

## 1 Peter 3:13-15 'Fear God! and Our Hope Is All About Jesus!'

Last Sunday we looked at 1 Peter 3:9-12: 'Flee Evil and Pursue Peace'. After having given us those tools of selflessness, Sympathy, Compassion, Loving as brothers we saw that humility is the key to it all. Peter then warned us of the downward spiral of difficult situations between brothers and sisters in Christ, when not selflessness, but pride, vanity, and our own ego are part of the equation. V9: "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult but with blessing" (Literally meaning with prayer). In Jesus' own words "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." But as I explained, Jesus spoke those words in general about all people. How much more then does this apply when it involves differences and difficulties between brothers and sisters in Christ!

In Verse 9: "Because to this you are called." As it is also written in chapter 2:21 "Because to this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." Peter was explaining that if needs be, we are called to take a hit for our faith in our Saviour. Whether it be in our wallet, our pride or even our physical well-being, because that is exactly what Jesus did for us. And yet infinitely more so! So we must beware of letting Satan get a foothold in our hearts through resentment, pride or vanity!

And then in v10-12 Peter lays hold of king David's words from Psalm 34:12-16, with the context being v11: "Come my children listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Yes we will only be able to obey this, (thinking of the others instruction) when we are living in the constant acknowledgement and reverent fear of who God is. He Himself tells us: "I am God and there is no other. There is no one like me." And we are not only to "turn from evil" from the spiteful tongue and heart. But we are to also "pursue peace" with our brethren. And with the comfort, but also the warning, of v12. "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but his face is against those who do evil." Those two different pictures. The loving eyes and ears of the Father toward his children. But the whole face of God's judgement, turned against unrepentant evil doers!

So to this morning's text: 1 Peter 3:13-15 "Fear God! And Our Hope Is All About Jesus!" Peter now continues his explanation of why we are to live in the way that he is instructing us to do so. Not only amongst the brethren, but even in general among the unsaved world around us! V13 "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?" Friends, can you see? He is getting us to look at this stand that we are called to make for our Saviour in the light of the day, so to speak. These are practical instructions. These are not airy fairy abstract theories or ideas, as in the case in many false religions! People sitting around in a circle or in some cave somewhere contemplating their navel for years. Or speculating on how many past lives they may have had.

No, here is the practical reality, Peter explains. "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?" Beloved, look at the phrase, "eager to do good." In the context of the Body of Christ, His church, if we "are eager to do good", if we are eager to make, and even to "pursue peace" with our estranged or hurt brothers and sisters, will we be harmed by that? Yes we will be hurt by doing so? Will our efforts to be reconciled and show brotherly love, Christlike love, as we have been instructed to do so, will this cause us suffering, or loss or pain? When that situation occurs which has been of our own, (or at least partly of our own making, or even if we are not at fault at all) but if we "are eager" to sincerely erase that carelessly spoken word or action. If we "are eager" to make it right, "to do good," will we be damaged by this? Peter puts it to us in V13: "Who is going to harm you if

you are eager to do good?" Dear friends, in general, what it will most likely cost you, (and this is a currency which we are often not willing to part with and yet are funds which we should be eager to spend and generous to spend) are the currencies of our pride, vanity and ego!

Beloved may I suggest, that most often when genuine humility is present in any given situation, then those currencies of pride, vanity and ego, have already been spent by someone. Yes most often, those things are all that these situations are going to cost us, when we "are eager to do good" even "eager to pursue peace." And more often than not, when those hurt feelings and pain subside, by God's grace and mercy, peace is what the outcome will be!

"But." Notice that he begins the next verse with the word "But." "But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed." Now the commentator explains, that in Greek, when Peter uses the words "but even if you should suffer for what is right, he uses the most infinitesimal possibility that this might occur. Because it is not a perfect world, even among believers! So the possibility of being rejected when we seek to do good though miniscule, is still there! Yes even amongst believers at times, there may be irreconcilable differences. Things that for whatever reason, in spite of our best efforts, which just cannot be mended.

This may well happen or has happened to you. It has happened to me. And it is always heartbreaking for us, if we truly care about the fullness and unity of Jesus' Body! Paul and Barnabas parted company for a good period of time. Sometimes time does indeed heal the wounds. But sadly, not always. Yes sadly, occasions occur when not even time heals. Some hurts may not even be healed until heaven's glories take us home when ultimately, all pain and suffering's gone. And yet should we be eager to do good and pursue peace? By all means. And yet in a sinful world and hurt feelings, sometimes our efforts may be in vain! "But even if you should suffer for what is right you are blessed."

