*Courageously Proclaiming Christ*

1 Peter 3:13-17

3/12/23

 This morning, we take up the subject of our relationship with the world. I use that termin a specific way. In his gospel, John uses it to describe the lost mass of humanity. I use it the same way. We live in a world where many people have not received Christ as Savior. They are still lost in their sin, traveling the broad road that leads to destruction. As Christ’s witnesses, our job is to proclaim the message of His salvation, calling people to repent of sin and believe in Him. We do this because we want to see Satan’s domain ransacked with the gospel of Jesus Christ as God transfers sinners out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son.

 We know that we are supposed to evangelize. Yet many of us feel guilty for neglecting this work and paralyzed about moving forward in it. We feel inadequate, ill-equipped, and at times just plain scared when it comes to sharing our faith. We want to, but we don’t know where to start. Our text provides a great place to begin. Peter gives three principles for our conduct in the world that emboldens our witness and creates a platform for us to do evangelism from.

 The first principle we see is that we are to be courageous for Christ. Verses 13-14 describe a dichotomy that Christians face. On the one hand, the way the gospel transforms our behavior should win us favor with people. Vs. 13 points in this direction when it asks *who will harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?* This recalls the positive qualities we discussed in vs. 8. When harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, kindheartedness, and humility mark our lives, people will be more likely to respect us than to attack us. Yet this is not always the case, as Peter’s original audience was experiencing. Despite the integrity of their lives, they were suffering because of their faith. This happens because the world hates God. Their disdain for God will cause them to oppose God’s people.

Many Christians have the notion that if the world gets offended at a Christian, it is the Christian’s fault. They must be a hypocrite, lack grace, speak too harshly, or have some other defect that caused the world to dislike them. We forget that Jesus was God’s gift of love to the world who possessed the fullness of God’s grace; and the world hated Him for it. When we live like Jesus lived, love like He loves, and demonstrate the grace He gives, we will be opposed by a culture that is doing everything it can to extinguish the light of God. This is why Jesus said *If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before you. If you were of the world, the world would love it own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.*

 Peter raises this reality in vs. 14. We should not be harmed if we prove zealous for what is good. *But even if you should suffer for doing what is right for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.* Living righteously will cause the world to oppose us. This is why the Jews turned on Jesus. His righteousness exposed their wickedness. Rather than seeing Him as the solution to their evil hearts, they treated Him as a problem to be eliminated. The world will do the same to us if we take seriously our responsibility to reflect God’s holiness in a culture bent on perversion.

 When we suffer for doing right, we are blessed. James tells us to count it all joy when we encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces endurance. And let endur-ance produce it perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Paul describes his suffering in Col. 1 as participating in and filling up what was lacking of Christ’s suffering. Suffering is not fun; but it gives us the opportunity to adorn the gospel with God’s beauty as we bear up under trials for Christ’s sake. There is reward for faithfulness in suffering.

 So the integrity of our lives should remove opposition from us; but the fact that we live in a broken world also means that sometimes we will suffer for displaying God’s righteousness. We are to respond to that mistreatment with courage. If we suffer for doing what is right, we do not fear their intimidation, nor are we to be troubled. Our culture uses intimidation and character assassination to ‘cancel’ anyone who does not parrot the politically correct narrative. We are to courageously speak the message of Christ into the insanity of our culture. We do not fear them. The worst they can do is kill us. We do not allow them to intimidate us into silence, because we know the eternal condition of their souls hang in the balance. And we are not troubled by their opposition, for it is expected behavior. Knowing that we have already won gives us courage to do Christ’s work irrespective of the temporal consequences. Our cultural moment calls for courageous Christians who are willing to lay down their lives for the sake of the gospel.

 The second principle we see in this text is that we are to be Christ-centered in our focus. Vs. 15 is probably the most well-known verse in 1 Peter, as it is commonly appealed to when considering our responsibilities regarding personal evangelism. The verse opens with a very strong command. Rather than being fearful, intimidated, or troubled by the world’s opposition, we are to *sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.* When you sanctify something, you are marking it as sacred. It is determined to be holy, set aside for the purpose of holiness. Peter is telling us that Christ is to have a position of prominence in our lives. Sanctifying Christ in our hearts does not mean we increase or diminish His holiness. His holiness is intrinsic to who He is. Rather, Peter is telling us that His holiness is to be the controlling factor of our lives.

 This is why we sanctify Christ as *Lord*. These two titles are significant. The term *Christ* points to Jesus’ ministry as Savior and all that that contains. The term *Lord* speaks to His divine rule. Yes, Jesus is the gentle and lowly Savior we read about in the gospels. But He is also the conquering King riding on a war horse and slaying His enemies with the sword of His mouth that we read about in the book of Revelation. These are not opposing views. Jesus is not bipolar. His Saviorship and Lordship go hand in hand. Jesus is willing to save all who trust in Him; yet those who reject Him will be destroyed, and rightly so. When we apply to Christ for salvation, we are also submitting to His Lordship, or rule, in our lives. Belief is demonstrated by following Jesus and submitting to His ways.

 We are to sanctify this Savior King in our hearts. The heart is the center of our being, the place where the soul resides. Sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts means we order our lives around Him. Our relationship to Him as Savior and King controls how we think, what we do, how we work, our attitudes, and our treatment of others. Christianity is not one of the hats we wear in life. It is a personal relationship with the eternal God of the universe that should be evident in every facet of our lives. When we sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts, it means we treat our spouses in a way that honors Christ. We parent children with an eye to God’s purposes for them. We work as if we are working for Christ. We serve the church because we want to please Christ and advance His purposes. We love our enemies because we want to be like our Savior. Our desire is for everything about us to remonstrate the greatness and glory of Christ.

