

Honouring Christ the Lord as Holy

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[0 : 00] Morning, my name's Ali, I'm the minister here, really nice to see you. If we've not had the chance to meet, please do come and find me afterwards, it'd be great to say hello. As Ross mentioned, we're working through 1 Peter and we're going to jump into those verses this morning, so it'd be good to keep that chapter open in front of you.

Just to whet your appetite for what we're going to be looking at this morning, this passage contains one of, I think, the most practical descriptions of living the Christian life in a really down-to-earth way that we find in the whole of the Bible.

And so there are lots of practical and there are lots of down-to-earth bits of the Bible. This is one of them, so it's really good to look at. We get almost a three-step program for the Christian life, so that's something that we'll be looking at this morning.

This passage also contains, in the second half, one of the most complex, disputed, exegetically challenging parts of the whole Bible as well.

That's the second half of the passage. So if you're keen to kind of see me suffer, you can look forward to when we get to that point. Or if, as we're reading that, it made your head spin a little bit, you weren't quite sure exactly what all of that second half meant.

[1 : 14] And don't worry, you're in good company there. We're not going to answer every question definitively in that second half, but we will see the big picture of what Peter is speaking about in those verses.

And it's actually that second half of the passage, which is the vital foundation for the practical outline of the Christian life that we're going to see in the first half.

So that's the plan for this morning. Two sections. First, we're going to see this practical outworking of the gospel, the Christian in the world. And then we'll move on to that foundation, which is the victorious suffering of Christ.

So that's our plan this morning. Let's start then with the Christian in the world. As I said, this brilliant description of how God's people are called to live out their faith.

This is really another kind of angle, getting to grips with that big idea that we've seen time and time again in 1 Peter, of living as elect exiles, living as God's people, those who have been rescued through his mercy, but in a world that is not our eternal home.

[2 : 29] The Christian in the world, this is verses 14 down to 17. And as I say, three kind of interlinked steps, really. I've called them living for Christ, speaking for Christ, and suffering for Christ.

So first, I'm living for Christ. Reading from where we began, halfway through chapter 3, verse 14, Peter writes, I remember one of the things that gives 1 Peter such a particular relevance, I think, to our culture today, is that Peter is writing to a people in a culture where Christianity is not the norm, where Christianity is thought at best a little bit odd, at worst is spoken about as evil or wicked.

So Peter is writing to a culture really just like ours, where the question, you know, what would Jesus do? Or perhaps a better question, what would Jesus have me do? Is not the question that is on most people's minds, is not the question that is controlling people's actions and shaping their behaviour.

And yet into this culture, Peter writes, he says to these first readers, he says to us as well, don't worry about what people around you are doing.

Don't take your standards from the ways of the world, from the culture that you live in. Rather, he says, but in your hearts, honour Christ the Lord as holy.

[4 : 11] See how Peter says there, in your hearts, honour Christ the heart, wherever we find that word heart in the Bible, it's not just talking about our feelings.

We would tend to talk about kind of head versus heart, kind of intellect against feelings. That's a kind of modern idea or picture of the heart. In the Bible times, really the heart, it meant the very core of who you are.

It was your thoughts, your emotions, your will, and then all of the kind of the actions, the behaviour that flows out from that. All of these things that we sometimes kind of separate out, well, that is what altogether the Bible means by the heart.

It's who we truly, fully are. And so Peter says, in all of this, in who we most deeply are, with the whole of our lives, every aspect, honour Christ the Lord as holy.

Be living for Christ. And really, again, Peter's point here is that you're going to be doing that in the midst of people who have their hearts set on other things, who are honouring other lords.

[5 : 24] It's easy to think, perhaps, you know, if we're a Christian, we have Jesus as Lord, no one else has anything, or anyone as Lord. Or if you're not a Christian, you think, well, I don't have a Lord. Actually, that's not what the Bible says.

That's not what we see in the world around us. As Bob Dylan famously sang, you're going to have to serve somebody. The point of that song, that ultimately, everybody has a Lord.

Other people have put it this way, that all humans are worshippers. The only question is, what is it that we're worshipping? What will we have our heart, that core of who we are, what will we have that set upon?

And that is what will shape our actions. And so a lot of people in our culture, in their hearts, honour money, or financial security, or the big house that can buy, as Lord.

You know, that is where their heart is set, where their hope is found. If that is the case, that will affect, won't it, the decisions that we make, both big and small, that will affect our attitudes and our actions.

[6 : 37] A lot of people in our culture, in their hearts, honour acceptance, or popularity, as Lord. The need to fit in, to be approved of, by those around us, to have our strengths, and the good things that we do, recognised and spoken about, to have our weaknesses, and our flaws, hidden away.

To ensure that we never become, the odd one out. Again, if that's the case, that will shape, how we live. That will shape our actions. That will shape, how we relate, to people.

We could think of, countless more examples, couldn't we? Other lords, and the consequences of those, on how we live. But Peter's point, is that Christians, for Christians, in our hearts, honour Christ, the Lord, as holy.

That it is living for him, for his glory, is reflecting his character, is depending on his grace, which is the thing, that our whole lives, are to be geared toward.

It's not one part, among many. It is living, for Christ. And that is something, then, that shapes, the Christians, actions, big and small, that shapes our attitudes, and our priorities, in a way that is distinct, from those, in the world around us, whose hearts, are directed elsewhere.

