

SERMON 14th JUNE 2020
1 Peter 3: 13-22

Friends:

It is said that the Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, so “feared” for his safety that his residence in Moscow contained 8 bedrooms. Each night Stalin chose a bedroom at random to ensure no one knew exactly where he was sleeping.

- What does “faith” offer for those who struggle with “anxiety”? How ‘should Christians respond to “fear”? How can we “avoid” a “default” response of “worry” to things that make us “afraid”?
- The Bible’s “consistent” ‘message’ is; “When I am “afraid”, I put my trust in You!”
(Ps. 56:3)
- It’s “okay” to fear “coronavirus”!
- But I also “want” to say: -
“Be “afraid”, but “don’t give way to fear”!”
- “Fear: is one of God’s “good” “gifts” to us!
- “Fear of God” is a spiritually “healthy” fear! Living in awe of and submitting to the King of Heaven is a good and holy thing to do!
- “Rapid response fear” is our ability to “react” in a moment of danger! Think of a parent who spontaneously leaps into action to protect their child from harm! This is a healthy fear!
- God “designed” us with the ability to be “afraid” because He loves us and wants to protect us!

Do I “claim” to understand “this pandemic”? Not at all!

- “Until” we’re on the other side, we may never fully understand why God would allow this trouble to enter our lives!
- But we know who God is!
- We know what He can do!
- We know what He has promised!
- We know that He is the same “yesterday, today and tomorrow”!
- In this moment of global pandemic, don’t let your meditation be dominated by “fear” so that you become “God forgetful”!
- “Yes” do all you can to protect yourself and others: but “most of all” never stop fearing God!

- Verses 13 & 14
“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”!
- Peter has moved to the “issue” that is central for the rest of the letter: the “issue” of Christian suffering!
- Peter “shows” us how the “love of God” turns the problem “upside down”!
- Christians are “free” from the need of “vindication”, and “filled with humility as heirs of grace”!
- “Suffering” is an “opportunity” to meet “evil with good”, and “cursing with blessing”.
- Peter is “not” saying that Christians have “better chances” of “escaping persecution”!
- Peter is “assuring” them that “under” God’s care and blessing; no “evil” can befall them!
- Peter’s words express Paul’s affirmation:
“If God is for “us”, “who” can be “against” us?”
(Rom. 8:31)
- The “psalmist” had the “same conviction”:
“In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can “mortal man” do to “me”?”
(Ps. 56:4)

Friends:

No matter what is “happening” around us or within us, we are to put our “trust in God”!

- “However” we live in a ‘broken and imperfect’ world so there is a “BUT” in this statement!
- Verse 14:
But even if you should suffer.....
- “No harm” can come to us at “last”!
- God’s vindication and protection will “preserve” the heirs of his blessing!
- We are “eternally” safe in God’s hands!
(1 Cor. 10:13)
(2 Thess. 3:3)
(John 10:28)
- Christ “prayed: that the Father would “protect” His own from the “evil one”!
- But “Jesus” did “not” pray that they be taken out of the world!
(John 17:15)

- Jesus warned his disciples:
"In this world you will have "trouble". But take heart, I have overcome the world!"
(John 16:33)

Friends:

As "believers" we should "not" think it "strange" that we "endure" "persecution"!

- We "haven't" experienced that much [persecution in Australia – but it might come!]
- "Suffering" is "not" the "opposite" of blessing!
- Jesus had 'declared' those to be "blessed" who "suffer" for 'righteousness'!

Friends:

'Rejoice' and be 'glad', because "great" is your "reward" in Heaven!

(Matt. 5:12)

- Verse 14:
"Do "not" fear their threats, do "not" be frightened".
- Since God is "for us" and will "bless us", there is no reason to 'fear man'; "nor be troubled" by any difficult circumstance may we face during our life on this earth!

Friends:

Who can really harm us if God will 'bless us'? "No One"!

