

Everyday Evangelism: Proclamation

1 Peter 3:13-22

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[Pray]

Before Nikki and I were married I owned a 1978 Porsche 924. It didn't cost that much but it was still a pretty nice car. One day Nikki and I took it for a drive and ended up at the cut banks overlooking the city.

We had been walking through the trails and sitting at the lookout for about half an hour when two guys with snowboards asked us where they could find the sandblast slopes. We told them, and they took off.

30 minutes later we headed back to the car, but as we approached I heard that ominous sound of breaking glass. I knew it was my car and so I ran around the corner to see what had happened.

When I got there one of the guys we met earlier was walking up the path towards me. And I yelled "Hey! What did you do to my car?" To which he replied "would you like to fight about it?" Now I realized fairly quickly that he hadn't really answered my question, but I also noticed that he was a fair bit bigger than I was, and he had a buddy who might offer a hand if he was at a loss for words. So, we had a short verbal discussion about the options and I walked away with my tail between my legs.

When I got to the car I saw they had broken the side window, stolen a \$5 gym bag and some \$1 sunglasses. Insurance covered the broken window and I ended up finding the gym bag and sunglasses discarded in the bush. And this is where the story would have ended if what those boys had taken from me was physical, but what they really took was my pride.

You see, in the gym bag was my Tae-Kwon Do uniform and black belt. But it wasn't righteousness or self control that made me back down from that fight, it was fear. That boy proved to me in front of the girl who later became my wife that black belt or not I was a skinny woos. And that hurt.

I've never seen those boys again but I literally dreamt about them for years. And in my dreams I didn't back down from that fight. In my dreams I was bigger and stronger and faster. And in my dreams I beat the living daylight out of both of those boys hundreds of times. I hated those boys, I was so angry.

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Please open your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 3, you will find it on page 858 in the pew Bible in front of you. If you are new with us today we are in the middle of a series on everyday life as a Christian. Throughout this book Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, has been urging his readers to willingly suffer in order to share the good news about Jesus with their neighbours.

And we have also said that first century Asia where Peter's readers were living, was a lot like Canada is today.

In Canada when people are honest about their faith in Christ they often encounter opposition. And this is the way it was in Peter's day as well. Christians then were ironically accused of being atheists. The reason why was that they worshipped the peasant son of a carpenter instead of the Roman gods like Zeus and Athena. And that made them weird in the 1st century.

And as a result these early Christians were beginning to suffer for their faith.

So let's look at the text starting in 1 Peter 3 verse 13.

[Read 1 Peter 3:13-14]

Last week we looked at how Peter encouraged his readers to live out their faith among their neighbours – be the hands and feet of Jesus. And the examples Peter gave were radical. Politically they were supposed to support the Emperor even though he had just exiled them to Asia; vocationally they were supposed to bless their masters, and work hard to make them prosper even though many times they were being mistreated. And relationally wives and husbands were to treat each other in ways that were way superior to the cultural norm.

Actions like these would have been blatantly visible to their neighbours because these people weren't being nice, they were looking like Jesus even though it was painful to do.

And then in verses 13 and 14 Peter says two seemingly opposite things. First he says "if you are living in these kinds of ways do you think people are going to hurt you?" Imagine, just for example, living in the first century and having a slave who started out performing all your other slaves because he was taking the initiate to serve you rather than waiting to be forced... Probably you would start treating him well.

But then in the very next verse Peter says "the reality is that's not the way it is going to work out all the time." In fact, sometimes living such good lives is actually going to result in persecution. And they are going to hate you for it because they hated Jesus for doing the same thing.

That's bad enough, but then Peter has the audacity to say "if you suffer for what is right, you are blessed." And then in verse 17 "For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil." In other words, if you mess up and suffer for it that is just life, but if you embrace suffering while doing good you are blessed because you are acting like Jesus.

But what about when we suffer and haven't done anything good or bad? This needs a little clarification.

