

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)

Bless For To This You Were Called

November 25th, 2018

1 Peter 3:8-12

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Introduction:

Good morning church! I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to 1 Peter 3:8-12; that's on page 1015 in your pew Bibles. While you find that, let me remind you of where we've been over the last couple of weeks. Back in 1 Peter 2:12 Peter said:

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. (1 Peter 2:11-12 ESV)

Then he began to unpack that. He began to talk about what it would look like to apply this teaching in a variety of real life situations. He called upon his people to:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution (1 Peter 2:13 ESV)

The job of the Christian is not to burn the house down. The job of Christians is to represent and resemble Jesus in whatever circumstances we might find ourselves in. Having said that, Peter understands that this teaching will be difficult for some people to hear so he talks tenderly and practically to two groups in particular. He talks to Christian slaves who might be serving under wicked and crooked masters and then he speaks to Christian wives who might be married to cruel and uncaring pagan husbands.

Having done that now, Peter returns to the general theme – how to live righteously and honourably as Christians in a hostile world – hence the opening word in our passage “finally”. This passage then represents Peter’s attempt to bring this theme in for a landing. Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 8.

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 9 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.

10 For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit;

11 let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.

12 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.” (1 Peter 3:8–12 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Now this is one of those passages that is kind of complicated structurally, but in terms of the substance is very straightforward. The centre of this passage, thematically, is very easy to spot – look at the end of verse 9:

bless, for to this you were called

That’s the whole point, right there!

Again – the call of the Christian is not to burn the house down. The call of the Christian citizen is NOT to overturn the government. The call of the Christian slave is not to rise up and overthrow the master. The call of the Christian wife is not to rebel against her husband. No – the call of Christians everywhere – in every situation is TO BLESS.

Your job is to bring the blessings of heaven down to the earth in whatever, broken, fallen, hostile – impossible – situation you might yourself in.

That’s the calling. And this isn’t new content – Peter already told us this back in chapter 2:9:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9 ESV)

You aren't really Roman anymore – so your job isn't to REFORM Roman government. You are a third race now. Neither Jew nor Gentile – you are the people of God. You are a holy nation. You are a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD.

When we preached on this passage a few weeks ago we talked about how the word “priest” comes from the Latin word pontifex – which literally means bridge. Christians are a BRIDGE connecting this world to the world to come. And our job as a bridge is to facilitate the movement of blessings from there to here. That's what Peter says – BLESS for to THIS you have been called.

That is clearly the main point of the passage.

Now, I mentioned that the structure of this passage is complicated – and it is – at least to our eyes. In most English paragraphs the main point is either at the beginning or at the end. We either state it up front and then try to prove or we try to build up to it, but in a Hebrew mind you put the main point in the centre – as we see here. And then also, very often, the points on the outside parallel each other and expand upon the central theme. Scholars refer to this as chiasm – or sometimes as “sandwich structure”. This paragraph is arranged according to that basic pattern. What it means practically is that if you look at the outer edges of this passage – verses 8 and 11b you will notice the theme of seeking peace and building community. Then if you go one layer in – verse 9 and verse 11a – you will notice the theme turning away from evil and not repaying hostility with hostility. And then in the centre you see the main point – bless for to this you were called. This is a passage about how to be a blessing in a broken and hostile world.

How To Be A Blessing In A Broken And Hostile World

The first thing he says is you've got to do is:

1. Build a loving church community

Look at verse 8 again. Peter says:

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. (1 Peter 3:8)

ESV)

Peter uses 5 imperatival adjectives here and you've just learned that Hebrew minds put their main point in the middle and then surround them with explanatory terms. Thom Schreiner says here:

“It seems that there is an ABCBA pattern in this verse, so that this verse functions as a chiasm....brotherly love is the middle term, showing that it is the most important of all the virtues and that the other virtues are embraced in the call to love one another as a family.”¹

Alright – that's it for the grammar lesson – here is the point. Peter is saying that if you want to be a blessing in a hostile world the first thing you've got to do is BUILD A LOVING CHURCH. You're going to need it – because the world is going to dump all over you – and they're going to need it – because the world is going to dump all over them too. This world is broken. It's a meat grinder out there! And sooner or later the hurt comes for everybody. So if you want to be a blessing, build a loving church.

