

## "Prepared for Witness" - 1 Peter 3:13-17

If you have claimed Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, if you have placed your trust in Him exclusively, if He is your Lord and you believe He has been raised from the dead, then you are of a privileged class. In fact, there is no class of human beings that is more privileged than the one you belong to. There is no billionaire, no earthly king, no royal dynasty that can come close to the privilege of your class because you are an heir. You have a guaranteed inheritance and that inheritance includes ... everything! Not the universe that exists today, but you will inherit a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. That is your promised playground ... forever!

It is so important that you remember your standing in Jesus Christ. That's why we opened the service this morning with 1 Peter 2:9-10:

*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **His own special people**, (1 Peter 2:9a)*

As God's own special people, you have one, vitally important responsibility:

*... that you may **proclaim the praises of Him** who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9b)*

If you are a Christian, you have been called to glorify God. You are to bear witness to Him. You are to declare the wonder of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You are the light of the world, and you must not quench the luminance that flows through you. You certainly must not extinguish its flame. As the world gets darker, you must shine brighter.

The world is hostile to Christians because the world is controlled by Satan.

*Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." (Revelation 12:12)*

Satan knows he's already defeated and it ticks him off! The world's system is coming after Christians. It is hostile to individuals, it is hostile to families, and it is hostile to the true Church. This will be the case until Jesus returns and restores all things and although for two hundred fifty years, Christians in our country have had a pretty easy time of it, those easy times are coming to an end. True Christianity is becoming an offense to this "free society." If you stand for the truth of this Bible, you are going to be persecuted. If you stand for what this Bible says about marriage, the culture will label you a bigot and a hate-monger. If you stand for what this Bible says about the sanctity of life, you will be vilified for daring to question one's freedom of choice.

This planet is not well. This planet is not happy. The beginnings of trouble Jesus predicted in Matthew 24 have come to pass. They've been here since the fall, but the troubles of the world are intensifying and are now being magnified incredibly, partially because they are fueled by a global media that finds financial profit in stimulating fear and anger. It doesn't matter what side of the political spectrum is promoted, the tactics are the same.

Peter has been teaching us that we must not respond to the world's hostility with the world's tactics. We are not to return evil for evil, or reviling for reviling. We are to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us and pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us. (Matthew 5:44) Well folks, that's just not

natural. You can't do it without the power available through the Holy Spirit. You can't do it unless you remember who you are in Jesus Christ.

*You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **His own special people.***

You need to be prepared and the Bible says it's my job to prepare you, because Jesus gave some to be ...

*... pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, (Ephesians 4:11-12)*

You need to be prepared for the hostility that is coming your way. You need to be prepared so you will not be assimilated by the world's system. You need to be prepared for your witness to the truth of Jesus Christ.

There are two components of your witness for Christ. There is the testimony of your lifestyle, and there is the testimony of your lips. The testimony of your lips is important; we must not be shy in declaring God's truth, but unless your lifestyle backs up your words, you will be nothing more than an incredibly irritating clanging cymbal and we have way too many clanging cymbals in nominal Christianity today. To put it another way, you need to earn the right to deliver God's truth by the way you conduct your life.

That is exactly what Peter has been teaching us. As Christians, we need to be the best citizens, the best employees, the best employers, the best neighbors, the best family members in the entire world. We are to live lives of submission, putting the needs of others first. We are to have a passion for goodness.

We don't like much of what goes on in the world but we must not hate those who are captives of Satan. They are prisoners of the spiritual war. So we must love those who persecute us because they need to be rescued.

We need to have a passion for doing good. There is a very practical reason for this and Peter sums that up in verse 13.

*And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? (1 Peter 3:13)*

Now that is not a universal statement. There actually are those who will harm you for doing good. Peter addresses that in the next verse. But it is generally true, people have a harder time hurting those who are of benefit to them. People have a harder time hurting those who are of benefit to society. So as Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

*See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. (1 Thessalonians 5:15)*

Please don't let any sort of anti-Christianity direct you toward retribution. We see way too much of that and it harms the cause of Christ. Instead, have a passion for doing good. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who spitefully use you.

But even if you are harmless as doves, demonstrating a passion for goodness, it doesn't mean suffering won't come your way. For an example, you don't have to look any farther than Jesus. What did He do to deserve the suffering He endured? Nothing at all. All He did was bring an incredible message of grace. He healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead. He brought great blessing to everyone He met. He did nothing to deserve the suffering He endured. It was what **you** did that caused Him to suffer.

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

Nobody likes to suffer. Jesus didn't like to suffer. God isn't asking you to enjoy suffering, but He is commanding you to cultivate a willingness to suffer for righteousness sake. As Christians, we are a people set apart. We are different from the world because we are not of the world and the world turns on those whom it cannot absorb. So Peter writes, in verse 14:

*But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed.  
"AND DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THEIR THREATS, NOR BE  
TROUBLED." (1 Peter 3:14)*

So Peter is admitting that even if you do good, you might be called on to suffer. And right now, many Christians around the world are suffering horribly for their refusal to deny Jesus Christ. The witness for Christ is stained with the blood of the martyrs, starting with Stephen and continuing on to this present day.

