

Home group questions on 1 Peter 3:8-22

By Phil Bailey

Theme of passage: Live as those whose hope and confidence are clearly in the resurrected, ascended Christ, not fearing suffering, but doing good.

Aims of sermon:

- Have hope; your identity and future are secure through Christ's resurrection and ascension.
- Live out that hope in love for the church and blessing to the lost.
- Be ready to explain that hope when asked.

Questions (make sure you get to number 4, even if you have to skip others!):

- 1) What (if anything!) in the passage or sermon encouraged you that the Christian hope is awesome and utterly secure?
- 2) In the sermon, we heard that baptism is God's seal of approval on the believer's faith as they appeal to God for a clear conscience – that is, for assurance that our guilt and shame has been taken away by Christ's death and resurrection. How does this help you appreciate your baptism?

If you've not been baptized, how could your home group and the elders help you reach that point?

N.B. for some people, the thought of sharing their testimony and/or getting baptized before a large crowd is very intimidating. If that's the case for anyone in your home group, you can reassure them that neither aspect is essential! Firstly, there is nothing in Scripture saying they have to share their testimony in public, so long as one or more of the elders have heard or read it and are satisfied. It's also possible to get someone else to read it out if you want that but feel too shy yourself! Secondly, baptism doesn't have to be in a big public gathering, though it's encouraging for the rest of the church when they can attend. Doing it as part of a church gathering also reflects the fact that we are baptized into the church family, the body of Christ. But, given that the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8, Saul in Acts 9 and the Philippian jailer and his family in Acts 16 were not baptized in church gatherings (as far as we can tell), we ought not to insist on it either. A smaller, more private gathering may be appropriate, though ideally the church should be represented by an elder and two or three church members!

- 3) We didn't have time to examine vv.9-14 in detail in the sermon. It's really hard to repay evil with blessing and to do good to those who hate us. But what encouragements does Peter give to help us?

N.B. there are encouragements in vv.15-18 too! It's also worth noting that v.9 is not entirely straightforward. Peter could be saying that we should bless others because we've already been promised the blessing of a heavenly inheritance (1:3-4). He could be saying that God's temporal blessings upon us in this life (e.g. his protection, provision and willingness to answer our prayers, cf.3:7) are partly conditional upon our refusal to repay evil with evil (which is certainly the original emphasis of Psalm 34). Both are true in Scripture more broadly, even if it isn't clear which option Peter had in mind here!

- 4) In the sermon we were encouraged to practice giving the reason(s) for our hope in Jesus by asking each other. Spend some time in 2s or 3s doing that, trying to put into words how/why Jesus gives you hope. This will help us be ready when non-Christians ask us. It will probably be really encouraging too!

A final thought on submitting to authorities and not retaliating

In the last week, a couple of people have mentioned to me their struggle to accept Peter's passive-seeming response to evil and injustice in society (i.e. obey the government!) – as if the right to peacefully protest or use the courts and our other legal rights were not enough. This is where our belief in who God is really matters. If we trust that we have a truly sovereign God and that the heart of the king is like a stream of water in his hand (Proverbs 21:1), we can rest more easily. We do not need to break the law in our search for social justice, climate justice, or any other kind of justice, because if it really matters that much, God can be trusted to bring justice about in his own good way and time. So we should not be desperate and think that justice hangs entirely on us. If that were true, perhaps it would legitimate us breaking the law to protest or disrupt, as groups like Extinction Rebellion have at times. However, it is not true! We have a sovereign and just God, who can be entirely trusted to bring justice, possibly in this present age and certainly when Christ returns if not. So we are called to honour and submit to him – which includes submitting to the governments he has ordained, even when they are bad (Rom 13). If we feel really strongly about something – like social justice or climate change – by all means, campaign peacefully and within the law. But do not view that as less important than prayer and fasting. It is God alone who can ultimately bring about change for the better.