

## **1PETER 3:8-12    CBC 28.6.2020am**

We're going to read 1Pe 3:8-12 which begins with the word "Finally". Peter is closing a section of his letter which began at 2:11. He's been showing us how to live our new life in Christ wherever we find ourselves, because the gospel works anywhere. So he began with a general word (2:11) encouraging all of us to live for God even though that makes us strangers in the world. And then he broke this down into various examples: living for Christ as citizens, slaves (workers), wives and husbands. And now he draws the section to a close with another general word addressed to everybody: "*all of you*" – *whatever kind of government you live under, whether you're a slave or an employee, whether you're married or single – all of you have found saving grace in Jesus Christ and that transforms the whole of your life.*

### ***Read 1Pe 3:8-12 ...***

v.10 speaks of "*loving life and seeing good days*" - Perhaps you're someone who doesn't always love life – who sometimes says "I hate life and I wish I were dead!" But when Peter writes about loving life and seeing good days, we know that's what we're all really longing for. It's what everyone wants, and Peter tells us how the dream becomes a reality.

Now when I hear a claim like that, the cynic in me thinks, "Oh no, we're off into fantasy land." But Peter is no fantasist. He's not going to tell us that he's found a formula which means we'll never have another problem. He's actually writing to people who have plenty of problems. They're going through what Peter describes as 'fiery trials' (1:6-7) because of opposition to their Christian faith. And Peter tells us this is the normal Christian life!

Yet Peter isn't downcast. He doesn't tell his readers to give up on this life and just wait for heaven. Rather, God's will is for them to have plenty of joy even in a world full of problems. So that's Peter's theme here. He's going to tell us how we can love life and have good days even though hard and hurtful things continue to happen to us this side of heaven.

And the first thing he says is that the good life comes from DOING good, not just waiting to receive it!

### **1. DOING GOOD TO OTHERS**

v.8 tells us to do good to one another in the church; and v.9 tells us to do good outside the church – even to those who persecute us. But because loving our enemies is hard, Peter invites us to warm up by loving our friends and family in Christ!

He describes what this means in v.8 with five adjectives:

- The first and the last form a pair, like brackets: "*Like-minded*" and "*Humble*" - that's the condition for being like-minded – for how could we ever be like-minded without being humble-minded? Like-minded is much stronger than "agreeing to disagree" - it really does mean what it says on the lid. It means all of us coming to the same mind, and that's the mind of Christ. Because we're sinners, we will sometimes have to agree to disagree – but we should never give up praying for a greater conformity to the mind of Christ. And that will only happen as we grow in humility. It's a sad (shameful) reality that many of our disagreements reflect how hard we all find it truly to submit ourselves to Scripture as we read it. We are self-willed; we know what we want the text to say, and we demand that it says it. We are not unbiased readers. That's one reason why there's so much value in studying Scripture together, so that others can help us be

aware of our bias and our blind spots. But we won't listen to anyone else without humility. Pray for it!

- The second and the fourth adjectives can be paired too: “*sympathetic ... compassionate*” – because the Holy Spirit makes us sensitive to one another's feelings and needs. Preoccupation with myself and sympathy with you can't co-exist, but the grace of Christ breaks our selfishness.
- And right in the middle of this list: “*Love one another*” – a recurring theme in Peter's letters, just as he'd heard it from Jesus' lips.

Five adjectives to describe our life together as Christians, and they highlight our transformation as the family of Jesus Christ. Once again I smile at what Peter wrote, because he had to learn these lessons himself and sometimes found it hard! How patient Jesus had to be with him! Don't write off difficult church members too soon – even Peter had to grow!

But that's the point. We don't love like this because we naturally like each other, but because we love the Lord Jesus and so there's an instinct in us to love those He has loved. So Peter isn't actually laying a heavy burden on us. He's saying BE what Christ has made you by His grace – a family under God. Don't live against the grain of the Spirit's work in you, but with the grain. Keep in step with the Spirit!

Do you know the great danger when we read a verse like v.8? That we yawn. We're bored. We've heard it all before and we take it for granted. And we forget that it's not how most of the world lives! We live in a bitterly divided world where people scream and shout abuse, demand their rights, and look after number one. And we don't realize that a quiet verse like v.8 is absolute dynamite. It's describing what the world in it's saner moments knows it needs (*think of the voices of those media personalities who call for more kindness, etc.*) but doesn't know how to get. And Peter says, “It's all there in Christ! This is the life you've been baptised into. Now be what you are! Live in the freedom of your new life, not in the bondage to self that characterised your old one.”

Here's the life the world wants – but they don't want the Christ who gives it. And the challenge facing Peter's readers – and us – is to show a hurting world such a beautiful life together that they reconsider their verdict on Christ – and some, at least, find life. Because as we learn to live a life of love together, it will spill over into all our relationships and gives us a supernatural witness!

