

The first feature film that Walt Disney ever produced was *Snow White* in 1937. *Snow White* is a story about a princess living with her evil stepmother. And the princess always does good. She is kind and generous and compassionate. But her stepmother is vain and spiteful and every day asks a magical mirror, “Mirror mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all.” And the mirror replies back that it is Snow White; this inner-beauty exudes out of her. So the stepmother tries to have Snow White killed. And although Snow White escapes and has a lovely time with seven dwarves, eventually the stepmother queen catches up to her and gets her to eat a poison apple, which puts Snow White into a deep, death-like sleep.

There is a happy ending of course—it is a Disney movie—but one of the great lessons built into the whole structure of *Snow White* is that there are some instances where you can choose to do the good thing at every decision point, but you still might suffer. You still might be hated. And it may even be the very goodness or kindness that actually leads you into suffering.

And isn't that true in this world? There are all kinds of suffering. Some caused by your own bad decisions. Some suffering isn't caused by anyone's decision; it is just the product of living in a broken world. But this morning Peter talks about a distinctively Christian type of suffering, suffering that comes from following Jesus, from being a Christian.

I wonder if you have ever suffered for doing good. Have you ever done the right thing, followed God's instructions, and had it not work out? You didn't get the promotion, you got ridiculed or ostracized, the relationship ended. We don't face deep and serious persecution in our part of the world as Christians very often, but certainly and increasingly we see and even experience sometimes suffering for being a Christian.

We've been looking at the book of 1 Peter for a few months now. And in this book Peter has made the argument that we, as exiles, must live differently than the world around us. We are to do good because of our love for Jesus. But what are we to do when choosing the good thing means walking into suffering? Peter tells us this morning to do good no matter what. In the first part of our passage Peter tells us how to do good no matter what, and in the second half he tells us why to do good no matter what. How and Why.

How To Do Good No Matter What

First, Peter answers the question of **how** to do good no matter what. What steps can you take to maintain a steadfast commitment to good, even when it costs you something? Peter gives us three steps. First know you are blessed.

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; (1 Peter 3:13-14a).

Peter reminds us that if you do good no matter what, you probably won't even suffer. The verb tense Peter uses here is rare and implies an unlikelihood of suffering. The reality is, most people over all time are in large agreement about what is “good.” Love for one another is good, peace is good, joy is good, compassion is good. Yes, there are exceptional people, and maybe even exceptional cultures who would disagree with statements like this. But they are just that—exceptions outside the norm.

Most people, most cultures, over most of history agree on what is good. There may be disagreements on what the loving thing to do is, but we agree that we should be loving. I think this is God's common grace on humanity. All humans have been made in the image of God and therefore have something of him in them. By God's absolute graciousness, he has restrained evil in the sinful human heart so that good, and a knowledge of what is good, is widely agreed upon. And because of this, if you do good no matter what, you probably won't suffer.

But Peter knows this is not always true. And as Christians, we will always be exiles—foreigners living in a home that is not our home, with a worldview different than the culture around us, and an idea of goodness rooted in something, or rather someone, distinct. So he says, “you probably won't suffer, but if you do suffer for what is right, you are blessed.”

What is Peter saying here? He isn't saying that “if you suffer, you will be blessed.” You will be rewarded for your suffering later. Other parts of the New Testament talk about that, Jesus talks about that, I think that is true too. But that isn't what Peter is talking about here. He says, you are blessed right now. Are you suffering for doing what is right? You're blessed.

Now, if you have ever suffered for doing good no matter what, you're probably wondering what Peter is talking about. But Peter is actually paraphrasing a Psalm. In this whole section Peter leans heavily on two Old Testament texts and is applying them to Christians. We'll get to the second in a minute, but the first is Psalm 34. It's a song that King David wrote 1000 years before Jesus, when he had been anointed King, but there was another king still on the throne. And that king, Saul, was trying to kill him, so David had to flee into the desert. Things got so bad, and he became so alone, that at one point he actually had to fake insanity to keep from being killed. In one of those great Bible verses it says that David let his spit run down his beard. And at that time of great suffering David wrote these words, “*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their prayer*” (Psalm 34:12).

It may feel like you are all alone in your suffering. That you are doing good no matter what and no one is noticing. But God has noticed. God is paying attention. God cares. And God will take your call. He has not forgotten you. You are blessed. Have confidence that you are blessed, that he is with you and attentive to you. The first step for doing good no matter what is to know you are blessed. The second step is to forget your fear.

...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, (verses 14b-15).

