

1 Peter 3:8-12 “Living Blessings”

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Good morning, everybody. If I haven't had the chance to meet you, my name is Derek Harris. I'm one of the pastors here, and I'm just going to go ahead and throw down that I am reeling from the events this past week.
- So you can pray for me. Thank you. Sorry.
- There's two guys sitting in the back there who are in my youth group in Nashville. I know you're hurting. I love you. That's why we do what we do.
- That's why we preach the Word of God. Our world is changing. Our world is changing. And America has often been thought of as a Christian country.
- [1 : 1 5] And it's changing. It's changing drastically. Okay? This is not an alarmist thing. This is a realistic thing that's been happening gradually, not just this past week.
- I want us to consider this slide here. Let's see if this is working. Oh, let me get back. I'm going to talk about four things this morning.
- We're going to talk about the world. We're going to talk about the Word. We're going to talk about why it matters. And we're going to talk about what now.
- But first, with the world, it's changing. Okay? It's changing a lot. And it may be changing rapidly for you. I want you to consider this quote here from Pew Research just in 2022.
- Only a few decades ago, a Christian identity was so common among Americans that it could almost be taken for granted. And as recently as the early 1990s, about 90% of U.S. adults identified as Christians.
- [2 : 1 6] But today, about two-thirds of adults are Christians, identifying as Christians. And the change in America's religious composition is largely the result of large numbers of adults switching out of the religion in which they were raised to become religiously unaffiliated.
- Many times they're known as the nones, N-O-N-E-S. Okay? Because that's what the box that they would check on a survey or a test or something like that.
- Because they have no affiliation with faith, none, when it comes to the faith. And not only is religious affiliation changing, so is the treatment of those who claim to be Christians, especially in America.
- Especially in the deep south, the Bible Belt, where you have been protected for so very long. It could be due to the past failures of leaders in the church.
- Workers of the church. Members of churches who may have hurt people. Missions, organizations. In regards to claims.
- [3 : 2 3] Rightful claims. Of abuse. Racism. Discrimination. Etc. Right? Church. Quote-unquote church.
- Institution church. Has done a lot of damage to a lot of people. And there's a lot of anger. And there's a lot of disappointment in our society towards these religious institutions.

Not just the Christian church. And so you may not affiliate yourself with church leaders who've been caught up in some sort of public controversy. Or an organization as such.

But there's a good chance that those people who aren't in church. Who you really wish were here. There's a good chance that they actually do affiliate those people with you.

Okay? And us. And when you enter into any conversation. You may find yourself needing to take punches. And we're going to sense that more and more and more as Christians.

[4 : 23] Okay? I will walk up to some conversations. And if they just hear that I'm a pastor. Conversation's over. Or it's instant anger.

My wife was in a conversation with someone recently. And they were giving her the dagger eyes just because they knew that I was a pastor.

And sometimes it's the opposite. Sometimes it's actually, oh, breath of fresh air. Please, can I ask you this? Can I ask you this? But you may feel some of that too.

As followers of Christ in the West, we don't live in a Christian country anymore. We live in a post-Christian country.

This is what I mean by that. The fundamental, this is a quote again. The fundamental societal institutions, family, school, church, that took their meaning and place from a basic Christian worldview shaped by Protestantism, are going through a rewriting of their status, which undermines their traditional outlook.

[5 : 31] Christians need to learn or relearn how to be creative and faithful minorities. The transition may be painful and difficult, but nostalgic attitudes toward a status quo, somewhat marked by Christianity, will not serve the cause of the gospel.

I thought that was an interesting quote there. So what he's getting at is this, that we as Christians now moving into the, living in this post-Christian era and moving forward, we might need to unlearn some of our old habits to be able to share the love of Jesus with the world that we so desperately want to have in the church.

And that's going to be a challenge for us, okay? It's not far-fetched. We're kind of at a crossroads right now. It's not far-fetched to believe that in our generation and kids and the generations that you grow up in, that if you follow the basic tenets of Christianity, you're going to be seen more and more as unloving, not loving.

You're going to be seen as a renegade. You're going to be seen as extremist. And I just want to prepare you for that because we have to be ready. We have to be ready to love, okay?

And it's not something to be alarmed about, but it is something that we have to be aware of. And this is why. Because the world is really, really confused about the church, okay?

[7 : 00] Most of the cars that drive by here that never set foot in here think what we do is really, really weird, okay? I recently was watching a documentary of the band U2, and they've rewritten the words to Sunday, Bloody Sunday, to reflect more where the heart of what they've learned over the years is.

