

I Peter 3:15-18 "The Hope of the Righteous"

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Preacher: Peter

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

How is everyone this morning? Good morning. It's really exciting to see all the seniors here. Thank you for waking up early and coming to church. It's good to have you.

I've seen some parents here as well. Please don't go to Target or find a way to fill an hour after this. We'd love for you to stay. We have Connect Communities that meet. They are, you can ask anybody about them and they'll lead you in the right direction.

And actually some of them will be discussing this sermon, for better or for worse, maybe how terrible it is. But it's a good time to build community and meet some of the people here who have been influencing your students' lives.

I would ask you all to open your Bibles, please, to 1 Peter chapter 3. And really do this, because this morning I'm going to kind of be all over the place. And I didn't give Blake a copy of my manuscript.

[1 : 06] So don't blame Blake if we're not exactly where we're supposed to be all the time. In your pew Bible, it's page 1016. And 1 Peter is one of those books that you can just turn pages and kind of follow along with me and understand what's going on.

And so, not complicated. So this is the crux kind of what Peter is writing about here in 1 Peter.

And we've been studying this on Sunday mornings in Senior High Life Connects, as well as on Sunday night in High Life. This book has been the topic of what we've been doing all spring.

So it seems fitting, when you consider Senior Sunday, how do you send people off? How do you want to charge them? Or what frame of mind do you want to be in for living?

And Peter sets us up really well here in this specific part of it. So I'll start here in 1 Peter chapter 3. I'm going to begin in verse 15 and go a little bit into 18.

[2 : 13] You know what, I'll back up so that there's a little context there. I'll start in 13. Now who's there to harm you if you're 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's 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.

For it's better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered, once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

Pray with me if you would. Gracious Heavenly Father, we're humbled to be able to come before you in prayer.

[3 : 13] We're humbled to be able to live for you. I'm humbled on a morning like this because you've given me so many opportunities to speak your truth into the lives of so many people.

And I can't do that. And Peter even says we're grateful for the gospel going forth through people like me because the Holy Spirit's actually who's speaking.

And I pray that that would be the truth this morning. That you would bless the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts.

That they would be pleasing to you. That we would glean from your word and from your servant, the Apostle Peter. Thank you for loving us.

And thank you for your word which does stand forever. And we pray this in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. I enjoy considering the conversion story of New Testament writers when I consider what they write about.

[4 : 29] Their presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Luke tells us in Acts 9. Make a note of that. Go read it sometime if you've not done so. Of the conversion of Paul.

And that's particularly intriguing. Paul is heading to the synagogue in Damascus with letters from the high priests. And essentially what he's doing is going there to find people who are followers of Christ.

And when he finds them, he is going to bind them and take them back to Jerusalem to stand trial.

Paul's a bad dude. He's known for seeking out, persecuting, and killing Christians.

He is highly educated. He called himself a Pharisee of Pharisees. He's particularly zealous against someone who he considered to be a false prophet.

But while he's on his way to Damascus, he's knocked off his horse, right, by Jesus' voice. He's blinded and he says, don't persecute me anymore. Oh, by the way, there were two of his cronies with him.

[5 : 37] So there were witnesses to this happening. And they helped him into Damascus. And they hide him away so that they can figure out what's going on. And meanwhile, across the city, there's a Christian, a follower of the way, as it's put, who has been praying and receives a vision that Paul is there and he needs someone to come and pray for him.

And that he's going to end up being used as this great and mighty tool for God's kingdom, which, of course, terrifies this man because Paul's notorious and he's known for killing people.

But he's faithful to it and he goes over, prays for Paul, baptizes him. Something scale-like falls off of Paul's eyes. They feed him. And, you know, the rest is history.

A few missionaries' journeys and 13 letters later, we know a lot about Paul. Dramatic and rapid conversion for somebody in this way will give you a certain way of looking at the world.

Right? Do you ever think about the humanity of the biblical writers, the perspective that they're writing from? Paul knows a lot about Jewish tradition and he comes to this sudden moment with Jesus and everything changes for him.

[7 : 00] Because everything has to change. We can also look in Luke chapter 5 to see about Peter's calling, right? Peter and James and John are fishing.

And Jesus is trying to get away from a crowd that's pressing in on him. And he gets into Peter's boat and says, hey, let's go out in the water a little bit. I need to get away here. And he says, hey, set your nets down in the water over on that side.

