

Meeting Jesus: Heart Preparation (Evening Service)

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening? In Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Hello, everybody. I just got back from the retreat about two hours ago, and it was phenomenal. I mean, it was beautiful. It was absolutely beautiful up there. And Ross Hastings just killed it, hit it out of the park. Band was amazing. We met with Jesus. We got to know each other. It was a fantastic time. So book it in. 2020.

2020 is when we're going to do it next. All right. So we've been doing a series to coincide with CCQ. In the first few weeks, we looked at what happens when people meet Jesus. And these weeks, continuing the series, what we're doing is something slightly different while CCQ is on, is we're looking at what the Bible says about being public and open about our faith. And in our cultural moment, sharing Jesus can be a fairly tricky business. If you've got a whole group of people who weren't churchy people together, and you ask them what they thought of Christianity, a few people would respect it. I met a guy the other day who said, yes, I have great respect for evangelical Christians. That was interesting. He wasn't a Christian.

Some people would see it as, they wouldn't respect it, but they'd see it as just an alternative worldview, something that we tolerate. But a good chunk of people would see the Christian faith as a bad thing, a belief system not to be tolerated, but actually something to be vanquished. And how do we respond as Christians when we are faced with people who fall into that third category? What do we do when you as a Christian are ridiculed or told what you believe is harmful or dangerous? What do you do? The world is becoming more secular. This is an ongoing problem, right?

Christianity is becoming more and more out of step with how culture thinks.

How are we going to respond? Christians have historically responded in three different ways. The first response is to become enculturated. So somebody says, your faith is harmful to the world, and you start thinking, yeah, actually, I think that could be right. I need to adjust what I believe. Second response is we don't get enculturated. We just kind of get shouty. We become shouty, angry, angry Christians. Third response, we get intimidated. We stay silent. We don't want the hassle. Now, none of those are great options. We don't want to become enculturated. We don't want to become angry, shouty Christians, and we don't want to remain silent either. Well, there's a fourth way, and it's in our 1 Peter 3 passage today. So that's what we're going to be talking about. 1 Peter 3.

So let's walk through it, and it's going to be helpful if you have a Bible or an app open to track with what's going on here. It's a little bit tricky. So verse 13 says this, now, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for doing good? So it starts with a rhetorical question, and the question is basically this. It's like, who's going to hassle you if you're doing good stuff? You're a Christian.

[3 : 33] That's great. Who's going to hassle you for that? It's a just-increation. Who would do that? And verse 14 says, actually, it's quite a few people are going to do that. You're going to be hassled for what you believe, and periodically it's going to feel very unjust.

People aren't going to get in your face. They're going to call you a bigot or a homophobe. They're going to say, what you believe is nonsense. They're going to say, you're anti-science. You hate the earth. You have a real backward way of thinking. 1 Peter 3 says, okay, given that that's going to happen periodically, how are we to respond? And the first thing it says is quite a surprise. Verse 14 continues, and it says, if you're in that situation, you will be blessed. Now, how is that a blessing? Someone's up in your face. How is that a blessing? Well, look what it says next. It says, basically, you have two options in that situation. Two heart options in that situation. And the heart options are fear or honor. You see, it says, verse 14, have no fear in that situation.

It's going to be blessed, and then it explains what that means. It says, have no fear. In the original Greek language, which is what the New Testament was written in, it actually says, don't fear what they fear. Don't be troubled in your heart by what troubles them.

But honor Christ as Lord. So you're blessed because your trust is in Christ. He is the Lord. He's in control of that whole situation. See, the alternative to trusting in Christ is a life based on very fragile hopes. The hopes that you'll sort of accumulate enough money to kind of get what you want.

[5 : 23] That you'll hopefully won't be unlucky, get a disease or something. That you'll try and make good decisions. You'll have, hopefully have some good genes. It's kind of like a lot of luck involved in there. It's a very fragile hope, isn't it? And persecution, somebody ridiculing you for what you believe. It exposes where our hearts are at. What are we going to do in that situation? Will we carry the fears of the non-believer? Will we let what troubles them trouble us in that situation?

