

The Hope That Is Within You

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Date: 22 July 2012

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[0 : 00] I'm going to ask John to come and speak to us and I will interview John later with probing, penetrating and difficult questions. But now we're going to turn to the Word of God.

Hopefully the Word of God will be more penetrating than the interview. I'm well aware that you're used to the Australian accent, so I don't have to do my normal thing of starting out slow and building up pace.

But actually Dan on the sound desk told me before I got up that actually they have a button on the sound desk that removes the Australian accent and makes it Canadian. So I sound Canadian, right? G'day.

I don't know how that comes out Canadian, but it's lovely to be here. I am going to speak to you from 1 Peter chapter 3, I think it's page 1013.

It would be lovely if you had it open in front of you so that you can see that what I say comes from the text, not just from my head. 1 Peter chapter 3 verse 13 is our beginning point.

[1 : 12] And you can see that the text is about making Christ public. That is what my life is about. It's my favourite topic, bringing Christ out into the public square.

But it hasn't always been an easy thing to do. When I first became a Christian, it was the most natural thing in the world to be open about Jesus.

I became a Christian at age 16, having never been inside a church. This is pretty normal in Australia and I understand it's pretty normal in Canada with our increasingly secularising cultures.

But I did become a Christian at 16 and was so thrilled at the news of Christ. I shared Christ with everyone.

You know, if it breathed, I told it about Jesus. My friends at school, my soccer mates, my family, the other teenagers on the summer camps.

[2 : 20] My mum used to send me on all the time to get me out of the house from sharing Christ with her. But in those early days, I had no idea you could be coy about being a Christian.

I had no idea that there was such a thing as a shy Christian about the faith. But it's something I learnt soon enough when I started to mix with other Christians.

And that's where I learnt to be embarrassed about being a Christian. And what was so interesting is when I became a Christian, my church spotted that I was really eager to share the faith.

And so they decided that I should be trained in evangelism. I'd never heard of evangelism. I just wanted people to know about Jesus. I didn't know there was a word for it, let alone a course that you could do over three months.

So off I went to this course where I learnt a pretty straight gospel presentation with 17 points or something. Bible verses I memorized, answers to tricky questions and so on.

[3 : 31] And then I was set loose on the unsuspecting public of Sydney. Doing door knocking and walking up to people in the shopping malls. But here's the interesting thing.

At the end of my three months of professional training in evangelism, I found myself coy about the faith. Whereas once it seemed like the most natural thing in the world to talk about the faith, now I found it a burden.

I found it a burden on my emotions. A burden on my memory because I was trying to remember the 17 points of the gospel. And I think most of all a burden on my poor unsuspecting targets of evangelism.

I don't blame the course. Many people have been helped by evangelism training courses and by this particular one also. But you know, I feel the way the course was taught in my church, combined with my sort of overzealous personality, led to a couple of really unhealthy attitudes toward this whole task of making Christ public.

I think the first unhealthy attitude was I became self-conscious about reaching out to others. Whereas I used to speak about Jesus just like I would talk about Manchester United, the other great love in my life.

[4 : 59] Now I found myself going into evangelism mode. You know, where you're concentrating on getting the exact words right. You're trying to steer the conversation in a pretty unconversational mode.

I was self-conscious. It's a bit like those talent quest shows. I know you have Canadian Idol here. We have Australian Idol. I love those shows.

But one of the very common criticisms of contestants is that they're self-conscious in the performance. So a judge will say to a contestant who's just sung a song, you know, I could almost see you counting out the dance moves.

I could almost see you straining to remember the next lyric of the song. And it was awkward to watch you. You were self-conscious. And when I hear that criticism, it's a very common criticism of performers.

It reminds me of how I felt at the end of this evangelism training course. Self-conscious about steering conversation. Self-conscious about getting everything exactly right.

[6 : 02] And I'd forgotten the joy of the song of the gospel. And the joy of the audience that I could share it with. I became self-conscious.

But I think the other unhelpful attitude that I picked up from that evangelism training course was that I felt that if I had an opportunity to say something about Jesus, I was obliged to say everything I'd learned about Jesus.

You know, I'd spent months learning the 17 points of the gospel. So, you know, if you gave me half a chance, I was going to tell you all 17 points. And I don't know how many people had to endure my sermonettes before I realized that that glazed over look in their eyes was not the look of wonder at all.

It was the look of, you know, get me out of here or something like that. Well, I'm glad that after I'd done that evangelism training course, I was helped by others to find my way back to natural sharing of the faith.

And it's that more natural sharing of the faith that I want to focus on as we reflect together on this wonderful passage from the Apostle Peter.

