

Sunday 13th June 2021

1 Peter 3:13-22 (Be blessed)

Talk by Ian Baldwin, Prayers by Margaret Davies

Good morning and welcome to our service. My name is Ian and today we will be thinking about how we are blessed even in the midst of suffering. Our bible reading is from 1 Peter 3v13-22

A prayer to begin with:

Father God as we come to listen to your word and we ask your Holy Spirit be with us. That we might come to bring the needs of the world to you and to hear your word. Amen.

Now Margaret will lead us in our intercessions then I will read our bible passage.

Prayers

Let us confess to God the sin that always confronts us:-

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are truly sorry and repent. Have mercy upon us according to your love. Wash away our wrong doing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

As John tells us:- "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and has cleansed us from all unrighteousness". So we thank you Lord. Amen

Our Loving Heavenly Father, we praise and thank you for so many things, but above all this morning for the gift of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour who you sent to die and rise again for our salvation and gave us your Holy Spirit to strengthen and revive us as we live and work for you in challenging and good times. We praise and thank you too for all the material things we have and for close family relationships we enjoy. Bless our family relationships as we meet again.

As we thank you for creation of our world, we bring to you so many needs there are. We pray for a slowing spread of coronavirus. May the vaccination programmes and distribution be effective and we pray that people will behave responsibly. Bless the work of Covax, that donations of vaccine will be given by the privileged countries to poorer nations to support and strengthen their health services and bring world-wide protection. Thank you, Lord, for America and Britain promising to give vaccines.

Almighty God, we pray that your will may be done to improve attitudes and actions of the governments and authorities in all the countries where there is turmoil due to wars, terrorism, greed and hostility. We pray especially for all the people affected because of loss of lives, homes, crops, therefore food and water. especially countries in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America. Please bring peace and justice through mediators and reconciliations. We pray that good decisions made by the G7 leaders will be carried out and that Jo Biden's coming presidential meetings with NATO and President Putin will lead to your will, Lord, happening for good in our world.

O Lord God, we pray for your worldwide church, the bishops and clergy and all Christian members, that all may be united in truth, live together in your love and reveal your glory in the world. Bless

all mission partners and organisations preaching the Good News of Jesus. We pray for Jason and Tracey Day working for you in Thailand. They ask us to pray for Nepal, where they used to work. Nepal is suffering very badly from coronavirus and need vaccines and more health care. Bless all who are persecuted for their faith. Give them courage and strength in witnessing and keep them safe.

Rochester Diocese ask us to pray for the right replacement for our Bishop James who is retiring soon. Lord, guide by your Holy Spirit those involved in the process to choose someone open to the needs of our communities and work towards the flourishing of your whole church.

Lord God, we pray the same for the new vicar for our merging churches, that our interviewees will know your will after the visits and interviews next week so that the right person to lead this important project will come. Please bless our merger.

We thank you Lord for our two fellowships. Especially we thank you for our wardens Ian and Steve and the church council for all their hard work during the interregnum. We pray for our food banks, for CAP, for Living Well, for Amaze Penge for our study groups and services, many via zoom. We pray that all will be helpful to people served and bring them to know Jesus as their Saviour too. . Thank you, Lord for the Alpha course and the Bible course, encouraging faith and knowledge of you, Lord.

Our Father God, there are many people in need. We pray for Gemma's family, whose father-in-law died on Friday. Comfort his son and daughter and extended family. Please comfort too all bereaved due to Covid, disasters or accidents. Lord, bless those we know who are recovering from illness, especially we pray for Will, his wife Kath and son Sam, for Anthony, for Andy, for Val to continually improve. In a pause, name anyone you know and I have omitted.....

Lord, please extend your healing hand on them and bless those in other forms of distress of mind, body or spirit. Give them courage and hope in their troubles and bring them to the joy of salvation.

Let us bring our prayers together with the Lord's Prayer: -

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and fore ever. Amen**

Reading - 1 Peter ch3v13-22

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 threats; 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.

Talk

Verse 13 on face value it can mean if you do good who will persecute you? Having quoted from Ps34 in the previous verses we need not expect any harm.

But look deeper and we see that doing good in God's eyes is not necessarily the same as doing good in the worlds eyes for they work to different values and morals.

