what you're doing if it doesn't follow what he asks you to do?

When we're called to follow Jesus, we're called to really follow him. Not say you're a Christian, say you do things a different way and then carry on the way you were.

Easily done. Bad idea though. Who is going to harm you, Peter goes on, if you are eager to do good? Well, I hear his readers grumble, pretty much everybody.

It doesn't seem no matter how well I try to do things, they still have a go at me. And it's all because, in their days, I don't want to get involved in their religious festivals.

What might it be for us today? Not wanting to get involved in what's known as banter, a joke, rude posts on social media, posts which actually edify you on social media.

[7 : 48] If you want to do the right thing, people shouldn't want to harm you. But, realistically, Peter goes on, even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.

Do not fear what they fear. Do not be frightened. Do authorities the world fear things? You bet they do.

Just look at their social media posts. Look at the kind of things it's common for people to post about. Look at celebrities who don't want to live in a world in which somebody doesn't think they're wonderful.

Everyone has to think they're wonderful. Look at the arguments you get between people on social media about the most trivial things. Often, that's done just to get more views.

Because they feel the more views they get, the more people like them. Well, that's nonsense. Most of these people don't even know you. They're just looking at your social media account, flicking along, and they post something disparaging just for the heck of it.

[8 : 54] They might post something nice because they like you, but they don't know you. They don't know anything about you. They fear a lot of things. We have Jesus, which is why we get the first bit of this verse before we get the second.

But in your heart set apart Christ as Lord. That's why you should always be prepared to give a reason for people who ask about the hope that you have.

You give them an answer because our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. Now, we'll say that differently depending on who we're talking to and what they might ask.

But that's our hope. That's what we believe. For some of you here who don't know what this hope means, do listen to our next song when we finish here, In Christ Alone Our Hope Is Found.

Think about what this might mean for you. Keeping a clear conscience, Peter goes on, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

[10 : 03] Having a conscience is an interesting idea. Sometimes it can get in the way because your conscience might say to you, actually, God can't really want to use you because you're not good enough.

Well, actually, we're not really. That's the point. And if we keep listening to that, that can be a problem because it can get us to worry.

But our conscience is really useful. If we ignore that voice in your head that says, Should you really have raised your voice then?

Should you really have been unkind to that person at the shopping desk or in the taxi when you don't know what kind of day they've been having? Or what kind of issues they might be dealing

with?

Shouldn't you apologise? If we listen to that and respond to it, people who want to have a go at us as Christians and for just being Christian will find it hard.

[11:07] They're ashamed because they can't find anything to say. They're ashamed because, actually, you look better than them.

Now, knowing ourselves, we know it's not true. But it does look that way. That doesn't mean everything is going to go okay for you then.

It is better, if it's God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. So again, Peter's a pragmatic person. He lived in a world where Christians were the outcasts of pretty much everybody.

And we are in the Western world moving more towards a world where Christianity isn't seen as the norm. It's seen as something that's different or something that's a bit strange or something that's a bit odd.

I've often heard Christians bewailing this and complaining that we should move to getting our country to be more of a Christian country again. That may not be possible.

[12:12] And whether we ever were one is a bit debatable. But the Bible isn't seen as the go to moral standard in the West anymore, if it ever was.

And we may not get that back. But then they didn't have that in the beginning, at the beginning of the church. That's why Peter's saying if you're going to be persecuted for doing something, or treated badly for doing something, it might as well be for doing something that's right than for doing something which you know was wrong anyway.

Okay, this bit's all so far so good, right? Now we get the next bit, verses 18 to 20, and you think, what's this?

What's this supposed to mean? Disobedient and imprisoned spirits? Noah and the ark? Baptism? What's he talking about? Couldn't he have ended the chapter at the end of verse 17? It's a bit like when you build a tent, and you've got this lovely tent, which you're going to take your family away on holiday, and suddenly you find, right at the bottom of the bag, is a great big long pole you haven't fitted in yet.

[13:24] And you think, oh no, hang on, where does this go? Um, if I try to fit it in here, I think that's going to just make the tent fall down.

And this manual's not much help. Hmm, yeah, it looks like a load of wavy lines to me. Can't I just leave it in the box, and hope the tent will stand up without it?