[7 : 23] Because this instruction makes so much sense of real life making Christ public. He raises our consciousness about evangelism without making us self-conscious.

He gives us something to say about Jesus in public without insisting that we say everything. Verse 15.

Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet, do this with gentleness and respect.

I think this passage tells us a number of very important things about our privilege of sharing Christ in public.

And the first is kind of the most obvious one. All Christians share in the privilege and duty of making Christ public.

[8 : 27] All Christians. See, this letter is written to Christians generally. It's not like, say, 2 Timothy 4.5, which says, Do the work of an evangelist.

Well, that was said to an evangelist. That was not a general church letter. It was said to a specific person in ministry who was an evangelist. And yet, this text is written to all Christians.

As you can see from the opening paragraph of the letter, it's a general epistle. We read in the opening lines, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

I mean, that's a lot of places. And it's written not to pastors or evangelists, but to the elect generally. And to all Christians, therefore.

Peter is saying, Will you be prepared to have Christ on the lips? To make a defense when asked. To give an answer.

[9 : 33] What bold proclamation of the gospel is to the evangelist. Being ready to have Christ on the lips to give a defense. Is to the average believer.

Speaking up for the Lord is natural and crucial. It won't be everything we do to reach out to others.

Because the New Testament also says, Pray. And as you pray, the gospel advances. It says, Give money. And as you give money, the gospel advances. It says, Live the good life.

And as you live the good life, the gospel is promoted. But it also says, Speak when appropriate. Some of you may have heard that saying that's often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi.

Lots of people in Australia quote this. They say, Preach the gospel always. If necessary, use words. Now, it's cute. It's lovely.

[10 : 35] But it's not exactly what scripture says. Because speaking isn't the last resort of reaching out to others. It's just a natural part of who we are. Can you imagine if I never spoke about my wife?

Imagine if, you know, you'd spent some time with me. And I never mentioned my wife or my children. You would worry that there was something maybe wrong between us. That I was avoiding it.

Well, I think it's the same in the Christian life. If Christ is never on the lips in public, there's something spiritually unwell in your soul. All Christians share in the privilege of making Christ public.

Of giving a defense or answer, as Peter says. The second thing this passage, I think, makes really clear is that our motivation for sharing Christ in public is a loyalty to him as Lord.

The motivation for making him public is a loyalty to him as Lord. You can see this. If you see the way Peter introduces the exhortation to speak, if you take it from, say, verse 14, But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.

[11 : 53] Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy. Literally it says, in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.

Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone. Do you see the logic? When you suffer, as these Christians were doing, don't fear the things that people in the Roman Empire normally feared.

The imperial regime and its pressures. Don't fear them. Fear the true Lord. Set apart Christ as Lord. Regard him as true kurios.

The word often used of the emperor. Lord. Fear him. And you will speak. Do you notice how it's one sentence? Set apart Christ as Lord, or in your hearts regard Christ as holy.

Always being prepared to make a defense. Do you see they're actually connected? The degree to which you set apart Christ as Lord is the degree to which you'll be ready to make a defense. The point I'm trying to draw out here is that it's your loyalty to him as Lord.

- [13 : 03] It's the degree to which you know he rules everything that will inspire your willingness to speak up for him. And the point is intensified because Peter is actually alluding to Isaiah 8.12.

I'm not sure if the footnote in your Bible points this out, but it's quite clear that Isaiah 8.12 lies behind this very statement. Because Isaiah 8.12 says, Do not fear what they fear.

Do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to set apart or regard as holy. Exactly the same language applied to Jesus.

There's an extraordinarily high Christology in this letter of Peter. What was said about the Lord God of the Old Testament is now said of Jesus. Set him apart as Lord.

And you'll always be prepared to give a defense. The realization of Christ's majesty, your loyalty to him, will drive our willingness to speak up for him.

- [14 : 12] It's actually the same in the Great Commission. Do you remember the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel? Do you remember the logic of going into all the world?

Do you remember it says, Do you see the logic?

All authority belongs to Jesus, therefore go everywhere. There's this intimate connection between Jesus' absolute lordship over everything and our willingness to make him public everywhere.

See, when you know that he is the Lord, you will speak up. I'm not saying it'll make you into an evangelist. It doesn't turn introverts into extroverts. But it will make you the best version of yourself, which is all the Lord asks of you.

When you know that he owns every room you find yourself in, you'll be able to speak up for him. He doesn't just own this room. He owns the room you'll find yourself in tomorrow morning.

- [15 : 23] He owns the boardroom. He owns the university classroom. He is the Lord of every room. And I know there are all sorts of reasons Christians become shy about their faith.

