

Dear friends in Christ,

This is now our fifth sermon in this series called “Hope”... a series from 1st Peter. Next week will be last of this series. If you’ve been here for the previous parts, you will remember that this letter we call “1 Peter” was written to Christian in Asia Minor who were being persecuted for their faith in Christ. Any time we suffer in this world, it is difficult, and that can challenge our faith. But when you suffer specifically because you are a follower of Jesus, that can truly cause a person to lose hope. Paul wrote 1 Peter to encourage those believers who were suffering for the name of Christ. This wonderful letter does the same for us today.

Today and next week, we’re going to talk about the response of hope. If you have hope in Christ, how will you respond. What will you experience on the inside? What will that hope look like to people on the outside? In other words, as people observe you, especially those who might not like you because you are a Christian, what will they see?

Now this is a fairly narrow topic for a sermon. To get this, you really need to have in mind the context of the rest of 1 Peter, and the context of the sermons already preached in this series. You see, I am presuming that the four previous sermons have worked in your heart and that you already have living hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let’s do a quick review so we remember why it is that we have this **living hope**. We have learned how important it is for us to have hope. And so hope is what God gives us. Yes, in this world we will have pain and suffering. In this world it is likely that we will suffer because we are followers of Christ. Yet that should not rob us of our hope, because **you are redeemed!** You are redeemed from sin, death and the devil. He redeemed you with the blood of his Son Jesus Christ. He redeemed you for a life of praise to God and service to him.

We have hope because our hope is found in Jesus, our **Good Shepherd**... for he is the one who sacrificed himself for the sheep. He is the one who shows us an example of how to suffer.

In Christ we have hope because we know **we belong**. You have been built into Christ, the living stone, the cornerstone, the capstone. You are a part of his holy temple, the church. And as a part of his church, you have privileges... and they confirm that you do indeed belong.

So, you have a living hope. Now let us consider today: what is the response of hope? Specifically, what does a person with living hope look like on the outside? What do they look like even in the midst of suffering and persecution? How will your hope express itself in your daily life? Listen:

1 Peter 3:13-18 (NIV84)

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 what they fear; do not be frightened.” Then jumping to verse 17 it says: **“It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”**

Peter is telling us here that our response to suffering, our response to persecution should be, first of all, to do good. And not just do good, but be eager to do good... be zealous to do

good. That's not our natural inclination, is it? When you are hurt by others, what is your typical response? When you're suffering, how do you usually respond? Don't we usually get mad? Don't we usually want to get even? If someone hurts you, don't you want to hurt them back? But Peter says to do good. Be eager to do what is good.

The first reason he gives is that when you do good, it makes it harder for others to harm you. If you ever fought with one of your siblings growing up, you know how true this is. Why were you mean to your brother or sister? Wasn't it because you were looking for a reaction? Isn't it because you knew they would be mean back? And when Mom and Dad came in to break up the fight, was there usually just one kid to yell at? By the time Mom and Dad came in, isn't it true that you and your brother or sister had done wrong? And what happens if one or the other decides not to add fuel to that fire? They are wronged and they choose to respond with good? Doesn't that throw water on the whole situation and calm things down in a hurry? In fact, when brother is mean to his sister and only gets a response of goodness, he will tend to pick on his sister less and less.

Peter says that this principle sometimes works for Christians. If someone hates you because you're a Christian, and they harm you because you're a Christian, but you respond with only goodness... often times they will have less of a desire to harm you. They harassed you because they were looking for a fight. Instead you were nice, and did kind things. And so they stop harming you, at least not as much.

But Peter acknowledges that sometimes that's not the case. They may still harm you even though you are eager to do what is good. In this case, Peter says you blessed even if you must suffer for what is right. And maybe you didn't change the heart of the person who harms you, but is it possible your eagerness to do what is good will have an impact on someone else who sees you respond to evil with good?

Peter follows up with a quote from Isaiah 8: "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." By this he means, that those who hate Christians know what they are afraid of you, and they try to make you afraid in the same way. Peter says, don't fear what they fear. So what do they fear? 1) They are afraid of *rejection from peers*... rejection by the world... loneliness. And so they figure you must fear the same and they get your peers or the world to reject you... they try to isolate you. Don't fear that. God is by your side, and so are your brothers and sisters in Christ. 2) They fear a *loss of material things*, so they might take your things, or try to get you fired, or make sure your passed up for the promotion. Peter says, "don't be frightened of that." It's just stuff and you can't take it with you.

Those who persecute Christians do so with a knowledge of what they are afraid of and they assume you must fear the same things. But Paul says ,do not fear what they fear. What they are afraid of ultimately cannot harm you!

Now, where do you find courage to not be fear what they fear? **"15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord."** In your heart, on the inside where no one can touch you or influence you, you set apart Christ as Lord. He is master and king within you. He is the one in charge in your heart and in your life. You live for an audience of one: Christ. Only his opinion matters. Only his favor matters. Only his approval matters. When you honor Christ as Lord in your heart, you will not fear what people can do to you. You will remain eager to do what is good instead of responding with evil.