Peter had been doing this all night to no avail. And he looked at him and he's basically like, okay, well, I mean, I'm just a professional fisherman. I don't know what I'm doing. But okay, crazy man that wanted to get on my boat. I'll set my nets out. And the haul is so big he can't bring it into his boat, right?

So he calls James and John over and says, hey, guys, come on. Let's haul this thing into the boat. And they can't get it in. And they go back to shore. And Jesus says to them, follow me.

And they drop everything that they're doing and they follow him. And Peter spends the next three years living with Jesus. He watched him die.

[8 : 04] He watched him be resurrected. And he watched him ascend. Three years is a lot of intimate time to spend with a person.

Peter learned how important it is day in and day out to follow Jesus, learning to do the things that Jesus does in the way that Jesus did them.

So comparatively, a slow and steady conversion like this also will give you a certain way of looking at the world, right? Both of the men had a full and robust experience with Jesus throughout the rest of their lives.

Both of them speak the good news of Jesus faithfully and rightly. But sometimes the message can seem to be different. Paul's message is a bit more of what we're used to in the Reformed tradition. If you look on the back of your bulletin, if you use the three points from my outline there, it looks like this. If you're thinking of Paul, you would actually turn this on its head.

[9 : 11] We hope eternally. Therefore, we can suffer expectantly and live winsomely. I'm sorry, I lost myself.

I actually wrote a script because I didn't want to go for an hour and a half today. So be with me while I'm on my script here. Using the three points from my outline, it looks like this.

We hope eternally in our resurrected Savior we can expect to suffer because that's what happens to people who follow Jesus and not the world. And those things build a Holy Spirit-filled person

who's called to live winsomely.

That's to say, present a favorable and even enchanting view of what Jesus is all about. You've heard me say from time to time, be a taste of the kingdom of God to those around you. And this order definitely makes sense coming from a guy who is so incredibly turned upside down by Jesus that he finds no doubt in God's hand being the primary mover in anyone who's able to follow Jesus. Peter's message here in 1 Peter 3 seems to be Paul's message in reverse. If we live winsomely and we suffer expectantly, then we're going to find hope eternally.

[10:22] And when we put it that way, it looks like our works are ultimately what bring us to God. But that's not the foundation of Peter's message in 1 Peter at all as a whole, nor in this passage specifically.

The more helpful and biblical way of looking at both Peter and Paul's gospel presentation is as a circular flow with arrows going both ways and in between, around and through each of these topics. Eternal hope leads us to winsome living, but winsome living proves our eternal hope. Eternal hope leads us to suffer expectantly, but our expectant suffering proves our eternal hope.

And we can suffer expectantly, which allows us to live winsomely, but living winsomely also allows us to suffer expectantly. We spend a lot of our time feeling bad for ourselves because of the bad things in our lives.

Our lives feel pointless. I professionally work in the area of ministry, which is defined by planting seeds and or watering them. I rarely get to see the harvest.

[11:31] That can be incredibly discouraging. Science even knows that when the mind is focused on thankfulness and gratefulness and contentment, that something called neuroplasticity exists.

That's where your brain actually starts to heal itself. But it seems like we're more content to curse God and die than we are to do the hard work and find the hope in the one who chased us down in time and space.

So why spend time on this to start a message? This sermon is not suggesting that if you work hard enough, you can get yourself to God. Neither Peter nor Paul teach that, nor can you find it anywhere else in the Bible.

But Peter and Paul and James and the writer of Hebrews and John and Mark and Luke and Moses and the historians and Solomon and the major and the minor prophets.

What the Bible teaches is that from the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. Faith without works is dead. And the people of God are to be a blessing on the earth.

[12:45] The Bible teaches us that what we do matters. So rather than seeing this as a linear argument from Peter, listen to the rest of this sermon and see how each section interacts with each section.

For those of you who are about to graduate from high school or from college or from this world into eternity. For those of you who are at home and don't get to be with us, but you listen to these sermons faithfully.

The hope of the righteous is bound up in the person and work of our King Jesus. Love Him. Follow Him.

Trust Him. You matter. Everything you do matters. It matters because while you and I still hated Him and lived in sin, Jesus died for us.

Find hope in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because that death and resurrection ought to cause us to live winsomely.

[13:48] First point. Okay. Guys, if you're used to me on Sunday nights, this is going to sound a whole lot different than what I sound like on Sundays or Wednesdays. Okay. Live winsomely toward the world and toward each other as believers.