But if you are doing good and suffer, understand that your blessing is absolutely secure. You can actually rejoice in suffering because you have been promised an incredible reward. Jesus said:

*"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, (Matthew 5:11-12)*

Now understand, you don't have to be happy about the suffering itself. That would be more than a little nuts. Jesus did not enjoy the suffering He endured. In fact, He recoiled from it. It is what caused Him to sweat great drops of blood as He prayed in the garden. It was for ...

*... the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.  
(Hebrews 12:2)*

If you are called to take a hit for Jesus, understand that doing so is a great privilege. By the way, you will never have to suffer to the degree that Jesus suffered for you.

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)*

Peter underscores his point by quoting from Isaiah 8:12. The entire verse reads:

*"Do not say, 'A conspiracy,' Concerning all that this people call a conspiracy, Nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. (Isaiah 8:12)*

One commentator sums the idea up perfectly by saying "Don't fear their fear." Satan promotes fear and hate. If he can get us to fear, if he can get us to hate, he can get us to take our eyes off Jesus. That is what the enemy wants us to do. Don't fall for it.

Verse 15 sums up the purpose of our Christian lives.

*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; (1 Peter 3:15)*

There are several components to this verse. The first is, perhaps, the most important because everything hangs on this:

*... sanctify the Lord God in your hearts*

Let your focus be on Jesus Christ. Set Him apart. Venerate Him. Glorify Him. Adore Him. Honor Him. Submit to His purpose. Submit to His will. Jesus died for you; is it too much for you to live for Him?

When things get difficult, it is really tempting to simply embrace the world, but we must not. There are Christians in prison right now who could be released simply by denying Jesus. In some cases their captors tell them, "Hey, you don't even have to mean it. Just renounce your faith in Jesus and you can go back to your family." But they don't, because they have sanctified Jesus in their hearts.

We have been given great and precious promises. We have been promised an eternity of absolute bliss. It is an existence where ...

*... the tabernacle of God [will be with us], and He will dwell with [us], and [we] shall be His people. God Himself will be with [us]. And God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4)*

Are you looking forward to the promise of heaven? Can other people see the hope that is in you? Then you need to be prepared to give a defense for this hope.

The Greek word for defense is *apologia*. It doesn't mean to apologize; it means to explain the logic behind your hope. And it doesn't have to be a theological treatise, just tell them the great things God has done for you.

"I'm a sinner; I'm guilty of cosmic treason against the God who created this universe. I deserve eternal death, an eternity of suffering in hell, but Jesus died to pay the penalty for me and then He was raised from the dead, proving that His sacrifice was accepted and enabling me to have a living relationship with Him. I believe Him. He is my Lord and I believe He was raised from the dead, so the Bible tells me I have been saved. I look forward to an eternity of enjoying His presence. I don't deserve His blessing, but He offered it to me anyway. It's something you can have too."

It's the testimony of your lips. But you have to earn the right to give that defense with the testimony of your life. You need to live with meekness and fear. Yes, you are a privileged class, but you must not lord your position over those who are yet to believe. You are a sinner saved by grace. You brought nothing to the table except your faith, and according to Ephesians 2:8, even your faith was a gift given to you by God.

Are you prepared to give that testimony? I find that an awful lot of Christians are not. Do you know what you believe and why you believe it? Are you able to articulate your faith in a way that can be clearly understood? That is your calling. It is what every Christian is called to do and if you cannot do it, well, it means that I haven't done my job of equipping the saints for the work of ministry. The Bible says I will be held responsible for that failure. Please don't let me down, folks!

One of the best ways I know to become thoroughly prepared is to take advantage of the Contenders Discipleship Initiative. A number of you have. Yes, it requires a commitment of time and a commitment of effort, but it is well worth it because we are called to be prepared to give a defense of our faith. If you have never taken a Contenders course, please consider signing up for the next one we offer. If you've already taken the course, consider taking it again. There's always more to learn, and by participating in

the class you can be a real help to those who are going through for the first time. Stay tuned for this fall's offering.

Now, I can't win anyone to Christ. That's actually the Holy Spirit's job. My job and your job is to clearly present the gospel, to present it with the way we conduct our lives and when presented with the opportunity, we need to give a clear verbal explanation. If we do that, we can have a clear conscience because we have been obedient to the command of God.

*... having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. (1 Peter 3:16)*

There are people in this world who will try to make you feel guilty for standing by the truth of the Bible. They will try to make you feel ashamed, but if you are being obedient to God, you do not need to be ashamed. You can have a good conscience, a clear conscience.

I still remember my pastor, Ron Sallee, talking to that salty old fisherman on the Everett waterfront. When he said he really couldn't buy the gospel of Christ, Ron said "I guess that's okay; somebody's got to go to hell." It shocked me at the time, but Ron could say that because he had a good conscience. He had clearly communicated the truth of the Gospel. He told this guy what he had to do to be saved. It wasn't Ron's fault that the message was rejected and it will not be your fault either. You are responsible for your testimony, not the results.

But if you aren't willing or able to give the reason for the hope that lies within you, your conscience should bother you. Jesus said:

*For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels. (Luke 9:26)*

I do not want Jesus to be ashamed of me! When I come into His presence, I want to hear the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant." Don't you? So have a passion for goodness, cultivate a willingness to suffer and be prepared for witness.

Peter sums up his rationale in verse 17:

*For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:17)*

Boy howdy! In this life, you might have to suffer for doing good. But remember, you are a member of a privileged class. We are promised an eternity of the most exquisite pleasure, glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.