

1 Peter 3:13-17

“Always Be Ready”

Not being overcome by evil but overcoming evil with good; that was the overall thrust of our last gathering. We talked about having a “good day” and what it is that constitutes a good day, and it’s not necessarily a day that’s composed of peachy situations and a primrose path whereby I’m constantly pampered and continually sheltered from any problems. We learn from the life of Joseph, from the life of David, of Daniel and so many others that God can be doing an incredibly *good* work in the midst of what seems like an incredibly bad situation. So we can’t qualify a good day based solely upon factors that bring personal comfort to our physical being. But rather the scriptures declare that a good day is defined and found in communing *with* the Lord, a day in which I call *upon* the Lord knowing that I’m heard *by* the Lord. A good day is a day in which I’ve glorified and magnified Him, not only through the things I say, but by what’s been displayed in my life.

You see, the bible declares to the one that would love life and have *good* days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good, I need my walk to match my talk, it’s not just in *saying* the right things, it’s in *doing* the right things. Not returning evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing; not doing unto others and they’ve *done* unto you, but doing unto others as *you would have them* do unto you. How do you want people to treat you? That’s how you then need to treat others, seek peace; pursue it, why? (Vs 12) “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” You see do you want God’s *ears* open *to* you, or His *face* turned *against* you? Turn away from evil and do good, or another way to understand that? Repent of your sin and seek the Lord; seek peace and pursue it; Jesus didn’t say, “Blessed are the peace *breakers*” but rather “Blessed are the *peacemakers*” as much as depends upon *you* (the bible says) live peaceably with all men. There may be problems with people, but don’t let that be on you, you’ve been given the ministry of reconciliation, refrain your tongue from evil, or speaking negatively/harshly about others, in a manner that slanders them or tears them down, we’re to build one another up. “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous” He’s watching *over* them, has His hand *upon* them, be a person of integrity, lead your life in a manner that accords with truth and honesty, follow after the Lord whole heartedly and He’ll use your life tremendously...

Vs13-17

“Who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?” He’s underscoring the exhortation to seek peace and pursue it, to realize that God is with you in the midst of it, “Besides, [in a loose paraphrase] you don’t generally have problems when you do the right thing, it’s when you do the wrong thing that unhealthy ramifications arise.”

All of that (as a general rule) is true, and in a perfect world no one would *ever* harm you if you become followers of what is good. However in the world that we live in you can invite all kinds of interference by simply doing the right thing and following what is good.

Now understand that when he talks about becoming a follower of what is good, he's not referencing a casual approach to life whereby as a general rule you do the right thing. The word "followers" here means "vehemently contending for a thing" it speaks of "burning with zeal" or being "most eagerly desirous" it's something you're hungry *for* and pressing hard *toward*. It's not a "take it or leave it" type attitude, it's not a "well as long as I'm not causing any waves" kind of approach. It's a relentless pursuit and a eager yearning to do good, the question of ramifications isn't even an option.

Now you'd think that that kind of approach to life would get you commendation after commendation, Nobel peace prizes and various awards of honor, promotions and all the rest; unfortunately such is not the case. Often times we invite hardship into our lives simply because we refuse to compromise and insist on doing the right thing.

Because as a rule, Christians don't *create* problems; they *reveal* them. Just by the very nature of the way we lead our lives (again with integrity, in a manner that accords with truth and honesty). There you are at work and everybody is taking 15 minutes extra on their lunch break and not writing it down, you can't do that you have to be honest about it. But you were eating lunch with them so if you write it down and they all write something different we have a problem, now what do you do? You see you didn't create the problem, but you revealed it and now those who were standing *with* you are suddenly *against* you and should that kind of thing go on guess who gets conspired against in an attempt to get them fired? You're doing good and because of that they seek to harm you, to somehow hurt you; because you've exposed the unfruitful works of darkness. (Eph 5:11)

Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world.*" John 8:12 Jesus sheds light on the situation, which means that Jesus *in you* will shed light on situations. Tragically (generally speaking) people don't like the light, they want to lead their lives in darkness with a pseudo sense of security and ambiguity concerning their sin. In John Ch 3 Jesus said, "*And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*" John 3:19-20

