1Peter 3:8-22

Key verse 3:15a

*“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.”*

Introduction: In the passage Peter spoke of suffering for doing good. In order to suffer for doing good, believers should revere Christ in their hearts. There should be a transformation through the Holy Spirit to where they can overcome the fear of suffering and fear of evil and are ruled by the fear of God. When this happens, the believers can do what is right, even to repay insult with blessing and evil with God. They can also be empowered to share the truth of God effectively, because of their sincere hope in God and clear conscience before God. However, they should share with gentleness and respect, knowing that they are repaying insult for blessing on behalf of God’s precious souls. Believers suffering for doing good is not only to pass the test of faith and purify their faith, it is also for the purpose of reaching out to save others. It reveals the example of Jesus Christ to an unbelieving world.

1. Read verses 8-13. Why was it important for the believers to be like-minded, sympathetic, compassionate and humble, and to love one another? (8, 1:22, 2:4-5, 2:9) Why should they repay evil with blessing? (9) How should they live in order to be blessed? (10-13)

***8*** *Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.* ***9*** *Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.* ***10*** *For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.* ***11*** *They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.* ***12*** *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”* ***13*** *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?*

1. It was important for the believers to be like-minded, sympathetic, compassionate and humble in order to make a loving unity within the church. When they have a unity of love, they can be used to effectively advance the gospel. If church members cannot get along, how can they expect to reach out to an unbelieving world? The believers should first love one another. In 1:22 Peter said, *“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.”* When there is love for one another, they can build up the church as a unified body. In 2:45 Peter said, *”As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—* ***5*** *you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”* Finally, when the believers are united in love, they can effectively advance the gospel. In 2:9 Peter said, *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”* If the beliers did not love one another, there would be divisions, and the Church would not be built up nor the gospel proclaimed effectively. The exhortations in verse 8 each have to do with making a unity of love among the believers. To be like-minded means to share similar viewpoints or opinions. In order to share similar viewpoints or opinions, church members should readily welcome the viewpoints and opinions of others. To be like-minded has to do with loving others. It means to be ready to listen to the viewpoints and opinions of others with an open mind, and to be prepared to adjust one’s own viewpoint out of respect and consideration for others. In order to be like-minded, believers should submit to authorities and show proper respect to everyone (2:13, 17). Being sympathetic or compassionate has to do with considering the suffering of others with the desires to relieve their suffering. This also involves loving others because it requires sharing in others suffering, even at the cost of suffering more that others might suffer less. Both being like-minded and being sympathetic or compassionate involve love, but they also require humility. They require a lot of self-denial and self-sacrifice for the sake of submitting to authorities and considering others. To welcome opinions and viewpoints of others over my own opinions and viewpoints, or to be willing to share in the sufferings of others at the price of my own suffering requires a lot of humility. Loving one another requires a lot of humility. Peter’s exhortations here all have to do with loving one another, so that he even specifically included love one another among them. The believers should heed Peter’s exhortations in order to make a loving unity among them for advancing the gospel to an unbelieving world.
2. The believers should repay evil with blessing because to this they were called so that they might inherit a blessing. The believers calling was to inherit a blessing. But it was also the calling to suffer for doing good. They were called to suffer through bearing the insults of evil people Instead of repaying them insult for insult or evil for evil, they were called to repay insult and evil with blessing. However, the calling to suffer was not to suffer for their sins or to suffer meaninglessly. It was to inherit a blessing. Through suffering to repay insult with blessing or evil with good, the faith of the believers could be tested and purified. They could grow spiritually and become strong. Through this God was preparing them to inherit a blessing.
3. In order to be blessed by God, The believers should live a life of doing good by relying on God through prayer. Here, Peter quoted Psalm 34:12-16 and Isaiah 8:12. These scriptures talk about the blessedness of doing good. The believers should not think that they could be blessed through doing evil or through repaying evil with evil. They could only be blessed when they did good and repay evil with good. They must keep their tongues from evil and deception; like slander. They must turn from evil and do good and seek peace. As the apostle Paul instructed believers, *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Rom 12:21). However, doing good was not something that they could do on their own. It would have been especially difficult to bear the evil insults of unbelievers and continue to do good, even repaying evil with God. For this reason, the believers needed to rely on God through prayer. They should know that God sees their suffering for doing good and hears their prayer. God is with them to strengthen them when they bring all their cares and anxieties to God and entrust justice to God who judges justly.