Peter is quoting here from Isaiah 8:12-13 which says, *"And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. 'It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread."* Peter knows that fear is often what keeps you and I from doing good. If you do good in certain circumstances, certain situations, you may suffer, and suffering is scary.

Let's be honest, in our culture, what is the highest value? If you're not sure, finish this sentence for me: "I just want my kid to be _____." Happy. Happiness is our culture's greatest value; everything you do serves that goal. But happiness and suffering seem to be polar opposites. And so for you, as a Bay Area Christian, to make a decision to do good no matter what, even if you know it might lead to suffering, is terrifying.

You are afraid of what might happen to your future if you actually made retirement decisions based on what Jesus wants for your glory years because it might not be golfing in Auburn. You are afraid what might happen to your finances if you were really as generous as Jesus talked about. You are afraid what will happen to your job if you don't fake the numbers a little bit, plus it isn't even really faking the numbers, it's more like massaging them. You're afraid of what might happen to your reputation if you refused to gossip about that woman that no one likes, and instead you stood up for her. You're afraid of what it might cost your kid if you don't pack their schedule so full of extracurriculars and study sessions that they don't have time for church, or missions, or prayer, or anything else that won't fit on Stanford's application.

Peter knows all of this. The Christians in Asia Minor are just as terrified about suffering as you are. So Peter says if you are going to continue to do good in a world where that will sometimes cause you to suffer, you have to forget that fear. How? "Revere Christ as Lord," Peter says. What he means is, you know the Lord God Almighty? The one you are to regard as holy, to fear? That is Christ. So revere Christ as Lord. Peter is applying the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:28 to Jesus himself. *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*

Forget your fear. What can other people really do to you? Christ is more powerful than all those people. You can live a fearless life as a Christian because anyone who can do anything to you is not nearly as powerful as the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, forget your fear so you can do good no matter what. And the third step to do good no matter what is to be prepared to give a reason for your hope.

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 (verses 15b-16).

I don't want to spend too much time here because these verses are pretty straightforward and clear. Peter uses the word "apology, defense" and this verse often gets used, not wrongly, as a sort of justification for apologetics. That is fine, but that isn't exactly what Peter means here. Let me tell you a quick story I heard this week to illustrate this. Years ago there was a missionary doctor in a North African country who had a reputation for subtly and winsomely sharing the good news about Jesus with many of his Muslim patients. One day a woman came in with a pretty deep gash in her arm and he was explaining how first he would need to clean out the wound and get rid of as many germs as possible. "We don't want any infection in there before we bind it up." She paused for a second and looked at him and said, "It's not just my arm, I wish I had a clean heart."

Now what would you say? If you had a degree in Muslim apologetics, you might say, "You know, the problem with Islam is that there is no atoning sacrifice for sin. If you get accepted by Allah at the end it's because you obeyed him sufficiently to be accepted. Whereas in Christianity by contrast Jesus served as an atoning sacrifice to take away all the sin and dirt in your heart." How does that sound to you? That's not what this missionary doctor said though. Instead, this doctor said: "Oh I know just what you mean. I have had such a dirty heart myself. And then I met someone who took it all away. Would you like me to tell you about him?" This is what Peter is talking about here. A gentle, respectful reason for your hope.

In order to do good no matter what you don't need a degree in apologetics, you don't need to know all the right answers and theological language, just what Jesus has done for you, with gentleness and respect. Peter says that when people see your good deeds, even those who caused you to suffer, they will be ashamed of their slander. So how can you do good no matter what? Know that you are blessed, forget your fear, and be ready to give a reason.

Why You Should Do Good No Matter What

For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (v. 17).

It's pretty straightforward because it is always better to do God's will, even if it leads to suffering, than to do evil and avoid suffering. Peter's point here is not that God necessarily wills for you to suffer, but rather that he wills that you do good no matter what, and in this broken world that might lead to suffering. But is it really better?

Peter spends the rest of our passage looking at two examples of men who suffered for doing good no matter what, and reveals that it really is better to do good no matter what, even if it causes suffering. The first example Peter uses is the obvious one—Jesus.

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 (v. 18).

Christ also suffered unjustly! But in what way was it better for Christ to do good no matter what? Christ's unrighteous suffering

brought you to God, Peter says. Jesus suffered according to God's will. Jesus said, "Not my will but yours be done." And because Jesus did good no matter what and never once faltered—always submitting himself to the authority of God and the authorities of earth, even facing a brutal and painful death—he became the ultimate sin sacrifice and opened up access to God for you. And similarly, it is better for you to do good no matter what because your unjust suffering can also bring people to God.

