ALWAYS BEING PREPARED, PART 1

1 Peter 3:13-16

“Always being prepared.” That’s the title for this lesson. Well, prepared for what? Verse 15 of our text says this: “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” This is what we need to be prepared to do each and every day. Now you’ll notice the picture here is “judgment.” Specifically, God’s judgment on the earth in Noah’s day. This picture shows the flood waters rising as it rained for 40 days and 40 nights. This was God’s judgment against sinful mankind. You’ll see the significance of this a bit later in our lesson.

As we study First Peter it’s important to keep in our minds WHO Peter is writing to and WHY he is writing to them. So, who was Peter’s target audience? It was the scattered, persecuted saints living in exile in 5 Roman provinces (1:1). These Christians were suffering injustice because of their faith in Christ. Many had lost their homes, jobs and material possessions. And now they were being forced to live as aliens. As the Roman emperor Nero stepped up his persecution of Christianity, many of these same people, including Peter himself, would die as martyrs for their faith. They were suffering for Christ and it was NOT a pleasant experience. Their lives were difficult. They needed encouragement, words of hope. And so it is that Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, following the command of Jesus to “Feed my sheep,” does just that. He writes to these scattered saints to encourage and exhort them, to give them hope.

But Peter isn’t merely acting as some sort of spiritual cheerleader standing in the background saying, “Go get ‘em boys and girls!” No, Peter is more like a life coach and he offers specific instructions on how to live as Christians in a society hostile toward Christianity. He’s right there with them. He comes alongside these dear persecuted saints and he lifts their spirits with a very practical message. One they desperately needed to hear.

Peter reminds them of their great salvation in Christ, of the blessings of their inheritance, of their living hope, all that is theirs in Christ and which nobody can take away from them. He reminds them of their calling – that they have been set apart for holy living. He urges them to abstain from the passions of the flesh and to keep their conduct honorable among the unbelievers. Their good deeds, their holy lives, as well as their words, will serve as a witness, a positive testimony for Jesus Christ. He details their responsibility as Christians in 3 main areas of life: to submit to the governing authorities, to be good citizens in the country they live in; to submit to their masters, to be good servants, good employees; and to be godly spouses even if their husbands or their wives are unbelievers. Of course, the example Peter points to is Jesus Himself. Peter gives five positive character traits that Christian brothers and sisters are to possess: unity of mind (common goal to advance the kingdom of heaven), sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart and a humble mind. Our motivation is not to please men, but God. Peter reminds them that God is watching. He’s fully aware of what is going on. God hears the prayers of the righteous and He judges those who do evil.

And we agreed that Peter’s words for those 1st Century saints are words for us Christians today because God’s word has been divinely preserved and Peter’s words to them apply to us as well.

Peter’s message up to this point certainly must have encouraged those 1st Century believers. But the reality was that they were living in a hostile world and persecution for their faith was inevitable. So, that being a given, in what way, in what spirit should they respond whenever they were slandered, reviled, abused, mistreated, disrespected? And when it happens to us, how should we respond? Which takes to our passage this morning…

READ 1 Peter 3:13-17

V 13, Peter mentions being “zealous for what is good.” A zealot is a person with a passion [discuss the Zealots in NT times]. So then, believers are to be passionately pursuing that which is good with everything they have. And he implies by the question he poses that if a believer’s life is marked by goodness – by generosity, by unselfishness, by kindness, by thoughtfulness, etc. – then this might slow down some of the resentment and evil treatment done to Christians. Very quickly I need to point out, Peter is not saying that this will eliminate the persecution altogether. Not at all! We know this from v 14 – “but even if you should suffer for righteousness sake…” And v 16 – “when you are slandered.” So there’s no guarantee that if you do good you won’t be persecuted. But those out there in the world will have greater difficulty speaking against you even if they oppose your Christian beliefs. It will be harder to criticize you if your behavior is above reproach. So doing what’s good, as a lifestyle, having a passion for goodness, for holiness, should mark a Christian’s life. Such zeal for goodness will make us the model citizens and outstanding employees of Chapter 2 and the godly wife or husband of Chapter 3.

But like I said, persecution is coming, v 14. There are going to be people out there who become irritated or annoyed or even a bit jealous of you. And when that happens, when you suffer persecution for righteousness sake, Peter says something interesting: “you will be blessed.” What does Peter mean by blessed? In this case he means you will be honored by God. You will be privileged. You will be the object of God’s favor. Paul gives us insight into this idea in Philippians 3:8 when he says, “For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.” Then in verse 10 he says, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” So then, the persecuted Christian in a real sense shares in the sufferings of Jesus. There is a close association with Jesus that we have whenever we suffer for Him. Peter may have been thinking about what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:10-12: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

God will honor those who suffer for doing what is right.

