

When Reviled, Bless

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- [0:00] Our sermon text this morning is 1 Peter chapter 3, verses 8 through 17. So that's page 954 in the Pew Bible. We'll have it on the screens above as well.
- And let me pray as we come to God's Word in 1 Peter chapter 3. Oh Lord, what a mighty prayer that is, that we would become instruments of your peace.
- Lord, how we need your Spirit to be able to do that, and how we need your Word to hear what it is your Spirit is saying to us in these days that we might live into that holy and good calling.
- So come with us. Come to us now, God, and be with us as we turn to your Word. Give light to our minds and our hearts as we attend to what it is this passage is saying to us today.
- We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. All right, 1 Peter chapter 3. Let me read verses 8 through 17 for us. Peter says, For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.
- [1:35] 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.
- Now, who is there to harm you if you are 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 is 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 is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. All right, so remember, Peter is writing to Christians in this letter who are facing a problem that many Christians feel today.
- [2:41] That following Jesus faithfully often results in being misunderstood or even criticized or even slandered. Or as Peter says a few times in this passage, being reviled.
- He says in verse 9 and verse 16, there will be times when you're actually reviled for your good behavior in Christ. That is, you'll face angry insults or unjust verbal attacks.
- Now, thankfully, that isn't always the case, right? In verse 13, Peter says, Now, who is there to harm you if you're zealous for what is good? In many contexts, Christians don't face harm or slander or unjust criticism just for following Christ.
- You know, in that verse, it's almost as if Peter is reminding us that persecution isn't necessarily lurking under every government policy or every cultural movement. There is still common grace in the world, and God still providentially works for the common good through healthy human authorities.
- So we shouldn't give in to unnecessary suspicion or cynicism or fear. But Peter is very realistic in this passage that there will be times when you are reviled.

[3:58] Living for Christ is countercultural. We shouldn't expect to always be liked or welcomed or prized. Sometimes there will be mild ridicule.

Sometimes there'll be condescension when our neighbors or coworkers learn that we're Christians, right? Some of you have experienced that. And then there will be times when we're outright called judgmental or closed-minded or bigoted or hateful.

You know, the list could kind of go on. And in many ways, this experience is something that we should probably get more and more used to as Christians in a very post-Christian world.

On the one hand, people will see Christians' good lives and like what they see. On the other hand, people will see the countercultural elements of Christianity and perhaps utterly despise us. As Peter says, we'll be reviled.

Now, of course, as we're kind of orienting ourselves to this passage, we have to admit that sometimes Christians do things that actually are pretty despicable and run counter to biblical teaching, right?

[4:58] So we shouldn't think that every time a Christian is criticized, it's undeserved suffering. Peter's pretty clear in verse 17 of our passage when he says it's better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

You know, which means that Christians can actually be guilty of doing stupid and evil things, right? And they will rightly suffer for it. So there's no need to kind of defend or excuse or sort of minimize the wrong things that sometimes Christians do.

Better to confess it as wrong and then seek forgiveness and restitution as much as we can. Okay, but what about those times when you are actually reviled for doing good, just for faithfully following Jesus?

When you get the subtle or not so subtle scorn or slander, how should we respond? That's what Peter's writing about here.

When reviled as a Christian, then what? Well, Peter actually shows us two ways to respond. And these two ways to respond are actually related to the two kind of faulty ways we tend to respond.

[6:05] Because I don't know about you, but when I'm spoken against or ridiculed or criticized, I can sometimes feel two things. And if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, I bet you can relate to this too.

Someone levels an unjust accusation against you. Someone says something hurtful or unfair. And how does your heart respond? Well, one of two ways probably, right?

On the one hand, we want to repay and get them back. But then on the other hand, we just want to retreat and kind of move away. We want to repay and sort of make them feel what we felt.

Or in fear, we just want to retreat and go away. We don't like being hurt, so we try to hide or we try to disappear. Maybe you felt those two impulses in your own life.

You know you're at work and you imagine all the ways you could come up with a perfect comeback when you're insulted by so-and-so for the tenth time, right? Or you just kind of put your head down and try to avoid them and just you're afraid to get into another uncomfortable conversation.

[7:11] But Peter's going to show us a different way altogether. He's going to show us how, when we're tempted to repay, we can bless.

And when we're tempted to retreat, we can bear witness. So let's look at those two things together. First, in verses 8 through 12, we see that when we are reviled, we should bless and not repay.

Look again at verses 8 and 9. Peter writes, Now remember, up to this point in Peter's letter, he's just given specific instructions to citizens and servants and spouses about how to live honorable lives amongst their unbelieving neighbors.

But here, he's speaking to all of us. He says, finally, all of you. And then he lists five virtues that should characterize Christian lives. Unity, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion, humility.