Each of these has to do with who we are working itself out to those around us. Living winsomely toward the world means that who we are causes us to lean into the world in a certain manner. We see pointedly there in verse 15. In your hearts honor Christ, the Lord is holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason, for a reason for the hope that's in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect.

What that means and what it might look like has already been put forth by Peter if you go up just a little bit into verse 8. He says, All of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless. For this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. It's clear that these believers are defined by something other than an argumentative spirit.

[14 : 56] Of course, Peter's been discussing who they are from the beginning of this letter. Flip back to chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. They are elect exiles, elected according to the foreknowledge of God the Father and the sanctification of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ.

What does that mean? That God knew who he was going to save. What does that say about you and me? Doesn't mean we know who God is going to save. Those are two different things. There's a difference between God's knowledge and our knowledge.

God knew who he was going to save. And if you are saved and if you, for some reason, believe in this first century carpenter, Palestinian carpenter, who came to the earth to be your savior, that's not really a logical or reasonable or rational thought in many ways.

And if that alters and changes your life and makes you want to live for him and that's pushed into your heart and into your mind in such a way that you can't help but know that that defines who you are, that happened because of the foreknowledge of God the Father.

He placed that in you. Sanctification of the Spirit. Sanctification is just a big word for, hey, you're going to continue growing.

[16 : 20] He who began a good work in us is faithful to bring it to completion in Christ Jesus. Paul says that to the Philippians. But there's better news than that because it's also complete at the same time.

Because it's found in Jesus. He's accomplished it. And he's accomplishing it. And then the main point there is that it's for obedience to Jesus Christ.

They're God's people because he chose them. Peter explains to them what it means to be the people of God. He quotes Exodus later on. Will's going to be preaching on this in a few weeks. Exodus and Deuteronomy and the prophets Isaiah and Hosea to tell them that they're a royal priesthood.

That's where the creepy sprinkling of blood thing comes from. Come to me afterward and I'll explain what that means. A holy nation. A people for his own possession to proclaim God's praises.

They were once not a people but now they're God's people. Peter had to tell them this because these people weren't Jewish religiously or culturally. This is what causes them so many problems.

[17 : 30] They embrace the covenant of the Father in Jesus from the heart. When they embrace that covenant from the heart, they stop doing certain things. And it's hard to stop doing things that are embraced by the people around you because of what some strange and distant religion teaches.

This is happening. This letter is written sometime early 60 A.D. Like 59, 60, 61 probably. Well, Nero takes power in Rome not too long after that.

But what's happening to these people is real persecution, real suffering. They're getting kicked out of their houses because they're embracing Jesus. They're losing their jobs.

They're having to pay local authorities to protect them. Life is hard. This isn't some abstract thing he's talking about. They're living, like so many of us do, as mirrors of the sin in others.

And when you stop doing certain things, it's assumed by those people that you must think you're better than them. We can understand about this idea of some strange and distant religion taking hold of our hearts.

[18 : 40] And how much more is that true when they're being ostracized by those people who reject the teaching of that religion and are growing more and more to despise its followers? This also clearly shows in the manner in which they treat each other, humility is at the root of what it means to be winsome.

We're all cut down at the knees at the foot of the cross. No one is better than anybody else. That's the reality of humanity in light of who Jesus is and why he had to come.

We don't truly grasp our sin, but thankfully Jesus does. And he came to take care of all of it. The reality of the cross makes it so that all believers are subject to God's judgment.

Go to verse 17 in chapter 1 there. And Peter speaks this reality quite clearly when he tells him, conduct yourselves with fear. What does it mean to fear God in the Bible?

Fearing God means to know that you're not the measure of all things, but you're actually the one who's being measured. He goes on to say, impartially, according to each one's own deeds.

[19 : 53] Then in verses 22 and 23 there, Peter also says that they've purified their souls by their obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, so that they might love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

Since they've been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God. When we hear of our connect communities and our desire for gospel community, it's not based on affinity.

It's not based on how much you like each other. It's not based on how much we have in common. And it's not based on our commonality and vocation or anything like that.

Gospel community is based upon the reality of who Jesus is and how desperately we need each other to push us toward that goal of being Christ-like.

That's the definition of gospel community. We can have endless patience with each other because of that reality. That's what we desperately need in our lives.

[21 : 04] My parents were converted in the early 70s. Yes, they were Jesus-free kippies. My dad played. Oh, I can't say that. I'm being recorded. I was raised in a popular Christian culture through the 80s and 90s.

