

Intro (Section Header)

Glad you all are here // My name is _____ // Those listening online ... (hosers) ... mean that in the most loving way. Glad you can keep up with us. Look forward to having you back.

We just finished a few honest but hard looks at how we live as sojourners in particular areas of our lives.

Today is a little bit more general and feels a little less heavy ... YAY!!!

So let's jump into it.

1 Peter 3:8

8 Finally, all of you ...

Peter starts with a very strong word. "Finally ..."

He uses the word "Telos". A word meaning the final aim/goal/target.

As sojourners/citizens of heaven we are called to live toward heaven. We have a different aim.

Peter is about to give us the answer to the ultimate question: Why do I exist?

Important ... b/c how we answer that question determines what we live toward.

So, "Why do you exist?"

"Am I just a confluence of atoms through random chance that has no more greater purpose than to suck up oxygen on earth?"

Maybe that's not your answer. Maybe you have another answer. Maybe your struggling to find an answer.

Either way we are about to hear what God's purpose is.

Even if you aren't interested in that ... hey your hear ... so why not lean in.

1 Peter 3:8-9

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.

We live to bless not to be blessed.

If you are anything like me - SELFISH - you probably honed in on those last few words.

"that you may obtain a blessing."

Yes, rain down the blessings Lord!!

[praises go up ... let the blessings come down :-)]

We often approach life ... “Lord bless me ... then I will bless.”

“ Lord just let me win the lottery ... think of what the church could do with that tithe! “

... hmmm ...

Our version of this scripture is more like ... “Lord give me what I want ... and then I’ll be able to do what you want.”

Too often the things we want from God is stuff that would make life easier.

Better job / house / car.

We want the good things to flow to us.

We often don’t think about what is flowing out of us.

That would change what we pray for ...

Peter says the most things we should have is:

- Unity of mind (harmony)
- sympathy
- brotherly love
- tender heart
- humility

God says possessing those attributes is better than winning the lottery.

All of those things are other's focused and cost me something.

Think about it ... Unity of mind (harmony) ... means not demanding my own way.

Sympathy ... means I'm looking out for others ... thinking about them. Trying to understand what they are feeling.

Humility ... is not thinking less of yourself ... thinking of yourself less.

And so it changes the way we live.

When we possess these virtues we DON'T LIVE TO REPAY

...

1 Peter 3:9

V9 “Do not repay evil for evil ... or reviling (insults) for reviling (insults).”

We don't repay in kind; we respond with grace.

For to this we are called.

God called us to follow Jesus on His terms not ours.

We take the high road of love and grace.

So what does that look like?

1 Peter 3:10-12

10 For, whoever desires to love life

and see good says,

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.

In short ... Christians bless with their words and actions.

Notice there isn't any IF statements or qualifiers here.

“When you feel like it ... do good ... seek peace ... “

OR

“If people are treating you nice ... “

No ... we do those things B/C ... **“the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous.”**

Why do we RESPOND with grace rather than REPAY in kind?

B/C we live for an Audience of One.

Let that sink in ... [pause]

Your Savior's eyes are always set on you.

In every facet of our life ... school / work / marriage / parenting / rest / relaxation ... we should do it for the Audience of One.

Now you may think ... why do it for God and not for yourself or for the benefit of the other person?

Our hope is set on a different kind of blessing.

Let's think about what motivates us.

We do anything for some kind of reward, right?!

I shop, not b/c I like to shop, but I get rewarded when I purchase something I want.

I'm nice to my wife b/c I'm hoping my reward may be some 'smoochin' later on. :-)

I work hard for the reward of a raise or job security.

The point is that everything we do is attached to a hope of a reward.

But for the Christian who is living for the Audience of One our reward we hope for is different.

This isn't meant to scare us into good behavior.

That would be true if God were a harsh critic and judge.

But for Christians, saved by grace, the eyes of Jesus aren't eyes of judgment, but eyes of love.

