

Message #11

Kurt Hedlund

1 Peter

9/22/2019

## HOLY LIVING IN TOUGH TIMES

### 1 PETER 3:8-16

I.

It has been a tough summer for our congregation. We have lost a number of men who have all had important roles in the life of our church. There was Chuck Lamb and then Jerry Wood and then Bill Roush and then Mike Carter and now Vern Burk. For those of you who are newer in the congregation, Vern was an elder and adult Sunday school teacher and choir member for many years.

Death, of course, is not the only kind of suffering represented in our congregation. We have health challenges and broken families and addictions and financial pressures. As a largely older congregation, most of us have had our personal experiences with suffering. Yet we live in a culture that *New York Times* columnist David Brooks describes as **“awash in talk about happiness.”** He says that in one recent three-month period more than 1,000 books were released on Amazon on this subject. (Breakpoint, 4/16/2014)

A Christian psychologist by the name of Paul Vitz says that our culture is marked by selfism. Life is about meeting our own needs and desires. Self-gratification is the only ethical principle. He says, **“Selfist philosophy trivializes life by claiming that suffering and death lack intrinsic meaning.”** Suffering is treated **“as some sort of absurdity, usually a man-made mistake that could have been avoided by the use of knowledge to gain control of the environment.”** (*Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship*)

The Bible has a different perspective on suffering. The Apostle Peter was writing to Christians in the first century who were faced with tough times. Their difficulties were largely related to persecution for their Christian faith. But Peter’s advice to them has relevance for us.

We have seen that the apostle stresses that Christians in the face of trials must pursue holiness. Holiness means loving one another fervently in the body of Christ. It also means being in subjection to civil

government, employers, and husbands--- even when those people and institutions are unfair and unfriendly to believers. Last week we saw that holiness also means that husbands need to love their wives--- to live with them in an understanding way and to honor them.

The first part of our passage today describes what kind of character qualities are required in situations of suffering. The second part of the passage addresses the consequences that these qualities of living produce.

I.

Let's consider first, in vv. 8-12, THE CHARACTERISTICS NECESSARY FOR HOLY LIVING IN TOUGH TIMES. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE CHARACTERISTICS NECESSARY...) In v. 8 five qualities are mentioned. Verses 9-12 deal with a sixth. Peter writes in v. 8, **"Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind."**

So the first characteristic is **unity of mind**. (I. THE CHARACTERISTICS... 1. UNITY OF MIND) Literally it is "same mindedness." Often in the New Testament Christians are encouraged to be like-minded with other believers.

People in the ecumenical movement point to statements in the Bible like this to justify their attempt to unite Christian churches. The problem is that the basics of the Christian faith tend to be lost in the process. It doesn't matter to many of these ecumenicists if you don't believe in the virgin birth, the resurrection of Christ, or the inspiration of the Bible as long as you call yourself a Christian.

A month ago Suzy and I were at Glacier National Park on a Sunday. The day before we saw advertised in the place where we were staying that there would be a nondenominational service in our lodge sponsored by A Christian Ministry in the National Parks. I was not familiar with that group. But it sounded good, and we sat in on a service led by three young people. The music was OK, but the message delivered by one of the girls was about her hiking experience in the park and care of God's creation. She did not so much as mention the name of Jesus. We were disappointed. I have a hard time imagining one of the apostles of Jesus having a meeting with Christians and not mentioning once the name of Jesus. It was hard for us to have a "same-mindedness" with these three young people.

On the other hand, some Christians go to the opposite extreme and refuse to associate with other evangelical, born-again Christians if they do not believe exactly like they do on every point of doctrine. I can't imagine the apostles splitting hairs and dividing up in this way.

The Bible stresses the importance of Christians getting along with other Christians. The context here suggests that Peter wants Christians to get along with unbelievers also, as much as they can. Peter has been telling Christians how to relate to rulers and masters and husbands who are unfriendly to the gospel. We cannot have the same mind as they do because of our Christian commitment, but we can strive to have sympathy and love and humility toward them. As the Apostle Paul puts it in Romans #12 v. 18 (ROMANS 12:18), **"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."**

Look at the next three characteristics from our passage in v. 8. Our translation describes these characteristics as **sympathy, brotherly love, and a tender heart.** (I. THE CHARACTERISTICS... 1. UNITY OF MIND, 2. SYMPATHY, 3. BROTHERLY LOVE, 4. TENDER HEART) All three of these characteristics relate to love. When the heat is on a group of Christians, believers need to turn up the love--- toward one another and toward those who are giving us the heat.