And this is what they said. Here at the murder scene, the virus of fiction, reality TV, Why so many mothers cry? Religion is the enemy of the Holy Spirit guide, and the battle just begun.

Where's the victory Jesus won? You ever asked that question? That resonated with me. He was coming from a heart of the love of Christ and wanting to share it, but just creating that tension in those lyrics.

The world's confused about the church, and the world is longing for the love of Jesus. And the culture is looking for an alternative to itself, not an echo of itself.

So how are we as Christians supposed to behave and live within a world that doesn't understand us and is potentially hostile towards us? Well, remember, though, it may appear more challenging to follow Jesus right now than it has in the years before in your life, it was also very difficult for those who followed Christ in the first century.

[8 : 31] And they left us some really, really good notes. The Word of God. So let's read that today.

The Word. I'm going to open it up and read it from my Bible, because I just like reading it from my Bible. Finally, 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 to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

For 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.

[9 : 40] This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever.

And it is what we need. It's what we need to learn, and it gives us the direction that we need. It's not changed. God's love hasn't changed. So a little bit about this. Are you all familiar with the TV show Friday Night Lights?

It's an older show. So Coach Taylor, one of the great TV characters, he had this phrase that he would say, clear eyes, full heart, can't lose.

Although I think he said full hearts. I think there was an S on it, but you know. Clear eyes, full hearts, can't lose. Well, this text that we just read, think of Coach Peter, okay?

He's getting in our faces. He's helping us see how we're supposed to be playing this game to win. Now, let's start there with verse 8.

[10 : 40] He says, Finally, all of you, finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

Now, notice he doesn't start by looking outside the huddle. Right? Imagine him standing there, Coach Peter. He says, he's talking to the team, and he says, Finally, all of you, right?

Which means that he doesn't mean some of you. Okay? What does all of you mean? Anybody? What does all of you mean?

Everybody. Okay? Every single one of us. And the idea here is that what he says after that is how Christ calls every single one of us who proclaim faith in Christ to live within the church, within the team, and also everywhere all the time.

How many of you love the smell of coffee in the morning? Right? Some of you, I know there's some big coffee heads. If it's not coffee, maybe it's bacon. Okay? If it's not bacon, maybe it's barbecue.

[11 : 52] If it's not barbecue, fill in the blank. Maybe it's candy. I don't know. Sugar being made. And cookies. Something like that.

Right? And when you smell that smell, you ever woken up in the morning and you had that smell and you just feel like one of those cartoon characters that wants to float down to where the smell is coming from, it changes the environment.

And when we live the way that Peter describes, we're not going to echo the culture. We're going to offer it the very thing that it needs. The aroma of God's grace.

But that happens through Christ-centered community and relationships built on the foundation of the Word of God and Christ is the chief cornerstone. But grace is that aroma.

I was talking with somebody about that this morning. Grace is the aroma. And what does Coach Peter say? He says, unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, tender heart, humble minds can't lose. Okay?

[12 : 51] Think about this for a second. Unity of mind. Let's look at those phrases for a second. Unity of mind means literally live in harmony. Literally though, be of the same mind.

Okay? That can only happen when we share the mind of Christ. Where do you find the mind of Christ? The Scriptures. This is offered to us every day through the Scriptures.

Right? And through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. God in you. Christ living in us in this inseparable union that happens through faith. So the unity of mind comes from the unity of the mind of Christ within us that we apply towards one another.

And what does the sympathy mean? So when we live in harmony and we're of the same mind, then we can enter into the feelings of others. Right? Sympathetic comes from a Greek word which means feeling with.

And it's probably better signified by our English word empathy. Okay? And when we can enter into the feelings of others, then we're more properly positioned to share God's love with them.

[14 : 03] And that becomes that aroma of grace. So it breaks down the doors of hostility first. And my guess is that if you've ever been in a situation where you felt like heard and really understood that whatever anger you brought to that situation probably went down a little bit.

Went down a couple levels. Well, Peter's playing off his discussion that Will got to preach last week and not me about husbands and wives in those previous verses. And so here's the idea.

Having the unity of mind, having the sympathy, having this aroma of grace, it takes time and it takes hard work. And it's very hard to understand one another even on the good days, right?

How much harder on the bad? But all things are possible through Jesus Christ who gives us strength. And it starts by listening to each other.

Listening to hear as we've been challenging one another here recently. The church, God's people, the living stones, which we talked about a few weeks ago.