- What can they "take away" from us if God will bless us?
- "Nothing"!
- We will "probably" "suffer" as Christians in "this world" but that suffering is "slight and temporary" "compared" to the eternal "inheritance" that "awaits us"!
- The 'worst thing' that can happen to us is that "we die" and "receive" our "promised heavenly inheritance"!
- Can you "imagine" how "energized" Christians would be if we "only" believed what Peter is "saying"!
- How would your 'life', 'conduct' and 'words' be different if you really did "not fear anything" because you knew that the "worst" that can "happen" "cannot happen": that you "cannot" lose God's love for you!
- So the "alternative" to "fear" is to focus attention on someone else: **(V5)** "But in your "hearts revere" Christ as LORD!"
- We are to treat Christ as holy: May His Name be "reverenced"!

- Through “thick and thin”, keep your “hearts at attention” in “adoration” before “Christ”!
- When we “set apart” “Christ as Lord” we “believe” that “Jesus”, not one’s human “opponents”, is “truly in control of events”!
- To have such “reverence in your hearts” is to maintain “continually” a deep-seated inward confidence “in Christ” as reigning “Lord and King”, who even as we speak has angels and powers “subject” to Him! **(V22)**
- “So” when we “fear” “Christ” like this, we won’t fear man and we’ll be “free” to make a “defense” to “anyone” who asks us for a “reason” for the “hope” that is “in us”!
- Peter is ‘preparing’ us for the “possibility” that in the “midst” of Christian suffering our “prosecutors” may ask us to give a “reason” for the “hope” we have – that is , why we believe what “we” believe!

Friends:

“Fear” man will “keep us “quiet”, God’s “love” will “open our mouths!”

- “Tim Keller” says:
“the self-forgetful person would never be hurt particularly badly by criticism! It would not ‘devastate’ them, it would not ‘bother’ them. Why! “Because” a person who is devastated by criticism is putting too much value on what “other” people think; on “other peoples” “opinions”!”
- Verse 15:
But we are “not” to let our “boldness” lead to “arrogance”!
- Peter warns that we “respond” with “gentleness and respect”!
- In “dealing” with those who ‘oppose and oppress’ us, we are to “respond” without “harshness” and we are to be mindful of God!
- Christians should be “prepared” to give an “answer” (“apologian” is the Greek).
- “Apologetics” deals with answering “critics” who ‘oppose’ or ‘question’ the revelation of God in “Christ” and the “Bible”!
- Here are “5” apologetic “questions” you need to think through!
 1. Does God exist?
 2. Is God good?
 3. Is the Bible trustworthy?
 4. Did Jesus rise from the dead?
 5. What is the gospel?

- “Since” the questioning is concerning the “hope of Christians” that they have; Peter is “assuming that this inward hope” results in lives so noticeably “different” that unbelievers are “prompted” to “ask” “why” are you so “joyful”, “why” are you so at “peace”, “why” are you so optimistic about the future?

Friends:

Peter is ‘saying’ when we are “under “attack” as believers”, we can turn these confrontations “into” “occasions” for “witness”!

- “Edmund Clowney” said for the Christian faith, a strong “offence” is the best “defense”; “indeed”, it is the “only defence”!
- We “Christians” “defend” our “faith” by “proclaiming the “gospel””, declaring the reality of the resurrection of Jesus in the plan and power of God!
- Paul says that which is foolishness to the Greeks and an offence to the Jews is the “saving wisdom” of God!

(1 Cor. 1:23)

- Verse 16:
“Keeping a “clear conscience”, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander!”

- Bold words will not honour the LORD if they are “not supported” by a “consistent” life!
- The lives of believers must “reflect” the gospel message to those outside the church!
- This “consistency” of life “outside” the church must also be “evident” in the “human heart”!
- The “witness” of a “good conscience” is crucial for the witness of a good word!
- The apostle Paul said this standing before Governor Feliz:
“So I strive always to keep my “conscience clear” before God and man!”

(Acts 24:16)

- What is “conscience”?

“Conscience” has been “defined” as a person’s “inner awareness” of the “moral quality” of his or her “actions”!