Most Christians will tell you that general suffering often leads to spiritual growth. I can attest to this as when we were at Children's Hospital in Vancouver with our son Jaxon, those were some difficult weeks for us, but it was also a time when God spoke some amazing things into my life. And I can confidently say that I would not give those weeks up for anything. And Christians have recognized this and quoted verses like:

We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame. (Romans 5:3-5)

So suffering can lead to hope. And indeed that was my experience. But actually the verse I just quoted isn't talking about general suffering and the example I just gave from my own life is not what Peter is talking about in verse 14. You see, while God is capable of bringing good from all sorts of terrible situations there is nothing good about suffering for suffering's sake.

In the second century there were a group of Christians called the Desert Fathers – they did all sorts of good things, but they didn't really understand this. They were monks who lived out in the desert and sought to bring as much suffering upon themselves as possible so that they could experience God's blessing. And so they hardly ever ate, they slept on beds of pointy rocks, they stood for days on end, and put themselves through just about everything you can imagine. They went looking for suffering because they thought suffering was what God wanted for them.

But the problem with their thinking was that when Jesus saw people suffering He didn't tell them "It's good for you to suffer, God is teaching you something" instead He brought relief to their situations. He healed the blind and the crippled; He fed the hungry and comforted the hurting. And He did this because these people weren't suffering for being good or bad, they were just suffering. And people weren't created to suffer – suffering is a result of living in a fallen world. And Jesus was redeeming this fallen world.

And so if you are a Christian here today your job, like mine, is to do what Jesus did – we are His disciples. And one aspect of that means bringing relief to those around us who suffer. And there is lots of opportunity for that in Prince George. There are thousands of broken families right here; there are hundreds of kids who go to school hungry. There are people with nowhere to sleep and no family to call on. There are children who grow up in this city with no parents.

And it is no mistake that Jesus has placed you and me in the midst of this community. He has chosen us to increase His glory and expand His kingdom here. And that means whatever abilities we have, whatever resources are at our disposal, we need to use them to fight the suffering our community faces because Jesus did the same thing.

So suffering in and of itself is not a good thing. And yet in verse 14 Peter says “if you should suffer for doing good, you are blessed.” It is the “for doing good” part that is key to Peter’s thought here, but by and large that kind of suffering has been foreign in the world most of us have grown up in.

You see, while Canada is changing right now, the Canada of yesterday was one in which Christendom ruled – that means fifty years ago most people in Canada and the States considered themselves Christians, the Lord’s Prayer was said in schools and for the most part our government operated with a Christian worldview. Fifty years ago almost no one suffered because they said they followed Jesus.

But those days are ending fast. Today Christianity has been pushed to the margins of society and is generally looked down on by the secular world around us. If you stand up for the truth claims of Jesus at the university up the hill you are viewed as intolerant and narrow minded. Or try working for Jesus at your union job. It won’t go over well because everyone around you will look bad.

And so what Peter is not saying is “Be happy when you stub your toe or lose your job because suffering is good for you.” – Peter’s not saying that. Instead he says “if you suffer *for what is right*, you are blessed.”

The suffering Peter is talking about is suffering that originates because we are intentionally living lives that glorify Jesus in front of our neighbours even though it hurts. This is what Peter meant when he wrote:

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 2:12)

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Now look at verse 15 where Peter takes this to the next level.

[Read 1 Peter 3:15-16]

Now these verses are the primary ones used to support something called Apologetics. You may have heard this word before; it refers to making a defense for your faith.

And usually when people talk about apologetics they mean learning arguments that will convince your non-Christian friends that God exists.

Now I think there is probably a place for this kind of thing in today’s world, but that’s not really what Peter is calling for here.

Notice Peter doesn’t say “always be prepared to prove God exists.” He says “be prepared to give an answer to someone who asks you why you have such hope.”

God isn’t in need of our defense; it is our hope that is motivating us to live such different lives that is under attack.

So what is hope?

In today's English "hope" means longing for a change in circumstances. Somehow things are going to get better. Some day someone will come along and make things right.

There is a movie that came out a couple years ago called "The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel". It is set in India and the same guy plays in it as played in "Slum dog Millionaire". It is a movie about hope and there is a line that comes up several times where they say "There is a saying in India, everything will work out in the end, and if it isn't working out now it just isn't the end."