Sympathy involves compassion, especially in the face of suffering. The word for brotherly love is *philadelphoi*, from which we get Philadelphia. The original Greek word for a tender heart means "quick to feel and show affection."

The apostle adds a fifth characteristic in v. 8. He speaks of **"a humble mind."** (I. THE... 1. 2. 3. 4. TENDER HEART, 5. A HUMBLE MIND) Greeks and Romans of the first century could have recognized value in the first four characteristics. But humility was a counter-cultural idea. A scholar by the name of Elliott says, **"In the highly competitive and stratified world of Greco-Roman antiquity, only those of degraded social status were 'humble,' and humility was regarded as a sign of weakness and shame, an inability to defend one's honor."** (*1 Peter*, John Elliott, p. 605) That is not to be the attitude of Jesus followers. For we follow One who humbled Himself by becoming a human being and by dying a horrible death on a Roman cross to pay the penalty for the sins of the world.

In vv. 9-12 we have described a sixth characteristic that is to be true of Christians. I will call it blessing instead of returning evil for evil. (I. THE... 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. BLESSING INSTEAD OF RETURNING EVIL FOR EVIL) Peter writes, **"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. For 'Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; 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.”**

Back in #2, beginning in v. 21, Peter cited the example of Jesus who suffered great persecution but did not speak against His persecutors. He became a blessing to all those who follow Him. Now Christians are called upon to give a blessing to their persecutors.

There are two words for “blessing” in the New Testament. The one here is a word that refers to a verbal blessing. It is the Greek word from which we get “eulogize.” It means “to speak well of someone.” The other word means “to be happy, or privileged.” It appears in the Beatitudes as well as in v. 14, later in our passage.

There are three possible ways in which people can respond to the actions of others. We can respond on a mean-spirited level by doing evil in response to good. We can behave on the normal human level by returning good for good and evil for evil. Or we can respond on the supernatural level by responding to evil by doing good. That is what Peter is calling upon Christians to do here. In the midst of suffering and persecution we are to give a blessing instead of a curse.

In the Book of Romans (ROMANS 12:14) the Apostle Paul says, **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.”** Jesus said a similar thing in the Sermon on the Mount. The reason, Peter says in our text, is so that we might inherit a blessing ourselves. We should give a blessing so that God, in turn, will speak well of us.

Victoria Ruvolo of Lake Ronkonkoma, New York, was driving to her niece’s voice recital several years ago when she passed a car driven by 19-year-old Ryan Cushing. Cushing was riding with five other teens who had just used a stolen credit card to go on a spending spree. (PROJECTOR OFF) One of their purchases was a frozen turkey, which Cushing decided to toss into oncoming traffic. It smashed into this woman’s windshield and crushed her face.

Ruvolo spent ten hours in an operating room while doctors repaired her face. When she was eventually allowed to go home, she had to spend many more months in painful rehabilitation.

The offending teenager was arrested. At his sentencing in October 2005 Victoria Ruvolo came and asked his judge for leniency. In her statement she said, **“Despite all the fear and the pain, I have learned from this horrific experience, and I have much to be thankful for... Each day when I wake up, I thank God simply because I’m alive. I sincerely hope you have also learned from this awful experience, Ryan. There is no room for vengeance in my life, and I do not believe a long, hard prison term would do you, me, or society any good. I truly hope that by demonstrating compassion and leniency I have encouraged you to seek an honorable life.”**

Ryan Cushing wept and expressed remorse for his action. Largely because of his victim’s choice to give a blessing rather than a curse, the judge sentenced him to only six months in jail. He could have received a 25 year sentence if Ruvolo had not intervened. Victoria Ruvolo died this past March. I suspect that Jesus ultimately spoke well of her. (Beliefnet, 6/30/2016, *NY Times*, 3/28/2019)

Being a biblicist and a student of the Old Testament, Peter next turns to Psalm 34 to give a reason why believers should do what he has just encouraged them to do. In Psalm 34 David talks about the experience that he had when he was fleeing from King Saul and decided to go over to the Philistines. He went to Gath, which was the hometown of the Philistine hero Goliath, who had been killed earlier by David. David felt safe there from Saul, but he was not too sure about the Philistines. He pretended to be insane so that they would not see him as a threat.