Now, of course you aren't the ultimate sin sacrifice, so your unjust suffering doesn't lead people to God the same way that Jesus' does. But it is sort of like this: A gold miner in California in the late 1840's knew there to be gold buried in the rock of a certain hill in the California foothills. He spent day after day working vigorously to dig a deep mine-shaft into the heart of this hill to find the gold. After a couple years of painful and tireless digging he found the gold he knew was in the mountain, ran to tell his friends and led them to the shaft that he had dug and all who knew him shared in his great riches.

As generations passed, however, and new men and women came and settled in California, the mine was forgotten by most, until only rumors of the riches were left. One man, hearing the rumors, went searching for the mine. He climbed up this hill, through trees and bramble, tripping over rocks, enduring cold spring weather as he searched for this mine. Finally he found it, and discovered it was still full of much gold, so he quickly hurried down the hill and led his friends to the great riches in the mine.

Now let me ask you—which man's suffering led people to gold? Jesus dug the mine shaft of your salvation, of a great treasure. His suffering opened a way you never could have opened on your own. But your own suffering can lead people to that treasure. Your unjust suffering, like Christ's, will bring people to God.

But Jesus is not just an example to show us how our suffering can lead others to God, but also, Christ's example frees you from the fear he just told you to forget. Peter writes, "he was put to death in the body, but made alive in the Spirit." Peter knows that the worst that any human authority can do to you ultimately is to put to death your body. But he says, look at Christ's example! He was put to death in the body; they did their very worst, and yet God raised him up. He was made alive. If you suffer unjustly, don't fear, because you too will be raised to life one day like Jesus.

Do good no matter what. Jesus did, and he was vindicated by God and brought many to God in the process, including you! But in case you aren't convinced by this example, Peter uses another, much trickier example. He says, look at Noah. Before we read this text, probably the best word to describe the next three verses is "huh?"

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, (verses 19-21).

This is a notoriously difficult passage, in fact one commentator, Karen Jobes, on this passage said, "this passage has the reputation [among biblical scholars] for being perhaps the most

difficult in the New Testament." Martin Luther, the great 16th-century reformer wrote of this text, "This is a strange text and certainly a more obscure passage than any other passage in the New Testament. I still do not know for sure what the apostle meant." Which is his verbose way of saying, "huh?". But at heart, I think Peter's point here is pretty simple, even if his argument isn't. Peter is trying to prove to you, to show you, that it is always better to good and suffer, than to do evil.

There are two pieces of background information that Peter is assuming his readers know in this text, and which his original first-century audience did know. The first is one that you may know, which is the story of Noah and the ark. In case you missed this week of Sunday school, or missed Steve Carrell's Oscar-snubbed performance in *Evan Almighty*, here is the basic story of Noah!

Noah was a man a long long time ago who lived with his family in a particularly wicked time. As people multiplied on the earth, they began to do whatever they wanted and they were disobedient to God. It got to the point where the "sons of God," who were some kind of evil-divine beings, began to have children with the daughters of men, and unrighteousness spread all over the earth. As a result of this the text says, "*The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.*"

As a result, God decided to bring his judgement down on the human race and make people account for what they had done. So God sent a great flood. But before he did, he remembered Noah, a righteous man living in an unrighteous time. And God told Noah to build an ark for he and his family. So Noah built this ark, and as he did all his neighbors ridiculed him for laboring to build this ridiculous ark that God told him to build. But when the waters of judgment came down from the sky and flooded the whole earth, Noah and his family were saved. The waters of judgment that destroyed the unrighteous saved Noah by lifting the ark up above the water.

The other piece of background information that you may not have heard of is called 1 Enoch, and it is an apocryphal (meaning, non-biblical) book written about the time of Noah. Even though this book isn't in the Bible, many Christians knew a lot about this book, especially in Asia Minor, where one tradition had Noah's ark eventually landing as the waters receded. And remember, Peter is writing to Christians in Asia Minor. Included in 1 Enoch is a discussion of these "sons of God," the demonic spirits from the story of Noah. In the book they are called "the Watchers" and it is said that at the flood they had been put into prison in the underworld. Look again at verse 19: "*After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—*"

Christ went to this prison after his death and proclaimed to these spirits his victory and authority over all things. When Jesus died, they thought they had finally won, that Satan had defeated God and they would finally be free to create havoc in the world again. But when that prison door opened it was not Satan coming to open the doors, but Christ who came to declare his victory over death and his dominion over all things! Christ not only suffered to bring you to God, and was made alive to ensure

your resurrection, but he also won victory and authority over all powers, no matter how evil or ancient they may be. Therefore, again, you can do good no matter what! Because ultimately every authority is under the authority of Christ.