[15 : 10] We're to be lights and to be sanctuaries out in the world. Places of peace, but first to each other within here so that this is a place of peace. And then we take that peace into the relationships around us.

And then we're properly postured and positioned to share that love of God. And you can start just simply by asking questions and then listening.

Okay? Listening to love. Listening to hear where the world is hurting. And that, guess what? That world is here. We're hurting too.

Think about listening to each other here so that you can go listen out there. And then he goes on to say humble mind, brotherly love. We'll start with brotherly love, tender heart. What does that mean?

Being tender hearted comes more naturally to some more than others, right? However difficult though that journey may be, the early Christians would have agreed on the fact that they were called to become tender hearted no matter how difficult it was.

[16 : 16] That was going to be a staple characteristic of the community. Humble mind, what does that mean? So humble mind actually ties together the three attitudes before it. That phrase, humble mind.

And what I mean is that if you have that humble mind, you're going to have those other three things. And one commentator describes it this way, a humble mind shows that the secret of the character described here lies in a realistic estimate of oneself and a high concern for others.

So it starts by looking outside yourself and putting a higher view of that one outside of you than yourself. I love the language of the, there's a translation of the Bible called the message and it's meant to be as a tool, not a replacement.

But it says it this way, it helps to get my head around these. Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions.

And one of the things that I also love about Scripture is how it interprets itself. The Word of God will help you understand the Word of God. And it reinforces itself.

[17 : 24] And it's not just Coach Peter who says these things. And it's not just Coach Peter who talks about this aroma of grace. So does Coach Paul. And listen to what Coach Paul says in Ephesians.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Okay, now some of you may be thinking, nope, not going to do that. Not possible for me in my current situation that I'm in. You don't understand.

But it is. Okay? When we stop thinking about ourselves, which is hard, guilty, and we start calling on the power of God, amazing things can happen in your relationships.

And remember, what God is doing with us as a church. He said it earlier in 1 Peter. He's building us into a spiritual house where He dwells. And how's all that happening?

[18 : 33] Not through your power, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. So before you give yourself the test and you're destined to fail on your own strength, stop it.

Okay? Take that to God, whatever the situation is that pops in your brain. And remember, He's at work in you. He's the one forming you into these things. But we have to start by being honest about where we need to be that open door.

To open the door of our hearts and to be that open door for the world to talk to. And the passage, this passage, gives us that opportunity because it's possible to have the Holy Spirit in you.

It's a Holy Spirit resident, but not president. Okay? So, what does living this way look like? We'll go faster through these. Don't repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling.

But on the contrary, bless, for to this you are called that you may obtain a blessing. So, in another way, you remember, we talked a few weeks ago about living stones.

[19 : 37] Living stones don't just sit. Well, Peter's giving us more info. Living stones are living blessings. They go live blessings. That's what we do. That's what the stones do. We live that blessing to one another and we go live that blessing to the world.

And when we do, the world sees the power of God at work in us because we can't do that on our own. I was speaking with someone this past week. One of the most powerful things in evangelism to the world is emotional health.

Did you know that? That your wounds are actually the open door to share the love of God. But one of the things that the world notices the most is how you're still walking.

And so focusing on our own emotional health is one of the greatest steps towards evangelism because it's one of the greatest doorways to talk about where you found the healing.

And the world notices that seems to be one of the number one things that makes us approachable or not approachable is are you emotionally healthy? Because they're watching in this post-Christian world.

[20 : 41] But Peter says we're to bless in verse 9. So just like humble mind summed up verse 8. Peter uses that word bless to sum up all of verses 8 and 9.

All of these attitudes and virtues of the heart can be summed up in that one word. Bless. And what does blessing mean? One commentator says this I love this definition.

The calling down of God's gracious power and love on all people even those who wish to do us harm. Who does that sound like?

Hmm. Jesus. Right? Blessing instead of cursing. Praying for those who persecute. Forgiving our debtors as we have been forgiven.

And how can we do this? First by opening the doors of darkness in our own hearts to the power of the light of the living God. And only you can open that door.

[21 : 38] I can't open that for you. Your neighbor can't open that for you but you can. You can go and open that door to God right now. You can call on that resource and that power of the Holy Spirit available nowhere else than to God himself.

And when you do he's going to come in there and he's going to do some business in your heart and he's going to show you the relationships in your life that he's calling you to to have an impact for him.

And typically it's going to start with the ones that probably aren't that great. They're a mess. That's okay. I don't want that to scare you. That's the whole purpose of needing a savior. You're a mess. You don't have it together.