- The “presence” of the “Holy Spirit” in a believer brings his or her “conscience” before God with radical results!
- The Christian’s “conscience” is informed and reshaped by the “light of God’s righteousness”!
- The Christian “conscience” is “sensitive to “sin”!”

- On the “other hand” “because” God is Lord of the “conscience”; we as believers are delivered from “false guilt”, and from the “condemnation” of sin that God has forgiven!
- In “this verse” Peter is speaking of our “clear conscience” as obedient believers “rather” than simply as forgiven sinners!
- Having a “clear” or “good” conscience does “not imply” that “sinless perfection is possible”!

Friends:

Aim to have a “clear conscience” before God!

- How to “achieve” this?
- “Avoid” conscious or willful “disobedience” to God throughout each day!
- Practice “immediate” repentance and prayer for forgiveness and cleansing whenever you become aware of “any sin” in your life!
- Verse 16:
“..... so that those who speak maliciously against your “good behaviour” in Christ may be “ashamed” of “their slander!”
- Those who hear us with “either” be ashamed “now”, repenting of their actions and trusting Christ as their hope “OR” they will be “put to shame” on the day Christ returns!
- Verse 17:
“So Peter ‘reaches’ his counter-intuitive “conclusion”:

“For it is “better” if it is God’s will, to “suffer” for doing “good” than for doing “evil!”

Friends:

It is “better” to speak of Christ, “whatever the cost”, than to “deny” Him!

- It is “better” to live with Christ as LORD and be “persecuted” than to live in “comfort” and “never” live or speak for Him!
- Verse 18:
“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!”
- “A. W. Tozer” said:- “the scriptures teach us that if a person is “not redeemed” by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, an acceptable sacrifice to God; he certainly will “spend eternity” in Hell!”
- Peter’s “aim” in this letter and also in these “difficult verses (**VV 18 to 22**) is to “encourage” us to “remain” “faithful to God in “unjust” suffering!”

Friends:

Whenever we “suffer” for being believers we are “not along” in that suffering!

For “Christ” also suffered to the “point” of being “put” to “death”!

- “Yes”, we may “suffer”, we may even “die for our faith”, “but” Jesus has “already” “walked that road”; the Righteous One “dying for the unrighteous”!
- Jesus “death” was an example for all of us to “follow” – “BUT” at the same time, His death was “unique and unrepeatable”!
- Jesus’ “suffering” was “once for sins”, Jesus who “never” sinned; satisfied the wrath of God by standing in the place of sinners; and received their punishment, “in order” to bring “rebels to God”!

Friends:

It’s true that Christ “paid the price” for our salvation; “but” there is still a “cost” we must “each pay”! Don’t “ever” think the Christian life is a “free ride”!

(Lk 14:33)
(Matt. 10:38)

- “However” Jesus “path” was not merely to the “cross”; but “through” the cross!
- “Suffering and death” are “NOT” the “last” word!
- Jesus was put to “death” in the “body/flesh” but made “alive” in the “Spirit”! **(V18)**
- We “Christians” will “die in the flesh”, “judged in the flesh”, because we were born on Adam; “BUT” in Christ we shall be made “alive”!
- So when we “die in the flesh” our natural body is buried in the ground. “But” at the “resurrection” it will be “raised” as a “spiritual, incorruptible body”!
- Peter is saying “here” in **(V18)** that Jesus was born in the flesh, as we are, though without “sin”, died in the flesh, the natural body!
- Jesus was buried, as we all will be.... But then Jesus was raised in the spirit, “that is”, made alive in the realm of the spirit with an incorruptible, spiritual body!

Friends:

Our Christian “hope” is that “one day” will receive a “body” that will never “decay”, feel “pain” or “die”!

- So “Peter” has traced the path Jesus “blazed for us”. It took him to suffering and death and then to resurrection!
- Next, Peter says, Jesus went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits! **(V9)**

- Sometimes we “come” to a Bible passage that’s very hard to understand; **(VV 19-22)** is “one such” passage!
- As a result there are many different “interpretations” of this passage among Bible loving and believing followers of Christ!
- This still leaves us with the question: Who are the “spirits in prison” and “what did Jesus proclaim to them”?
- Verse 20 gives us the “reason for their “imprisonment”!

