

Jesus Christ, Our Living Hope

1 Peter 3:13-22

Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. Happy Easter! He is risen! He is risen indeed!

When making plans to teach through the letter of First Peter in a series subtitled, "Everyday Exiles," we intentionally planned to arrive at today's passage on Easter Sunday. That's because it's all about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the very thing we are celebrating today. So I invite you to open your Bibles with me to 1 Peter 3:13-22, which you can find on page 1016 if you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs.

The title of today's message is "Jesus Christ, Our Living Hope," and the main idea of the passage is really more of a main question: Why is it better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil?¹ I think Peter then gives us a few really important answers to this really important question: (1) because Jesus has defeated the power of evil - v. 18 (through his death on the cross), (2) because Jesus can deliver from the power of evil vv. 19-21 (through his resurrection from the grave), and (3) because Jesus will destroy the power of evil - v. 22 (through his ascension to the right hand of God, where he is seated with all authority).

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is 1 Peter 3:13-22. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in

¹ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Loc 5604

which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. 1 Peter 3:13-22

May the Word preached here today echo in our hearts and among the nations. And all God's people said, *Amen*. You may be seated.

Exposition

A few years ago a man named Ronnie Smith moved to Benghazi, Libya with his wife and young son. He had taken a job as a chemistry teacher in a local high school. You see, Ronnie loved Libya and wanted to help students aspire to their dreams. In fact, during one Christmas break Ronnie and his family had plans to return to the United States for visit, but Ronnie decided to stay behind a bit longer in order to help his students through their midterm exams. It was at that time, while Ronnie was out for a morning jog, that he was shot and killed.

Why? We still don't know, especially in light of Ronnie's desire and work toward the peace and prosperity of Libya. But it likely had something to do with the fact that Ronnie believed the most peaceful and prosperous good that could be done for the Libyan people was the joy of knowing God through Jesus Christ. Now I know that some would see this as an evil thing, but Ronnie wasn't trying to import American culture or force Christianity on people; he only hoped for the opportunity, while doing good, to introduce Jesus to people who didn't know about him.²

Obviously, there is much that is sad and evil about this story. As a husband and father, it is especially hard to think about a wife and son being so suddenly stripped of the man they loved and depended on. So why is it that Christians would look at such a situation and still believe the words of Peter,

¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:17

² The Austin Stone Community Church, "Grieving the Loss of Our Brother in Christ," <https://austinstone.org/ronnie>

Why not hate the Libyan people in response? In the very least, why not hate the people who killed Ronnie? Why not seek to retaliate? Well, in the United States there is a common way we answer questions like this. We say, 'It's better to do more good than bad because that's what makes you a good person.' And if you believe in God, then being a good person is what allows you to go to heaven. This makes logical sense to us, and even some people who call themselves Christians think this way.

But here's where that way of thinking really starts to break down. What happens when doing more good than bad really starts to cost you something? In our context, the cost of Christianity isn't so much persecution. Instead, it's the cost of being awake rather than asleep. It's the loss of ignorance about your own wickedness. It's the loss of the freedom to be apathetic about the world. It's the loss of trust in your own strength and sufficiency. It isn't those who sleep that suffer, but those who are awake.³ And when we really begin to feel the cost of being awake, the good road doesn't seem so great.

What Peter is saying is that even when it costs you—maybe even costs you everything—it's still better to do good than evil. Why? Why can he say that? Well, that's the question we want to answer this morning; and the answer has a lot to do with Easter.

This was the situation of the people to whom Peter was writing his letter. They were little pockets of Christians scattered throughout the Roman empire; and they were treated like weirdos for being Christians. People looked at them and said, 'You don't believe Rome will last forever? That's weird. You don't sleep around outside your marriage? That's weird. You don't fire back when we make fun of you. That's weird.' Eventually the question would come out—'Why? Why are you so weird?' So Peter didn't just want to teach these Christians to be weird by doing good even if they had to suffer for it. Like any good teacher, he wanted them to understand why.

I. Because Jesus Has Defeated the Power of Evil - v. 18

This brings us to our first answer to that question: because Jesus has defeated the power of evil. We read in verse 18,

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 1 Peter 3:18

³ Eugene H. Peterson, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire: A Conversation on the Ways of God Formed by the Words of God*, 247

The first big problem with thinking that life is just about doing more good than evil has to do with something called sin. According to the Bible “evil” isn’t just some *thing* that happens in the world. It’s anything that departs from the goodness of God. And it exists not just so much “out there” but “in here”. It’s not like an infected cut that works its way in and eventually kills you. It’s more like a cancer you’re born with that—apart from a miracle—has already claimed you for dead. And since you can’t clean it up from the outside in, something foreign has to enter you and work the miracle. That foreign thing is Jesus Christ.

And that’s what Peter is telling us here. Christ, perfect and healthy and sinless, entered an imperfect and unhealthy and sin-filled world, and he suffered, being put to death in the flesh. This isn’t just a matter of Jesus coming in and blasting sin with his chemotherapy power. This is Jesus taking your cancer into his own body, leaving you healed and him dead. This is the exchange that’s happening when we talk about Jesus dying on a cross for your sins.