But the antidote is the realization of his lordship. It is, as Peter says, setting apart Christ as Lord. Some Christians are shy about the faith just because they are naturally shy people.

They can hardly tell a joke in public, let alone speak about the gospel of Jesus' lordship, his death and resurrection. But the antidote is a fresh realization of his lordship and you will become the best version of yourself.

Other Christians are coy about the faith because they have intellectual doubts. Others, I think, suffer from the corporate inferiority complex.

You know, that's where the church thinks the world thinks the church are fools. And so we don't open our mouth lest we confirm the impression. Yeah?

- [16 : 24] It's a corporate inferiority complex. I don't think the whole world thinks the whole church are fools. They're just not thinking about us. But we have this incredibly negative view of how the world views us.

Yes, I know that both our nations are very secular and secularizing. But I think that the devil has sown this little lie that's made us feel bad about ourselves.

That we never stick our heads above the parapet and say boo. But when you, in a sense, peer behind the curtain of heaven and you see God on his throne and Christ at his right hand, you go out into the world saying, I can make Christ public.

He owns every room. So this week at work, if some comment is made about the Christian faith and there are others in the room, you know, maybe it's in the staff room at work, just take a deep breath.

Remember who is the Lord of that room too and make your defense. Give your answer. Because the Lord owns the room.

[17 : 44] He is, as Peter says, Lord. The third thing this passage tells us is that sometimes the manner of our speaking can be as important as the content.

Do you notice there's not much about the content here? Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope, but he doesn't actually say exactly what you're meant to say.

Presumably this is because it depends on the kind of question that's asked. But Peter is at pains to tell us how to answer. How are we to answer?

Yet do it with gentleness and respect. Gentleness and respect. This is really hard because some of the criticisms of Christianity are hard to respect.

And I'm not sure Peter really wants you to respect every argument, but you can respect the human being made in the image of God who makes a silly argument. Yeah? And gentleness, oh, that's hard.

[18 : 47] It doesn't come naturally to me to be gentle. But Peter says you've got to be gentle. Let me share with you a log in my own eye that sort of illustrates what not to do.

Okay? I was at a pub with a bunch of friends and I was introduced to this friend of a friend who was an ardent, self-made, wealthy, Aussie atheist.

And, you know, I was having great fun with him. And he was telling me all that was wrong with Christianity. Apparently science had disproved everything in the Bible. And I was gentle and respectful in my reply.

He told me that Christians are all hypocrites. You know, they're one thing on Sunday and another thing during the week. And I think I managed to sort of offer a gentle and respectful reply.

But then his third criticism was that Christianity only spread throughout the world in ancient times because of its armies and the sword.

[19 : 47] And it forced everyone to believe. Oh, man, that turned a corner for me. Gentleness and respect were out the window.

That just riled me for some reason. It could be because that's actually the area of my academic research. And I started to say, no, no, no, that's not true. And he said, oh, no, no, every historian knows that's true.

It was through armies that Christianity converted everyone. And I was irate. And I started to raise my voice. I started to name authors that he'd never heard of, that had argued the opposite.

And as the words were leaving my mouth, it was almost like I could hear Peter in my ear saying, gentleness and respect, which were nowhere to be found.

I was making the fatal mistake of public evangelism. I was trying to win the argument instead of the person.

[20 : 55] I wish, you know, that were the only story I could tell you. It's the only story I will tell you. But, you know, it's something I really have to work on.

And what is so striking in this passage is that the word Peter uses for defense, apologia, is usually the word for a sort of bold defense in court.

It's quite a strong word. And yet, as soon as he uses that strong word, he sort of measures it out by saying, no, no, with gentleness and respect. And so I just want to put it to you.

Yes, Christ owns every room. He calls on you to make him public. But will you do it gently? Will you do it respectfully? Even if the arguments are silly, naive, treat the person respectfully.

Have a tone that is gentle. Because sometimes the tone of how you share Christ says as much about Christ as the content.

[22 : 06] And I feel terrible that this particular bloke in the pub left that night, no doubt, thinking Christians were arrogant. And he had some pretty good evidence.

Fourthly, this passage tells us we are to live lives worth questioning in the first place.

Do you notice that the whole passage is actually about godliness? I've zeroed in on the speaking up for Jesus bit, but the passage is actually about godly behavior.

In other words, speaking up for Christ, it comes out of the sort of the devotion to good works. You can see it from say verse 14.

But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you'll be blessed, have no fear and so on. And then having urged us to speak up, he returns to the theme in verse 16. You 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.

