



Good morning North Campus. My name is Neal Benson and I'm the Foster City Campus Pastor. Many of you know that Rob, your pastor, and I have known each other for almost thirteen years. Rob and I served at a church together in Las Vegas. One Sunday night we had planned an outdoor baptism at a local pool. It was a beautiful May evening; perfect for a baptism service. We had set up a small sound system and our worship leader just led our church in a few songs. After that Rob took the microphone to talk about baptism and the decision that a number of people standing behind him were about to make. He was sharing about baptism, commitment to Christ, and the good news of Jesus. Right about this time a disgruntled neighbor walked into the pool, came over to Rob, grabbed the mic and pushed him out of the way. It was crazy!

The man started yelling into the mic that we weren't supposed to be there. The lifeguards froze in shock. The people getting baptized had no clue what was going on. Thankfully we had a few police officers who attended our church and they stepped in. If my memory serves me right, the man was arrested that night. Rob was given the choice to press charges against him. Do you know what Rob did? All he asked was to share the love of Christ with him.

I don't know if this man surrendered his life to Christ or how the story ends; you could talk to Rob about it later. This encounter reminded me that people need to hear the truth of Christ and see the love of Christ. Rob didn't respond with violence. Rob modeled what Jesus told the disciples about turning the other cheek. Rob's heart was to share the love of Christ in word and action. How would you respond if someone did to you what was done to Rob? How do you respond when people smirk at you for following Christ? What happens inside your soul when the people you love ridicule you for loving the Lord? Would you get physically violent or respond by sharing the hope of Christ?

Grab your Bible and open it up to 1 Peter 3. We continue our series through the New Testament letter of 1 Peter called Exiles. We're about halfway through the book and this morning we're going to talk about the opportunity believers have to share the hope they have within and Christ's victory. Peter writes this letter to believers who are scattered throughout Asia Minor, or modern-day Turkey. He wants to encourage them to live for Christ and stay strong in the commitment they've made no matter what they encounter. Earlier in the letter Peter wrote this. *"Dear friends, I*

*urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us"* (1 Peter 2:11-12). Peter encouraged the people to abstain from sin and live a godly life. For the last month we've talked about different aspects of life and how these words apply to roles we find ourselves in. These words are still going to apply to what we talk about this morning.

### **Our Opportunity to Witness with Our Words**

Peter is going to start off by letting the people know they have an opportunity to show the love of Christ with their words.

**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 (1 Peter 3:13-15a).**

Peter has moved to the central issue of the rest of the letter: the issue of Christian suffering. The question in verse 13 is closely related to the previous verses, especially 11 and 12. In fact, the NIV omits the Greek word *καί*, meaning "and" or "but." If the NIV kept that word in the text we would have a better connection to the previous verses. The words of Peter here express what the Apostle Paul said to the church in Rome when he told them that *"if God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Rom. 8:31).

But if you do suffer for what is right, you are blessed. An understanding of the Greek language helps us better read what Peter is saying. Peter is not saying suffering is persistent but that suffering will come for a Christ-follower. At this point in history, I don't think Christians were being martyred for denying the deity of Caesar. That wave of persecution was soon to come, but it hadn't at this stage. These words are good for our church today; the time will come when we face more persecution for being Christ-followers. Peter wanted to prepare the church for this.

Christians must exchange our fear of men for the fear of the Lord. I wonder if, as Peter was writing this encouragement, he thought back to sitting on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. As he sat on the southern facing slope and listened to Jesus teach, he would have heard a similar instruction. *"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*

*Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you*" (Matt. 5:10-12). There are believers across the world who are threatened by their neighbors for their faith in Christ. Some of you might be passed over for a promotion because of your faith in Christ. You might be rejected by your family for loving Jesus. Maybe you've been forgotten by your friends because you trust Christ.

Peter knows about suffering for Christ. Peter is the man who denied Jesus three times at the unjust midnight trial. Peter is also the man who stood in the Temple a few months later and boldly preached the name of Jesus to the crowd. He did this after healing a man in the name of Jesus on the way to the Temple for the afternoon time of worship. Do you think Peter was tagged in Instagram photos for his sermon or interviewed by *Preaching Today*? No! He was arrested for speaking about the name of Jesus and thrown into prison for the night (Acts 4:3).

His life experience uniquely qualified him to write about persecution and to encourage others to revere Christ as Lord in their heart. The Greek breaks up verse 15 with a period but the flow would be more literally read: "Set apart, the Lord, the Christ in your heart ready always for answer." It can be easy to interpret this to mean the area of our life that no one sees, but this is incorrect. We need to interpret the heart as the part of our life where everything flows from. That is why the writer of Proverbs said to protect your heart because everything we do flows from our heart (Prov. 4:23). When a person reveres Christ as Lord in his or her heart it comes out.