Neither do I. We're broken messes but Jesus takes broken things and he makes them beautiful. How? Because he was broken. And that's beautiful. And he offers you eternal life.

He was broken for you so you don't have to go be broken for yourself and punish yourself over and over. In fact he's called you to be a part of cleaning up the mess. And when you do you're going to find purpose but it starts with relationships.

[22 : 41] It starts with you letting them in there. Letting them in your heart and look around. Ask him to dwell there and while he's in there you've got to keep your eyes on the scoreboard and the scoreboard says you win. When you look around the world it says oh this is bad.

Scoreboard says we win. Okay? We win because Jesus wins. We're going to talk about that this week. Right? We get to see the light and the darkness of the gospel story as we lead into this Easter week.

But only you can open that door. The message says it this way no retaliation no sharp tongue sarcasm instead bless that's your job bless. You'll be a blessing and also get a blessing.

And what's the blessing? First it's this that you're going to experience the blessing of living a life that doesn't retaliate with anger. You're going to have freedom from the prison of anger.

The prison of comparison. It's only realized through a life of forgiveness. forgiveness. These are some of the benefits of asking Christ to forgive you is that you actually get freedom.

[23 : 44] And it's only possible if you've experienced true forgiveness that's offered through Jesus' blood. And when you live a life of forgiveness like Peter described you're oftentimes going to be reviled for it.

Okay? But you will be free. And what does that freedom look like? Unity of mind sympathy brotherly love tender hearts humble minds not repaying evil for evil or reviling for reviling but blessing.

I've got a student who is in one of our youth groups a dear student who is in a gender transition right now and you know with what happened last week I didn't I wanted to reach out because most of the world and family has abandoned him but I still love him and he identifies as a female now so it's still hard for me to say that to say him so I just texted him how you doing with the recent news he lives in Nashville the world is so crazy right now I don't even have much time to absorb it taking this to heart I said well you know what it's a good time for me to remind you that I love you you are bringing something to the world and I love you and I love you you know he sent something back right we're still still in that relationship there's an opportunity to bless him and then he returned a blessing and so you got that blessing of living that life of forgiveness not anger we don't have to retaliate we don't have to be so up in arms about everything we should be the least easily offended people on earth if Christ is at work in us but the blessing of freedom also means the future blessing of hope that you have that scoreboard that's been won the eternal life that's ahead where you're going to live in the presence of the one who's forgiven you is free you're going to worship and experience that new creation forever and you get to take that invitation right now to the world that's what you offer them when you go and enter into the relationship and you take your hurt and your emotional unhealthiness and talking about how God has gotten you through it guess what they need that too and ultimately you get to hold their hand and take them to Jesus okay then verses 10 through 12 there whoever desires to love life and seek good days don't you want to love life and seek good days here's the key let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit oh that's easy let him turn away from evil and do good okay let him seek peace and pursue it got 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 may not seem so but it is may not seem so when you look around but it is ultimately and one day those two things will line up so Peter goes on now and this is what

I love too about the reliability of scripture if you doubt the trustworthiness of this book they quote from things that were written hundreds and hundreds of years earlier and all these things line up you go look at your Bible we've taken the oldest documents and the newest documents you compare them it's 99.9999% accurate yes there are some errors in your Bible but you know what they're like punctuation and little things here and there and it was transmission stuff but there's no other document that is as accurate and attested to as the scriptures people aren't going to tell you that very often it's true you can back it up there's all the data that's not a lie so when you read this know that what you're reading is accurate now what we do with it is the hard part right it's telling us to go do something so Peter's going on now to say I'm backing all this up with the Old Testament just like he did in chapter 2 about living stones he backed it up with the Old Testament and then he talked about the living stones he quoted from Psalms he's doing that again here because he's a human and he writes and he has similarities so living stones are living blessings so a life of blessing doesn't curse doesn't retaliate it doesn't speak deceit it doesn't pursue evil it pursues peace does that describe you in your current relationships with other Christians does that describe you in your current relationships with those around you it's hard it's messy but that's that's what we're supposed to do okay are you doing it blessed are the peacemakers

Jesus said for they shall be called sons of God where is the Lord's attentive ear and caring eyes they're on the righteous it says okay well who are the righteous how do you get that for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God it's not us it's foreign it's an alien righteousness that's given to us by Jesus and he paid the price for the gift on the cross so if we confess our sins he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness aka we become the righteous and God's attentive eye and listening ear are always on the righteous that's you if you have faith in Christ he clothes you in his righteousness so in these verses this is really cool Peter's quoting from Psalm 34 12 through 16 and this was a psalm of thanks for God to deliver David remember he was asking to be delivered from king of Gath okay referred to as