Peter goes on in v 14 to say, “Have no fear of them.” Be courageous, be bold. Be righteous and holy and be passionate for good. V 15, “honor Christ the Lord as holy.” Peter tells these saints to make Christ the object of their life. In the midst of persecution, possibly unto death, you honor Jesus Christ as Lord no matter what happens. As my wife is always reminding me, “It’s not about us, it’s all about Him.” We don’t do anything in the Christian life with the idea of making ourselves look good. No, our motivation is to live our lives in such a way that we point people to Jesus.

V 15 goes on to say, “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…” What Peter is saying is we need to be able to verbalize, to explain, to answer our critics, give personal testimony, tell anyone who asks us why we are a Christian. We need to be able to articulate clearly to them what we believe and why we believe it. “The hope that is in you” is your faith in Christ. Peter called it a “living hope” in Chapter 1. And as we tell people why we are Christians we do so with “gentleness,” a kind respect for the person to whom we are speaking (even if they are not nice and a bit confrontational); and “reverence,” a healthy reverence for God. Remember, you and I are ambassadors for God. We are the representatives of Jesus Christ in a lost world.

Peter talks about us “having a good conscience” in v 16. The NIV says “a clear conscience.” Our conscience is that little voice which God has placed inside every person, believer or not. It is what God has given us to help us discern the difference between right and wrong. Our conscience affirms when we do what is right, and it convicts, makes us feel guilty, when we do what is wrong. So not matter what others say or do, Peter tells us that we are never to compromise doing the right thing. We are to remain obedient to the Word of God. Our good conduct will convict others that they are wrong and will put them to shame.

[flip slide] V 17 tells us that we have two options – we can “suffer for doing good,” what is right and be blessed (v 14), be rewarded by God for it; or we can suffer for “doing evil,” what is wrong and be punished for it. Obviously “it is better to suffer for doing good.” And the model for this, for how we are to live out our Christianity is Jesus Christ. In the midst of His suffering, Jesus triumphed. And that’s what this next section is all about.

READ 1 Peter 3:18-22

V 18, when Jesus was killed unjustly, He triumphed over sin. “The righteous [Jesus who knew no sin] for the unrighteous [sinful mankind, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God]. Christ’s victory brought us to God. His death on the cross made a way for our salvation. As Peter said back in Chapter 1, we “were ransomed…with the precious blood of Christ.”

“Being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.” Paul put it this way in Romans 6:4: “We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Jesus suffering, His death on the cross, brought us salvation. And this deep theological point is what Peter explains further in the next few verses. He uses the analogy of Noah and the ark. [briefly explain meaning of verse 19 – very complicated]

So the picture of salvation in Christ is the ark which carried 8 people only to safety during God’s judgment on the earth. The ark was the means of deliverance thru judgment and it carried those who went into it to a brand new life. And so it is for those who are in Christ. Millions of people perished in the great flood, God’s judgment. And why? Because they rejected Noah’s message (2 Peter 2:5 – “Noah, a herald of righteousness”). For 120 years while the ark was being built, Noah preached a message that God’s judgment was coming. It was in preparation for this judgment that Noah was building the ark. It’s this idea that Peter conveys thru the rest of the Chapter. V 21, how does God save us? Thru the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter, if you read the context of the verses before this, is not talking about water baptism as we normally think about baptism. “not as a removal of dirt from the body,” not water baptism. He’s talking about the baptism of God’s judgment upon the earth in Noah’s day. The ark represents Jesus Christ. We are saved from the wrath of God’s judgment if we are in Christ. There is judgment for those outside of Christ. It is a beautiful picture. Just a thought here. In Noah’s day who was it that got wet? Those who drowned, who were outside the ark.

Jesus therefore triumphed in His suffering, in His death on the cross. And now where is Jesus? V 22, He is in heaven, seated at the right hand of God – that’s the place of honor and power. After His resurrection Jesus ascended back to the Father and took His rightful seat. Hebrews 1:3 says, “After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Hebrews 10:12 says, “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God.” And what’s Jesus doing there today? He is interceding for us, His saints. Hebrews 9:24 says, “For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.” And Peter tells us that all created beings are subject to Jesus. Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:20-21, “He [God the Father] raised Him [Jesus, the Son] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

Peter actually continues this same thought into Chapter 4 and verse 6. This is why the gospel was preached to you, so that you might escape judgment. And this is why we preach the same gospel to a lost world, to people characterized by all those things in 4:3-4, so that they too will have an opportunity to escape God’s judgment to come. That’s why we’re here. That’s the reason why when we got saved God didn’t just take us on home. It isn’t about us and our comfortable life. It’s about reaching people with the gospel message… while there is yet time!

This is why we must always be prepared to make a defense, to explain to anyone who asks us, for a reason for the hope in us. We need to tell others why we are a Christian. We must tell them the good news. Our lives are important. And our words are important.