The truth is, many Christians are actually, they do this. They are, in everyday life, practical atheists. Their hope is in many things, and a small amount in Christ, but in a whole lot of other things. I mean, you can live like that. Or do you fully hope in Christ, that he is the Lord? Look at the end of the passage. How does it describe Christ? Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. That's who the passage is calling us to honor and trust. This sounds simplistic, but let's trust that guy. You know, let's trust that guy. That seems to make the most sense, doesn't it? So you're facing persecution, and Peter says, you will be blessed. Why? Because your hope is in the solid rock of Jesus.

So there you go. That's your first response. Someone's in your face. Make sure your hope is in the right place, or your hope is in the right person. So the first response is a heart. It's a heart response. The next response, Peter says, is don't waste the persecution. Don't waste that opportunity.

Someone comes to you with an accusation about your faith. Peter says, what a great opportunity.

[7 : 27] Verse 15. Always be prepared to make a defense to someone, to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. So someone dislikes what you believe. They tell you why. Your response, it's not stoicism. It's not silence. It's not being passive. We respond. We respond to them, but we respond to them thoughtfully. And we can do that because Peter says, we have prepared for this. Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Being prepared to give a reason. The Greek word there for reason is *logos*, it's where we get the English word for logic.

So as Christians, our hearts are prepared for persecution, but also our minds. Someone says the Bible is a myth. It's such a myth. That stuff couldn't have happened. Just look at Genesis. It's ridiculous.

What are you going to do? You can't bring cliches to the table in that conversation. You cannot just blabber on. Now you can be, you can say to them, I don't know, but I'll get back to you. But be prepared. Bring clear, thoughtful logic to the table. So I'll give you some examples. So someone might say, Genesis is ridiculous. It's clearly not scientific. Therefore the whole thing falls apart.

And a logical response is to say, well, if you read it, does it sound like a scientific document?

Actually it doesn't, does it? It sounds more poetic than scientific, doesn't it?

I remember hearing J.I. Packer talk about this. And somebody said to him, was asking about Genesis and how we can date the earth or something. And he says, if I want to know how the earth is, I'll speak to a geologist. But if I want to know why the earth exists, well, I'll read the Bible.

[9 : 29] So that's, that's a very basic answer to that question. There's more things to say there.

Well, what about this? Somebody comes up angrily to you. They find out you're a Christian and they, they get, they get angry with you. And they say, religion causes all the wars. You guys are responsible for so much injustice. We would be so much better off without your religious dogma.

You might say, yes, yes, the church has done bad things and people have done bad things in the name of religion. But let's think very clearly about this. Let's talk about the facts here.

If that's something that's keeping you from the Christian faith, then let's just talk, let's talk about facts here. And the fact is that the 20th century was the most secular in history and it was the bloodiest. And all of the major genocides were committed in an effort to get rid of religion.

Pol Pot, Stalin, Lenin, that's tens of millions of people. If you want to go deeper, there's a, there's a, there's an encyclopedia series called the Encyclopedia of War. I looked it up. It's like \$400 on Amazon. It's not cheap, but it's published about 10 years ago.

It documents, it documents the history of the 1700 wars that have been fought since 800 BC that they have information about. And of those, this is a secular book. It's not a Christian book. It's just a secular book. Of those, the author says 123 were religious in nature. That's 7%. 7% of the 1700 wars were religious. The truth is when somebody says religious causes, religion causes all the wars, it's just not the truth. Non-religious motivations are to blame for almost all of mankind's wars. There's just a couple of examples. People accuse you of your faith. You can't bring fluffy ideas to the table there, folks. You've got to bring reason. You've got to bring logic.

[11 : 25] And now look at the end of verse 15 here. We bring a reason for our hope. So that's what we do. We bring clear thought to it, but not in an angry, shouty way. We do it, verse 15, with gentleness and respect. So we don't try to overpower people with our phenomenal arguments or a force of our personality or through aggressiveness. We do it with gentleness and respect. We do it kindly.

Let me tell you a story. So I shared this at a CCQ on Tuesday, so forgive me if you've already heard it. About 15 years ago, I'm backpacking around Europe and I'm doing, I'm there for three months backpacking around Europe. I'm by myself. And as you do, if you ever backpack, you just, it's great to travel by yourself. You just meet up with these groups of people. So I meet up with these Australians and they were great. I loved hanging out with them. One day we're in a backpackers in, I don't know, I think we're in Italy somewhere. And we're on this big table and I'm having this very philosophical discussion with a woman directly in front of me. And I remember she had dark hair. She was from Sydney.