Corrie ten Boom, Dutch Christian who survived a Nazi internment camp told a story that deeply impacted her as a teenager.

She was listening to a man from India tell his story of how Jesus saved him.

He hated the God of the Bible. Even burned a Bible to publicly display his scorn.

Three days after that he had such unrest in his soul. He was so unhappy he wanted to die.

So he decided to kill himself and find out if God was real.

Here is his account:

“I planned to throw myself in front of the train which passed by our house. Then suddenly something unusual happened. The room was filled with a beautiful glow and I saw a man. I thought it might be Buddha, or some other holy man. Then I heard a voice.”

‘How long will you deny me? I died for you, I have given my life for you.’

“Three days before, I had burned the Bible, and yet he was not angry. I was suddenly changed I saw him as Christ, the living One, the Savior of the world.”

As this Indian man described his visions of Jesus someone in the audience asked the question on everyone’s mind ... ‘What did Jesus look like?’ ... The man put his hand over his eyes. “Oh his eyes, his eyes ... they are so beautiful.”

Corrie ten Boom writes ... “since then I’ve longed to see Jesus’ eyes.”

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous ... his ears are open to their prayer.

Too often we get caught up in the difficult call to live to bless.

Or we try to motivate ourselves by putting our hope in the wrong reward.

It is not so God will give us bigger homes, better cars.

It’s the pleasure of living before the Audience of One... It’s the pleasure of knowing his face is shining on us; His loving eyes set on us; His ears open to our prayers.

Of course, we can mistake that to mean that we are guaranteed a life on easy street.

1 Peter 3:13

13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

If God's for us ... he's hearing my prayers ... his eyes are on me ... I'm living for the Audience One ... surely that means no more suffering ... right!

**Wrong! [Hey! you said this sermon was light and fun!!!
Why you gotta be like that?]**

Our hope doesn't guarantee an escape from suffering; it fuels us to keep being a blessing in the suffering.

1 Peter 3:13-17

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.**

Everyone suffers from fear and trouble.

It makes us live defensive. Think about it.

Fear-based parenting has good intentions to keep kids safe, but it is producing harmful results.

The more protections we've put around our kids the more fragile they've become.

In our attempt to eradicate suffering we've kicked the can down the road only to come up to a worse can of worms.

Example: Peanut allergies ... dangerous ... doctors told parents to avoid any trace of peanut in food for their infants.

- Schools eliminated peanut products.
- Over the years it produced more peanut allergies, and increased the severity of those allergies.

Helicopter parents ... fear of kids being kidnapped. So our kids aren't allowed to leave our sight.

Fear of kids being bullied. Kids don't experience non-policed playtime.

The data is showing us now that it is producing adult children who live in fear and dependent on adults to keep them safe from perceived dangers.

- More adult kids not leaving home.
- Increase in college counselors to meet the demands of more students experiencing anxiety and stress.

Fear of suffering drives us to live defensively. Which makes our world smaller not bigger. Which in turn feeds more fear.

What is the antidote?

You might think ... just be courageous, take risks!!!

Sure ...

But, let me tell you something even better // even truer.

Faith and hope in God's promises are the antidote to fear.

Abraham, the father of our faith ...

God called him to leave his hometown and go on a journey.

And he did. He left daddy and mommy.

He left the safety and security of the familiar.

Why? B/C he was so brave? (Wore fearless t-shirt / Canaan or Bust) :-)

No, Abraham wasn't Rambo. He hid behind his wife to save himself a few times.

He wasn't perfect ... so how did he do it?

When God called Abraham he said this ...

Genesis 12:1-3

1 “...Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 ... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

God gave Abraham a hope to put his faith in.

God called him to be a blessing.

Abraham believed in that promise. He put his hope in that promise.

When things got tough his faith and hope in God was his anchor.

It kept him from turning back.

God didn't promise him a suffering-free life.

Abraham didn't parlay the terms of the deal with God before he left.