But how do we see those virtues in action? Well, we see them in action most clearly, Peter seems to imply, when we're wronged, when we're reviled.

[8 : 31] You know, we're a bit like a tube of toothpaste, right? When you squeeze it, you see what's inside. Now, what's interesting is that the five virtues in verse 8 most often describe in the New Testament how Christians are related to each other, to other Christians.

Brotherly love especially is used to talk about how Christians should treat each other, which means that verse 9 about blessing when we're reviled could just as well apply to how we respond to Christians as well as to non-Christians.

Right? You don't need to be a Christian for very long to realize that in the church, harmful things are said to one another. But how should the church be different?

And when we're out in the world and we're reviled, how should we be different in that context too? Well, Peter says, when reviled, we don't repay, we bless. Now, lest we think that's just some crazy idea that Peter came up with, we realize that across the New Testament we hear the same thing.

It's not just Peter. Paul will say the same thing again and again, like in 1 Corinthians 4.12 when Paul comes out and says, when reviled, we bless. But it's not just Peter and Paul.

[9 : 44] This is what Jesus himself taught. In Luke 6, for example, Jesus says, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. So there's no getting away from this.

It is central, unavoidable Christian teaching. When reviled, we don't repay, we bless. Now, what does it mean to bless someone? Literally, the word just means to speak well of someone.

So if someone speaks angrily or poorly of us, we don't do the same in return. Rather, we speak well in return. Now, that doesn't mean that we sort of just make things up and say that someone's a really great person, even when that's not true, right?

But it does mean that we're not on the hunt to find all the flaws and faults in someone else because they've criticized us. Sometimes blessing someone looks like treating them fairly and with appropriate charity, even when they've refused to do that for us.

And blessing those who revile us doesn't mean that we have to throw all boundaries out of the window, right? If someone is just relentlessly, actively, aggressively criticizing you, it's okay to try to separate yourself from that person if you can.

[11 : 04] In that case, blessing someone might look like not repaying that person by tearing them down when you're with other people, right? Oh, you know so-and-so. They're a real jerk. I just can't stand them.

Here's all the crappy things about them, right? No, to bless someone is to show them the dignity that their actions might not deserve.

We still treat them as humans created in the image of God, even if their actions fall short of that dignity. But, you know, ultimately, blessing someone means more than just what we say to that person in return.

It means what we say about that person to God. After Jesus says, bless those who curse you in Luke chapter 6, excuse me, Jesus says, pray for those who persecute you.

What does it mean to bless, ultimately? It means that we ask God to show his favor and grace upon those who have done injury to us. And, of course, this is the heart of the gospel, isn't it, friends?

- [12:12] When our sins deserved God's just curse, Jesus took our place, and he bore the curse of our sin so that we might get God's blessing instead.

Why should Christians be so eager to bless when reviled? Because that's exactly what our Savior did for us. That's what he did for you, and that's what he did for me.

The only reason we have any hope at all in this world is because God decided to bless those who reviled him. When we reviled God, when we were living lives that were utterly in opposition to him, God chose to bless us through the cost of his own son.

So how could we not turn and do the same? But Peter goes on and points even to another reason in our passage why we should bless when reviled.

He says at the end of verse 9, And then in verses 10 through 12, he quotes Psalm 34 that Suzanne read earlier in the service for us.

- [13:17] What is the blessing that Psalm 34 speaks of? Look at verse 12 in 1 Peter. Peter, again quoting Psalm 34, says, So when we are reviled and refuse to repay, but instead we bless, in doing so we're not just responding to God's call on our life, but we're stepping forth into a deeper appropriation of God's blessing of grace.

This psalm speaks of seeing good days. Not in the sense of getting more kind of creaturely comforts, but seeing good days in the sense of having intimate fellowship with our creator.

Having his eyes and his ears and his face turned towards us, as verse 12 says. And friends, is that not our highest good in this life?

To have God himself in intimate fellowship with us. You know, we live so much of our lives trying to find something good, something beautiful, something satisfying.

And Peter's saying here, you know what? If you step into this life of blessing when you're reviled, you actually get more and more of the greatest good that could ever be. Fellowship with God.

- [14:46] Peter's not saying here that our good works will somehow save us. No. But he is saying that if we want a richer experience of this saving grace, then we must put it into action.

And when we do, when we bless those who revile us, we know that the eyes and the ears and the face of God are upon us and that he's near to us. So when reviled, we don't repay, we bless.

But, you know, if I had to guess, I think perhaps more of us are prone to the second sort of response that Peter addresses here. I think more of us might be prone not to sort of repay when we're reviled, but to retreat.