 When we do this, it will get the world’s attention, creating a platform for us to share our faith. The seeker movement of the late 80s misled the church into thinking that the way to reach the world is to adapt it to the culture. Show people how Christians are just like them so they will want to be like us. We have gotten very good at this, for there is oftentimes no demonstrable difference between the world and the church.

The world doesn’t need us to be like them. It needs us to be distinct, holy. This is why the Bible calls us to be salt and light, showing the world a different way to live. Salvation transforms us. It gives us life, light, hope, joy, peace and so on. These things should be visible in us. It is the holiness of our lives and the hope that empowers it that catches people’s attention. When people see a marked difference in us, they will want to know why. This is what creates the platform for us to share our faith. They don’t need to see perfection. They just need to see the difference Jesus makes in our approach to life. They should see us face death with peace and hope. They should see our joy when we are mistreated and watch us express thanksgiving in hardship. When they see these things in us, they will want to know the reason for our hope, because they do not have it but want it.

 The center of vs. 15 raises two aspects of our evangelism efforts. First, we adorn the gospel by our conduct. Peter says that when our faith radically transforms us, people will want to know why. I was told this week of how a funeral home director asked a family he was working with if they really believed all that stuff about heaven. He asked because their hope was evident in their mourning and wanted to know its source. The husband of the woman who had passed away shared the gospel with him. Brothers and sisters, when people watch us, do they see Christ? Or do we look, act, and think just like them? We have been born again to a living hope. That hope should be on display, not just in the big moments of our life, but in little ones too.

 As important as our conduct is, no one can be saved by our conduct. The gospel is good news that must be proclaimed. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word concerning Christ. So as people ask us about our hope, we need to be ready to explain the reason for it. This is where we often make evangelism harder than it needs to be. You do not need to have a degree in theology to share your faith. All God asks is that we be able to tell others what our hope for salvation is. Tell people what you believe and how it has changed you. Point people to Jesus, telling them why He came, what He did, and how He will save them.

 Beloved, do not make evangelism harder than it is. All you are doing is sharing what you believe makes you right with God. If you cannot do that, then you need to ask yourself if you believe the gospel. Sadly, pastors have been less than clear when explaining the gospel, often trying to soften its claims to make it more palatable to hearers. Then they wonder why those they serve are fuzzy on the main tenants of the gospel. This is a message we need to be clear about. A partial gospel or edited gospel is a false gospel. We need to know the message of salvation for our own soul’s sake, and so that we can tell others about it.

 I brought a book up here with me today titled *What is the Gospel*. If you are unsure if you can define the message of salvation clearly, then buy this book and work through it. It breaks it down into simple terms and supports it with Scripture. It will equip you to be able to give an account for the hope within you.

 Vs. 15 ends with two qualifiers on sharing our faith. The first has to do with our approach to the listener. We are to share our faith *with gentleness*. We are not those who carry a 10 lbs. study Bible around looking for someone to club over the head with it. The gospel is a message of hope. It is living water for the spiritually thirsty. It is food for the starving soul. It is salve for the blind eye. It is life for the spiritually dead. We are not aggressive in our presentation of hope. Instead, we are gentle, showing people the gentleness of our Savior who said *come to Me all you who are weary and heavy leaden and I will give you rest.*

 We are also to be reverent. This speaks of our attitude towards God. Our concern in doing evangelism isn’t just to woo the sinner to Christ. We also want to honor God. This reverence causes us to be accurate with the message, serious about the subject, and earnest in our appeal. We will not give an account to God for how people respond to our witness. Salvation is God’s work. But we will give an account for our faithfulness to bear witness and how we handled we handled the opportunities He gave us. So we are to be ready to share our faith whenever opportunity allows.

 There is third principle, which hits at something we have repeatedly addressed in this study. Vs. 16 calls us to keep our conscience clear. Although our behavior does not change the truthfulness or power of the gospel message, poor conduct will limit our opportunities to share and our effectiveness when we do. Furthermore, sin riddles us with guilt, which will paralyze our evangelistic efforts. Conversely, having a good conscience emboldens our efforts.

 Vs. 16 should sound familiar, because it is very closely related to 2:12, where we are told *keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evil doers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.* Now we are told *keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.* The conscience is the seedbed of our actions. It helps us know what is right and what is wrong. Like the rest of us, our conscience as been corrupted by sin, so it needs informed and reprogrammed by God’s word. This is the reason Peter tells us to keep a good conscience. We are to watch over it, mold it to God’s word, and keep it tender to the Spirit’s leading. When we have a good conscience, it will produce excellent behavior.

 If we do not keep a good conscience, not only will our behavior be less than ideal, but it will also break our spirits. I read a book a while back on five martyrs from the English reformation. Several of them were encouraged by friends to recant their views and escape death. Their reasoning was that they were more use to God alive than dead. Once out of prison, they could continue their work of reformation. Several men listened to the counsel of their friends, recanted their views, and were released. But in doing so, they violated their consciences, which broke their spirits. Shame and depression swept over them, making them ineffective in Christ’s service for many years. Each of them realized they had made a mistake in recanting.

 This is why we are told in vs. 17 that it is better to suffer for doing what is right than for doing what is wrong. Those men I just mentioned, godly men who would seal their testimony for Christ with their own blood, suffered immensely because they violated their consciences and did what was wrong. It would have been better had they suffered for doing what was right. They probably would have been killed much earlier, but they would have gone to their Master in heaven with a clean conscience as faithful witness.

 Beloved, we need courage if we are to speak the truth into our culture. And we need to demonstrate the power of the gospel, not just with our words, but with a transformed life. This happens when Christ is our consuming passion, when He becomes the all in all of our lives. When we live like that, we will have ample opportunity to tell people the reason for the hope that is in us.

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.*