[23 : 13] In other words, the logic here for Peter is that it's the good behavior of Christians that prompts the slander that requires the defense. It's the good behavior of Christians that prompts the slander that requires the defense.

That's the logic. It's out of the godly life, it's out of the life of service that the opportunities to speak of Christ will come. And this has never been more important because increasingly in our day, the rumor that Christianity has just raped and pillaged through history is taking on great force.

It's always been one of the things in the atheist quiver to say Christianity has damaged society. But now it's risen to about number three in criticisms of Christianity.

It seems to me. Listen to Christopher Hitchens, the famous atheist who unfortunately recently passed away. I think he's God's favorite atheist, if that's possible. But listen to what he says in his book, God is not great.

As I write these words, and as you read them, people of faith, and he means Christians, are in their different ways planning your and my destruction and the destruction of all hard-won human attainments that I have touched upon.

[24 : 35] Religion poisons everything. Now there are things we can say in response to this theme that Christianity has done more harm than good.

And I have the great privilege of speaking on Wednesday evening on this very, very topic. And I hope you'll be able to bring your friends who are skeptical about the Christian faith as I try and address this from a historical, intellectual, and personal point of view.

Has Christianity done more harm than good? But there's something way more important to say. Regardless of the intellectual apologetic that can be brought to this question of the damage Christianity has done, it's the life of the Christian community that is the ultimate apologetic.

It's your godliness that will undone this idea that Christianity poisons everything. As Dawkins and Hitchens and Sam Harris and Michelle Onfray and all the other atheist writers influence our culture, it's as the church is known for good deeds that the argument is undone.

And in context, I want you to notice, in context, the good behavior Peter's referring to is not so much morality as love and sympathy and humility.

[25 : 57] See, go back to verse 8 of chapter 3, which is actually the official beginning of the unit. You know, if I were giving a proper exposition, I should have started at verse 8.

But you can see that this informs what he means by good behavior and righteousness sake. Verse 8. Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, a humble mind.

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you are called.

It's as the Christian community looks like that, that we will have opportunities to speak of Christ, but also the ultimate defense.

And I am so convinced of this, that just in the last couple of years, I've found a way to move myself back into local church ministry. For years I've been this sort of itinerant guy running around, you know, debating atheists and doing public talks and so on, which is all great and all important and I'm glad to be doing it, but I am utterly convinced that the most powerful apologetic there is in the world is a Christian community that looks like that.

[27 : 33] Because it's when people in Roseville, where I live and work, bump into people from St. Andrew's Church, that the argument that Christianity poisons everything comes undone.

It's when people in this neck of the woods bump into St. John's Vancouver, that the argument that Christianity poisons everything evaporates. Character is a powerful component of persuasion.

We are to live lives worth questioning. Then offer answers worth hearing. Let me end by simply saying this. Please don't underestimate the very small things you do and save for the Lord.

You never know. Because the Lord is sovereign, because he is the Lord of every room, he can take your little efforts for him. The little word you speak at work, the little response, the little defense, the gracious thing you say, he can take it and do an amazing thing in someone's life.

Because ultimately, he is the evangelist. my own faith, I think, is a result of a very simple answer that was given to me by one of the teachers at my school.

[28 : 56] I was this tear-away 15, 16-year-old in trouble with the police, run away from home several times, you know, a million miles from God, had never been inside a church, but I knew there was this teacher who was a believer.

And I went up to her after class once, making sure none of my friends was looking at me because I didn't want them to think that I was going to catch religion. And I went up to her and I said, if God's true, what do you think he thinks of me?

I now realize that was a very dumb question to ask a very clever Christian because her response was this, I'll never forget it. She said, John, God can see everything you've done, said, and thought.

And she left a pause and I remember thinking, oh no, everything I've done, said, and thought. And then she said, but he loves you even still.

I thanked her, I took off down the hallway, down the stairs, out into the playground, but those words went round and round in my head for days. He sees everything you've done, said and thought.

[30 : 10] But he loves you even still. And I would honestly say that little defense, that little answer to my question was the thing that opened my heart to want to know more to the point where I came to know Christ and I read the Gospels and I came to see him as the sovereign Lord who died for me and risen again.

don't underestimate the little thing you do and say for the Lord because in his hands it can be a big and beautiful thing.

The Bible does not urge us all to be evangelists but it does ask us to shore up our loyalty to Jesus and with gentleness and respect and a life of godliness to speak up.

Let's pray. our father we thank you for your word indeed may it pierce our hearts and transform us by your spirit father will you transform us to be the best version of ourselves possible that we might make the Lord Jesus public in his name we pray Amen