That's what Peter is saying here and then he tells us 4 supporting things about loving church. You'll notice that the first and fifth adjective are roughly similar and the second and fourth adjectives are roughly similar. So I've used some similar words in the subheading to help you see that. This is what Peter is saying about a loving church.

The first thing he says is that a loving church:

A. Pursues unity of mind

Look at verse 8:

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind (1 Peter 3:8 ESV)

I love how Peter Davids explains this. He says:

“This is not the unity that comes from a standard imposed from without, such as a doctrinal statement, but that which comes from loving dialogue and especially a common focus on the one Lord.”²

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 164.

² Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle Of Peter* *The New International Commentary On The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 124.

Now, that isn't to say that there is no value in a doctrinal statement – he's not saying that, he's just saying that a doctrinal statement can't MAKE unity. This kind of unity comes only from loving dialogue with a particular focus on the person and work of Christ.

Can we just pause and sit under that.

You know churches do a lot of stuff to try and generate UNITY – and a lot of that is fine and a lot of that is helpful to an extent. But the heart of it is loving dialogue with a particular focus on the person and work of Christ. Meaning you preach and small group and Bible Study and coffee shop your way into unity. Unity begins with unity of mind. It begins with believing the same truths and celebrating the same Gospel. That's where it all begins, Peter says. If you want to be a blessing – if you want to give your community the gift of a loving church – then you've got to take the time to learn and believe together.

Hear that! You can't be a loving church until you all believe the same basic stuff about God, about us and about how God saved us through the person and work of Christ. So many denominations – so many churches – desperately need to understand that. Unity at the expense of talking about truth doesn't work. It doesn't exist and it isn't helpful. If you want to be a loving church – make an investment in on-going, loving, Gospel talk.

The second thing he says is that a loving church:

B. Abounds in sympathy

That's the second adjective in verse 8. The Greek word used there literally means “to have the same feelings”. It is the word “*soom-pathace*” and it is a compound word made from two other words; a word meaning “together” and a word meaning “feel” – thus to FEEL TOGETHER. This is what Paul meant when he called on believers to:

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15 ESV)

It means to enter into another person's emotional experience. Isn't that amazing? That's what a

good church does! They celebrate when you celebrate. When you have a baby – they fly you a balloon. When you get married, they dance the Makaraina, right? They rejoice with those who rejoice. And they weep with those who weep. When you lose a parent to cancer they feel that. When you lose a job – they feel that. Christians are called to be emotionally involved with one another – that’s good church. That kind of church would be a blessing to any community.

The third thing he says is that a loving church:

B. Abounds in compassion

Now I’ve labeled it B and I’ve used the same words that I used in the other point B to help you see the connection. Remember this is a chiasm inside a chiasm. There are 5 characteristics of the church that blesses and the middle one is the main one – build a loving church community - and the outside ones are parallel to each other and explaining the middle one. The point is that this B is similar but not identical to the first B. Peter is talking about FEELINGS here in the B points and here in this second B he uses a similar word with a slightly more active sense about it. He uses the adjectival form of a word that we normally see in the Bible only in reference to Jesus.

The verb for “compassion” is ONLY applied to Jesus in the New Testament – did you know that?

True story. We saw it a bunch of times in our Mark series. Let me show you a couple. In Mark 1:

a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” Then Jesus, **moved with compassion**, stretched out *His* hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.” (Mark 1:40–41 NKJV)

Then again in Mark 6 there was a crowd of people chasing him all around the Sea of Galilee and Mark says:

When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and **he had compassion on them**, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. (Mark 6:34 ESV)

We could go on and on – Mark uses the verb several times – but always and only in reference to Jesus. Only Jesus is TRULY COMPASSIONATE. He was always RESPONDING TO PEOPLE. He was never INDIFFERENT. HE WAS ALWAYS AFFECTED.

Stop right there and think about that!