But Peter goes on in verse 20 and continues to point to the example of the Noah story as evidence that it is always better to do good no matter what. It turns out that Noah is the perfect example here. Noah suffered the ridicule of those around him for doing good. But God did not forget Noah and his family, even though there were only a few of them. Rather, he used the vehicle of judgement to be their salvation.

The same is true for Christians today. You might suffer ridicule for doing good. And though there aren't many who have committed their lives to God here in the Bay Area, he has not forgotten you either. Instead he has used the vehicle of judgment and death to save you by breaking the curse of death. In making this argument Peter compares the waters that saved Noah to the waters of baptism. Look again at verse 20: *"In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also."*

If you've been at CPC for a while you know that we believe the Bible, but also that we don't believe baptism, or any other religious act for that matter, saves you. We believe that salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone. But you could say, and some do, it says right here, "baptism saves you." But does it? When you look at the context you can see Peter is actually saying the exact opposite. I wish I had more time for this; as I was researching for this sermon I found that many people spend a whole sermon on this. But let me point out two parts of his argument that reveal that Peter doesn't think baptism, the religious act of dunking someone under water, saves you. Peter's next line says, *"not the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God."*

The word used here for "dirt" actually refers to "moral filth" and the word for "body" is actually the word "flesh," that Paul uses elsewhere in contrast to the Spirit. What Peter is saying is that the waters of baptism don't wash away your moral filth once and for all; that's not how they save you. Rather, baptism is a pledge of a clear conscience before God. Salvation and baptism aren't just a one-time event; it's a pledge to God that you intend to live a life with a clear conscience, by the grace of Jesus Christ. It's a pledge to do good no matter what. Baptism isn't about the removal of moral guilt from your flesh; that happens when God imputes his righteousness to you at the moment of salvation.

But look at the very end of verse 21 as well. Peter says that *"[baptism] saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."* That word *through* was recently used by Peter; it's the word *dia*. In verse 20 Peter says that Noah was saved *dia* water, and the parallel that Peter sets up is that you are saved not *dia* baptism, but *dia* the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' resurrection saves you from the destruction of death and it gives you an opportunity for

new life. Baptism symbolizes this. When you get baptized you get dunked under the waters of judgement to symbolize your death, but you are then raised out of that judgement into new, resurrection life with Jesus.

Again, I don't want to get bogged down here. Peter's argument is that Noah is a perfect example for us because just as he and his family were saved from judgment and given new life in a sense in a sinless world, so too you have been saved from judgment and been given the ability by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to be done with sin.

Peter tells you this morning to do good no matter what. Know you are blessed. Forget your fear. Be prepared to give a reason for your hope, because it is always better to suffer for doing good than to do evil.

At the end of the movie *Snow White*, the princess is duped into eating a poison apple that causes her to fall into a deep, death-like sleep. When the animals and dwarves discover this they chase the evil queen away and as she tries to crush her pursuers with a boulder a strike of lightning causes her to fall to her death. But though the queen is dead, Snow White seems to be also. So the dwarves lay her on a table, too raptured with grief to bury her body. And Prince Charming comes along and in his grief, kisses Snow White. And when he kisses her, the curse is broken and Snow White wakes up and is raised to life and they live happily ever after.

Friends, Walt Disney may not have had this passage in mind when he produced *Snow White*, but he was telling our story. Like Snow White you might suffer for doing good. And like Snow White you were duped into eating the fruit of sin you should have left alone. So, like Snow White you lay under the curse of death. But like Snow White that curse has been broken. Not by a gentle kiss, but by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By his death and resurrection he has opened your grave and ripped you from the clutches of death. He has broken the gates of Hell and pulled you out. He has raised you to new resurrection life, a life without the plague of sin so that Peter can say in 1 Peter 4:1, *"you are done with sin!"*

So you are free to do good no matter what, even if you suffer. You can submit to unjust authorities and you can continue in love, and compassion, and humility no matter what might happen, because you know who is really in authority. You know that when Christ was raised from the dead verse 22 quickly followed. *"He went into heaven and is at God's right hand- with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to him!"*

That one day every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess—even those of long forgotten primordial evil spirits, even those who persecute and mistreat you, even those who use their authority for injustice—will declare that Jesus Christ is Lord. So friends, no matter what, do good.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC South. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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