We're simply afraid. We're afraid of being reviled or ridiculed or criticized. So we don't even bring up that we're followers of Jesus. We just, we keep quiet and we avoid the topic altogether.

And that's what Peter talks about in verses 13 through 17. He kind of turns the corner in our passage to talk to those of us who are afraid, who are tempted to retreat.

- [15:54] And he says, when reviled, don't retreat in fear. Instead, bear witness. Bear witness. Now look at what he says in verse 14, if you have the passage open there.

He says, But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. Now first, to those of us who are afraid, Peter pronounces a blessing over us.

He says, you'll be blessed. Now where does that come from? Well, he's simply passing along here what Jesus himself said in Matthew chapter 5. Remember where Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, Of course, being reviled isn't good in and of itself.

But Jesus says, If you're reviled on my account, you're blessed. The world might think the worst of you. But before the throne of heaven where it matters most, you have a great reward.

So Peter first says you're blessed, but then he says, Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. Now, you might hear that and you might think, Well, come on, Peter.

[17:11] That's easy for you to say. You're an apostle. Look at your courage. Look at your strength. Look at all that you did for Christ. Of course, you could say have no fear, but me?

I could never be brave like that. But do you remember Peter's story? Peter, too, knew what it was like to be afraid. Do you remember how when Jesus was arrested and Peter followed the crowd into the high priest's house, and then someone said to Peter, Hey, aren't you one of his followers?

You've got that Galilean accent. I think I saw you with him earlier. And what did Peter do? Three times in fear, Peter denies his Lord.

It's the same Peter who knows what it's like to be afraid, who knows what it's like to give in to fear, who says, Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.

Peter's actually quoting the prophet Isaiah there. In Isaiah chapter 8, Isaiah was telling the people of Israel not to be afraid of the surrounding nations with their big armies.

[18:23] And that message is the same one for us. Peter's bringing it home to the church. He's saying, Though it might look like the world around us is calling the shots and wielding the real power, Peter says, Along with Isaiah, have no fear of them, nor be troubled.

But why not? Why need we not be afraid? Well, because Isaiah and Peter say, We know the one who is greater than this world and who alone is truly to be feared.

Listen to how Isaiah puts it in Isaiah chapter 8, verses 12 and 13. Isaiah says, Do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread, but the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy.

And you can see, right, how Peter picks up this verse from Isaiah when he says, But in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy. It's a clear echo of Isaiah, but notice, along with Peter, we know the Lord to be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know the Lord more personally and powerfully than Isaiah ever could. And so rather than living in the fear of this world and what the world can and can't do, we must set our hearts on Christ and in our hearts set Christ up as the truly awesome one, the one whom we must fear and love above all else.

[19:54] Isn't that what changed Peter after all? Fearful Peter, denying Jesus, living in retreat. What changed him? Well, first it was an experience of Jesus' forgiving love.

When Jesus approached Peter on the beach after his resurrection and restored Peter, saying, Peter, do you love me? Then come, feed my sheep.

And brothers and sisters, you can know this morning that the risen Jesus comes to you and comes to me just the same. If you feel like you've lived in fear, if you feel like you've lived in retreat, the Lord Jesus comes to you in grace, ready to restore you and eager to receive you.

But that wasn't all for Peter. What also changed Peter was what happened after the resurrection when Jesus had ascended into heaven. And on the day of Pentecost, Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit.

And on that day, with the Holy Spirit filling Peter's heart, he went forth in the assurance that Christ was indeed the resurrected and ascended Lord of all. That he was indeed seated at the Father's right hand, reigning in glory, securing for us an eternal inheritance, ready to be revealed at the last day, as Peter will say in this letter.

[21:17] And friends, the Holy Spirit gives us the same assurance today. The good news of the gospel is that our sins are forgiven. That like Peter on the beach, our failures have been cleansed away.

But in addition to that, the good news of the gospel is that we've been given new hearts, new desires, and a new hope. No longer are our hearts ruled by the old fears and old desires anymore.

You know, our hearts used to be ruled by the acceptance of our peers or by getting earthly security. All these fears used to rule us. But then the gospel comes and a new Lord is set up as holy in our hearts, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what He holds out for us is real and lasting hope. A hope that conquers death. A hope that will restore all that's lost.

A hope that one day will heal all that's broken. And with Christ exalted in our hearts like this, we don't retreat when reviled.

[22:22] We bear witness. On the day of Pentecost, the crowds ridiculed the early Christians. Remember that? They reviled them. Are these guys drinking? It's kind of early, right?

What are they doing? They're crazy. But Peter stands up, his heart full of hope and his Lord, and he bears witness. But bearing witness isn't just for the apostles, you know.

