

May 1, 2014
4th Sunday after Easter

Hope in the Good Shepherd

1 Peter 2:19-25
Pastor Michael Ewart

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear friends in Christ,

We are continuing our sermon series called “HOPE.” We are working our way through portions of 1 Peter. Maybe before we get too much farther, let me point out something about this letter. Peter does not write like Paul. When you read Paul’s epistles, they tend to be very linear and structured. Paul moves in a very organized fashion as he progresses from point to point. Peter on the other hand writes in a spiral fashion. He touches on a topic, then comes back and touches on it again, and again, and again. So as we continue through this sermon series, it may strike you as I read a text, “Wait, that sound familiar. I thought we heard something similar last week.” And you probably did. Because similar thoughts and themes are repeated throughout the book. It’s not the way we westerners typically write or teach, but it’s a good way. Repetition is the mother of learning, so if you keep approaching the same topic again and again, you are likely to learn it better.

So, that said, you may recall the first week we noted that Peter is writing this letter to a group of Christians in Asia Minor who were suffering for the name of Jesus. They were Jewish Christians who had been scattered because of persecution, and now they were being persecuted again. They were getting pretty sick of it. They were getting discouraged. They needed hope. And so a message of hope is really the theme of 1 Peter.

Now the question I want you to consider is this: can you associate with this message? Is it something that really speaks into your life and experience today? How many of you suffer because you are a Christian? At first glance, we might assume the number suffering for Christ is quite small. Certainly we can find places in the world today where persecutions of Christians is happening. We could see where 1 Peter might be especially needed by Christians in China, or North Korea, or Pakistan, or Nepal. There Christians are attacked, their property is stolen or can be confiscated. In some cases they can lose their life for following Christ. Surely they would need to hear this message of hope!

But do we really need it here in America? I would suggest to you that we are indeed persecuted here in America. If you will boldly follow Jesus, if you will live out your faith in our life, if you will take a stand for all of Christ’s teachings and defend them, if you will witness your faith and not hide it, you will suffer persecution. Oh, you won’t be killed or imprisoned. You won’t have property stolen or confiscated. But it is very likely that you will be labeled. You will be called narrow-minded. Backward. Intolerant. Prejudiced. Unloving. It is likely that you will be avoided. . . . that you won’t be invited to certain activities or parties. You may be ostracized by some, and spoken about behind your back.

And I don’t think this is news to you. You kind of know this is happening, don’t you? Isn’t this why we just kind of sense how direct we can be about our faith? It’s kind of a cultural sense you develop. You can talk about God in general, and vaguely about faith. It’s okay to say you’ll pray for somebody. But you know this, don’t you. . . . that there is a definitely line that if you cross it. And you are definitely over that line if, for example,

- you express your belief that the God of the Bible is the creator of all things.
- if you speak of Jesus Christ specifically
- if you insist that salvation is found in Christ alone.
- If you speak about the Bible as the true Word of God with no mistakes, and it is the only standard and norm for our faith and life.

That sort of talk, even in America, will likely mean for you persecution.

So the message I want you to take to heart today is the message that Peter spoke to those 1st Century Christians living in Asia Minor is this. Faithfully and closely and actively follow the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is good when you hope in Christ and live out your faith and hope in your daily life. But here's the thing: when you do, you will suffer. But here's the big idea. Be ready and willing to suffer for Jesus. Be ready and willing to suffer for doing good. Even as you suffer for Jesus, if you will continue to hope in the Good Shepherd, God will pleased. You will endure. Your faith will stand. God will be honored.

Hope in him as your substitute.

Hope in him as your example.

So let's listen to these thoughts as we read through the verses before us today in 1 Peter 2:19-25.

1 Peter 2:19-25 For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

This part of the letter was specifically addressed to slaves. Peter doesn't urge them to rise up against their masters to obtain their freedom. But instead he says to submit to them and to respect them... even the ones who are harsh. In doing so, will they be treated well? Peter says, "Maybe not!" They might still suffer. But if we must suffer, we ought to suffer for doing good, not evil.

So listen carefully: "If you will faithfully, always do good... if you are always a good Christian... if you always love others like you love yourself... always kind, generous, hard-working, dedicated... you will never suffer. People will always notice and commend you. You will always be respected." Is that true? No. That is false. You may faithfully do good to the glory of God... and suffer because of it.