In Psalm 34 David talks about the lessons that he learned from that experience. Among other things, he says that the person who wants to get the most out of life needs to watch his tongue, stay away from evil, do good, and seek peace, because the Lord watches out for righteous people and eventually does in the bad guys.

David was faced with a lot of stress in his life. He experienced suffering and persecution. But he decided to take hold of his life and make the best of it. So Peter in v. 10 in our passage quotes Psalm 34 and says, **“Whoever desires to love life and see good days”** should avoid evil, do good and seek peace. Life can be hard, but we can choose to make it worthwhile.

People can respond to a life that has problems and suffering and death and unemployment in one of several ways: 1) An individual can decide that life is pain and drudgery. It is a burden to be carried and endured. This is the person who goes around with the attitude, “Woe is me. Life is so hard. Things are so bad for me.”

2) Or a person can look at the problems and sufferings in life and spend his life running away from them. He runs into a problem with a mate or a difficult circumstance at work or a conflict with a friend, and he or she is out the door.

3) Or a person can look at the problems and stresses that he has in life and blame others for them. My unhappiness and suffering is because of what other people have done to me. This is the angry person who sees himself as the victim of forces beyond his control.

4) Or a person who has trusted in Jesus can decide to be thankful for the good things in life and to persevere through the difficult things..

Where does this person find his or her motivation? Look at v. 12. She places her confidence in a God who is sovereign, who hears the prayers of the righteous, and ultimately punishes the unjust. This person believes that the trials and sufferings of life are not without purpose.

II.

The virtues mentioned in vv. 8-12 are not automatically demonstrated when an individual trusts Jesus as his personal Savior. They must be cultivated and developed. Times of stress and suffering can be good opportunities for individual Christians and for churches to develop them. They can also be opportunities for these qualities to have an impact upon the watching world. Thus vv. 13-16 describe THE CONSEQUENCES FOR HOLY LIVING IN TOUGH TIMES. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE CONSEQUENCES FOR...)

Verses 13 & 14 provide a heavenly perspective on suffering. Peter says, **“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.”**

(PSALM 118:6) In Psalm 118 v. 6 the author issues this challenge: **“The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”** What is the worst thing that people can do to us Christians? Well, they can kill us. But even in that situation we will be blessed. The promise of the Scriptures is that those who have trusted in Jesus will go to heaven. It is the final judgment that awaits us that should be our ultimate concern.

Most of the time when we are zealously seeking to do good, it is difficult for people to do harm to us, especially in this country. Sometimes we do encounter mistreatment. Jesus, after all, did go to the cross in spite of His zealousness to do good. But that isn't what happens most of the time in our every day life. (PROJECTOR OFF) In other times and other places there are those who do suffer for doing good.

In the 1950s Christy Wilson and his wife went to Afghanistan as teachers. Life was challenging in that primitive setting and with the dominant Muslim culture. Some of you will remember Peggy Harry from our congregation. She had a sister and brother-in-law who worked with them in Afghanistan. The Afghan government paid these people to teach in their schools. Mrs. Wilson at one point befriended a couple of blind boys in Kabul, where the Wilsons were living. She discovered that there was no organized program for teaching the blind in the entire country. So she learned braille and taught it to the two boys in their own language.

The national minister of education in that Muslim country came to visit the Wilsons once. He was so impressed when he saw the two blind boys reading braille that he described what he saw a short time later on a radio program. He also announced that all of the blind who wanted to learn how to read should go to the home of the Wilsons. The Wilsons didn't know that this open invitation was going to be made. But they made the best of the opportunity and out of it an institute for the blind was established. Eventually it included over 100 students in Kabul and 40 students in another city, many of whom became Christians through the influence of this American family.