It's for all of us. As Peter says in verse 15, always be prepared to make a defense for anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

Now, Peter isn't saying that we have to all be seasoned apologists, ready to answer any and every question that might come our way. That would be a pretty intimidating thing, right?

No, but he is saying that we should be able to articulate in a clear way why the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news.

[23:27] So, friends, let me ask you, what makes the gospel good news for you personally? Can you articulate that simply, clearly?

If so, then you're ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you. Now, if you're looking for a good book that tackles some tough questions about Christianity, there are some really good ones, and I'd encourage all of us to be reading books like that.

If you're looking for one, Rebecca McLaughlin wrote a book called *Confronting Christianity*. *Confronting Christianity*, that's a really good place to start. She actually wrote a version for teenagers, too.

So, there's like your pro tip. You can go listen to the one written for teenagers, and it's really easy to follow. It's called *Ten Questions Every Teen Should Ask and Answer About Christianity*. I've been listening to that lately, and it's quite good, and there's lots of illustrations from Disney, so I'm sure I'm ready to just, you know, go after my kids' questions when they come up.

But, you know, you don't have to be sort of well-versed in the art of apologetics to be ready to give a reason for the hope that you have within. Rather, spend some time this afternoon asking yourself, how is the gospel of my Lord good news to me?

[24:46] What is it about the death and resurrection of Jesus that fills me with hope? And if you can answer that question honestly and clearly, you're there. Because chances are the same thing that makes the gospel of Jesus Christ good news for you is going to resonate with your neighbors and with your friends.

Because we live in the same time, in the same place, and we have the same fears and the same concerns. If you can answer that question honestly and clearly, you're there.

And, you know, if it's coming from that place where it's real for you, that place where it's good news for you, then you'll be able to do what Peter says. You'll be able to bear witness with gentleness and respect.

You know, when the gospel is sort of just an idea that we want to convince others about or when it's an argument that we want to win worse, you know, these kind of conversations never happen with gentleness and respect.

But when the gospel is about how the real Jesus meets my real life and gives me real, eternal, everlasting hope, even when everything else is crumbling around me, then we naturally do it with gentleness and respect.

[26 : 03] D.A. Carson tells this story in his essay on this passage in 1 Peter. He writes, I know a doctor in a North African country who's served for many years now in clinics that minister to Muslims.

One day, he was treating a woman who had a deep gash in her arm and as he worked, he explained how the wound had to be carefully cleaned to get rid of as many germs as possible so as to prevent infection.

She listened, paused for a moment, and then commented, it's not just my arm. I wish I had a clean heart. And then Carson writes, now what would you say?

Would you say if you had a degree in Muslim apologetics? You know, what would you say? Might you be tempted to point out that the problem with Islam is that there's no atoning sacrifice that is offered to take away sin?

That is, you're only accepted by Allah at the end if you've obeyed him sufficiently for him to grant you a place in his presence. Christianity, by contrast, handles the dirt that we have in our heart by providing a Savior to take it away.

[27 : 05] But then Carson says, but this doctor personalized his response, testifying to his own hope. What he said was this, oh, I know what you mean.

I have had such a dirty heart myself and then I met someone who could take it away. Would you like me to tell you about him? With gentleness and respect, for conscience sake, the doctor gently points her to Christ.

When reviled, we don't retreat in fear. We bear witness, friends. And we bear witness not because we have all the right answers, but because Christ is our living hope and he has indeed given us a clean heart.

Imagine what it would be like if we were this sort of church. Because if we're faithful to Jesus as a church, there will be times when we will be reviled. But what if we didn't repay and we didn't retreat, but instead we blessed and bore witness?

Would the world know what to do with a church like that? Probably not. Might some revile us all the more? Probably. But at the same time, as we go forth blessing and bearing witness, there won't just be reviling.

[28 : 28] There will be some who see hope and who wonder just where this hope comes from. And by the Holy Spirit's work in their heart, they'll come to take hold of Jesus by faith too.

Don't forget, brothers and sisters, that though the world might revile us, God loves the world.

He loves our city and our neighborhoods and our neighbors and our coworkers. even if the reviling increases, may we not become angry or afraid, but remember God's love for them and for us.

and may we bless and bear witness. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we pause for a moment now and ask for you in this moment of just stillness before you to show us the areas of our life where we might bless and where we might bear witness.

Lord, we confess to you now the ways in which we've been angry or afraid. pray for your Holy Spirit to come and cleanse us and renew our hope in you, Lord Jesus.

[29:50] Wash away our fears and our angers. Help us to see how much we've been blessed through the faithful witness-bearing of others before us. Fill our hearts with your hope, Lord Jesus, and send us forth to do this good work in your name.

We pray. Amen.