

**West Valley Church**  
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## **On This Rock**

### **Part Five**

#### ***1 Peter 3:8-22***

I can't even begin to tell you how much I wish we could be doing this in person; we are continuing to work on a re-opening plan for our church, which seems to be an ever-evolving process. A friend of mine sent me this tongue in cheek statement that sounds like what we are hearing from the Governor's office:

"We have a six-phase plan to reopen the state. The plan will be a phased plan that we will plan and utilize in phases. The phases will be planned and the planning will be phased. We will move quickly and slowly to open but we will plan to remain closed until we can phase a plan for not opening. I have created a staff of staffers who will plan the phases and that phase of planning will commence while phasing their phases in the plan.

And that is our re-opening plan.

Thank you, the Governor."

Sound familiar? I don't want to sound like that at all! But we are doing our best to make sure that when we *can* open, it will be done in a way that allows everyone to participate in worship at the same time, whether in person or live streaming while staying safe at home, because we know that not everyone will want to venture out at the same time.

In light of all of that, these messages from 1 Peter in our series, "On this Rock: Peter and the Church" are very timely because Peter wrote this letter to believers who were scattered from each other and weren't able to worship together because of persecution. We are not facing persecution, but we can relate to the feelings of separation and isolation.

So let's find more application from this next section, 1 Peter 3:8-22. I'd like to read this passage to you, but I want to encourage you to follow along on the screen and with your own Bibles – 1 Peter 3:8-22. Let me read it for us:

"Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 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. For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. 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.'

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.' 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, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 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. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—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, 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, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him." (1 Peter 3:8-22, niv)

Alright; like I said, I think there are things in this passage that you are going to find very interesting and will apply to our situation today as Christians and as a church. I might also add that this contains one of the most confusing passages in the whole Bible, so we've got that to look forward to!

This section has been called the "main section" of Peter's letter – it actually goes from 3:8 all the way through 4:19. If you thought there was a lot of stuff packed into the last sections, well buckle up. There's so much in this that we are going to take two Sundays to explore it.

You might say that this section that we read today could be called "oxymoronic," because each key part can be summed up that way – they seem like two concepts that ought to be opposites, but actually make sense. Starting with...

## **1. The Concluding Introduction (3:8-12)**

Maybe you noticed that we included verse 8 at the end of our reading last week – I did that on purpose, even though I didn't comment on it. The first person that emails me to tell me they noticed that (Be honest!!) – email me, tell me you noticed and what your favorite candy bar is, and I'll deliver it to your house.

Here's why I included verse 8 in both readings: verse eight is a strong concluding verse of our passage from last week, because we talked about our relationships with society, with our work, and with our spouses. So verse eight was a great conclusion to that teaching – it summarized it well. Notice Peter said, "Finally, be...these things." So these verses from 8-12 are a concluding summary of *that* section, but they also serve as an excellent introduction for *this* section, preparing us for what Peter is going to say next. There's something really cool going on here that doesn't get translated well into English, so let me point that out and then we'll move on.

Peter gives all the churches that would read his letters – and that includes us – he gives a strong instruction or exhortation on how we should treat each other, using five compelling words. You can see them there in your Bible. These five words are *descriptive* of how Christians behave toward one another, so if you were to describe a genuine church, you'd use these five words. But they are also *prescriptive* – meaning they are instructions to the church on how we should treat each other. Keep in mind, this instruction was written *while they were scattered and not able to worship together* – so they are prescribed for us.

But here's the cool thing: Peter is using something that is called a "chiastic structure." Think of an "X" – that's the form he's using. The first and fifth adjectives describe the way we should *think*, the second and fourth adjectives describe the way we should *feel*, and the center word or third word is the central characteristic that drives all of them.

So one line of the "X" describes ways we should think in toward each other, first that we should be *like-minded*. That doesn't mean we have to share the same opinions, but we *should* all focus on Christ as our Lord. We live in harmony together – not in some sort of cultish, Stepford-Wives kind of way, but because we all share the mind of Christ toward each other and the world. The other way we should think (the fifth word) is to be *humble*. This means that we should show respect and love to each other, regardless of whether it is to those in authority over us, to equals, or to those who might seem inferior. Those are the ways we should *think* toward each other.

The second and fourth words are the other line of the "X" and they describe the ways we should *act*: first, we should be *sympathetic*, meaning we share the feelings of each other – Paul said "we rejoice with those who rejoice" and we "mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15). We should also act *compassionately* toward each other. Compassion is the deepest level of human emotion toward each other. Ours is not a shallow or superficial care and concern for each other; we feel it deeply.

All of these are tied together and motivated by the middle command: "love one another." This is, after all, Jesus' command to us in John 13 (34-35, 15:12).

Then in verse 9-12 Peter reinforces all this teaching by quoting Psalm 34:12-16.

After verses 8-12, which are instructions in how we treat *each other*, Peter launches into instructions about how we are to treat *those who persecute or mistreat us* because of our faith. He does that by pointing out that we will experience...

## **2. The Blessed Suffering (3:13-17)**

Our suffering will be a blessing. Again, this sounds like an oxymoron, but it's a beautiful description. Peter continues the theme that we talked about last week; that if you are mistreated for behaving badly, don't blame it on your Christianity and act like you are being persecuted; you are merely getting what you deserve. But, if you are persecuted or suffer for what is right, Peter says "You are blessed" – he is using the same words Jesus used in the sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:11. In fact, the word that Jesus and Peter use is best translated, "be happy!"

Then Peter reminds them that they need not fear anything at all that anyone can do to them; instead they should only fear Christ as Lord.