Continuing the theme of Peter's quote from Ps 34, Rom8v31 is similar where Paul writes "If God is for us then who can be against us?". Or maybe recalling Ps 56v4 "In God I trust, I will not be afraid. What can mortal men do to me?"

Well, we know that people can hurt us and even kill us and that is certainly harmful! So it must mean something different.

In Matt 5v10-12 Jesus said,

"¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Mat 10v28 "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell".

These are warnings to us of being persecuted for righteousness and our security in heaven. If we do suffer then no harm can come to our souls because we are under God's vindication and protection as his children.

Clearly if we do good we will not be free from opposition and consequently hardships. We may not escape evil people, however we must not see suffering as the opposite to blessing. Blessing does not stop if we suffer. There can be blessings of peace, strength to endure, a place to live , food to eat and Christian fellowship to name a few. Most importantly we are blessed now whatever happens because we are right with God.

We see earlier in the chapter that wives (ch3v1) witness by a changed life and a submissive nature as Kemi spoke of last week. However it all changes if someone asks us to explain. This is why we

have to be ready not just with what we believe but ready to take the opportunity. The question may be direct or implied and I will come back to this later.

Now think of Peter who had reached a low point when he denied Jesus but now look at him speaking boldly to authorities and writing letters to encourage the young church. He has lost the fear of man and replaced it with the fear of God. We may not reach those heights but the principle is the same.

In verse 1 Peter quotes Is 8v12 "Do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it" meaning to be more aware of God's power and glory than that of the power of those around you.

He urges them to set Christ apart in their hearts which is to say sanctify God. Which we do by recognising he is the only one who is Holy and that Jesus is Lord and Saviour.

That is putting into practice the prayer "Hallowed be your name".

This is a real struggle for it is easy to say things with our lips and even to do the right things but to set God apart in our hearts to make him central in all things is far more difficult.

The secret is to love God and worship God and to let go of our self-importance and allow the Holy spirit to fill our hearts and live in the reality of God with us.

As we sanctify Christ in our hearts there is the end to fear and as we sanctify Christ in our words there is the start of witness. Therefore we sanctify God when our lives encourage others to glorify God and to honour his name.

This may be a challenge but by God's grace and his gift of faith it is possible as millions of blessed Christians over the centuries have shown.

The light of Christ in our lives may be the very thing that attracts people to Jesus but also those walking in darkness may react against us.

Our courage to speak is born of hope and fear in the Lord for we have a sure hope built on a strong foundation will not fail.

So when we are challenged in some way because of our faith and actions we should look for the opportunity to explain but not to force it.

In verse 15 Peter states that we are to give an answer or reason or to explain the hope we have but do it meekly and with fear (no arrogance or pride or self-assertion) with deference to people and with awe and reverence to God. The word used in the original for answer is apology, which is not saying sorry, but means the defence used in a formal setting or court of law. An apologist means someone who defends the Christian faith.

So we are to be bold in word but humble in life.

Remember your manner is important because if your tone and body language puts them off they will not listen to your words however well prepared they may be.

Now let me come back to the way we might respond to people when there is an opportunity. I am not going to talk about direct questions but never think you have to have all the answers and don't be afraid to say I don't know but I will try and find out. How you explain the gospel or what part you start with is down to you.

Here are four common conversations you may be involved in and the different responses to the opportunity.

Natural:-

You ask "what are you doing this weekend?"

They reply "Oh the mother-in-law is coming over so she will be on about getting the baby done".

You respond by asking "What do you mean getting the baby done".

And so a conversation may happen where you can explain baptism, even thanksgiving, and see where it leads. You may even help his relationship with his mother-in-law!

Not an opportunity:-

Someone asks "What did you do at the weekend?"

And you reply "Well on Saturday we did some gardening and on Sunday we went to church and had an international meal after".

They respond by saying "I'm going to the toilet".

My advice is to understand they have closed down the conversation so do not follow them to explain the gospel as that is just weird.

Do not force it:-

Someone asks "Did you watch the Champion league final?"

You reply "No but I know one of the Manchester City players is called Jesus (Jzoos) which is Spanish for Jesus and I want to tell you about the real Jesus, the son of God".

By this time they have switched off and labelled you as a religious nutter to be avoided from now on. They may never speak to you again.