Brothers and sisters, the pursuit of uprightness in the sight of God is in itself a gift, and a divine blessing from the Almighty Himself. And yet at the end of v9 Peter writes, "So that you may inherit a blessing." But whether this blessed inheritance is that which awaits us in heaven only, I'm not quite sure. It may well be. If it is though, I tend to believe that alongside of that truth, is the reality that suffering for what is right and for the sake of Christ's body, His Church, holds blessing within itself now. Because as I said last time, to do so is to honour the Name of our Lord, and chapter 2:21 "to follow his example and walk in his steps." Those things that He has left for us as our guide to imitate!

So to suffer unjustly for our faith is to reflect the very life of the Lord Jesus Christ himself! Chapter 2:22: "He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth." V24 "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." Yes, suffering unjustly for Jesus' Name is what we have been called to do. And yet in this there is true blessing! But friends, I have been applying these things to, and within Jesus' church. But Peter applies such things more broadly to the whole of unsaved world around us. Paul actually points us to this reality, as he himself was not long to be executed for his faith in 2 Timothy 3:12: "In fact everyone who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Notice that it's not some will be or a large number maybe, but everyone. So persecution, (in whatever forms that might take here in Australia today, for those who would boldly stand up for Jesus) is what awaits "everyone." Yes all true followers of Jesus. And may I add, that clearly, this will continue to be so and in increasing measure, as our nations spirals out of control upon that road of deep depravity that we are heading on. Yes this is the reality that awaits us!

We've seen it many times over the years. Matthew 16:24-27 "If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what would it profit a man were he to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? And what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with the holy angels and then he will reward each person according to what he has done." It is not health, wealth, or a life of ease that Jesus promises us, It is a cross!

And yet even so, in the light of such truths Peter writes, v13: "Who is going to harm you if you do good? V14 "But even if you do suffer for what is right you are blessed." Standing against, (and even speaking out against the evil of these days and the legislated ways of this beautiful land in which we live if needs be) holds within those actions themselves the comfort, that in accordance with His Word, we are seeking to live within the "fear of the Lord." And that in doing so, His "Eyes" are always upon us. And His "Ears are attentive to our prayers."

This is because, Beloved, by Grace the shadow of Jesus' Cross has mercifully fallen upon us. Yes we have heard His call of "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." And we've come to the cross, He has washed us clean with His Blood, and now we strive to live for Him! So if we suffer for the pursuit of "doing good," to which He has called us within the time that we have left in this life then so be it. And praise God we say. For in such things there is blessing not only in this life, but also in the life to come! Hallelujah. Don't live your life in the fear of the world and what it can do to you, Peter tells his readers.

And friends let's remember, persecution wasn't an abstract concept in his day. A murderous death for the Christian was all too real. And yet, he encourages them in v14: "Do not fear what they fear" and then he reiterates this: "Do not be frightened." Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 10:13-14: "Now all has been heard here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his Commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." Yes "fear God and keep his Commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

Again friends can you see? That Peter is encouraging all of his readers including you and I, whatever situation you might find yourself in, although it be frightening, threatening or even terrifying. Don't fear what man fears. "Fear God" live for Him, and everything else will fall into His preordained plan and place! And even in the most difficult, the most frightening situations that we find ourselves in, v15 "but in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord." No don't fear what men fear, they fear what other men can do to them. Not you. "In your heart set apart Christ as Lord." He is the Creator and Sustainer and Ruler of the entire universe. "His eyes are upon the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayers." Yes, "but in your heart set apart Christ as Lord." "In your heart" separate Jesus from those worldly threats. Because He is eternally above and in control of all of those things. Even kings and authorities are but dust in His Hands. "Dust you are and to dust you will return." The scriptures say.

Brothers and sisters, yes it is true that Jesus is above all of those earthly threats and authorities. And yet it is our duty to set Him apart and above those things in our heart! The word in Greek used here for "set apart" is *agiasate*. It means to sanctify. To make holy. "Hallowed be thy Name" we pray. In your hearts enthrone him, king of glory now, we sing. But I guess the question is, how do we "set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts?" Is Peter talking about some kind of feeling or emotional response? Even some thought that we lay hold of and keep floating around in our minds somehow? Well no, I don't believe any of that to be true. Now certainly, having the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

in the forefront of our minds, so that everything which we say and do is overshadowed and permeates every aspect of our life, by them, should give us our reason for being. But how do we “set Christ as Lord apart in our hearts?”