"15 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 behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” You have hope. But it’s not yours to hoard. It’s yours to share. And God wants you to share with everyone in your life.

- 1) Don’t withdraw from the world or those who persecute you. In John 17:15, Jesus said, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” God wants us to live in the world, but not of the world. God wants us to live in the world, but not like the world. God wants us to live in the world, so that we can be salt and light in this world... so that we can testify to his truth and connect people to Christ. God wants you to love people in this world... even those who might persecute you... enough that you will share the reason for your hope at every opportunity.
- 2) And so as we live in this world eagerly doing good in service to God, even when we are persecuted or suffer, people WILL notice. And some people, when they notice, will ask you: Why do you hope like you do? Your hope is striking to them. They know that if they were in your situation, experiencing what you are experiencing, they would not have hope. But you do. Why? They want to know. And that is your opportunity to share the reason for the hope that you have.

I have heard some Christians say that they don’t need to talk to other people about Jesus. Their life of good works is the only sermon they need to preach. Peter would disagree. Your life of good works in service to God in reverence for Christ, in response to his saving work for you and in you is certainly an essential start. It is pre-evangelism. It’s the thing that has to be there first to give you the right to speak to people about Christ. After all, if your life was indistinguishable from the people of this world, they would care less about what you believe in. It doesn’t make a difference. If your car breaks down as often or more often than my car, I’m not interested in what kind of car you have. It’s no better than mine. But if they see your life is better than theirs. You have hope when they do not, they will be led to ask you about your faith. They will want to know about this strange hope that you have. And Peter tells us, that when they ask, you need to be ready! Ready to give the reason for the hope that you have.

So let me ask you this: Are you ready? If an unchurched friend of yours walked up to you this afternoon or at work tomorrow and said, “I’ve noticed you’re different. What rattles me doesn’t phase you. What’s important to me doesn’t seem important to you. You have a peace that I do not have. You have a hope I wish I had. What is the reason for you hope?”

What would you say? You need to give this some thought ahead of time. Write out a script ahead of time if you need to so that you really think this through. These opportunities don’t come every day, so when they do come, we need to be ready? How do explain the reason for the hope that you have?

Maybe you could say something like this: my hope is not in me... it is outside of me. In me I see wrong and mistakes and failure. The reason for my hope is outside of me... it is found in Jesus Christ. He is my Savior. He saved me by living a perfect life on my behalf. He died on a cross for all my sins. His dead body came out of the grave on the third day and he lives again. Jesus is my Savior. He is the center of my universe. My hope revolves around him and him alone. Whatever troubles this world bring, Jesus is that immovable rock in the

center of my life... that living stone upon which my life is built. That is the reason for the hope that I have. And I would love nothing more than for you to have that same hope!

Those were my words. What words would you use? Can I give you an assignment? Take time this week to carefully plan what you will say when someone asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. If you want my help in working through this, contact me and we'll work on it together. But we need to be prepared!

Can I just make one more quick comment about witnessing your faith? Be bold, witness your faith, watch for every opportunity and take it! But note what Peter said about the way you are to witness your faith: **“But do this with gentleness and respect.”** This can sometimes be a challenge. When you are under attack for being a Christian, your inclination will be to attack back. They are getting aggressive, so you get more aggressive. They get angry, so you get angry. They are defensive and you start getting defensive. They are rude to you, so you want to get rude back. They show a lack of understanding, and you are tempted to show off your knowledge, or to act arrogantly. Resist that temptation. Instead, always witness your faith with gentleness and respect. Another passage says, “Speak the truth in love.” As you witness the truth, constantly be evaluating “am I doing this in love? Am I speaking with gentleness and respect?” The way you say something often sticks in a person's mind more than what you say. Part of your witnessing to the hope that you have is the manner in which you say it!

One more verse to look at that ties all of this together. Peter, throughout his letter, keeps coming back to Christ. What is your motivation for good works? How will you continue to be zealous to do them even if you are suffering for Christ? What is your motivation for speaking up about the hope that you have considering the result very well could be more persecution? Listen: **18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,**

Peter keeps coming back to who you are in Christ, and how you got to be who you are. You are a dearly loved child of the most-high God. And how did you enter into such an esteemed status? Christ died for all of your sins, once and for all. You didn't deserve it... you were unrighteous. But he did it to bring you to God. It was the only way. He was put to death for you! But he rose from the dead on the third day by the Spirit.

Be eager to do what is good to praise his name and to witness through your life about your amazing Savior. Boldly give the reason for the hope that you have because Christ died for your sins and he brought you to God. You can lead others to have that same hope!

Friends in Christ. You have a living hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. Make that hope that is invisible in your hearts, something that is very visible in your daily life. And make it something very audible as you proclaim to your friends and relatives and neighbors the reason for the hope that you have. So leave today once again with the assurance that you do have hope. And go today pondering this thought: Hope gives witness. Amen.