

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

How to Cope in a Hostile World

1 Peter 3:13-17

Part One

Let us read **1 Pet. 3:13-17** “**And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? (14) But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, (15) but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (16) and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (17) for it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.**”

When we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior we are set apart to God. Before we were the friends of the world and the enemies of God, but when we make the decision to place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation a transformation takes place. Christ explained the transformation and the reason for it in **John 15:18-19** “**If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. (19) If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.**” When we become joined with Christ we become joined to the one that the world hates. Friendship with the world therefore no longer is possible. But what is possible is the world’s hatred of Christ being directed toward us. Certainly this was true of those that Peter was writing in this epistle. Therefore he writes this epistle and this specific passage in order to help them to know how to righteously cope in a very difficult situation.

We are in effect sitting on a powder keg. How are we going to cope with this situation acceptably? What needs to be true of our lives if we are going to be able to effectively cope in a hostile world?

WE NEED TO HAVE A PASSION TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT

Why would this be helpful? It would be helpful because it will minimize the amount of suffering that we will have to endure in our earthly sojourn. And isn’t this what we have experienced over the course of our lives? It is very difficult for us to mistreat people who we truly view as good, who we truly view as righteous. And it is extremely easy for us to persecute those who we view as bad and who we truly view as wicked.

Last night I went with Kristin and Nathan to see Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat at the Pantages Theater. We had purchased the cheapest seats in the theater, but we could see that there were going to be much better seats up further so I asked . And then later on (describe exchange between usher and older woman).

Let us look now look more closely at V. 13 “**And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?**” In V. 11 the Apostle Peter quoting David from **Ps. 34** challenges his Christian readers to “**turn away from evil and do good.**” After giving this particular instruction he goes on to explain why.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

He first of all mentions in **V. 12** that the “**eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer.**” And now he adds in **V. 13** “**And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?**”

This is a rhetorical question. It is asked in order to emphasize what everyone already intuitively knows that people naturally do not persecute people who are committed to righteousness. This same truth is stated in a little different way by Solomon in **Prov. 16:7** “**When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.**”

If we turn away from evil and do good, or in other words do what is right, not only will the Lord view us favorably but even those around us will do so and it will tend to quench the hostility of the world toward us. It is like

We saw this even in Pilate’s brief encounter with Christ. In **Matt. 27:11-26** it makes it very clear that Pilate viewed Christ as a righteous man. That was why Pilate tried so hard to find some other way to satisfy the the Jews other than the crucifixion of Jesus.

We need to practice this truth and we need to pass this truth. If we are therefore going to put ourselves in the very best possible position to cope in the midst of a hostile environment, we need to pursue righteousness, if we would do this the flames of hostility around us will tend to be quenched.

But we also need to observe in **V. 14** the intensity of the pursuit of righteousness. Look again at the verse, “**And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous**” for what is good. **We are not to pursue that which is good or right “casually” but rather “zealously.”**

The word for “**zealous**” is the word “**ZEALOTES**” A “zealous” person is a passionate person. In the time of Christ the term “zealot” applied to a political party with religious underpinnings which did not hesitate to use intrigue, violence, force and deception in achieving its liberating ends. Very much like the “Hezbollah” is doing today in order to achieve an independent Palestinian state free of Israeli control.

If we are going to put ourselves in the very best position to cope in the midst of a hostile environment we need to pursue righteousness not casually but fervently. We need to pursue righteousness zealously.

Are you in fact doing this? Are you dripping water on the end of the match or are you pouring water over the end of the match? Is the pursuit of righteousness more important to you than pleasure, comfort, excitement, vindication, success? Are you carefully evaluating your thoughts, words, feelings, and actions, especially in light of those groups we talked about earlier in the epistle? Those in government, those over you in the workplace, and your family. If it is then you are on the road to peace even in the midst of a hostile world. If you are not doing this and are far more zealous to make sure that others are doing right rather than yourself then you are on the road to potentially inflaming the conflict.

What else needs to be true of our lives if we are going to be in the very best position possible to cope in the midst of a hostile world?