[29 : 25] Abimelech in the title of that area of your Bible so David was delivered from the king after he changed his behavior is what it says now do you remember how he changed his behavior to get out of there he was trapped so he tried to act like he was going insane he just started you know he just started freaking out a little bit to scare somebody he did that and the king let him go free so Peter's playing off that theme by quoting the psalm and when as Christians when we live the way he describes get this lives of freedom in Christ when we change our behavior the world's going to think we've gone mad but we are the ones who are set free isn't that beautiful that's the blessing that when we come to God we're set free though his face is against the evildoer his eyes are on the righteous so to turn your face is to turn your back okay we are called to repent and turn our back on evil and run to him but how there's only one place where God the Father turned his back on evil and it was the evil of our sin and this is why on the cross

Jesus bled and he cried out my God my God why have you forsaken me that's true justice why have you turned your back on me God it's a rhetorical question it's because of us and it's for us so that we could have the blessing that Peter is speaking of in these verses to be adopted as children of God and then to invite others into the family who has access at all the times to the loving ear of King Jesus who always has access to the power of forgiveness who has always the future hope of heaven and eternity who possesses this knowledge this power and carries it around in their bodies the church okay those who have been adopted as sons and daughters of the living God through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus and live this life of freedom in Christ unity of mind sympathy brotherly love tender heart humble minds can't lose the aroma of God's grace to a grace and love hungry world and here's why it matters because the culture is looking for an alternative to itself not an echo of itself and a divided world needs a united church you are the church that's you remember your purpose it's greater than anything you can conjure up on your own if you are a child of God you are a uniter of this world in the name of Jesus by taking him to him these verses aren't just about being moral they're not about trying harder they're not about doing better they're about remembering your true identity in Jesus living stones built on the chief cornerstone being built up to that spiritual house literal walking temples of the

Holy Spirit living stones who are living blessings living stones who are the children of God and how we live says something really important about dad he knows that when his children get along and treat one another this way other people want to be in our family and it's so important that we live this way that he gave us the Holy Spirit the power of the resurrection to be able to live this way so the companionship of Jesus in every single moment is available to you the place where we're supposed to be safe and practice all of this is right here and this is what the world needs to experience from us how they do it through you so in closing church who are you I love this quote the church is a beloved family created by God and redeemed by the gospel called to be the primary means by which God shows and tells his story of redemption in

Jesus and he tells it with your life he tells it with your wounds he tells it with all of the things that he's made you to be and he's put you uniquely in one place to go share it with somebody else so what do you do with that I challenge you to look inside first okay where do you need to open the doors of darkness in your heart to God today and let him walk around okay start there so look inside then look around once you know it's probably going to be a person that you need to go do something with make something right call somebody once you know okay go to that person if you need help take somebody with you and when you go to that person you have to seek peace and sometimes you have to pursue it in community okay you don't have to go it alone we're living stones right and living stones don't just sit but they hold one another up where two or more are gathered there

I am in their midst where do you need to go be that living blessing today in a relationship in the same way that you would run after your dog if he bolted out the door and ran into traffic don't expect peace to come to you when you whistle it has to be pursued all right and that may require us learning some new habits it's all about that freedom of forgiveness though so look inside look around and then go live a blessing seek that peace peace it's all about that freedom and without your brothers or sisters you can't do it okay you just can't do it so by the power of the Holy Spirit though at work in us the church you can go proclaim Jesus as alive to this whole world don't you want to do that let's go proclaim him as alive because this culture is looking for an alternative to itself not an echo of itself a divided world needs a united church and you are the church let's pray father on this

[36 : 03] Palm Sunday I thank you father that you hold us and that it was your palms father that held the reins of the foal it was your palms that washed the feet of your disciples and father it was your palms that were bound to the cross and lord you've come to save us you've come to redeem us and you've come to make us yours and Jesus only you only you father can make us slave for these slaves of sin and fear and despair into prisoners of hope lord Jesus you have you are and you will forever continue to do that thank you lord for these words and that prayer those are not my words that scotty smith wrote and lord i pray that you would do something magnificent with this church take us into this world and use us father as those blessings praise you god it's in the name of Jesus i pray amen for more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanother sermon.host)