Natural:-

You ask "Any plans for the weekend?"

They reply "I'm off to my Mum's as my Dad is in hospital".

You obviously say "I'm sorry to hear that, is it serious?".

They reply "We don't know yet, he is in for tests".

You can now offer to pray for them and the family on Sunday at church and follow their lead.

Even if they say 'no', don't be offended. Just continue with the general conversation and enquire again next week. Remember you may be the only one who asks how they are. Things may change and they now know you pray so they may come back.

The point is some conversations are short and some go over many weeks but be patient just as Jesus is patient with you.

Now Peter continues with our own relationship with God.

We must maintain a good conscience before God and behave and speak in a good and virtuous way so our detractors are put to shame. That is those who run you down or seek to defame you and speak against you they will be silenced and shut down.

We have to walk the talk as people delight in pointing out hypocrisy. That is why a clear conscience is important to our witness.

Verse 17 seems obvious but it is better to suffer for doing good than for evil.

Doing evil brings its own deserved punishment as a consequence of their actions.
If the righteous do good and suffer it is not a moral consequence of their actions.
So there must be some element of God's will involved and there must be some good reason and purpose. Jesus, who was sinless, suffered so why should we think that we won't suffer.
The Holy Spirit at work in our hearts and minds will convict us and point us to repentance but also protect us from false guilt of sins already forgiven. So our conscience needs to be informed of God's ways and laws and also be clear as we regularly come before God in confession. That is why it is better to suffer for doing good in obedience to God than doing evil in obedience to the world and that is why it is a blessing.

Christ is the supreme example of suffering who patiently endured it all. Suffered here means died – it was an atoning death, the just for the unjust. It was a substitution in that our sins were paid for by Jesus' death. It was the means of satisfying the wrath of God.
So the cost of all our sins (that is wrong doing against God) has been paid in full by Jesus once and for all. Christ's sacrifice removes the barrier between a Holy God and a sinful people. We are reconciled to God and can be children of God and heirs.
Christ did not only die but rose again thus conquering death and by his resurrection we have new life.

In the time of Noah it was an example of God's long-suffering grace as he waited patiently for the people to repent. Those saved in the Ark were brought through the waters safely. The world was judged and the eight repentant people were saved and came to a new post flood world. A type of salvation prefiguring Christ.
Noah warned people that rejecting God put them under judgement and rejecting the gospel puts people under the judgement of God now.
There is much in the OT that points to Christ. Noah or the Exodus show God saving people but it did not give eternal life only Christ does that and that's why we are blessed.

Peter uses the example of Noah to talk about baptism which relates directly to those baptised into life in Christ. The flood was about judgement and the ark was about being saved, being given a way out. Christian baptism is about entering a new life with God. This is achieved by belief in the death and resurrection of Christ.
Peter emphasises that it is not baptism or the water that saves as water only washes the dirt from the outside. It is the work of the spirit that purifies our hearts and it is only through the death of Jesus Christ that we are saved from judgement and also reconciled to God.

So let's not get hung up on outward appearances but see what God has done to the heart souls and conscience of a person. As we heard last week beauty is about the person not the clothes or jewellery. Baptism is only an outward sign so the questions asked at baptism give us the opportunity to come with a good conscience towards God.
Those who share in this salvation must also confess their faith in Jesus for this is about a personal commitment to God and for such a confession they may also suffer. But in knowing Jesus we are truly blessed.

Christ's death and resurrection have other consequences and the passage ends showing more of the victorious side of Christ's suffering.
Christ does have the power to save those he died for.
He was raised as a human but in a glorified body and ascended to heaven.
He is enthroned at God's right hand in a place of supreme privilege and sovereignty in the universe.

All heavenly beings and authorities are subject to his control.

These are the things we profess at baptism and worship through our prayers, songs and creeds.

Peter exalts us to allow God's spirit to cleanse us and renew us. For it is in this Jesus that we place our hope and in this Jesus is our faith.

Christians are called to live in submission to Christ but this is not as defeated captives in hopeless slavery rather it is the willing and joyful service of those who know they are victors and heirs with Christ. That is good news and we should celebrate being blessed by God and be ready to share that with anyone who asks.

Amen

Thank you for taking the time to read this and may God bless you this coming week.