When the Communists and the Russians took over in 1980, many leaders in government were killed, and many changes were made. But the institute for the blind was left intact. In fact, the man appointed to lead it was himself a blind Christian, converted through the influence of the Wilsons. That institute has continued in the ensuing years. In 2016 it was bombed by the Taliban. The last that I read about it, it was being rebuilt. **"Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?"** I would say that a primary consequence of holy living in tough times is the glorification of Jesus. (PROJECTOR ON---II. 1. HOLY LIVING IN TOUGH TIMES GLORIFIES JESUS) **Holy living in tough times glorifies Jesus.**

In v. 14 the apostle uses a form of Greek grammar that indicates that he is describing a remote possibility. A more literal rendering of what he says would go something like this: **"But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness--- and that usually won't happen--- blessed!"** So a second consequence of holy living in tough times is blessing for us. (II. 1. 2. HOLY LIVING IN TOUGH TIMES PRODUCES BLESSING FOR US)

The word used here for “blessed” means “happy,” or “privileged.” In what sense are we happy or privileged when we suffer for the sake of righteousness? Peter may well have had in mind what he heard the Lord Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount (MATTHEW 5:10). Beginning in v. 10 of #5 in Matthew Jesus declared, **“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (MATTHEW 5:11) Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (MATTHEW 5:12) Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”**

There is a sense of privilege and joy that can come from the knowledge that a person is suffering for Christ. These people are part of a great cause that is worth dying for. Christians can look forward to a great reward in heaven.

Peter experienced something of this blessing in Acts #5. He and his cohorts were arrested by the Jewish priests and beaten for preaching about Jesus. (ACTS 5:41) In Acts #5 v. 41 we are told, **“Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.”**

Now Peter says in our text, beginning in v. 14, **“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...”** The apostle is again quoting from the Old Testament, this time from Isaiah #8. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In #2 Peter also referred to Isaiah #8 when he was talking about Jesus as a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. In Isaiah 8 the southern kingdom of Judah is faced with a threat from the growing power of Assyria. The northern kingdom of Israel and the country of Syria want Judah to join them in fighting Assyria. So God tells Isaiah and the people of Judah that they should not fear these outside threats. Instead they should trust God.

Peter picks up on that in our passage and tells his Christian readers that they should not fear those who persecute them. Instead they should trust God. So in vv. 15 & 16 he explains that HOLY LIVING IN TOUGH TIMES RESULTS IN OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE GOSPEL. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. 2. 3. HOLY LIVING IN TOUGH TIMES...)



First, we need to honor Christ the Lord as holy. We are to set Him apart as Lord of our lives. Jesus needs to be treated as our sovereign God

When that happens, especially in tough times, people will wonder what makes us tick. When a Christian wife begins to submit to her unsaved husband, he will begin to ask questions. When an employer mistreats his Christian employee, and the employee does not respond in an angry, vindictive way, that presents opportunities for Christ to be seen. We will have an occasion to explain our Christian faith. In those rare situations where Christians are hauled into court because of their faith, we will also have an opportunity to make a defense--- to give a reason for the hope that is within us.

The Greek word for “defense” is *apologeia*, from which we get “apology” and also “apologetics,” which is the study of the defense of the Christian faith. Notice that Peter expects Christians to act as witnesses, not as prosecuting attorneys. It sometimes happens that witnessing situations degenerate into uncomfortable arguments. Our goal as believers is to give an account--- a reasoned defense--- for the hope that is within us.

We are to do this “with gentleness and respect.” (PROVERBS 15:1) As Proverbs #15 v. 1 says, **“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”** Our purpose should be not to win an argument but to see someone drawn toward Jesus.

Glenn Stanton works for Focus on the Family. He speaks at the invitation of law schools and student activity groups several times a year on college campuses on the subject of same sex marriage and parenting. (PROJECTOR OFF) Often his opponent in these college debate forums has been John Covino, a Wayne State University philosophy professor who is gay.