And that's the way we think of hope these days. Hope is positive or wishful thinking. It is longing for the moment when our situation will change. Hope is waiting for the good guy to win in the movie. Hope is believing the financial disasters of the States will soon right themselves; Hope is longing for the boss to offer us the job or wishing the little dictators would start sleeping through the night. That's what hope means to our world.

But the hope Peter is talking about is so much bigger than that. Yes heaven is part of our hope, and so we can live for Christ looking forward to eternal reward. But the hope Peter has been talking about in the previous two chapters is that Jesus has made us into a royal priesthood and a holy nation and we live in the power of that reality right now. In fact it is because God lives within us that any of the radical living we've been talking about is possible.

And so exiles can serve Emperors, slaves can submit to masters and husbands and wives can love each other in radical ways because Jesus is alive within us. And friends, if you aren't living in that reality right now you are missing the hope that Jesus has for you.

You see hope for Christians does not mean Jesus is going change our circumstances, hope for a Christian means Jesus is changing us into His image in the midst of our circumstances. And when we look like Jesus we find ourselves living the life of ultimate fulfillment that God wants for us because this is what we were created to do from the beginning.

Are you living in the reality of this hope today? If not, pray that Jesus will change you to image Him in the midst of your circumstances. Seek this hope because this is what it means to live in the fullness of what God has for you. But also seek this for the people around you.

Do this because living in the reality of this hope is what evangelism is all about....Huh? What does this have to do with evangelism? Everything...

Evangelism has been a really scary word in the church for a long time. Whenever we hear it we think of angry street preachers in big cities telling people they are going to hell.

But evangelism means pointing people to the scrumptious banquet of living a fulfilled life in Jesus – Friends the Gospel is good news! And we do that the same way Jesus did, by stretching out our hands and feet and loving our neighbours in word and deed so much it hurts.

And in verses 13 through 22, which we are looking at today, Peter zeroes in on “word evangelism” which he describes as giving a defense – and that’s primarily a verbal defense – for the hope we have.

But like we said last week word and deed aren’t two alternative ways to evangelism, they are intimately tied together. But here his point is that deed without word isn’t good enough.

Last week at the young adults Bible Study Meghan told us that she found herself in conflict between deed and word evangelism once (and I’ve asked her permission to share this story with you).

She was at university and had been intentionally trying to look different because she belonged to Jesus when to her surprise a girl came up to her and asked her “why are you so different.” And this forward question totally caught her off guard and so instead of telling her that it was because of Jesus, she mumbled something about trying to be nice. She was living different enough to be noticed but wasn’t able to give a defense for her actions.

Now put yourself in Meghan’s shoes. You’ve managed to live in a way that got noticed – not easy to do – now what would you say in this situation? Perhaps you’ve flubbed this one before because in the moment you’ve thought “if I tell these people that the reason I’m different is because I am a Christian and Jesus, who lived 2000 years ago and was actually God wearing human skin; who then died for me and to bring me out of the darkness I was living in and into His glorious light. These people are going to look at me like I’m a Martian. We’ve been afraid.

Peter says “don’t do that!” Don’t let fear keep you from declaring the reason for your hope, instead be prepared to give an answer – be prepared”

That’s easy to say, but what does it look like?

Peter says there are two parts to it: First, he starts verse 15 starts with these words: “set apart Christ as Lord.” Or “Revere Christ as Lord.”

Here Peter is urging us to trust God’s sovereignty. To be Lord means to be ruler – to be king. In the first century Rome resounded with the words “Kaisaras Kurios – Caesar is Lord!” And Christians were getting in trouble because they wouldn’t say this, instead they said Xristos Kurios – Christ is Lord.

And they said this in intentional recognition that while Caesar was powerful in Rome He wasn’t all powerful – there was only room for one God in Rome.

And this is the first part of being prepared to give an answer for our hope. If Jesus is Lord then He is in control. So even though it's scary to defend our hope we are willing to do it because we recognize there is ultimately nothing these people can do to us.

This is why Jesus tells us:

"Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

So to revere Jesus as Lord means that we are able to live fearlessly in the world. And that fearlessness is the first part of giving a defense of our hope.

The second way to defend our hope has to do with the word "prepare" that Peter uses.