1. Read verses 14-16. How could the believers overcome fear to suffer for what is right? (14-15a) How could they use suffering for what is right as an opportunity to bless others? (15b) What attitude should they have in answering the questions of unbelievers? Why was it important for them to keep a clear conscience when answering their questions? (16) Why was it better to suffer for doing good than evil? (17-18)

***14*** *But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.”* ***15*** *But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,* ***16*** *keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.* ***17*** *For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.* ***18*** *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.*

1. The believers could overcome fear to suffer for what is right when they revere Christ as Lord. To revere means to have deep respect. However, in the context here, it refers to more than early respect, but to holy respect or holy reverence. The NASB says, “... sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts …” In other words, set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts. It means to make him the Lord of your heart through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. This can also be described as having a holy fear of God. In order to revere Christ in your heart as Lord, one needs to first know him as Lord. One should have a personal love relationship and ongoing fellowship with the Lord, and struggle to obey him in their practical life. God has given Jesus all authority in heaven and earth (Mat 28:18). He has the authority to execute judgment, and even to judge believers according to what they have done, whether good or bad (John 5:27, 2Cor 5:10). For the believers to revere Christ as Lord they should submit to Christ’s authority and to entrust judgement to Him. They should not fear people, but fear God. They should obey the Lord by doing what is good and right and by not doing what is evil or wrong. Especially, they should obey to suffer for doing good, because this is what they were called to.
2. The believers could use suffering for doing right as an opportunity to bless others when they were prepared to give an answer for their hope. When they do what is good and repay evil with blessing, unbelievers might become curious and begin to ask questions. This could happen at any time, so they needed to be prepared to answer. In his way repaying evil for good was not only an opportunity for the believers to grow in faith, but was also an opportunity to share their faith and their hope in the Lord. Repaying evil with blessing and doing what is right in the face of suffering is a powerful testimony. Without even having to open their mouths, they may attract unbelievers asking the source of their hope. At that time, the believers would need to be prepared to share the living hope they have in Jesus Christ.
3. The believers should have an attitude of gentleness and respect in answering the questions of unbelievers. This is a reminder of what Peter said earlier, saying, “Show proper respect to everyone …” (1Pet 2:17), which includes unbelievers and even those that speak and do evil against believers. When unbelievers ask the reason for a believer’s hope their hearts are opened to hear the gospel. Their previous evil and insults should not be held against them. Their questions represented an opportunity to repay insults with blessing and evil with good. At that time, the believers must share the gospel with gentleness and respect. They should remember that the unbeliever is Jesus' precious sheep and that God is looking to save their soul.
4. It was important for the believers to keep a clear conscience in doing good so that those who speak maliciously against their good behavior in Christ might be ashamed of their slander. The believers should be above reproach, even in terms of having a clear conscience before God. The status of one’s conscience is spiritual, and doesn’t seem that apparent to others. It might seem like a dirty conscience can be easily covered or hidden from others. But a clear conscience is so important for sharing the gospel sincerely. When a believer’s conscience is clear there is nothing in them to make them ashamed and nothing others can say against them without being ashamed. Believers can have a clean conscience when they come to Jesus to have their sins forgiven. As the apostle Paul said, *“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Heb 9:14).*
5. It was better for the believers to suffer for good than for evil because Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring them to God. Simply put, suffering for good revealed Jesus Christ, but suffering for evil did not reveal Jesus Christ. Jesus was righteous, but suffered for the unrighteous. He did so in order to save the unrighteous and the sinner. Suffering for good has meaning, because it is suffering for Jesus, which not only helps the believers to grow in their faith, but also opens a way for others to be saved through them. Suffering for evil is meaningless suffering that leads to death.
6. Read verses 18-22. To whom did Jesus mysteriously proclaim the truth? (19-20 Ref: NASB) How does water baptism symbolize God’s work of salvation in the life of a believer? (21a) How are believers actually saved? (21b-22)