Peter was aware that if you and I revere Christ as Lord we will be ready to give an answer to the hope we have within. Peter is not referring to a judicial case that could come against a Christ-follower but to everyone you come in contact with. The exhortation here is instructive: Peter wants all believers to have solid intellectual grounds for believing the Gospel. Notice also that he uses the word "hope" and not "faith." There is hope in the Gospel. Our words have the power to bring hope to the hurting and desolate.

About three years ago I met a new guy at our Foster City Campus. I was talking with him in the lobby and we exchanged emails to set up a lunch with each other. Emails were sent and it was going to be three weeks until we could meet. God had other plans though. That week my daughter Leah was starting preschool. I went on Wednesday to drop her off for the first day and who was there? It was Marco. The man I had met at church on Sunday was dropping his daughter off also. Marco and I began meeting each month and talking about the hope there is in Christ. Marco was interested in Christ but wasn't ready to commit.

After about nine months of meeting we were sitting in front of Philz Coffee in downtown San Mateo when Marco shared his

fear of death with me. Another dad in our girls preschool had just passed away. Marco was frightened of death. As we sat outside drinking our coffee, I shared the Gospel with him by using the Bible app on my phone. When I was done I asked Marco if he wanted to trust Christ. Right there he prayed to receive Christ as his Savior. After we prayed I could see a physical change in his countenance; he finally had hope!

Who has God placed in your life that you can share this hope you have in Christ? God will give you opportunities to witness with your words; you need to be ready. If you've recently placed your trust in Christ you don't have to know everything, you can share what God has done in your life. If you've been a Christ-follower for a while, don't give up on sharing the hope of Christ with others. If you're not a Christ-follower yet I encourage you to think about surrendering to Christ and finding the hope you're probably looking for. It might involve suffering but the hope of Christ is eternal and His blessings unending.

### **Our Opportunity to Witness with Our Life**

Bold words for Christ won't impact the world if they are not supported by a consistent life.

**"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" (verses 15b-17).**

I like to think of the second half of verse 15 as an asterisk to the first part. We can revere Christ in our heart and be ready to give an answer but the tone and context of how that answer is given is a game changer. If you're going to share the Gospel with your words, your body language and tone need to match the love of Christ. Listen to what the scholar Karen Jobes says: "The humble and respectful testimony of believing Christians defeats the malicious talk of those who would malign their faith."

If you're a Christ-follower, it's weird to think that people are watching how you live your life, but they are. Your neighbors, family members, friends at school and business partners are watching how you live your life. Peter talks about living with a clear conscience so that no one has any reason to say anything bad about you. Even if they do talk about you behind your back they will be convicted because you are living such a good life!

Conscience has been defined as "a person's inner awareness of the moral quality of his actions." Some of you are thinking of Jiminy Cricket. Your conscience can be compared to a window that lets the light of God's truth into our light. When you start disobeying God that window gets dirtier and dirtier until light no longer shines in. When you have a clear conscience you can filter the negativity and live a life that will cause others to desire Christ.

It takes work to keep our conscience clear because there are so many things vying for our attention. A clear conscience before God will help you have a better witness to those around you.

Allow these verses to serve as a mirror to your life. Place these verses up to your life and ask yourself how you are doing. I did this. Just this week my wife had jury duty. We all know how much we love jury duty. When I found out I was upset because I needed to write this sermon and jury duty was getting in my way but turned out to be a great thing for me. I was able to spend part of Thursday morning with my son. During this time we walked to the local coffee shop by my house and if you've ever walked with a two-year-old, it was a slow walk!

While we were walking at the pace of a two-year-old I found myself feeling internally frustrated and wanting to move quicker. The Holy Spirit convicted me and asked: "Why are you in such a hurry?" I processed the question the whole way home and concluded that I've missed many opportunities to share Christ because I'm so busy. I think my schedule is more important than God's timing and that is wrong. Do you ever feel like you're living life at such a rapid pace you're missing opportunities to love those around you and show the love of Christ?

If the Holy Spirit is convicting you I invite you to repent of your actions that don't honor God. Repentance, contemplation and knowing God's word have been great tools to keep my conscience clear. The great author C.S. Lewis once wrote: "We are mirrors whose brightness is wholly derived from the sun that shines upon us." This part is hard. That might be why Peter talked more about suffering. You will suffer as a Christ-follower. But Christ suffered for you also. As Jesus prepared for His crucifixion, He told His disciples they would have troubles in this world (John 16:33). Jesus also promised that He would always be with you during every situation you encounter (Matt. 28:20b). When you suffer, you are not alone. The power of the Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen you!

