

1 Peter 3:8-22; John 13:33-36

1 Peter 3 ⁸ Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.

¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.

¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.'

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear their threat; do not be frightened.' ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere 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. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

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. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— ²⁰ 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, ²¹ 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, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

John 13 ³³ 'My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: where I am going, you cannot come.

³⁴ 'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'

³⁶ Simon Peter asked him, 'Lord, where are you going?'

Jesus replied, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.'

Life continues to be a challenge – with Covid cases increasing, restrictions being extended, the prospect of this all continuing well into next year. On top of all this many of you have your own challenging personal health problems or maybe loved ones facing redundancy or other difficulties.

The problem is when we are suffer prolonged pressure, it's easy to lose patience with one another, to take out our frustration on others, to lose heart, maybe for some to lose a bit of our faith...

How can we avoid crumbling when we are constantly being battered?

How can we cultivate spiritual resilience? *1 Peter* is very helpful and in particular the passage we are looking at today.

To remind you of the context: Peter was writing to small scattered groups of Christians spread over what is now northern Turkey, who almost certainly were facing discrimination, harassment and persecution from their master, their neighbours and the local authorities. In this passage Peter refers to his Christian readers: encountering *evil and insults*, v.9;

suffering for what is right v.13;

v.14: *Do not fear their threats do not be frightened;*

v.16: *others speak maliciously against your good behaviour*

One of the interesting things about this passage is how Peter doesn't just tell them to do good, but he constantly tells them to refrain from evil:

⁹ *Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult
keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.*

¹¹ *They must turn from evil*

the face of the Lord is against those who do evil

For it is better, if God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

It seems that in the face of all this, it was easy for them like us to lose heart and to forget their calling to live holy lives as followers of Jesus.

Under their constant battering, considerably worse than what we are facing, it seems the Christians were in danger of crumbling.

How were the Christians going not only to survive, but flourish when living under such hardship?

First: Peter stresses the importance of unity – of sticking together.

v.8 *“live in harmony” be like-minded – literally be of the same mind.*

How is that possible with such a diverse group of people, converted from different backgrounds, many Gentiles, some Jews, many poor, but no doubt a few quite well-off?

Like us, they were bound to have different viewpoints and opinions on a whole range of things, but they could still be of the same mind on the most important things, *to love God with all of their mind*, to seek to have *the mind of Christ*,

c.f. Acts 4:32 *All the believers were one in heart and **mind**.*

Paul links being of the same mind with having the same purpose in Christ:

*1 Corinthians 1 :10 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and **the same purpose**.*

What is that purpose? *Philippians 1:27 standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one **mind for the faith of the gospel***

How do we achieve having the same mind? Paul says *those **who live in accordance with the Spirit** have their **minds** set on what the Spirit desires.* Romans 8:5

and then he spells it out even more clearly in *Philippians 2:2-5*

be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, **but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.*** ⁴ *Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.* ⁵ *Let the same mind be in you that was^[a] in Christ Jesus,*

Note that Peter, like Paul, links this with **humility** which means being more concerned for the unity of the church family than your own status or proving that you are right or cleverer or more knowledgeable than the other person.

Secondly, humility means treating those you disagree with, with compassion and respect.

Finally, humility also means being open to the terrible possibility that your opinion might be wrong!!

Peter's 2nd main point is that when life seems really unfair, whether it is because someone is treating you unfairly or it's just circumstances, **remember Jesus as your example:**

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.*

Whatever you are going through, it is nothing compared to what Jesus went through for you.

However much you think you deserve what is happening to you, Jesus deserved it less – He always has been *“the righteous” “in Him there was no sin”*

⁹ *Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing.*

Jesus endured insults, abuse and the very worst of human nature, but He always responded with blessing. e.g. on the cross: *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

For us, it will not always be easy; at times it will be a real battle. Especially when deal with those who disagree with us and even more so with those who would do us harm. But responding with love, gentleness and even blessing is in fact the way most likely to win over antagonists.

It's the old fable of the contest between the North wind and the south wind trying to get the man to remove his coat. The more the north wind tried to blow the coat off the man, the more tightly

he hugged it around him. But when the south wind heated up the man with its gentle warmth, it wasn't long before he took off his coat himself.

Even if we *don't* win over the person making life difficult for us, we are called follow in the footsteps of Jesus, because if we trade scorn for scorn, abuse for abuse, or harsh word for harsh words, we have immediately lost the argument, because we are demonstrating that we are no different from the rest of the world and not really followers of Christ at all.

Peter wants his audience to know that even if the very worst was to happen and they are executed for your faith, God will raise them just as he raised Jesus. We are unlikely for face such a severe fate, but the reality of Christ's resurrection is that the same power is at work in us and if you are pushed down, God will by that power, in time raise you up.

How do we have the courage and the resilience to live and behave like Christ?

Peter says: *v.15 in your hearts revere Christ as Lord*

Thirdly Peter says **don't just remember Jesus but remember Noah!** This seems at first like a very eccentric diversion. However, remember:

- *Remember Peter was writing to Christians in northern Turkey. For them Noah was a local hero his ark having ended up on Mt Ararat*
- these small groups of Christians often felt at the mercy of antagonistic local authorities; Peter reminds them that Noah also lived in a very wicked society, which was swept away by the flood. Peter is saying that there have always been spiritual powers which lie behind all evil and injustice in our world - in Noah's time just like today. They have always been at work. But after his victory on the cross, Jesus put those evil spiritual powers on notice, that they have been utterly defeated; the root of their power had been destroyed by the cross.

It is like Jesus has poured the most powerful systemic weedkiller onto that all-pervasive bindweed of evil. At first nothing seems to have happened. But as the weedkiller makes its way down to the weeds roots, its ultimate death and destruction is assured.

So however, much the power of evil seems to have the upper hand in our world today, we can know for certain that one day, that power will shrivel up and die.

- Finally remember that even when you slip up, it is by grace you are saved and not by your good works: This is why Peter suddenly starts talking about how Noah's family were all included in Noah's destiny by being in the ark. Most of Noah's family were a pretty shabby lot. But the one thing they got right was to go into the ark with Noah and so with Noah, they were saved from the flood. They were saved by being united with Noah or "baptised" – as it were in the Ark in the great flood.

In the same way we who are true followers of Jesus are by our baptism united with him and so we can be assured of enjoying the same destiny as Jesus. He is our ark, and just as He endured on the cross the flood of evil and came out the victor on the other side, so will we share in his victory.

I love to go to the top of a hill outside a town because it gives you such a different perspective. When you are in the streets, the town is your whole world. But from the top of the hill, you see the town has limits and actually it is quite small compared to the vastness of the countryside surrounding it.

This is why Peter says at the heart of this passage *in your hearts revere Christ as Lord*. Not only to remind ourselves of Jesus' example, but to change our perspective and to see the world with all its challenges and difficulties from the viewpoint of his heavenly throne. Because it is only from that viewpoint that, in the light of Christ's resurrection, and the context of God's vast and eternal kingdom, our entire world shrinks to its real, small and limited size.