

Witness in Exile (3:8-17)

What's up church fam online? Good to see you. If you have your bibles, go ahead and turn with me to 1 Peter 3:8 If you're new to our church fam and I haven't gotten a chance to meet you yet, my name is Marcus and I'm one of the pastors here at City Church. We recently have gotten back to our 1 Peter series that we started a while back and the big idea is that as followers of Jesus we are called to live distinct influential lives. He calls us not to conform to culture, but to live distinctively from it. He calls us not to fight culture but to influence it. And he calls us not to run from culture, but to remain present within it.

In today's teaching we're going to do something a little different. Since this passage is, in many ways, touching on the same themes we've covered the past 2-3 weeks, we're not going to spend quite as much time going over it all, because we've already done a lot of that in past weeks of the series, but we will instead sort of briefly unpack it and then give some real life examples followed by some application for us.

So 1 Peter 3:8 starts like this:

[8] Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. [9] Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

So right here, up till this point Peter has talked about specific arenas of life where we're called to do have unity of mind, sympathy, etc. But now he zooms out and says I'm calling *all* of us to respond this way. So whether you're in authority or under authority, whether you are slave or free, married, or single, in college, working, stay at home mom or dad, retired, or any other stage of life, here's how you should respond to evil, injustice, and mistreatment if you are a follower of Jesus. The *natural* response to any hostility is retaliation. You see this a lot in social media these days. One group wrongs another, and the other dedicates the rest of its existence to repaying that wrong. And the cycle continues.

Elliot Clark who wrote *Evangelism as Exiles* said it this way,

But when we suffer, if our collective Christian tone is complaint, if we constantly lament our loss of cultural influence or social standing, if we weep and mourn as if Jerusalem has fallen when our chosen political agenda is overlooked, then we expose our true values. Those troubling circumstances have a way of unmasking

our highest hopes. Sadly, far too often they reveal our hopes have actually been in this present age and not in the one to come.

So Peter, in contrast to all of those tendencies in us, says , when someone reviles you, or criticizes you in an abusive or angrily insulting manner, you should have the posture of a follower of Jesus which is to actually bless them and not repay them with evil. And he then says “for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing” So as followers of Jesus we were called to bless others, or speak well of others, that do evil against us, much like Jesus did. And as we bless, the hope is that the cycle that we talked about earlier stops. It may take a while but the hope is that it stops the violence, the blood shed, all manners of evil. And even if it doesn’t we are still called to endure peaceably and not return with evil at the very least so that we can inherit our blessing and not turn down the path of evil.

There’s a powerful quote from Dr. King that sort of hits these same notes:

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.

Next, Peter is going to get at the same point, but this time is going to reference a psalm from the Old Testament to drive it home.

[10] For

*“Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
[11] let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.
[12] For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

So Peter uses this passage from Psalm 34:12–16 to continue to highlight what he is trying to say. It’s a really good chapter overall if you have the time to read it today. And in many ways this part of the psalm actually reads like it’s a proverb. If you desire to love and see good days as an exile, then here’s what you should do. Keep your tongue from

evil and deceit. Turn away from evil and do good. As followers of Jesus we must refuse to use our words to harm, no matter how great the temptation. We should seek peace and pursue it. And just in case you were wondering, it says the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. Peter offers this psalm without clarification. In other words, he is implying that "the face of the Lord is against those who do evil...period." Doesn't matter if you were responding to *their* evil. God is still against any form of evil.

Let's continue:

[13] Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? [14] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,

So here, Peter is summing up the Psalm we just read. He says to be zealous for doing what is good. And he says that even if you were to suffer, you will be blessed. I'm sure he's both getting this from his Psalm passage but I'd imagine he's also harkening back to when Jesus said something similar in Matthew 5:9–12:

[9] Blessed are the peacemakers [in our daily devotional this past Monday, Sara mentioned that peacemakers and peacekeepers are not the same thing. That a peacekeeper just does their best to not rattle any cages or rock any boats. But that a peacemaker enters into the midst of strife, pain, injustice, and suffering and fights for peace], for they will be called children of God. [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.

Love that passage. Let's continue in 1 Peter

[15] but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

So in this verse, Peter lays out one of the primary ways that he thinks people in our society should hear about Jesus. We might put it in three "steps" **Step 1:** live differently as followers of Jesus. **Step 2:** let that raise questions in people when they see it. **Step 3:**

be ready to explain why that is to them. That, in Peter's mind, is one of the primary ways people in our world should hear about Jesus. If we were to put that into Christianese, we might call that an "evangelism" strategy.

Now there are plenty of other evangelism strategies out there, some of them goofier than others; and oftentimes they're disconnected from any relationship the person you're sharing Jesus with. So you see it with the WWJD bracelets, and the evangecube (which yes, is actually a thing—Google it sometime), or cheesy t-shirts that say things like "Virginity Rocks: Matthew 5. Yes, that is also a thing. The truth is that Christians have come up with all sorts of evangelism strategies over the years. And my goal isn't to knock them—I know a lot of people have actually come to know Jesus through those (maybe minus the "Virginity Rocks" shirt).