Let me mention this because this is important, and I think it's the key to the whole passage: there are *two* types of fear, according to the Bible. The *good* kind of fear is to be in awe of God – to be in awe of Christ, because you realize that he is God, he is powerful, he created you, he is the judge yet he loves you, he has compassion on you, and he is merciful toward you. So you should be in awe of him, or “fear” him. The *other* kind of fear is *every other* kind of fear. It could be fear of people who mistreat you, fear of a pandemic, fear of a diagnosis, fear of not having enough money, fear of what might happen next, fear of what people will say or think, fear of *every other thing besides God*. Because if you do not fear God or are not in awe of God, you *will* be in fear or in awe of people and your circumstances. Do you see that? You are either in awe of God and worship him for it, or you will be in awe of circumstances and worry about them for it. Worship or worry. Fear or fear.

I know there are a lot of people who feel out of control right now; and that can be frightening. Some are becoming very anxious. Some are looking for some made-up, falsified conspiracy theories in order to make sense of this. Let me lovingly tell you – if that's you, you are being fearful of the circumstances. You need to be fearful of God, who is greater than your circumstances. I don't buy into conspiracy theories, so I've got some friends on Facebook who tell me I've got my head in the sand. My answer is, I don't have my head in the sand, I've got my mind on Christ! Because it is worship or worry, my friends. Fear or fear. That's verse 14.

And the reason this is so very important is because Peter ties this issue directly to being able to witness and introduce others to Jesus. *That* is your job and mine as long as we are still walking this planet. This is the primary job of the church on earth.

In this passage, Peter directly links these two things: 1) the way we respond to hardship or being wrongly treated, and 2) our ability to introduce people to Jesus. Peter clearly points out that one influences the other: our good behavior *should* lead people to ask us for a reason for our hope. If we are living for Christ, then the circumstances that we are facing in these days may actually give you and I and our church the *greatest* opportunity for people to ask us the reason for the hope that we have. Are we living hope-filled, peaceful lives in this pandemic in such an unusual, supernatural way, that people want to know how and why? Or are we spending so much time wringing our hands, worrying, complaining, and trying to blame governors and billionaires and the government, and therefore no one knows that we have any hope?

And when people *do* ask, what is the spirit in which we offer our perspective and our hope and our reason? Do we complain? Do we answer with gentleness and respect, or is it harshness with a belligerent Facebook meme? Are we answering with both our kind and good behavior as well as our kind words?

There are several things here that Peter expects for Christians: we *will* be treated poorly by a world that doesn't follow Christ. Yet Christians *should* behave in such a way that displays hope so that people will ask. We should be ready with an answer that is spoken in gentleness and respect, and our lives of love and faith and kindness should put to shame our accusers. We love each other and we love our enemies.

Peter does *not* expect that Christians should have degrees in theology and be able to answer any abstract or profound question about the Bible. But he does expect every Christian to share their story. You and I may not be experts in theology, but each of us is an expert in our own story. No one can argue your experience with Christ, because it is yours! Be an expert on *that*.

Your suffering will result in blessing – blessing to each other and blessing to those who don't know Christ – even those who mistreat you. But it is also a blessing to yourself, because you are *being saved* – a concept you might remember from the first chapter.

All of this leads to...

### **3. The Victorious Death (3:18-22)**

In death, Christ is victorious! This brings us to one of the most mysterious passages in the Bible – this stuff about Jesus preaching to imprisoned spirits – those who were being disobedient in the days of Noah. There are a lot of theories about what Peter meant by this, and I'm not going to go into details on this because we don't have time and I'm not sure how productive that would be. DM me and I'd be happy to discuss in more detail. But let me quickly give you an overview, then tell you what our perspective needs to be and what it means for us.

The questions this raises are: Who are the spirits he preached to? Who preached? What was preached? And, when was it preached? There are basically four interpretations of these questions: one is that the preaching is happening to people in the underworld (possibly by Jesus, by Enoch, or by the dead apostles). The second theory is that Jesus was preaching to the fallen angels between his death and resurrection. The third is that Christ did the preaching after his ascension, and the fourth interpretation is that it refers to the Spirit of Christ preaching through Noah's faithfulness, actions, and words to the people of the world at that time.

Most likely it is one of the last two, and probably the last one, when you look at all the nuances of the original language.

But let me put this into perspective: we don't know for sure! Anyone who tells you that it specifically means something is only showing their arrogance or ignorance. You've got to realize and live with the fact that there are things in the Bible that you won't understand until we get to heaven. This is one of those things. As our dear Pastor Arden used to say, "It means what it means. God said it. Let it go." There just aren't enough supporting statements in the Old and New Testaments to give us a clear understanding. *Peter* knew what he meant, but unfortunately, we can't ask him right now.

Here IS what's important: this passage does *not* apply to you and me. Christ has already died and risen from the dead. We've already been told the Gospel. We don't get second chances after this life.

And neither do the people around you.

So we must – MUST – revere Christ as Lord as Peter said in verse 15, and do all we can to show others his love. We don't really know a lot about what Peter is referring to, but we *do*

know this: His death resulted in a resurrection. His death resulted in our victory. That's why Peter starts talking about the imagery of baptism – every believer – EVERY believer – is to be baptized because it is a way for us to declare Christ's resurrection power and to pledge our loyalty to Christ. He's not saying that the act of baptism saves us; what baptism *represents* is what saves us: that's Christ's work for us and our response to it.

So when it comes to this passage, don't worry about what you *don't* know; focus on what you *do* know: Christ's was a victorious death, that has changed everything for you and for me, and he is now King of Kings and Lord of Lords at the right hand of God himself, and everything and all things are under his authority.

### *Prayer*

Have a great week - - Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult...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, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.