And someone says, that's the central pole, mate, leave that out, and the whole tent falls down. And if you ignore them, guess what happens? Well, the tent falls down, doesn't it?

So, is this a strange pole that doesn't fit? Well, actually, it isn't. Peter's explaining to people why it is you can have confidence.

Why it is you can give this answer to people who ask for the reason for the hope that you have. Why you can be different. Because Jesus died for us, for our sins, for the righteous and the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

[14:34] Okay, that's easy. He was put to death in the body, but made alive in the spirit, whom he also went and preached to the spirits in prison, who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

Okay, just a bit of context there. At the time that Peter lived, many Jewish people loved a book called One Enoch.

Oh, great heavens, guys, you're a rubbish audience. You're supposed to go, THE Enoch! Because the Enoch, in Genesis chapter 5, was supposed to have been taken away by God into heaven and never died.

The Book of Enoch, and you're still not doing it, the Book of Enoch was not written by THE Enoch, but it's made to look as though it is.

And essentially it teaches that the reason mankind disobeyed goes back to disobedient spirits. You can read the whole story in Genesis 6, and if you really want to read One Enoch, you can read the Apocrypha and find it.

[15:48] But this book preached that at some point, God would have victory over these disobedient, nasty spirits. Well, says Peter, it's happened. We have this victory.

It's in Jesus when he died. And when he rose again from the dead, he was saying to these spirits, your days are numbered. Your power is broken.

I have the victory. And because he has the victory, we have the victory. But Enoch also taught this is why the great flood happened.

If you've read the story, you'll have heard of Noah's Ark at least. In the story of Noah's Ark, eight people are saved from the flood.

And Peter sees this as a symbol of baptism. Because he's saying, baptism isn't about just being dunked in a pool of water, or in a river, or in something.

[16 : 56] Baptism is when you make the pledge that in a good conscience you will serve God. When you're baptised, you're saying, I'm a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come. Hallelujah.

Now, I'm not saying, if you're not baptised, you're not saved. But baptism is the foundation for you to build on, to show that you're saved.

And if you're saved by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, well, Jesus is in heaven at the right hand, at God's right hand, with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Take heart, says Peter, because you were baptised. Because you were saved through baptism, just like Noah and his Ark.

Incidentally, the people Peter were writing to firmly believed that the Ark was on a mountain somewhere in what we now know as Turkey. So even non-believers understood this story.

[18 : 11] That's why Peter chooses it. The Ark is a symbol, a hint of what was coming and has come, that we're saved. So what could we take away from this?

Well, three things. If we're going to give people an answer when they ask the reason for the hope that we have, and we must do that with gentleness and respect, we have to look different.

That's why we should live in unity with each other as Christians. Be sympathetic. Be compassionate. It's very easy to have a go at other Christians who don't see faith, politics, anything the same way as we do.

That's not what we're called to do. If we've never agreed on what Jesus Christ did and who he is, we shouldn't be sniping at each other. Because if we do, why should anybody take our answers seriously?

Times will be tough and things will be difficult. There's no getting round that, unfortunately. We'd much rather it wasn't like that, but that's not the world we live in. But Jesus led our way, and if we set apart Jesus as Lord in our hearts, we really have no reason to be as fearful as many people who do not know him are.

[19 : 41] And thirdly, we can be confident, even if we're given a hard time for doing the right thing, because God has won the victory. That's why those last verses really aren't a poll that you can leave in the box when you're making your tent.

Essentially, it proves everything else that we've been hearing so far. That Jesus is at the right hand of God and he has saved us.

If there's anyone here today who's not really heard about this hope, or is thinking about this hope, it's for you. It always has been for you.

It always has been for you. It always will be for you. For those of you who are listening and think, well, I may not need this message, I've heard this all before. You do need it. Both so we can pray for our brothers and sisters around the world, where Christianity isn't just not the norm anymore. It's seen as the most awful thing you can possibly be. But also so we can listen when we're called, and respond when times get tough, and support each other.

[20 : 54] This hope is for us. This hope is ours. And Christ has the victory. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you so much for this letter from Peter.

It may look strange sometimes, but in it there's so much, in which he reminds us how to live, that we are different, living in a world that will see us as different, and that to follow you we need to know that you have won the victory.

Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Thank you so much. I'll give you a handbag.