And even though it doesn't define my mom and dad, I was largely surrounded by my father and mothers in the faith who were heavily impacted by the political activism of the moral majority.

And I don't say that to endorse or decry the effects of this movement, but rather to reflect on its impacts on my life. Very pointed, argumentative, all the time, everything.

And there were things that stuck out to me that was just a very aggressive, everything seemed very aggressive to me as a kid. And I look back on it, obviously, a lot of the causes were very good.

But there's a sweet saint in our church. Her husband was one of the founding elders at the church I grew up in. And she began a Christian school there and was the headmistress there until her death.

[22 : 08] Her name was Eugenia Bruce. And she would remind my dad all the time, she would say, John, we must be the winsome ones. In a climate of change and fear and activism, Mrs. Bruce recognized that Christians ought to be always known by their humility and reverence for and hope in the God of creation, the one who's at the root of and who is above all laws, the one who reached down and plucked people like you and like me and said, I'll be your God and you'll be my people for my own possession.

Once you were not a people, but now you're my people. We have hope. Peter takes great care to let us know that our behavior, what we do, matters all of the time in every situation.

It's what defines us as agents of the Father, restoring all things through his son, Jesus. We don't have the prerogative of pride. We don't have the prerogative of control.

We're the ones who know the one who is in control. We have specific marching orders in our behavior, our obedience, our understanding of what's at stake.

That's a gift from the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. We act and we know and we behave rightly because souls are on the line. Our souls and the souls of others.

[23 : 38] In chapter 2, verses 11 and 12, Peter tells them, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Does that define you?

Is this your daily outlook on life? Do you understand how much your every action, your every interaction has to do with eternity? Biblically speaking, it's impossible to live like hell and go to heaven.

Not only does it belie the hope found in Jesus, but it presents a false reality to the people who live around us. Using the Christian freedom that Paul describes as licensed to live selfishly, only caring about our own souls, this counts the intertwined realities of God's sovereignty and our responsibility toward each other and toward the world which doesn't know him.

The primary reason that an unbelieving world finds the person and work of Jesus unbelievable is that he is the stone that makes men stumble and the rock that makes them fall.

[24 : 59] The secondary reason is believers who proclaim Jesus with their mouths but deny him with their actions. And I'm sure you've heard this before. But this is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.

Which brings us to our next point. The death and resurrection of Jesus ought to cause us to suffer expectantly. Let me first say that suffering is a result of our desire to be God and not a thing brought from God.

Suffering in any form is not the way that it was meant to be. Your suffering matters because Jesus has shown us that it matters to him. And we'll get to and discuss physical, mental, and emotional suffering.

But Peter's initial point here refers to people who suffer because of Jesus. And Peter makes it clear to us that suffering is because of Jesus, not because of us. If we go back to 3, continuing from verses 15 into 16, he says, Unpacking all of that would be a sermon in itself.

So let's stick to some of the basics of what Peter is saying here. We're going to be slandered. We'll suffer because of Christ. Our suffering can be worsened because of our conscience when we know that we brought it on ourselves to be evil and acting in a way that we know that we shouldn't act.

[26 : 46] That doesn't impact our eternal reality, but it shows how much we often think of ourselves. Argument from authority is one of the more egregious logical fallacies. What it says is that a perfectly reasonable, logical, and cogent argument for or against something should not be nullified or made wrong simply because someone who has more education or experience in a particular area says that the argument's wrong.

Arguments are supposed to be able to stand on their own merit, not the merit of one who is making the argument. I hope I'm not pointing anybody out, and I promise you there's no one in mind when I say this, but have you ever experienced the one-upper?

The one-upper is the person who, no matter what experience or reality you share with them, has always seen it worse, and maybe in 50 different ways worse than the one way that you just described. There are certainly times that the one-upper is someone who is crying out for help because they don't have anyone to hear them in their suffering.

But more often than not, the one-upper has never really experienced true suffering. We don't know much about persecution in the Western church.

We don't know what it's like to look down the barrel of a gun ready to shoot us for our beliefs. We don't know what it's like to have friends and loved ones hauled off to prison for the sake of King Jesus. We don't know what it's like to have our churches bombed on one of the most holy days of the year when they're the most full.

[28 : 17] But these things don't mean that we're immune from suffering, nor do they mean that our partaking in suffering is somehow meaningfully different than the persecution of our brothers and sisters around the world.