In order to grasp what Peter is saying, we need to look to the Old Testament, the first half of the Bible, in the time before Jesus came to earth. How did people before Jesus resolve the sin within? The heart of it was to look to God to work the miracle through a detailed system of sacrifice. God instructed a large number of men to serve as priests, which might sound like a really clean job, but it was actually quite bloody. That’s because the priests received offerings from the people of God and sacrificed them for the forgiveness of sins. The problem with this is it never dealt with the problem at its source; it was like rubbing neosporin on a tumor bulging under the skin.

The amazing difference between these priests and Jesus is described in the book of Hebrews, which reads,

¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. Hebrews 10:11-12, 14

We, too, can try to outrun sin by doing more good than evil, by being our own personal priest who stands and labors over offering after offering on the sacrificial altar. But hear this Easter good news: *Jesus has already done it*, once for all time, and sat down from his labor, that he might bring us to God.⁴ Jesus has defeated the power of evil.

⁴ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of First Peter*, The Bible Speaks Today Series, Loc 2256

II. Because Jesus Can Deliver From the Power of Evil - vv. 19-21

But even as I wrote those words earlier this week, I immediately thought to myself, “Has Jesus *really* defeated the power of evil? ‘Cause when I look around, there’s still a whole lot of evil going on.” I think it’s a fair question. And I think it leads us into our second answer as to why it’s better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil: because Jesus can deliver from the power of evil.

We continue reading in verse 19 that after being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 1 Peter 3:19-20

Ok, so what in the world does *that* mean?! Many Bible interpreters today still agree that this is most difficult passage to understand in the New Testament.⁵ In trying to understand what Peter is saying, we could easily get distracted from what he’s *actually* saying. So, of the almost 200 ways you could interpret this passage, I want to quickly describe the top three:

- First, some people think this happened *before* Jesus’ death and resurrection, that his spirit was present in Noah when Noah preached to people that a great flood was coming to destroy the earth and they needed to get into his ark to be saved.
- Second, some people think this happened *between* Jesus’ death and resurrection, that Jesus descended into hell after he died and preached to the people and/or spirits there, especially the people or spirits described during the time of Noah and the flood.
- Third, some people think this happened *after* Jesus’ death and resurrection, that Jesus preached not to people but to fallen angels (demons) about his victory and their doom.⁶

So there you go—which one sounds the best, right? Well, any time we come to a confusing passage in the Bible, it’s important not just to look to our favorite Bible teacher, but to the surrounding context.

So here’s what we know: Peter is writing a letter to encourage marginalized Christians, and he’s answering the question of why it’s better to suffer for doing good than for doing

⁵ Jobes, Loc 5563

⁶ Clowney, Loc 2278

evil. Their thinking could easily become similar to ours today: ‘If God is so good and powerful, then why is there so much suffering in the world? Even look at Jesus—you’re telling me he has defeated the power of evil? Dude was hung on a tree like a lynched slave! That seems like weakness, not power.’

So imagine the encouragement of seeing Jesus’ suffering not as a defeat, but as a victory.⁷

And not just victory in the sentimental way that makes you tear up at a movie, but true victory, a flood of victory. The days of Noah we know for it’s literal flood, but really, they were a flood of evil. We read in Genesis 6,

⁵ The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Genesis 6:5-8

God had the power to destroy evil. He could simply wipe everything out. And just when it seems all is lost and the hope of humankind defeated, God chose a different way. He told Noah to build an ark and invite all people to come in and be saved. But only eight people, Noah and his family, entered in. And God himself sealed the door, and the rain came down, and the flood waters rose. And they weren’t saved *from* the water, they were saved *through* the water, the suffering and destruction *had to happen* to purge the evil—but they went through it safe *in the ark*.

Do you know that when a person bets their life on the good news of Easter, he or she is entering into an ark? Not an ark made of wood. But an ark that is a person, the Person of Jesus Christ. When you see the evil not “out there” but “in here” and you run to Jesus Christ, you are taking refuge in him as sure as Noah took refuge in the ark. And the purging of evil that is to come, the flood of fire that God will soon pour out, you will only come through it safely if you are found in Christ and willing to suffer with him.⁸

That’s what Easter is about. That’s what Peter is saying here. When Jesus died and descended into the grave, he went the way we all must go so that he could experience it

⁷ Jobes, Loc 5604

⁸ Romans 8:17

for us and, one day, be present with us as we go through it.⁹ One day “at the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow in heaven and on earth and—[where?]
—under the earth”—why under the earth?¹⁰ Because Jesus went there and declared he is Lord there too—and to prove it he rose again.