Because Glenn Stanton understands the importance of gentleness and respect, and because John Covino is a reasonable, thoughtful man himself, the two of them have become good friends. They have hosted each other in their respective homes. They are both passionate about their viewpoints, but they are reasonable and kind enough to maintain a good friendship. Glenn Stanton writes, **“Conflict is a curious gift because it sharpens us, demanding grace and forgiveness. Complete harmony is the exclusive domain of the members of the Godhead or solipsists** [those who are unsure that anything exists beyond their own minds]. **Someone without frictional relationships is indeed a poor soul, for we are best formed in the crucible of conflict.”** (*Christianity Today*, January, 2009)

Verse 15 says that we ought to always be prepared for these opportunities. The best thing that we can do to prepare for them is to study God's Word. On the Day of Pentecost, when Jews from many countries were gathered in Jerusalem for the feast and heard the disciples speaking in their native languages, they requested an explanation. Peter responded by making a defense for the hope that was within them. That defense took the form of an explanation of certain Old Testament passages and events. It resulted in three thousand people deciding to trust in Jesus as the Messiah. So Peter saw from personal experience how powerful a reasoned defense based upon the Bible could be. His audience was Biblically literate. Our audience is often not. So it is helpful to be aware of other arguments that may be useful. But the Bible is divinely powerful, and it is the basis for our evangelism.

In v. 16 of 1 Peter 3 the author adds, **"...having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."** The final objective standard that we have by which to judge our behavior is God's Word. But if we are studying God's Word and seeking to align ourselves with it, our conscience can also be a guide. In situations of suffering or persecution we may be tempted to yield to other pressures put upon us. But if we keep a good conscience toward the Lord and do the right thing, our good behavior will ultimately put our unbelieving accusers to shame.

The persecution that we American Christians face seldom compares to the persecution that many first century Christians faced. But we encounter tough times of our own. The challenge to all of us in these tough times is to continue to pursue those qualities necessary for holy living and to trust that God will use our faithfulness to make an impact upon the world.

Luis was a boy in Argentina who experienced tough times of his own. His father died when he was just ten. When he was twelve, a Christian teacher at his school convinced him to go to a summer camp. This is what Luis later wrote: **"My camp counselor's name was Frank Chandler. ...eventually every other boy in our tent had talked to Chandler. When he came in on the last night of camp, I knew he was coming for me!**

**"Come on, Luis," he said, 'get up.' .... We went outside and sat on a fallen tree. It was cold, and a light rain was beginning to fall. Chandler knew he had to hurry. He pulled out his flashlight and opened his New Testament. 'Luis,' he asked, 'are you a Christian or not?'**

**"I said, 'I don't think so.' 'Well, it's not a matter of whether you think so or not. Are you or aren't you?' 'No, I'm not.' 'If you died tonight, are you going to heaven or to hell?' I sat quietly for a moment, a bit taken aback, and then said, 'I'm going to hell.' 'Is that where you want to go?' 'No,' I replied.**

**'Then why are you going there?' I shrugged my shoulders. 'I don't know.' Chandler turned in his Bible and read Romans 10:9-10. 'If you confess with your lips, Luis, that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart, Luis, that God raised him from the dead, you, Luis, will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.'**

**"He looked back at me. 'Luis, do you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead?' 'Yes, I do,' I said. ... 'Luis, are you ready to confess him as your Lord right now?' 'Yes.' 'All right, let's pray.' .... I opened my heart to Christ right there, out in the rain, sitting on a log, in a hurry--- but I made my decision. I prayed, 'Lord Jesus, I believe you were raised from the dead. I confess you with my lips. Give me eternal life. I want to be yours. Save me from hell. Amen.'**

**"When we finished praying, I was crying. I gave Chandler a big hug, and we ran back to the tent. I crawled under my blanket with my flashlight and wrote in my Bible, 'On February 12, 1947, I received Jesus Christ as my Savior.'"**

(PROJECTOR ON--- LUIS PALAU) Luis Palau went on to become a great evangelist. He has spoken to large crowds all over South America. I have also heard and seen him speak in a number of Christian meetings in our country. (PROJECTOR OFF)

God has not necessarily called us as a church to be large and famous. He has not necessarily called us as individuals to be rich or famous or powerful. But He has called all of us to be faithful. He has urged us to honor Christ as holy, being prepared to make a defense to everyone who asks us. If we dedicate ourselves to that pursuit, He will accomplish His purposes with us.

We in turn will inherit a blessing. The sovereign God of the universe will speak well of us. What better tribute could we look forward to but to hear the words some day from our Savior, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."