A good example of this is Joseph in the Old Testament. Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers. He was taken down to Egypt where he worked as a slave in Potiphar's house. Joseph was a hard-working, dedicated slave. He was always honest, and he worked his hardest. Potiphar noticed, and put Joseph in charge of everything in his household. But then Mrs. Potiphar noticed Joseph and how handsome he was. She tried to seduce him. When Joseph refused and ran away, she framed him. Joseph was arrested and imprisoned.

But wait, that's not how it should have happened! He did exactly what God wanted him to do! But he suffered.

Exactly. And I want you to understand that this very well may happen to you as well.

So the question becomes: “Why should I do good? Why should I persevere? Why bother if doing good still results in suffering? Why should I not lose hope? What can keep me going?” Hope in your Good Shepherd will keep you going, just like it did Joseph.

There are two kinds of hope you place in Jesus your Good Shepherd: Hope in him as your substitute. And hope in him as your example. Both are very important.

Listen:

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

First, consider how these verses described Jesus our Good Shepherd as our Substitute. The truth is you have not been perfect. You haven’t always done good. You haven’t always tried your best. You haven’t always submitted to the will of God. You haven’t always been kind, generous, helpful, dedicated, industrious. You have compromised your beliefs and godly morals. You have done what Jesus hates.

And you haven’t always perfectly hoped in the Good Shepherd, Jesus. You have doubted. Your faith has wavered. You’ve doubted his Word and his promises. You’ve become distracted by and focused on the things of this world. You’ve sometimes thought that you can do it yourself, and you don’t need God’s help.

What I’m describing is called “sin.” You have it. It’s comes from within you. It is ugly and destructive. It ruins your relationship with God. It prevents you from being in God’s eternal presence in the future. It condemns you to eternity in hell. This is serious.

But... hope in the Good Shepherd, because Peter explains how he is our Substitute. He has done what we have not. **“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.**” If you want to know if Jesus was truly a perfect human being, look at him when he was under the greatest pressure. His life was on the line. He was being falsely accused. How would you react if you were being falsely accused and you could get the death penalty as a result? Do you think you would defend yourself? Do you think you would say a few choice words? Do you think you might get very emotional, and lash out against those falsely accusing you? Jesus didn’t. He was sinless. He did not retaliate. He did not threaten anyone. He simply trusted God. He is your perfect substitute.

But it didn’t stop there: **He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.**” Jesus was innocent, yet he went the way of the cross. Why? Because he bore our sins in his body on the tree. He was willing to be punished instead of us. By his wounds, you have been healed. It was your body that should have been smacked, and spat upon, and scourged, and nails pounded through, and crown of thorns. Imagine yourself in such pain and agony as Jesus was on the cross. This is the just punishment from a just God... and it should have been yours!

But with every smack, you have a bruise that disappears. As the crown of thorns is

pressed in his head, your head stops bleeding. With every strike of the scourge that tears open his back, your back has one less wound. Whip after whip, his back is torn up and yours keeps healing. When nails are pounded through his hands, your nail holes close up. And as Jesus calls to heaven, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken ME?" You look up and see the Father smiling at you! And when Jesus calls out, "It is finished" you look in the mirror and see yourself holy, perfect, clean, pure, pristine... fit for heaven. By his wounds you have been healed.

Jesus is your substitute.

But listen, because of what you are in Christ Jesus... because your Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep... now don't you want to follow him in his example? Don't you want to live like him and act like him and talk like him? And... here's what we're especially talking about today... when you have to suffer, especially when you suffer for doing good... especially when you suffer for the name of Jesus... don't you want to follow Jesus example and suffer in the same way that he did? When you hope in the Good Shepherd, won't you strive to handle suffering as the Good Shepherd did?

And what does that look like? **To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.**" Following in his footsteps means that when you suffer for following Jesus, you will not sin. You will not lie, or hide the truth for your own convenience. You won't be silent or vague about your faith in Christ. You will not retaliate when you are attacked. You will not threaten those who threaten you. You will trust that the Judge of all things will one day make this all right. You will strive to live for righteousness because doing what is right in God's sight will be your greatest desire.

CONCLUSION: So [confirmands today you have boldly and publicly confessed your faith. God will call on you do that in much more hostile circumstances.] don't compromise or generalize your faith to avoid suffering. We do this almost naturally. Instead, be bold in your faith. Be specific in your faith. Be vocal with your faith. Be confident in your faith. Be active in your faith. And expect to suffer. But when you do, keep your hope in your Good Shepherd. He is the one that sacrificed himself for you. He is the one that shows you the way to stand firm when you suffer for doing good. Hope in the Good Shepherd! Amen.