

The Reason for Our Hope – 1 Peter 3

I was talking to my friend, Jeanna Driver, the other day. Most of you know Jeanna. She's in a rehab facility in Bridgeport right now but hopes to get out this week. As we talked, the topic of conversation landed on Heaven. She said she had gotten to know some really sweet people while she was in that rehab but a couple of them had died. She said that made her sad. But then she said it is not as sad as it used to be for her because she knows as a Christian that she will see those people again in Heaven. And that made her happy.

Do you know what that is called? Do you know what having that world view is about? It's about **hope**. That's what the Bible is talking about when it says that we as believers have hope. We have the hope of Heaven. We have the hope of eternity with Jesus and the hope of spending the next life with our believing loved ones. And that should make us happy. Of course we miss them right now but pretty soon we will see them again. And that is our hope.

But how many of you have ever asked somebody if they are going to Heaven and they say, *"Well, I sure hope so"*? Well, I'm sorry to tell you this but if that is your answer, then you won't. Because the only way to Heaven is through Jesus and if you have a relationship with Him then you can be assured of that hope for Heaven.

See, there are two kinds of hope. One kind of hope says, *"I hope it won't rain tomorrow."* Or, *"I hope my team wins the game."* You are unsure. It could go either way. The biblical hope that we have is an assured hope that we just haven't seen yet. In Greek, the word is "elpis" (not Elvis) and it means *"a favorable and confident expectation, a forward look with assurance."* (Strong's Concordance, 1680)

In **Acts 26**, Paul is on trial for preaching the Gospel. Imagine that, right? And when it is his turn to speak, he gives the reason for doing what he is accused of. He says, *"And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today."* Paul's hope was God's promise of Heaven and he was prepared to explain it to everybody that would listen. Was Paul unsure about this hope? For Paul, could it go either way? No. Paul knew that he knew that he knew that he was going to Heaven. That was his hope that, at that point, he just hadn't seen yet. And that is the same hope that you and I have and, according to **1 Peter chapter 3**, we are to do exactly what Paul did and be ready to give an answer explaining that hope to anybody that asks.

Let's look at it. Turn to **1 Peter 3** and let's look at **verses 14-16**. All through chapters 1 and two, Peter has called us to be holy. Be holy as God is holy. Be holy and you will be happy. Here's Jesus, our model of holiness. Here's why. Here's how. Here's what is going to happen if you do and what will happen if you don't. If you have gotten this far through the book of 1 Peter, you have to start believing that holiness is the best way. Living like God wants you to live is the best way of life.

Now, do you know what is going to happen when you start to live a life of holiness? Somebody somewhere is going to notice. They may be impressed or they may be offended. They may be curious about it or they may get mad. That's up to them. But pretty soon, somebody is going to ask you about it. Pretty soon they are going to say, *"Uh, hey, you're kinda weird. What's going on with you?"* Or maybe they say, *"I want what you have. You don't get freaked out when a crisis comes. How do you do it?"* Or they might even say, *"Hey, you can't say that. You can't do that. That offends me and I want you to stop it right now!"* What are you going to say when that happens?

Let's take a closer look at what Peter says we are to do in those situations. **1 Peter chapter 3, verses 14-16**. I don't like how the verses and chapters are laid out in the book of Peter so I want to start in the second sentence of **verse 14**. It says this: *"Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."* ¹⁵ *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. 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."*

Most of you know I got another dog not long ago because, you know, everybody needs three dogs, right? Anyway, I was out in the back yard last week building a doghouse for sweet Lucy, my new Blue Heeler. I was sawing and measuring and hammering nails with my hammer and I noticed the neighbor kid was watching me across the back fence. I didn't think much about it but the kid just kept staring. It got kind of weird. So, finally I asked him, *"You ok?"* And he said yeah, he was fine. I said, *"Well, do you need something?"* And he answered, ***"No, I was just waiting to hear what a preacher says when he hits his thumb with a hammer."***

I say that because we need to remember that the world is always watching us. They are comparing our lives to what our lips say and so it is important that if we talk about holiness

that we live holy lives. And if we live holy lives then we need to be prepared to tell a worldly person why we live that way.

We need to remember that 1 Peter was written during the horrible reign of Emperor Nero who did unspeakable things to Christians all over the Roman Empire. That is the context of this. The people this was originally written to were being horribly persecuted or at least threatened with persecution and Peter is telling them to be prepared to give an answer as to why they lived a Christian life like they did.

That phrase, *“be prepared to give an answer”* could mean be prepared for a trial before the authorities in a formal court as you are tried for your life, like Paul was doing in Acts. Or it could also mean to be prepared to answer somebody on the street who just asks you why you believe what you do. But let me ask you a question. Why are they asking? What is it that makes them notice you? The answer is in **verse 14**. He says, *“Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”*

When the world sees that you are not afraid of whatever the world may throw at you, they are going to notice. The world is full of people who said they were believers in Jesus but when the world says or does something to make them be quiet about it, they shrivel up and stay quiet because they are afraid of what the world might do or say or not allow that person to do. So, when somebody backs up their holy speech with a holy life and then shows no fear of what the world may do to them, people are going to notice and ask questions. Why do you believe what you do?

You probably know what you believe but do you know why you believe it? Is it because your parents believed it and taught you to? Is it because you went to church as a kid and that's what you heard and you never heard anything else? We need to be able to explain to people the reason why we believe what we do. And that comes from reading the Bible and going to church and finding out the reason for our beliefs.