But whatever evangelism strategies we gravitate towards, I think one strategy we absolutely cannot neglect is what Peter lays out here. Peter is saying that as believers we must give people a regular glimpse into our lives. And in our lives, what they should see is *distinctiveness*: because Jesus was distinct we should be distinct. And from there, we should be prepared to make the defense when people see Christ in us and ask us about him. Does that make sense? So we should give them a window into our lives. **We cannot divorce all evangelism from real, life-on-life relationships.**

I believe that the more we live our lives as followers of Jesus. Turning from evil and doing good. Blessing those who harm us. Living distinct lives of hope throughout it all. I believe that will lead people to ask questions, precisely because it is so different from how the world around us responds. And that will lead us to be able to defend why we hope this way. All these instructions are aimed at embodying hope in front of a watching world, which they will eventually become curious about.

Let's continue:

[16] having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered [Peter says here that it's going to happen], those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. [So people will revile your good behavior apparently and how you respond will evidently put them to shame, why?] [17] For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

So there's our passage. As we said, if you've been with us during this series, there is nothing necessarily all that novel in those verses we just read. Peter is just echoing what

he's been saying through this entire letter. And part of the reason I wanted to walk through it so quickly is because the concept itself is not all that complex. "Turn from evil, and do good." It's a pretty followable concept in theory. I think the difficulty is not so much understanding what Peter says, but in desiring to do it.

So I wanted to just walk us through some historical examples of when people have done this. Sometimes, when a concept is so foreign to us, what we need most is to have someone put some skin on it. We need some inspiring examples of when it's actually been done well, to move us in the right direction. So let me just give you a few. First up:

Martin Luther King Jr.

We talked about MLK a few times during this series but he truly embodied returning evil for good. His days as civil rights leader saw him lead peaceful protests in the midst of full on hatred and racism. He was committed to being peaceful and not retaliating. He did this so regularly to the point that someone who had observed him called him Jesus junior. Because he so consistently embodied who Jesus was in this regard.

Let me give you another one,

Charleston Nine

In 2015, many of us heard about how Dylan Roof walked into a Bible study of one of the oldest black churches in the US and killed 9 African Americans. It was horrific time in our country. But one of the beautiful things to come out of it all was that one of the victims said:

"I forgive you and my family forgives you,"

And then said:

"But we would like you to take this opportunity to confess and repent, offer your life to Christ, the one who matters the most, and change your ways, and you will be OK. You will be better off than you are right now."

Now apparently Dylan Roof was reported as saying that he boasted to his friends that he was about to kill a bunch of people but later confessed to the police that he almost didn't go through with it because everyone was so nice to him. Imagine loving someone so obviously and steadily that even the person who wants to kill you because of your skin color, goes, they were such nice people. That is exactly what Peter is talking about here.

That even when people speak evil against you for any reason, they are silenced because of your love and posture towards them.

So the next one is what some would call the...

Amish Massacre

In 2006, a man named Charles Roberts went into an Amish schoolhouse and randomly killed 5 girls and then killed himself. Afterwards while the Roberts' family was still coming to grips with the reality that their husband, dad, and son had done this horrific act, the Amish decided to comfort them throughout it all. They extended forgiveness when it seemed like none of that would happen. They even set up a charitable fund for the Roberts family.

So this is what we are talking about when we talk about returning evil for good. Not only did they forgive but they also blessed the Roberts family immensely. The reason they could do that is because the Amish tradition is filled with stories of martyrs, including Jesus himself. They believe that foregoing vengeance does not undo the tragedy but it does constitute a first step towards a more hopeful future.

Everyday Examples

Alright, hear me say, most of us will not be in these types of situations if we are being honest right. But even so we will encounter situations where our roommate will say something that is meant to hurt us, or maybe our spouse says something to intentionally get under our skin. Or maybe a coworker gossips behind your back or your professor makes a snide remark or comment towards you in front of the whole class. So on some level you will probably encounter a few situations like these in our everyday lives.

Now I'll let you in on a little secret: those situations, the everyday situations, are the proving ground for situations like the Charleston Nine. Like MLK. Like the Amish school.

If you've ever wondered if you'd have the faith, the ability to respond with mercy and grace even when the horrific happens, I'll just go ahead and tell you: if you can't respond to your roommate's evil with good or if you can't respond to your spouse's evil with good, you probably won't be able to do it when the stakes are higher either. If you can't respond to your coworkers' or professor's evil with good, you probably won't be able to do it when the stakes are higher.

See, every day, we may not be faced with situations like the Amish community and the Charleston Nine were, but we *are* likely faced with some type of scenario that is an opportunity to practice this posture that Peter hits us with. And as you turn toward blessing, and the more you do it, the easier it will become. We talk about this around City Church often, a central piece of how we change is through our habits: the things we do over and over again.

So here's how this works, responding with evil with blessing won't be easy at first. But don't wait until it "feels right" to do it. Don't wait til your" heart is in it" 100%. Choose to respond to evil with blessing even if it doesn't feel right to you. Because if you do that day in and day out over time this will create a heart posture that does it more naturally.

Jesus

And the motivation for it all, as always, is Jesus himself. When he was on the cross, being mistreated, reviled, excluded, hated...what came out of his mouth was "father forgive them, they know not what they do." Not reviling, but forgiveness and blessing. That's the model we're given for how we should live as well. And if we do that consistently then that will raise questions and lead us to an opportunity to talk to them about who Jesus is and the hope he brings. And that church family is what we are going for.

Let's pray