***18*** *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.* ***19*** *After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—* ***20*** *to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,* ***21*** *and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,* ***22*** *who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*

NASB:

***18*** *For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;* ***19*** *in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison,* ***20*** *who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.*

1. Jesus mysteriously proclaimed the truth to those who were disobedient in the days of Noah. There is a lot of controversy regarding this particular Bible passage. Most of the controversy revolves around the questions when, where, how and why? When did it happen, where did it happen, how did it happen and why did it happen? First, when did it happen? When did Jesus proclaim to those who were disobedient in the days of Noah? Was it after his bodily resurrection as the NIV translation implies through verse 19, “After being made alive he went …” Or, was it possibly at some other time, a possibility left open through the NASB translation of the same phrase in verse 19, “... in which he also went …” Second, where did it happen? Did it happen in hell, where those imprisoned spirits were residing after Jesus’ bodily resurrection as would seem to be the logical conclusion of the NIV translation using the words “..the imprisoned spirits… “ in verse 19? Or is the time left open to more possibilities as the NASB implies through translating in verse 19 “... spirits now imprisoned, that is imprisoned at the time Peter was writing? Were they in hell at that time, or could have they even been imprisoned not in hell but simply by their sins? Third, how did it happen? Did it happen through the risen Jesus in bodily form as again implied by the NIV translation? Or did it possibly happen in the spirit, as the NASB uses the words, “...in which…” in verse 19, referring back to the words, “... in the spirit in verse 18? If by the spirit, then how did Jesus do so during the time of Noah? It could have been through Jesus’ spirit inside of Noah. Fourth, why did Jesus proclaim the truth to them? If it was after his resurrection while those spirits were imprisoned in hell, was it just to confirm the judgement they had already received? After all, they had no possibility of being saved after the fact, did they? However, if Jesus proclaimed through the spirit inside of Noah in the time of Noah, when those people were still in the body on earth, then they certainly did have the opportunity to be saved? But since they did not believe the proclamation of Noah or proclamation of Jesus’ spirit in Noah, they all perished and are now imprisoned in hell, and were so at the time when Peter wrote the letter. This seems to make more sense since Peter goes on to say that only 8 persons were saved, so the purpose of Jesus’ proclamation of judgment and salvation is to save souls while in the body on earth.
2. Water baptism symbolizes God’s work of salvation in the life of a believer through the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. The pledge of a clear conscience represents the decision to turn from sins and turn to God--living a new life of faith. There is a layer of symbolization in these verses. The water through which 8 people were saved in the days of Noah, symbolized water baptism. However, water baptism is also symbolic of a clear conscience toward God. This is now the second time in the passage where Jesus spoke of a clear conscience. The first time, he spoke of it in regard to sharing one’s faith. Without the pledge of a clear conscience a believer’s growth is stunted and their spiritual influence limited. There has to be a firm decision before that God would work in and through them.
3. Believes are actually saved by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus defeated death, the final enemy when God raised him from the dead. Through faith in the resurrection and power of the resurrection sinners are saved from the power of sin and death. After Jesus was risen, he ascended to the right hand of God and was given all authority over heaven and earth. Especially, Jesus has authority over death and all the agents and elements of death. Jesus has all the power and authority to save. Believers just need to make a decision to repent and believers; to turn from their sins and turn to God in Jesus Christ. When believers make a pledge of clear conscience before God they can experience the power of salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

One word: Suffer for doing good to save others