Friends may I suggest, that it must begin by knowing Him. Yes we must come to know Him by our labours in his Word. Sola scriptoria the reformers were heard to cry, while they were being burned at the stake for their faith. Not by works but Scripture Alone, they cried. And Sola Christos. Christ alone. As they sought to cast aside the heresy and the brutal, murderous oppression of Roman Catholicism. And paying for their declarations within their very lives!

Yes first we must know Him through His Word. How can we defend that, and whom we do not know? First we must know Him in our heart. But then we must have him rule over our life. We set him apart in our heart through his Word as it is governing our life! Yes we “set Christ apart in our heart” in our responding to that Word, adhering to it, and being transformed by it. We “set Him apart in our heart,” by setting aside time each day to spend with Him in His Word. And we “set Him apart in our hearts” by dedicating our lives to the worship of Him, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, on that day that He has given us to do so. The Lord's day!

Beloved, the worship of God is not something which we do as an afterthought. As Christians, it should be the pinnacle of our week. If we have an eye and mind to those heavenly glories that Jesus has promised us that are to come, the worship of God among His people should be our greatest priority. Because our worship of God together may I suggest, is our only real preparation for heaven. Because Jesus is in the midst of His worshipping people! Yes these are the ways that we set Jesus upon the “throne of our heart” dear friends. Romans 12:1-2: “Therefore I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good pleasing and perfect will.”

Yes friends we need to know him. But in your hearts set apart 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. Brothers and sisters, let me respectfully point out the obvious here. Peter is not writing to the theologically privileged or the religious elite. No. He places the responsibility and the declaration of Christ's gospel, upon the shoulders of us all. If someone asked you these questions: Why do you have hope for heaven? Why do you believe in God? Not just any God but the God of the Bible? Why do you not really fear death? Not the way we die, but death itself? There is a difference. Friends, what are you going to say? What are you prepared to say?

There was a theological exercise many years ago, which really does get to the heart of answering these questions. And it went something like this: When you get to the gates of heaven and God ask you the question, “Why should I let you into my heaven?” What are you going to say? Are you going to say, (as sadly, many in Christendom believe today) ‘Well I have tried to be as good as a person as I could. I have helped a lot of people. I have given much to charity over the years. I have volunteered in many a community minded cause. I gave to the church; indeed I have given a lot to the working of the Church of my time and my finances. Surely that will buy me a place in heaven!’

The problem with such thinking of course is that when Paul considered all of those things that he could bring to Jesus' Cross, (he being a Jew of Jews and a Pharisee of a Pharisee) yes though he was very well credentialed, he considered those credentials to be “as filthy rags.” Meaning those cloths that were covered in blood after a woman had been menstruating. Yes Paul considered his

credentials to be as “filthy rags” in the sight of God! Well in his no nonsense way, Les Stewart put it to me this way those many years ago. I will look for that one who has the holes in his hands and his feet and say, I am with Him!

Beloved, it might seem simplistic and even sound trite, but that in essence, is our answer to all of those questions. Because, it is all about Jesus! Why do we have hope for a future which we cannot see? It's all about Jesus! Because of the evidence of an empty tomb. Because of the evidence of the witness of hundreds and hundreds of people who knew Him and saw Him die. But then saw him alive again! Because of the evidence and reality that from a group of 12 men, all of whom were murdered but one, John. Yes from 12 men in the face of the opposition and persecution of the whole world, from without but also within the church. The message of a Jewish man who lived 2000 years ago, who was Himself murdered on a cross by the governing authorities, yes His message of being the very Son God, Has permeated the four corners of that world, and that same message lives today! Yes that One with the holes in his hands and feet, I'm with him.

It's all about Jesus! Because Jesus lives, and Jesus saves! 1 Peter 1:3: “Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” No the hope that we have is not dead or buried, because the tomb was empty, and Jesus lives! Throughout all of this terrible coronavirus stuff, when people asked me what I felt about it all. Whether I was worried or not. My answer was very simple and straightforward. No I'm not worried about any of that stuff. Because I know where I'm going. Or as Les Stewart put it, I'm with Him. I'm with Jesus! Yes it's all about Jesus! Praise God! He is our strength and our refuge. He is our hope and our stay. He is the anchor and foundation and substance of our faith. My hope. Our hope!

Yes it's all about Jesus! My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' Blood and righteousness no merit of my own I claim but wholly trust in Jesus' Name. On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand all other ground is sinking sand. “Fear God and keep His Commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” Yes it's all about Jesus.

Let's pray.