The call of God doesn't work that way.

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther’s, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time – death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call.” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

This should change how we live out our lives. Freedom from fear!

When we are mistreated for the name of Jesus we don't become defensive.

Instead we give a reasonable defense with gentleness and respect.

When we are mistreated period, we don't react in kind (insult for insult) (accusation for accusation).

We entrust ourselves to God. We respond with gentleness and generous grace.

Story: Family whose neighbors asked their kids to stop playing our own backyard. Too loud.

They could have responded in a gangster rap'esque tirade.

But instead they chose to die to their rights. They had their kids play in the front yard instead.

Why? B/C a tirade would have created an enemy.

But the undeserved grace earned a friend. 1 week later the neighbor repented for their actions.

The reaction could have been "How dare they try to take away my right to be blessed!"

Instead they chose to be a blessing.

Living defensively builds barriers. (walls to keep others out.)
(How can we be missional then?)

Living to bless keeps an open door.

Now, that doesn't mean the results always work out well.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer who I just quoted ended up being martyred by the Nazi's for staying true to the Gospel.

Whatever your "dying" might look like we can do it with joy in a greater hope.

We can live to bless once we realize we already have every blessing we need in Jesus.

1 Peter 3:18-22

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 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.

We don't have time to get into all the nuance of this portion of Scripture.

But the headline is Christ suffered ONCE FOR SINS ... THAT HE MIGHT BRING US TO GOD.

Because of sin every person must one day enter into an unending suffering. Life without God.

BUT JESUS!!!

He came, He suffered the eternal/infinite judgment for our sins.

The justice of God the Father fell upon the Righteous Son of God.

As He stood in our place taking our sin upon himself.

The Righteous for the Unrighteous.

He lay in the grave for three days ... it look like death had one, therefore sin had one.

But he rose again and is now reigning in heaven with all power and authority.

He couldn't receive the glory of the crown until passed through the humility of the cross.

And that is our calling.

We receive the crown of life through bearing our cross today.

We enjoy the crown of fellowship with God while we are taking up our cross daily for the name of Jesus.

Our hope is that in Jesus death is defeated.

Our sins are paid for.

Eternal life is secure.

So we don't try to earn our way into heaven with good works.

We hold on to the hope that all that we need-- all blessings-- are secured in Jesus and his finished work.

In Him we have everything we need!

This frees us from living in fear and working for our blessing.

We live free to be a blessing, knowing that our blessings are complete in Jesus.

Response

Not a Christian:

- Easy to live afraid ... try and earn your way into God's blessing.
- Or deny God and deal with suffering on your own.
- How is that going?
- God is offering you a better hope.
- He is calling you to lay down your fears and pick up faith in Jesus.
- He is calling you to let go of defensive living and pick up hope in God's promises and blessing.

- God is calling you out of your spiritual hometown where you are stuck. It may feel safe and secure. But something inside is restless.
- Trust in Jesus. Put your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- I pray as you do that you will feel the face of Jesus upon you. You will experience the loving eyes of your Lord flood your heart.

Christians:

- As we respond with Communion we are reminded that Jesus calls us to come and die to ourselves.
- What does that look like to you?
- Ponder what God is calling you to die to today?
- Perhaps it's dying to the fears driving your life.
- It's responding to stepping out in faith to journey with God.
- Some of you have put up your hands already in faith to trust in God.
 - Leading CG's... attending a CG
 - Planting this church...
 - Serving on Sundays...
 - Giving your tithes and offerings even when it was inconvenient.
 - open doors/homes to neighbors
 - ... and many other ways that God only sees.
- God is calling us to His table today to remember that we are blessed in Christ to be a blessing.
- The bread and cup ... suffering for our sin ... taking away of our sin.

- Communion reminds us that in His suffering our blessings are complete and secure and waiting for us in heaven.
- We take it remembering that, believing it. In the meantime our suffering in this life is fellowship with Christ in His suffering.

PRAY