“Because they were “disobedient” long ago when God waited “patiently” in the days of “Noah” while the ark was being built!”

- What were the spirits in prison?
- Unbelievers who have died; Old Testament believers who have died or fallen angels?
- What did Christ preach?
- 2nd chance for repentance, completion of redemptive work or final condemnation?
- When did He preach?
- In the days of Noah; between his death and resurrection OR after his resurrection?

Friends:

This is “my humble opinion”, for “what it’s worth”!

- By “saying” in **(V9)** that Christ “went and preached”, rather than just saying that “he preached”; Peter “suggests” that Christ did not stay in Heaven but “went” to where people were disobeying, and there preached to them through the “lips of Noah”!
- The “content” of this preaching was the “gospel”! The good news of salvation: the “need” to “repent” and turn to “God as Saviour”!
- “Later” on in 2nd Peter we learn that “Noah” was a “preacher of righteousness”, in fact, Noah was the first “evangelist” in the Bible.
- Even when Noah wasn’t saying anything, his labor on the Ark would have been a witness!
- The writer of Hebrews says in “Chapter 11, Verse 7”:
“By “faith”, Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.
- By his “faith”, he condemned the world and became “heir” of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith”!

- The “message” of the prophets in the Old Testament, the message of John the Baptist, the message of Jesus and the apostles is always the “same”: “repent”, stop disobeying God and return to God as Saviour and Lord!
- Noah “faced” the same “circumstances” that Christians face today!
- Noah and his family were a “minority” surrounded by “hostile unbelievers”, so were Peter’s readers, so are we!
- Noah was “righteous” in the “midst” of a wicked world! We too must live a righteous life even if no one else does!
- Noah “witnessed” boldly to those around him!
- We too are called by Jesus to be witnessed to those around us, being willing to suffer, if need be, to bring others to God!

(Matt. 28)

- Noah “realized” that “judgment” was coming soon on the “world”, that’s why he was building an ark!

Friends:

We too must be ready for Christ’s “second coming”; and preach Jesus Christ alone as the “ark” of eternal salvation!

- At the “time” of Noah, God was patiently waiting repentance from unbelievers before bringing judgment on the world!

(2 Peter 3: 9-10)

Friends:

One of the greatest traits of God is His “patience”!

- Our God is “patient” with “unbelievers”, He doesn’t want anyone to “perish” without Him: but “desires” that everyone will come to repentance!

Friends:

“Every day” God patiently bears with us, and “every day” we are tempted to become “impatient” with our friends, neighbours and loved ones!

- And our faults and failures “before God” are so much more “serious” than the “petty actions” of others that tend to “irritate” us!
- God is “calling” you this morning to graciously “bear” with the weaknesses of others, tolerating them and forgiving them even as God has “forgiven” you in Christ!
- “This passage” with all its difficulties and misunderstanding, should function today as a great “encouragement” to us to be “BOLD” in our witness (as Noah was), to be “confident” that, though we may be few, God will certainly save us (as He did Noah), and to remind us that just as certainly as the flood eventually “came”, so final judgment will

certainly “come” to our world as well, and above all “Christ” will ultimately triumph over all the “evil” in the universe! **(V22)**

Friends:

We who follow Christ are men and women of “eternity”! Don’t put any confidence in the passing scenes of this disappearing world!

- This “week”, this “month, this “year”, “set apart” Christ as Lord in your hearts! **(V15)**
- What costs you ‘little’ or ‘nothing’ is worth exactly that “much”! The challenge before us this morning is simply this:-

What are you willing to pay, sacrifice or surrender in order to “advance” in living the “crucified life” for God’s glory?

- The most effective “argument” for Christianity is still the “good lives” of those who “profess” it!
- A “person” that is willing to “repent” will find God! Worship God with all “your heart” this week!

Let’s Pray!