You see there's a reason people party at night, that bars are dimly lit, there's a reason that crime (for the most part) takes place at night; it creates a covering for people's shame, again that false sense of security concerning their sin. However when you enter the equation it creates a problem because you (having Christ in you) are the light of the world (Matt 5:14) and your righteousness exposes their wickedness, your integrity exposes their dishonesty, your truthfulness shames them in their deceit. So often times things can get volatile if not altogether hostile, the world will harm you for doing the right thing, if you hinder their agenda. The world doesn't respond well toward righteousness, they prefer to revel in wickedness; case in point, Christ crucified. If the world responded well toward righteousness Christ would've never been crucified, but men love darkness rather than light and lest their evil deeds be exposed they don't come to the light and seek to shun the light from their lives.

Joseph was lied about and thrown into prison because of his refusal to compromise, Daniel was thrown into a lion's den because his life and work was a witness against the Babylonian officials.

Mark it down, if you desire to live godly in Christ Jesus you *will suffer* persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). 1 Peter 3:13 reminds of Rom 8:31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" We know that ultimately, that is as it pertains to eternity no one can be, the idea is the same here in 1st Peter, but as it pertains to real time in the here and now practically there are a # of things that will be against us. As we mentioned the world will often times be against us, Satan himself is definitely against us, our own flesh wars against us.

We've talked about the world; consider Satan's agenda. Jesus said in regards to Satan, "*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.*" John 10:10 It really doesn't matter if you're *in* Christ, if you don't have a relationship *with* Christ or anything else, Satan wants to destroy your life. Be it through misguided priorities, or things that lead you into spiritual obscurity, or more obvious things practically like drugs/alcohol, messed up relationships or whatever. He wants to distract you and he wants to destroy you. If you're *in* Christ it's like his intentions get placed on overdrive, now he's really out to destroy you, to distract you, to disillusion you through quirks or quandaries, predicaments or problems in the body of Christ. He wants you to see all the fun you're missing out on in the world and rob you of the eternal perspective and get you to trade *eternity* for what pleasure your flesh can perhaps obtain *presently*, don't be ignorant of your enemy's devices.

Outside of the world, even beyond the spiritual forces of darkness your own flesh wants to often times harm you. In your inner man you want to follow what's right, your flesh begins warring *against* you, seeks to do damage *to* you by entangling you in things that aren't healthy for you. You find yourself failing, the flesh is fighting you and it's hurting you spiritually and often times practically with regard to the fallout of whatever the particular sin may be.

So there are things that will seek to hinder you, and hurt you if you become followers of what is good (of course greater is He who is in you than he that is of this world, God is your strength, your shield and your strong tower). But Peter's primary point here is that if you're doing right *by* people, showing respect *to* people, most generally you won't be persecuted for that.

Now I think that we should note quickly that there can be a difference between being "hurt" and being "harmed" in that people might hurt you physically, or circumstantially, but they can't harm you as it pertains to eternity. Jesus said, "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*" John 10:27-28 Can people hurt you physically? Yes, can they damage you in anyway eternally? No way.

Vs14a

Now I stop there because in my mind the 2nd ½ of this Vs lends itself better to Vs 15 than it does the end of Vs 14. Peter says, "You probably won't suffer for treating people right, but in the event you do, there's a blessing in it for you." Jesus said it like this, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" He said, "*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*" Matt 5:10-12 Peter himself was a victim of persecution and suffering for righteousness sake, and there in Acts Ch 5 you find that after the apostles were beaten for simply sharing the gospel of Christ that they went away from the council *rejoicing* that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

They knew that God would bless them for that, if not presently, eternally. So (as we read in the 2nd ½ of Vs 14) "don't be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled..." The light affliction which is but for a moment is working for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The bible teaches us that the fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe (Prov 29:25). Jesus said, "*...do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" Matt 10:28 You see a proper fear of God will dispel the fear of man; and that's the transition that's found between Vs 14-15; don't fear man, fear God.