The Lord God Almighty. Yahweh Lord of Hosts. The Creator of all Things. God in the flesh – was ALWAYS AFFECTED by human suffering.

And he always did something about it.

You see that's the new piece here. B2 is roughly parallel to B1 in that both involve FEELING what other people FEEL – but here Peter says that to be a good church, you have to do MORE THAN FEEL what other people feel YOU HAVE TO DO SOMETHING – you have to ACTIVELY ENTER IN.

Jesus didn't just IDENTIFY with the needs of people – HE MET the needs of people. He healed them. He taught them. He did what was NEEDED in every situation.

That's a good Savior right there – and that's a good church. That's a church that would be a blessing in a broken and sinful world.

The fourth thing he says is that a loving church:

A. Pursue humility in thinking

Again I've labeled that with an A and used the same words as I did in the first point because these points are ROUGHLY PARALELL. They both involve thinking together. The word that is used here literally means "lowly thinking". This is what Paul means when he says:

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment (Romans 12:3 ESV)

Don't have a high view of yourself, Paul says, have a low view – a sober view. In a good church people don't take their own opinions too seriously. They know that their own thinking has been affected by sin and shaped by the cultural consensus. Therefore they take the Word of God

seriously – they esteem the Bible very highly and their own opinions very lightly. If everyone is doing that, well then, you ought to be on the same page and you ought to be well on your way to building a really good church.

That's the first thing you need to do if you want to be a blessing. Build a good church. Listen we've got more to say this morning – but we could stop here couldn't we? That's a good take home. Do you want to bless this city? Do you want to help people? Do you want to bless people all over the world? Then help build good churches. Good churches are a blessing to a broken world. That truth has to effect how we do missions locally and globally.

Listen to me now – food banks and soup kitchens will not change the world.

Youth Drop In Centres and Student Breakfast programs WILL NOT CHANGE THE WORLD.

Micro finance and vaccination programs WILL NOT CHANGE THE WORLD.

All those things are good – but if you want to change the world – build a healthy, loving church. A church that agrees on the Gospel and loves men and women. That, my friends will be a blessing in this broken and fallen world.

So the first thing you've got to do Peter says is build a loving church community.

The second thing he says you've got to do is:

2. Endure mistreatment from the world

You can see this in both verse 9 and in verse 11. If you want to be a blessing Peter says, you can be playing tit for tat. You can't be returning fire. You can't be trying to get even. You've got to suck it up buttercup. Because if you are always at war you can never be speaking peace.

Now where do you think Peter got that from?

Well of course, he got it from Jesus. Jesus said:

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.
(Luke 6:27–28 ESV)

Return good for evil – return blessings for curses – for to this have been called. Peter is just quoting Jesus here. Jesus said this stuff all the time. He said:

11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:11–12 ESV)

Again – that’s exactly what Peter is saying here.

Listen friends, we haven’t had to think about this one for a long time because we’ve been FAVOURED by the government in this country for over a hundred years. For crying out loud – we get TAX RECEIPTS for giving money to Jesus – we are not a persecuted people.

And yet things do seem to be changing out there.

You probably all know about the church in Oshawa that is being attacked in the press and on the internet because they actually dared to practice church discipline against one of their members.
... donuts and coffee to the protestors.

That’s exactly what I’m talking about. I don’t know when it will happen here – but I know that it will. Could be sooner than you think – some of you know what I’m talking about. It could be in a couple of months – or it could be in a couple of years – but you can bet your bottom dollar that it’s coming – and so we need to be ready to respond as CHRISTIANS.

When people protest at the driveway of this church – when they remove our tax exempt status – when they threaten us with lawsuits – when they call us bigots, haters and neanderthalls on the internet and on the news – let’s all agree right now how we’re going to handle that.

Let’s agree that we are not going to seek revenge. Let’s agree that we are not going to speak evil of the people who are speaking evil of us. Let’s just agree that we are going to pray for those who

are persecuting us. Let's agree that we are going to rejoice that we have been counted worthy to suffer on behalf of the Name. Let's agree to buy donuts and coffee for those who hate us. Let's agree to BLESS when others curse us because to this we have been called.