That's v.9: “*Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*” There's the evidence of what the gospel has done in our lives! We do good to our enemies, because that's the way God deals with us.

v.9 doesn't allow us simply to build a wall to hide ourselves from a horrible world! Nor does v.9 let us get away with gritting our teeth and “putting up with it for the sake of Christ”. We're not told to be passive, but to be active: Go out and bless! And it's a gospel witness, because it's so different from how others respond when people make life hard for them.

The great question for us is, How can we live in a way that commends the gospel to a hostile world? And Peter doesn't say, “Go out and make a nuisance of yourself! Go and aggravate your society. Go and take their weapons and do what they do!” NO. Peter actually says, Do the reverse of that. Bless your enemies so they see the difference Jesus makes! This is what STEPHEN did at his martyrdom – and Saul was watching, and was later converted. And then Saul was renamed PAUL and he did

the same thing in a Roman prison in Philippi – and it ended up with the jailer asking, “What must I do to be saved?” And he was converted too!

NOW: this is not an easy or cheap way to live. Doing good to those who do evil to us is one of the hardest things to do. It can only be done when we really trust God to care for our needs, and that’s the point with which Peter closes this section:

## **2. RECEIVING GOOD FROM GOD**

He urges us to live this way “*so that you may inherit a blessing*” (v.9). God wants to bless us! As we bless others, we receive a blessing ourselves! And not just in heaven! In vv.10-12 Peter quotes from Psalm 34 to make the point that right behaviour brings God’s blessing in *this* life.

“Does it really?” we ask. Well, doing God’s will certainly doesn’t guarantee a problem-free life. The psalmist David certainly knew that – just read the rest of Ps 34, or look at his other psalms. Peter knows that too – he faced persecution and so did his readers. For this is a fallen world, where evil sometimes has temporary triumphs. But the triumph of evil can never last. And generally speaking, even in a fallen world life will work much better when we pursue goodness and avoid evil, because that’s how God designed it. That’s Peter’s point.

So we should love one another (v.8), love our enemies (v.9), and love life (v.10)! And the key to all three loves is to pursue goodness – to walk in the ways of the Lord. So v.10 “*Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.*”

Why do you think Peter says that if we want good days we’ve got to control our tongues? Because his mouth often got him into trouble! He knew the sad consequences of hasty words. Think how much of your unhappiness in life has been caused by things you’ve said, or that others have said to you. If you want to love life and see good days, “*keep your tongue from evil.*” Every Christian should read James 3 regularly and pray Psalm 141:3 daily (“*Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips*”).

In fact, the best way to get our words under control is to let the word of God dwell in us richly so that our habitual way of talking carries the accent of Christ. Then we’ll be well on track for v.11: pursuing peace with others, including our persecutors.

But what if our enemies take advantage of our goodness? Ah, says Peter, we have a great security: v.12: “*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer ...*”

God is watching over us! Do you believe that? Personally? Today? In your present circumstances? A simple truth, but life-changing. When you’re under pressure, say “Lord, You see me.” When people abuse you, say “Lord Jesus, this isn’t really about me, it’s really about You. How can I bless them, witness to them, point them to You?” That’s our calling, and God will give us all we need if we’re willing to receive it.

On the other hand, v.12b: “*the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*” That’s reality. It’s God’s world, and all things are ultimately against us so long as we try to by-pass Him. And, on the other hand, if we love God, He works with us in all things for our good.

So we don’t have to be defensive, because we have a trustworthy God who will look after our interest in His own way. Live humbly, serve others, bless them even when they persecute you, and you will be blessed, because God is watching over you for good.

## CONCLUSION

John Bunyan's 17<sup>th</sup> century classic "The Pilgrim's Progress" is still one of the best books on the Christian life. Bunyan sometimes put biblical truths into simple verses to make it easier for his congregation to learn them. Here's one of my favourites, and it sums up what Peter has been saying to us today:

*He that is down (i.e., down at the feet of Jesus; humble) needs fear no fall,  
He that is low, no pride;  
He that is humble ever shall  
Have God to be his guide.*

Whenever I've remembered that truth and lived by it, I've loved life and seen good days. And whenever I've forgotten that truth, life has gone pear-shaped.

Do you want to love life and see good days? Then heed the word of the Lord.

**PRAYER:** Father, your commands, like your promises, are pure love from start to finish. Help us by Your Spirit so to trust in You that we may love life and see good days; and may our lives draw others to taste and see that the Lord is good. In Jesus' Name. AMEN.

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION**

- How did you experience a broken world and fallen people this past week, and how did you react? *Be specific about your thoughts, words, and actions.*
- How does God's love for you in Christ strengthen you to live the way Peter describes?
- Who can you encourage this week with the promise of v.12?