Here in Vs 14 Peter is quoting from Isaiah 8:12-13 whereby Assyria was preparing invade Judah (some of the most brutal/bludgeoning and feared people in human history with regard to the way they treated their captives) and Isaiah was sent to Ahaz to encourage him to fear the Lord and not to fear man, that he not be afraid of their threats but rather that he hallow the Lord of hosts and fear Him.

Here Peter says, “Don’t be afraid of those who persecute your body, but rather sanctify the Lord God in your heart (or more literally ‘Christ as Lord’).” He’s saying that contrary to appearance we’re to realize Christ is in control, not the persecutor; Jesus is Lord and we’re subject to *Him*, we fear *Him*, do with me what you feel like you have to I fear God and have to stand before Him, I’m in love with all that I am *with* Him therefore I can’t turn away from Him. If God *allows* it I need to trust that He has a plan and a purpose *in* it; and I know the thoughts that He thinks toward me, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give me a future and a hope. So...

Vs15

Question: How often should you be ready to explain to people the reason for the hope that is in you in spite of the persecution or problems that have perhaps found you? “Always.” What does that mean? It means that you need to have a working knowledge of the word of God and the reality of what God has done in your life. You see this word “defense” isn’t a word that speaks of “defend yourself” as though you’re taking up arms. It’s a word that speaks of a legal defense as in a court of law whereby you’re called to testify on your behalf.

Here’s the idea, as times of tribulation find you, as people watch you go through trials, problems or persecution and yet you continue to hold your head up, deny yourself and have this contentment, or beyond that even joy that can’t be explained (that surpasses all understanding) that’s going to create an environment that facilitates the question, “What is it that keeps you going?” And as they ask you and I need to be prepared to answer, “What is the hope, how did you obtain the hope, what’s contained *in* the hope and on what does the hope rest?” You see crisis creates opportunity to witness, believe me people will take notice when all signs point to the fact that you should be beside yourself yet you have peace. You’re not acting like things aren’t real, you don’t live in “la la” land but there’s hope there, “what’s going on with that?”

Of course we remember what biblical “hope” is, it’s not an unlikely wish, something we want but we’re stricken with uncertainty. Christ in you the “hope” of glory isn’t something that you’d like to see happen, but you can’t be sure. Biblical hope is a guaranteed certainty and a concrete reality. The bible is clear that people who are with out God are with out hope in the world; believe me they want the hope that you have, the purpose, the contentment...

The question is can you articulate that hope to them? If you were asked why it is that you seem to be at peace when your world is crumbling to pieces around you what would you say. I’m not asking you to explain the theological position that you hold, but rather the personal *hope* that you have...When you’re going through the fire, yet you continue to hold fast and have hope it will invite questions; how will you answer?

Scientists calculate that there are roughly 2000 stars visible to the naked eye in proper conditions from the surface of the earth (more than that are obviously there but depending on where you're standing you can only see so many). However during the day you can't see any of them with the exception of the sun, things are bright and sunny therefore the shining of the stars can't be seen. It's only against the blanket of darkness that they really shine, so to with you and with me. When things are going good, things are looking up (bright and shiny) in our lives, people don't really have the opportunity to see us shine like they do against a blanket of darkness. It's when catastrophe comes, when the setbacks arise, it's during the dark days of difficulty that you're given the opportunity to really shine. Like diamonds against black velvet that's when your splendor is set off the most beautifully.

We should note the manner in which we're to share the hope that lies with in us, "with meekness and fear," with a gentle and respectful type tone or mentality. Not a "know it all, condescending" kind of attitude. We're not called to argue with people, we're not trying to win arguments, but we are seeking to win souls to Christ. Like Stephen in Acts Ch 7, or Paul as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come in his trial before Felix (Acts 24). Or when he shared with Festus in Acts 26 and Festus said, "Paul, I think you're going crazy man!" Paul said, "*I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason."* Acts 26:25 When Paul was finished making his defense before Agrippa we read, "*Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian.' And Paul said, 'I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.'"* Acts 26:28-29 Sharing his hope with meekness and fear...