But in **verse 15**, Peter tells us the very first thing we need to do if we are going to be ready to tell somebody why we believe the way we do. He says we first have to set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts. And when he says that, most of you probably go, *“Okay, no problem. Check. What's next?”* But what it really means is that we have to honor God in our hearts - not just with our mouths - as over all and in all and we submit to His will, even when that sovereign will includes suffering; even when His sovereign will allows us to be persecuted unjustly and illegally and it's not right and it's not fair and we don't understand it and we don't deserve it. The first thing we have to do is to be able to truly say in our hearts, *“God, I*

know you are Lord over this whole situation. I know you are in control. I know you love me. And even though I don't understand this, I trust you." That is step one. No problem, right?



Then Peter says in **verse 15** that we are to give an answer. Maybe your version says to make a defense. The word in the Greek is the word from which we get the English word “apology” or “apologetics.” That absolutely does NOT mean we are to apologize for being Christians. That word has changed meaning over the years and it just means to give an answer. Be ready to answer or give a defense for your beliefs.

I think most everybody now knows who **Charlie Kirk** was. Charlie was assassinated last September but there were few people as good as Charlie at apologetics. I love watching those videos of people just foaming at the mouth screaming at him and accusing him of all kinds of stuff and telling him he was wrong about whatever it was. And then Charlie would just calmly quote the Bible and quote the Constitution and explain history and then say, *“And that’s why I believe what I do.”* And the whole crowd would clap and the person yelling would slink off in embarrassment. Charlie was an apologetic. He was ready to give an answer about most anything. All Peter was telling us to do is be able to answer why we have hope in Jesus to take us to Heaven when we die.

But there is one caveat. We have to do it carefully. Peter says we are to do it with gentleness and respect. And that can be harder than it seems. The context of this letter would make it very hard to do this with gentleness and respect. Peter was saying to Christians who would sometimes be on trial for their lives by crooked and evil politicians that they should respond gently and respectfully. Some versions say with meekness and fear but I think gentleness and respect is a better translation.

Many times our problem today is that we want to win the argument. That is not the goal. You can win the argument and easily lose the person. Listen, at some point, the world is going to persecute you. They may put up with you for a while but some day, somewhere they are going to want you to be quiet. And do you know the best way to get rid of an enemy? Make them your brother. So, even when they persecute you and even when they are mean and rude and even when they have lied about you and have disrespected our Lord – gentle and respectful.

I heard a guy say one time that his kids won some goldfish at a carnival. He wasn’t thrilled about it but he found an old fish tank out in the garage. It had been out there for years and

was filthy but with some serious cleaning with some bleach and some other cleansers, the tank looked pretty good. So, they put the fish in there and what do you think happened? If you have ever had fish, you probably know. The fish quickly died because the cleansers were too harsh. What he hoped would clean the tank killed the fish.

We can easily do that with our witness as well. If your answer to why you have hope makes the other person feel attacked or not listened to or looked down on, that person won't respond well. Speaking of listening, that is absolutely critical when you give your testimony. Make sure the other person is able to ask all their questions and then answer their questions the best that you can. Of course, that doesn't mean you have to know all the answers. Sometimes you may want to tell them you don't know that answer but you will try to find out. But make sure they know they were heard. That's where the respect comes in.

Lastly, look at **verse 16** again. It says, *“keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”* Do you know what your conscience is? I heard a preacher say that your conscience is that divinely implanted mechanism whereby you are either feeling accused or excused. (Pastor Skip Heitzig) I thought that was a good definition.

Now, at salvation, your conscience is wiped clean. That's why you feel so good. **Hebrews 9:14** says that the blood of Christ cleanses our consciences from acts that lead to death. We are no longer guilty at that point. But from then on, it is up to you to keep it clean. And when it's not clean, you ask God for forgiveness.

But do you know what happens when you have a clean conscience? You can be bold in your witness. You don't have to remember anything. You don't have to worry about what people say. Let them accuse you. You know what you have done and not done.

In **Acts 23**, Paul is once again on trial for preaching the Gospel and it says, *“Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.”* Can you imagine Paul with a clear conscience? He was bold!

Charles Spurgeon was a powerful preacher from a couple hundred years ago and one time somebody tried to blackmail him. He got a note that said, *“If you don't give us a certain amount of money we will tell everybody all the bad things you have done.”* Spurgeon replied, *“Publish it in the newspaper. Write it in stars. I don't care what you say. My conscience is clear.”* That's a man with a bold witness.

What are you going to say when somebody asks you about the hope you have for Heaven? And how are you going to say it? Every Christian needs to think it through and be prepared to tell anybody that asks. Are you ready for that? Are you ready to be persecuted for your faith? It will come. If it doesn't, you aren't doing something right.

Music

Do you even have a testimony to give? Do you have that hope that is assured or do you just hope for the best? Let's make sure today. If you don't know for sure that if you died today that you would go to Heaven, I need to talk with you right now. You can be absolutely sure. All you have to do is believe that Jesus is, as He said in **John 14:6**, the only way to Heaven. He died on the cross to pay the price for your sins that the Father said was due. If you had to pay it, it would require you to pay with eternity in Hell. But we are saved by grace and through faith. Let the faith that God gives you accept God's gift of grace. Do it right now as the music plays.