Peter wants the believers to live in such a way that the unbelievers around them will take notice. He is not asking them to shrink back and assimilate into the society around them. Instead, he is encouraging them to live lives of gentleness and respect. In the summer of 1805, a number of Native American chiefs and warriors met in a council at Buffalo Creek, New York. They gathered to hear the gospel presented by Mr. Cram from the Boston Missionary Society. After the sermon, a response was given by Red Jacket, one of the leading chiefs. Among other things, he said, "Brother, you say that there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, then why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the Book?"

He went on to say, "Brother, we are told that you are preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors.

We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Native Americans, we will then consider again of what you have said."

Your commitment to Christ can be the catalyst that invites the people around you to trust in Christ. It can be what invites them into an eternal relationship with God and they will glorify Him! We all need to engage with people who have yet to trust in Christ as their Savior. This requires living such a good life that those around you are going to want to know more about the God who changed you.

## **Christ's Victory Over Suffering**

We've talked about sharing that hope with our words and life, now let's look at Christ's victory as described in the last five verses of chapter 3.

**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 (verses 18-22).**

There's much we could say about this portion of Scripture, especially verses 19 and 20. I'd like to quote the great theologian Martin Luther on these two verses in particular: "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." These verses must have made sense to the original audience but for us they can be confusing. In these last verses let's briefly look at Christ's victory and how we can participate in that through baptism.

**Christ's Victory.** There is progression that occurs here: Christ was put to death, He was made alive, He went and now He is at the right hand of God. Christ suffered once for sin. It wasn't His sin that placed Him on the cross; it was the sin of all mankind that Christ bore on the cross. Christ paid for your and my sin. Our debt has been paid in full. Persecuted and suffering believers need to remember both the humiliation and exaltation of Christ.

Christ is more than an example to us, He is a substitute for us. Peter says literally, the righteous (singular) for the unrighteous (plural). Christ alone stands in the place of all sinners. His purpose for this was to bring you closer to God. Apart from the

saving work of Christ there is no hope for anyone. As the passage goes on, Peter's description of Christ's victory is made clear. By His death, Christ won life for each of you. Christ's death was not the defeat, it was the victory! Those who were far off are now brought near. Those who cursed now worship. Those who rejected are now accepted. Those who were lonely are now welcomed into the family of God through Christ's victory. We get to celebrate this victory daily!

**Participation in Baptism.** Let me share a way you can participate in this victory. If you have given your life to Christ but have not been baptized yet, will you think about making that next step in your walk with Christ? Baptism is a great way to publicly declare your commitment to Christ. Baptism is an outward expression of an inward change. Now baptism is a step in drawing near to God.

Baptism does not save you; *"... he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,"* (Titus 3:5). Paul made that known to Titus and Peter wanted to make sure that his original audience knew that they were saved by the resurrection of Christ. This is the same for you; you are only saved by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. If you haven't been baptized I invite you to get baptized right here on Easter. What a better way to celebrate the victory of Christ than participating in baptism on the day Christ conquered death!

In this whole passage Peter continues to encourage the believers who are being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. Peter writes about two ways we can share the hope we have within and ends with the victory that Christ already has. It seems that Peter is encouraging the believers in Asia Minor to do good no matter what. We can apply that same encouragement to our lives today!

A few years ago I was able to visit the country of Rwanda. As many of you know Rwanda experienced a horrible genocide in 1994. If you're not familiar watch the movie *Hotel Rwanda* and you can feel the pain (watch the movie at your risk though). We

visited the country just months before the 20-year anniversary of this tragic killing where nearly a million people lost their lives. Many of the lives lost were Christ-followers. During my time in Rwanda I connected with a man named Franc. Franc came into Rwanda just days after the genocide concluded. He shared graphic stories of the state of the country upon his arrival.

Franc was almost thirty years old when he returned to Rwanda. While helping to rebuild the country he met believers who showed him the love of Christ. They spoke about the goodness of God in the aftermath of a horrible situation. He was perplexed at how they could have such hope in a God that would allow this much violence. Their words and actions won Franc to Christ. He saw, with his own eyes, the victory that Christ had conquered the grave and changed their lives.

Over twenty years later Franc is a pastor and ministering to people. The hope of Christ changed his life. Instead of rebuilding the country physically, now he is rebuilding the country spiritually. He is helping the broken find healing. He is helping the lost to be found. He is introducing the captives to the only One who can break their chains. Earlier this month Franc came to the States for a visit and I was able to have lunch with him. As I looked in his eyes, I again saw the hope he has in Christ.

Suffering can be one of the greatest shaping tools for our lives and suffering can be one of the greatest growth motivators for the local church. If God could redeem and rebuild Rwanda, imagine what God could accomplish on the Peninsula. Imagine what God could do through a group of people who are committed to sharing the Gospel with their words and actions. Imagine how Christ could help your neighbor, heal your marriage, interest the lives of young people, calm the angry hearts of fighting families. God is in the business of changing lives. God can have bible studies where there was once brutality. God can redeem marriages. God wants us to be agents of change right now!

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

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