Vs16

Here's the idea; if your life is a testimony of pursuing that which is good, if yours is a life of integrity, that accords with truth and honesty, yet people persecute you and seek to do damage to you yet you maintain a meek and respectful demeanor toward them and those who inquire of you, then you'll keep a clean conscience and those who've come against you will be ashamed of themselves. Oh, they may not confess that publicly, but they'll know what they've done inwardly and God can work on them through that.

What is the "Conscience"? It's been called that element of our heart and lives that either *accuses* us or *excuses* us. *Cowardice* asks, "Is it safe?" *Consensus* asks "Is it popular?" *Conscience* asks "Is it right?" The conscience has been compared to a window that lets the light of God's truth into our lives. The more we disobey the word of God the dirtier the window gets until we can't really see right from wrong anymore, we're "in the dark." Leading to what the bible refers to as a "defiled conscience" (Titus 1:15). The bible also says that one can sin against their conscience such to the point that it's like unto a "seared conscience" no longer really sensitive to that which is right or wrong (1 Tim 4:2).

Some have a conscience so poisoned that it approves of evil and accuses the person who does good. It's what the bible refers to (Heb 10:22) as an "evil conscience." You know a criminal feels bad when he "snitches" on his friend but feels good if he succeeds in his crime.

How critical it is that we maintain a "good" conscience, a "clean" conscience that readily receives the light of the word of God and walks in the knowledge thereof. How many of us can testify to the reality that a convicted conscience drains us, distracts us, and in reality keeps us from witnessing of the Lord because our conscience is constantly witnessing against us. Now is the conscience alone the test of right and wrong? No, just because a person's conscience doesn't convict them when they disobey the word of God doesn't mean they must not be in the wrong. God's word is the meter, not my conscience, if my conscience doesn't convict me when I sin there's nothing wrong with God's word, there's something wrong with my conscience. If I want to maintain a good conscience I've got to be dealing with sin in my life, confessing it, repenting *of* it keeping "the window" clean (so to speak). I need the light of God's word consistently flooding my heart and my mind. One author (Wiersbe) said, "A strong conscience is the result of obedience based on knowledge, and a strong conscience makes for a strong Christian witness to the lost."

Vs17

Now he'll speak more on the subject of suffering on into Ch 4. For now let's acknowledge 2 things #1 God's will *can involve suffering* for the believer. As we've noted before those who believe that God's will can never involve suffering of any kind can't have meditated too long upon the cross, we thank God that He allowed Christ to suffer for in His suffering, the shedding of His blood, His death and resurrection we find our salvation... (Maybe you've not met Christ, you've not been forgiven of your sin, today you'll receive that opportunity, you can respond to His work on your behalf, believe of Jesus Christ and find forgiveness, the healing of your heart in Him). The 2nd thing we'll note before we close is that if you suffer, make sure you don't deserve it do to some wrong you've done. Now when it comes to our sin we realize that we all deserve to pay the penalty that Christ paid for us. Outside of that don't suffer because you brought it on yourself due to poor or sinful decisions. As people we'll often say things like, "I don't deserve this" or "this isn't fair" Peter is saying here, it's *better* that you didn't deserve it. It's to your shame if you deserve it, it's to the glory of God if you don't. Your crisis will create an opportunity to tell others about Christ, what He's done *for* you, the fact that He lives *in* you and the peace He's given *to* you. Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart, set Him apart from any and everyone else that He alone might rule and reign in your life, and *always* be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...

Prayer Points: Father may Your word be rooted deeply in our heart today, and Jesus may You find Yourself enthroned with in the heart of each individual here, teach us what it means to be zealous for what is good; that we're quick to seize the opportunity You create in times of crisis to testify of the hope that we have in You. Reignite a fresh passion for Your word in us and may we be the salt and light that You've called us to be for the glory of Your name.

If you don't know that hope, you don't have a relationship *with* the Lord, you've not called *upon* the Lord or been forgiven *by* the Lord, than why not do so today? I want you to know that you're headed for heaven, I trust that by the very nature of the fact that you're here that you're seeking for more than what this life has to offer, or at the very least you're open the reality of what Christ can do for you. Let Him fill the void in your heart, turn *from* your sin, give your life to Christ and He'll make you a new creation right here, and right now.