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

WE NEED TO HAVE AN OPENNESS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF SUFFERING

The zealous pursuit of righteousness will certainly help quench the flames of a hostile environment as we pursue to love others as ourselves and fill our lives with good works toward those around us but it will not totally eliminate it.

Let us again go back to our passage and read **V. 14** “**But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.**” If we would prove ourselves zealous for what is good, certainly the hostility that the world may express toward us would be diminished but not eliminated. This is important for us to know in order that we would not be surprised when we in fact experience persecution. This is the very point that Peter will later make in **1 Pet. 4:12**, “**Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you**” we should expect that we would in fact be at peace within our community as we zealously pursue righteousness, but this is not a guarantee.

If we are going to be in the very best position to cope in the midst of a hostile world we need to know that even if we are zealous for doing what is right we should not underestimate the depravity of man.

There are men in this world whose consciences are seared who are very capable of inflicting harm on people that they know to be righteous without regret. Certainly we all know that there are people who are capable of persecuting us in spite of our righteousness.

But we also need to know that there are some who would not only persecute us in spite of our righteousness, but even because of our righteousness. The zealous pursuit of righteousness is a double edged sword on the one acting as water quenching the flames of hostility but on the other hand it can even light the fuse of hostility. Look again at **V.14** It says, “**But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness.**” The performance of righteousness does not always act like water on the flames of a hostile world. Sometimes it acts more like gasoline!

How do those who are pursuing righteousness light the fuse of hostility? Who is the one the world hates? It is Christ, in our zealous pursuit of what is good, we will be compelled to share the message of the very one that the world hates.

The hostility created by our message may begin when family or friends become aware of your baptism. It is so often at that point when family members begin to see that you are taking your faith seriously and will become alarmed for a myriad of different reasons. What may begin at baptism and can grow into a full fledged persecution if in your zealous pursuit of righteousness you seek to proclaim Christ and His gospel boldly.

I really do not have to tell you this. This is something that you know innately. Your heart does not begin to race or your stomach turn into knots when you are working out righteousness in such areas as Bible reading, prayer, or good works. When in fact does this happen? It is when you begin to see that your righteous responsibility is sharing your faith. It is when you begin to share with your father or mother, brother or sister etc. Why? Because Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It is potentially provoking to share that, but even though there may be this sense of forbidding don't become intimidated. Why?

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Look again at the verse. It says, “**But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness you are blessed.**” What does this mean? It doesn’t mean happy or joyful as much as it means privileged. What does **Matt. 5:10-12** say? “**Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. (12) Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**” When we find ourselves persecuted for the sake of Christ and our testimony for Him our future awards will be great and in this confident expectation there can be even joy.

Peter then goes on to quote from **Is. 8:12-13** in **V. 14** “**and do not fear their intimidation and do not be troubled.**” The quote is from **Is. 8:12-13** in this passage the Lord is encouraging Ahaz, the king of Judah, not to fear the Assyrians as Israel and Syria had done but rather to fear Him.

When we are in the zealous pursuit of that which is good many people will find any hostility they might have felt toward us diminished because of our lives filled with good works, but there will be some others who will, because of our testimony for Christ, become incensed and might seek to persecute us. But if this happens we are to count ourselves blessed in light of promises of Scripture such as **Matt. 5:10-12** and not allow ourselves to be intimidated.

CONCLUSION

WE LIVE IN A HOSTILE WORLD. WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WE CAN IN ORDER TO COPE AS BEST WE CAN.

FIRST OF ALL IF WE ARE GOING TO EFFECTIVELY COPE WE NEED TO ZEALOUSLY PURSUE RIGHTEOUSNESS. IF WE WOULD DO THIS A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF HOSTILITY WILL BE QUENCHED “**AND WHO IS THERE TO HARM YOU IF YOU PROVE ZEALOUS FOR WHAT IS GOOD?**”

BUT SECONDLY WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE ZEALOUS PURSUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS CAN CUT BOTH WAYS. NOT ONLY REDUCING THE HOSTILITY OF SOME BUT ACTUALLY PROVOKING THE HOSTILITY OF OTHERS, AND WHEN THIS HAPPENS WE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED, BUT RATHER CONTINUE TO POUR ONTO THE FLAMES A LIFE OF GOOD WORKS.