And when you take refuge in Jesus, against all odds a flood of victory comes over your life. And as you follow him in obedience and are baptized as a public display of this victory, you are proclaiming the same victory to the powers of evil and the people whom they hold captive. That’s why Peter continues in verse 21,

21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 3:21

Not that the act of baptism saves you by cleaning you up, but the baptism, the flood of victory, that Jesus shares with you, it delivers you from the power of evil.¹¹ Not the pain of evil, but the *claim* of evil, past, present, and future. And that is why you can choose to suffer for doing good rather than doing evil, because when you were plunged into this flood of victory, you were also pledged into sharing everything that belongs to Jesus—and that includes his suffering.¹²

III. Because Jesus Will Destroy the Power of Evil - v. 22

Like the commitment to non-violent protests during the Civil Rights Movement, we can choose the harder, nobler road of true Christianity because we have hope that something great will ultimately be accomplished. That greater something is our third and final answer to today’s question: we can choose to suffer for doing good rather than doing evil because Jesus will one day destroy all the power of the evil.

We read in verse 22 that Jesus not only has died and risen, he also

has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. 1 Peter 3:22

⁹ Matthew Y. Emerson, “Why Holy Saturday Matters,”

http://www.centerforbaptistrenewal.com/blog/2019/4/19/why-holy-saturday-matters?fbclid=IwAR0_Af41QnrZb6A5IbEo3XuuptmOxNcvbKLWhauzndHDsY16ukbVjunBcNA

¹⁰ Philippians 2:10; Emerson

¹¹ Clowney, Loc 2392

¹² Clowney, Loc 2416

After Jesus ascended to heaven, it kicked off something that is still happening even right now as we speak, even though you don't hear it talked about much in churches today. It's called the session of Jesus, his sitting down at the right hand of God. "In the ancient world, to sit at the right hand of a king [meant] that [you] acted with the king's authority and power."¹³ Now, this doesn't mean Jesus became God—he already was. What's different now is that he sits as both God and man; in other words, he has a real body on a real throne. And God the Father has turned and said to him,

*"Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool." Psalm 110:1*

That means that every angel, authority, and power found on the side of evil *will be destroyed*. Now it's not just those under the earth who will bow at the name of Jesus, but those in heaven as well.¹⁴ And if the enemies of God under the earth will bow and be destroyed, and the enemies of God in heaven will bow and be destroyed, what do you think that means for the enemies of God on the earth who ignore or indulge the evil of sin in their hearts?

People, it is better to suffer for doing good than doing evil because Jesus will soon destroy all power of evil, and we want to be found on the side that's already guaranteed to win.

Conclusion

So, what does that mean for you today though, Easter Sunday, 2019? Well, think about what it meant for the man who wrote this letter. Peter was Jesus' best friend. And on the night Jesus was betrayed, Peter said to Jesus, "Even if [everyone else] denies you, even if I have to go to prison and to death, I will never deny you!"¹⁵ But when it came down to what it would cost Peter, as Jesus sat in chains and people began to recognize Peter, what did he do? He denied he even knew his best friend.

Fast forward just a little bit later in his life, and we get a very different picture of Peter. He's doing good to the people by sharing good news with them about Jesus. He ends up arrested and standing before the same tribunal that Jesus did. Except this time instead of lying and giving into evil by protecting himself, he said to them,

¹³ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 173

¹⁴ Philippians 2:10

¹⁵ Matthew 26:33-35; Luke 22:33

⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”...¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:9-12, 18-20

This was a totally different Peter. What changed him? Easter changed him. The reality that Jesus had died for him, rose for him, and ascended for him, that changed everything. If doing good instead of evil cost him something, who cares—he has Jesus! “No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me, from life’s first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny, no power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand, till he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I stand!”¹⁶

What this means for you, Christian, is if you're in a hostile land and someone guns you down during a morning jog for doing good, or if your own country repeals the freedom of religion and you begin to suffer more like the rest of Jesus’ church around the world, it’s not the end of the world.¹⁷ Because (here’s your chance to respond, get ready) he is risen! He is risen indeed! But more than just in those extreme circumstances, if you’re in your daily grind and you’re choosing to live awake rather than asleep, and along with the good you seek comes the pain of consciousness, it’s not the end of the world. Because (get ready) he is risen! He is risen indeed!

What this means for you, non-Christian, if you are courageous enough in the midwest/southern United States to admit you’re not a born-and-raised, card-carrying baptized believer, as strange as it might sound, this means an invitation to the good life. It’s not a life free from suffering, as you may have heard Christianity described. No, it is an invitation to embrace a faith whose symbol is a cross, whose leader is a crucified Jewish man from the first century. But if this man has risen from the dead, and

¹⁶ Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, “In Christ Alone”

¹⁷ Clowney, Loc 2084

ascended to heaven with all authority because he is truly the Son of God, then it's no longer about what it costs you, but what it cost him.

It means that this was for you. On the night he was betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and said to his disciples, "This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me." He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, "This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord's death until he returns." **Today we are announcing that Jesus Christ has died, Jesus Christ is risen, and Jesus Christ will come again.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you're a baptized believer, come and remember who you are and whose you are. If you're a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you're not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. Let's pray.

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