To be prepared means to be intentionally ready, it isn't something that happens by default, instead it is something that requires practice.

So how do we practice defending our hope? Here I think there are probably lots of different ways to do this, but one of the most effective is to share stories with each other of when God has showed up in our lives and changed us to look like Him.

As a body we do this every New Years Eve serve. We tell stories of how God has been at work in our lives. But we probably need to practice this more than just once a year.

And small groups are a great place to do this. So small group leaders make a point of asking your people how God has been active in their lives lately. Or ask your small group leader how Christ has been active in their life.

Now if that sounds scary it doesn't have to. Here is why:

When we ask this question we aren't asking for miracle stories of when Christ changed our circumstances – maybe you've got those, maybe you don't, it doesn't matter. But we are asking for stories about Christ changing us in the midst of our situations because He is alive within us. And there is a big difference between these. God doesn't always change our circumstances, but if you are a Christian He is changing you.

So let me give you a story about how Christ has been working in me lately.

Last Sunday after preaching about living such good lives that our neighbours end up glorifying God I ran over to one of my rental suites because I had some tenants moving out. While I get along with the vast majority of my tenants these ones had been trouble and I was happy to see them go.

When I got there I was pleased to see that they had done a good job cleaning, but noticed that there was damage to the flooring in the bedroom. We looked at the move-in inspection together and noted that the damage wasn't there when they moved in so I told them I was going to have to deduct \$100 from their damage deposit to fix it.

At this point things began to escalate really quickly. They began swearing at me, accusing me of not being fair and threatening to mess the suite up on their way out. This went on for about 20 minutes but since the contract clearly stated that the damage wasn't there when they moved in I stuck to my guns. Eventually they left with \$100 less than their full damage deposit and some fingers wagging out the window.

I then did a final look through the suite before the new tenants arrived and noticed that they had forgotten a big load of clothes in the dryer. Now I didn't want to see these people ever again. What was I supposed to do?

For a minute I considered throwing the clothes out, and then I thought perhaps donating them to Bibles for Missions would be better, but then God's convicting voice began to speak to me. And I knew I had to give them back. So I sent them a text letting them know that they could come pick them up at my house.

When they arrived a few minutes later the guy seemed thoughtful but the girl was still raving mad and more finger waving ensued while I gave back their clothes.

I had never wronged these people, and now I'd gone out of my way to be kind to them, but God didn't let me off here. As I was praying I felt God telling me that I wasn't supposed to shoot for being fair, I was supposed to shoot for looking like Him to my tenants. And that meant even though I'm pretty sure I was right, the fact that they felt I'd stolen from them was more important.

And so the next morning I called them up, drove to their new house and gave back their full damage deposit. As I was doing it the guy was in obvious shock, he didn't know what to say. I was prepared to give an answer but he didn't ask. Perhaps I'll run into him again.

Now I'm not the hero of this story – please hear that – and I don't tell it to you to make you impressed with me, I tell it because Jesus is at work within me and He's the hero. He doesn't always change my circumstances, but He is changing me in the midst of my circumstances.

And the evidence of this is that these days sometimes I don't react in a normal way when everyday life happens. 14 years ago when my car got broken into Jesus had only really just begun working on me to transform me into His image. And the evidence was that I reacted exactly how anyone in the world would act.

Today I'm still just a man, I'm still susceptible to falling into sin, to losing my cool and missing the mark, but Jesus is at work within me and He is changing me into His image.

Friends, proclaiming the Good News about Jesus to our neighbours doesn't happen by accident. It happens when we are prepared to give a defense for what Jesus has done in our lives.

And so I want to leave you with three questions today.

First, are you living in the reality of the hope of your salvation today? Do you know that Jesus is at work within you changing you in spite of the circumstances you are experiencing?

Second, are you empowered by the fact that Jesus is Lord? Not just Lord in your life, but Lord of the universe? The reality is Jesus is in control and so we have nothing to fear from the world around us.

And finally, because Jesus is Lord are you prepared to give a defense for the life you are living? Have you thought about it? Are you in the practice of telling stories about how Jesus is the hero who is transforming you from the man or woman you used to be, into the son or daughter He wants you to be?