The third thing Peter says about how to be a blessing in a broken and hostile world is that we've got to:

3. Go to God on behalf of men and women

Look at verse 12 – it's the last piece of the Psalm that Peter is quoting at the end of this paragraph; he says:

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." (1 Peter 3:12 ESV)

That's Psalm 34:14-15 – except Peter added one word; the word "for". The word FOR is not in the original wording of the Psalm but Peter adds it here because he is using this part of the Psalm as the conclusion to the whole section of his epistle. He is saying that we want to do all of this – we want to BUILD A GOOD CHURCH and we want to ENDURE HOSTILITY AND MISTREATMENT FOR A PARTICULAR REASON. And the reason is that if we want to be a blessing then we NEED TO BE POWERFUL IN PRAYER. We need to GO TO GOD on behalf of men and women and be assured that we will receive what we're asking for.

Look again at verse 12.

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. (1 Peter 3:12 ESV)

What Peter seems to be saying here is that if we build a good church – if we are thinking together, feeling together and LOVING TOGETHER – if we are a real, bona fide CHRIST FOLLOWING CHURCH – then God is going to give us POWER in PRAYER in order to bless other people.

Are you hearing that?

Now the Bible talks about this all the time. In Isaiah 58 God blasts his people for being a bunch

of fakes and hypocrites. He says you come to church but all you are thinking about is when its going to be over so that you can get back to work. You abuse the poor, you don't love your brothers and sisters – you actually hide from them in church, the prophet says. You're a disaster! But if you get that stuff figured out:

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' (Isaiah 58:9 ESV)

Are you hearing that? It sounds like a loving church has God at their beck and call. That's what the text says. You will call and he will say: Here I am. How can I help you?

That is a church that could be a blessing.

The Apostle James says something similar, he says:

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16 ESV)

Well, now here in 1 Peter we are learning that the prayer of a righteous church – the prayer of a loving church – a good church – also has great power in its working.

That is a game changer!

I don't know what your take home today is going to be – but this is going to be mine. There are few things I want more than power in prayer. The more powerless I feel as a person and the more broken and desperate this world becomes – the more I want power in prayer and I am seeing something of a road map to that in this passage – are you seeing that? I'm seeing this text saying that if we love one another – if we talk lovingly and listen and grow in agreement and if we identify emotionally with one another and more than that - **MEET REAL TANGIBLE NEEDS IN THIS PLACE** – if we do that – then our prayers are going to be **FLIPPED ON**. God is going to **TAKE AN INTEREST IN WHAT WE'RE SAYING** and what **WE'RE ASKING FOR** and we are going to see **MIRACLES HAPPEN IN THIS PLACE** – are you seeing that? That's my take away.

But there's one more thing I want to show you in the passage – it's the last thing Peter says in th

passage and I assume he means it as motivation. He says that a church that wants to be a blessing needs to:

4. Be ever mindful of final judgment

Look at verse 12 again:

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. (1 Peter 3:12 ESV)

I mentioned that he's quoting there from Psalm 34. The whole verse reads as follows:

The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. (Psalm 34:16 ESV)

Are you hearing that? The face of the Lord is against those who do evil to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

That's what's on the line here friends.

Our friends and neighbours, our co-workers, employers, political leaders, Facebook haters – and then of course in some cases even our KIDS and PARENTS and our siblings – are headed towards a Christ-less eternity and if they are not ARRESTED and turned around by the Sovereign grace of God then they will be outside, in the dark, under judgment, away from God and us – FOREVER.

That's what's on the line here and so we need to do whatever we need to do to position ourselves to BE A BLESSING.

That's what Peter's saying.

Our calling is not to burn the house down.

Our calling is not to pursue social or political revolution – no! We have bigger fish to fry. Our

calling is to stand in the gap and to call into the dark and to beg people to come home. Our calling is to pray mountain moving, miracle working prayers in order to help, heal, soften, and summon straying sons and daughters.

That's our calling. That is our mission and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let's pray together.