She was delightful. And we're talking about faith. I'm talking about my faith. And it gets sort of quite philosophical. Everyone starts listening in to the conversation. They all stop talking. They start listening to this conversation. And she says, listen, I just can't, you know, I can't believe what you believe because basically there's no, there's no ultimate truth, right?

It's just, it's just a social construct. And I said, that's what, is that what you believe? Yeah, I really believe this. And I said, so there's no truth. No, there's no truth. And I said, so there's no like absolutes, like absolutes. And she said, no. And I said, are you absolutely sure?

And she said, yes. And then she got it. I had sort of philosophically trapped her. And I leaned back with a big smile on my face and thinking, there's one point for Jesus. And then I realized that everyone was laughing at her.

[13 : 33] Everyone that was listening in was laughing at her. And she had been, I had humiliated her. And I won the argument, but had lost any traction with her. She's not going to talk to me. She didn't want to talk to me after that. I was all bravado, no gentleness, no respect. And I ruined a really wonderful opportunity. Let me remind you of the big picture here of this passage. How do we respond to persecution? People who are not happy about what you believe, think it's a harmful thing.

First, we make sure our heart is in the right place. It's trusting in the right place. It's trusting in the right person. It's trusting in Jesus. He's in control of the situation. Secondly, we respond well. We respond thoughtfully with ideas and lines and stories and stuff that we've spent time learning so we can give a defense for what we believe. Thirdly, we do it respectfully. We do it with great kindness. And why do we do this? That's verse 16. Verse 16 says this, having a good conscience so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. Now, the goal is not to shame the person. The goal is that you respond so well to that situation, so thoughtfully, with such character that they might consider the gospel.

Now, verses 18 to 21. Just slide your eyes over verses 18 to 21 there, moving along, because we're walking through the passage. What do you make of that? Luther describes these verses as the most obscure passages in the Bible.

I mean, it says that during the days of Noah, Christ preached to spirits in prison. I just have no idea. I don't know what this means.

And all the scholars I read just have different ideas. One guy had 180. See, there's 180 possibilities here. Let's start by going through them. So, when you're in these situations, and there's not many of them in the Bible, when you're in these situations where you're just like, I have no idea what this means, you kind of just go with the gist of it.

[15 : 55] What is the gist of this, the basic gist? The basic gist is this, is it begins by talking about the righteous for the unrighteous.

It's talking about the great exchange that Christ made on the cross. So, it starts with that. So, we wear Christ's righteousness. We wear his goodness when we can come to God.

That's why we can have a relationship with God. But, he wore our sinfulness up there. Christ was rejected by his Father on the cross instead of rejecting us.

Baptism is a picture of this. It's like, it says it's like sort of being cleaned in this wonderful way. So, this is the gospel. This is what we trust in.

And Noah, we have this wonderful example of someone who trusted in God. In incredible circumstances, the guy's building a boat in the desert, right? Imagine the mockery.

[16 : 55] Imagine the accusations. But he trusted God, and he persevered, and he was saved. That's what I think that last little section's about. Let me finish up here.

The passage finishes, as I said before, with Christ on the throne. He's sitting at the right hand of God. What does that mean, he's at the right hand of God? It means that he's acting with the Father's authority.

And this is really important because at the end of the sermon, I don't want you to think the main point is, Okay, I need to amass a whole lot of logical rebuttals to accusations I might face. Now, that's important. You need those.

You should study them. You should have them in your back pocket. But if that's all you have, you truncate the attractiveness and the beauty of the gospel to just logic rather than hope in God.

So have the apologetic stuff. That's important. But also have a living faith in a person. That's what's going to sustain you in those situations. And it's what you really actually want to share with people, right?

[17 : 54] So the apologetic stuff is fantastic. Have it. Study it. Have it. It's there, right? But mostly, I think that stuff is just to clear the intellectual rubble out of the way. So that in these conversations, we can present Christ to people.

And why we have hope in him. And why it's such good news. Amen.