For some of us, suffering looks like the coming to terms with a dream deferred. We had great plans for our life, career, family, security, financially. And those things were put down by the sinfulness of the other, a path that didn't facilitate them, or even a seemingly devilish intervention.

For others of us, suffering looks like the unfair death of a family member or a friend. Still others of us suffer and mourn daily because of the absence of a neurotypical upbringing for our children.

Grievous and chronic physical ailments plague and cause suffering for many in this room and many who aren't able to be in this room. And for the more experienced among us, the simple realities of the mind and body failing with age create a suffering for us and those around us, which seems natural and unfair all at the same time.

The hope we have in Jesus is that for those who trust him, this world is the only hell that we'll ever know. Peter further encourages the elect exiles and us in chapter 4, verse 19.

[29 : 43] Let those who suffer according to God's will and trust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. And then back in verse 13, rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

And I keep using the word hope because that's what Peter's wanting to inspire in his audience and in us. But what we've looked at so far can universally be understood somewhat as moralistic therapeutic deism as anything else.

Believe what you want to specifically in your religion, but make sure that you treat people well, call on God if you have a problem, and live your best life now as long as it doesn't get in the way of somebody else who's living their best life now.

Be a good person, you're going to go to heaven. I'll suggest to you that this is no hope at all.

Even less our lives are, if our lives are just some existential blip on a random timescale created by nature, there is no hope at all.

[30 : 50] But Peter doesn't want to leave us there. In the New Testament, when you see the word hope, it's not for some ethereal thing like hoping your favorite team wins the World Series, or hoping that nobody finds out about that thing that you did, or even hoping that you pass your finals so that you graduate, which I'm sure is a feeling in this room.

This hope is a concrete hope secured for us for all eternity by one who suffered in the ways that we suffered, suffered in ways that we've never suffered, and conquered all of it so that you and I can hope eternally in the God who brought us to himself.

We'll go pretty quickly now. Look back at chapter 3, 17 into 18 there. For it's better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will than doing evil.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. This is our hope. Every ounce of suffering is wonderful because you're stubbing your toe on the path that your Savior blazed for you.

He blazed that trail of suffering. He wept at the grave of his friend as he was overcome with sorrow.

Is there a point to all this suffering in your life? You hope in the one who has brought us to God?

[32 : 22] If your answer is anything other than yes, I really can't give you a reason for your suffering. But for those of you who do suffer, count it joy that you might be able to show others the hope that you have so that they can glorify God.

This is what Peter tells us in chapter 2, 11 and 12. I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they'll see your good deeds and glorify God. We're not participating in some short game. We're not making up the rules as we go along. Everything we do, all of us, at every age, either tells the truth about who God is or it tells a lie.

Everything we do, all of us, at every age, either displays the glory of the work being done in us by the Holy Spirit or tells a story of how we're the ones who get to make the rules.

[33 : 34] You and I are not the rule makers. We're the God-fearers. We're not the measure of all things. We're the ones being measured.

And that's a really good thing. I don't mean to be the one that breaks it to you graduates, but your life actually began a long time ago.

You've been living it. These things have been true for you now and are true for you. I'm sorry, these things have been true for you. They're true for you now and they'll be true for you this afternoon and they'll be true for you as you move on to the next phase of your life.

I like the John Mayer lyric, I just found out there's no such thing as the real world. There's no magical time that you're suddenly relevant to the kingdom of God. We've just seen that we have a precious Savior who's given us great importance in every aspect of our lives.

So whether you're the 13-year-old dreading school tomorrow, the 8-year-old looking forward to your baseball games this week, the 30-year-old ready to sit in your cubicle for another 40 hours, an executive interacting with hundreds of people, a new retiree trying to figure out what are you going to do in the next phase of your life, or the most experienced among us biding your time until your heavenly Father calls you home.

[34 : 54] What you do matters. Live winsomely, suffer expectantly, and always display the eternal hope given to you by the one who loves us more than we could ever know.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for the message of your love for us, which oozes out of every part of Scripture.

Thank you for your Holy Spirit that enables us to do these things that you command. Thank you that you don't call us to be perfect.

You call us to be those who call on you and whose lives are changed because of the reality of who you are and the reality of our King Jesus. Thank you for our graduates.

Thank you for the parents and the other people who have influenced their lives and have pushed them to be more like your son. And we pray that they would find communities like that as they move on, even as Christine prayed earlier.

[36 : 06] Most of all, thank you for our King Jesus, and we pray all this in his name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.