[8 : 02] So that's the first thing, living for Christ. And really that flows, straight into the second aspect here, we go from living for Christ, to speaking for Christ. Again, verse 15, in your hearts, honour Christ, the Lord, as holy, always being prepared, to make a defence, to anyone who asks you, for the reason, for the hope, that is in you.

We've seen a lot, in 1 Peter, over the last few weeks, about our actions, our conduct, and the power of those, as a witness to the gospel.

But here, Peter also highlights, the importance of our words, and that our actions, lead on to words. The logic here, is that as we live for Christ, having our hearts, set on him, having our security, found in him, seeking to be holy, like him, our hearts, set on him, you know, as that shapes our life, again, in the big, and the small aspects, well, that then, in turn, might spur people, to ask questions, about the hope, that we have, the reason, that we live, as we do.

And as Peter says, that we would take, those opportunities, to be able to give a reason, to defend, that hope. And I don't think, that means, particularly having to, to work through, a kind of, a scientific defence, of Christianity, or a philosophical defence, or a historical defence, I think Christianity, can be defended, in all of those, different ways, and it's great, that so many, gifted people, have invested time, and thought, into those areas, that field, that we call, a kind of apologetics, defending the faith, in that way, and all of those, resources can be really helpful, good things to know about, good things to be able, to point people toward, Lord, but actually, I think, what Peter's speaking, about here, the reason, for the hope, we have, that he's getting at, is the gospel, as we are living, for Jesus, and that promotes, questions from those, around us, that then we are prepared, to speak, about Jesus, that because of, his great love, for us, because of the good news, of the gospel, we have a hope, that stands firm, even through the trials, of life, and gives us a motivation, to serve him, that is the reason, for the hope, that we have, where we get that chance, to share the better story, that comes from having,

Jesus as Lord, rather than any of the, the substitute Lords, that our world, tries to supply, so what does this, look like then, it's fine, think of a couple of examples, maybe when the stress level, is rising at work, or when it's dog eat dog, in terms of sales, and numbers, and figures, how is it, people might ask, that you're able, to maintain, that degree of peace, in that environment, to be someone, who in the team, shows kindness, and grace to others, rather than always, just trying to get a leg up, as we act that way, people ask those questions, it gives that opportunity, to explain how, well your hope is not in, that promotion, or in your finances, or in your reputation, relative to others, but that it's being, being loved, by God, through Jesus, or maybe it's, why are your kids, not at every, possible activity, why can't they make, some of those class parties, that fall, on a Sunday, aren't you worried, that they'll, they'll miss out, from what everyone else, is doing, well actually, it's an opportunity, to say that there is, something more important, and more secure, that I want to prioritize, for my children, and that is to know, the love of Jesus, that will never, let them down, which is far, more sustaining, and which will last, far longer, than the ups and downs, of friendships, as they grow up, through school, and beyond, or perhaps, it's an age thing, you know, as people fret, about going grey, or not being as young, as they used to be, when you get to that stage of life, where you just, for no reason, start to think, you might buy a motorbike, and that will make you really cool, you know, how is it, people ask, that you're able to grow old, gracefully, and it gives us a chance here, to say, and you know, this is back on, with one Peter, isn't it, well actually,

[12 : 31] I think there is more to come, and this life, is not all that there is, through Christ, there is an imperishable, inheritance, being kept, in heaven, for me, as we saw, in chapter one, or maybe it's time to suffer, I think this is particularly, powerful, and often a time, when people, will ask questions, and God uses, our responses, you know, how can you keep on going, how are you going to be able, to face, that incredible, difficulty, and challenge, and you're able to say, through tears, and sadness, well I know, that there is a love, that will not let me go, and I have my certain hope, in that ultimate destination, where suffering, and sorrow, will have no place, and I'm sure, as you kind of listen, to those examples, you think, well that sounds, a little bit clunky, a little bit sort of cheesy, and you know, you're probably right, it's hard to kind of, compress these conversations, into a sentence or two, but I hope that principle, makes sense to you, that as we live for Jesus, in all these different areas, in work, in parenting, in just life, in suffering, in everything else, that as that shapes, our whole life, as we live for Jesus, we get the chance then, to speak for Jesus, and not just in a kind of, an abstract, you know, here's a gospel tract, sort of way, but in a way, that actually shows, and makes sense of, and builds on, the tangible difference, that having Jesus as Lord, makes in our life, that reveals, the hope, that he brings, in all the sorts, of different situations, that we, and those in the world, around us face, and Peter, knowing our human nature, is quick to point out, isn't he yet, do it with gentleness, and respect, is the very next thing, he says, you know, this isn't about, imposing, beliefs, or behaviors, on other people,

Peter says, this is something, that has to be done, with humility, saying, look, I don't live this way, because I'm so strong, or because I've got it, all sorted, or because I'm kind of, elevated above, the struggles, of this world, but it's because, as Peter has repeatedly, emphasized, we have received, mercy, that we don't deserve, it's because our hope, is in Jesus, and it's through him, not anything, that we've done, that we have this perfect home, to look ahead to, and that is where our hope is, when Jesus' mercy, is the reason for that hope, and then there has to be a hope, that we speak about, with gentleness, and respect, and respect, and so, living for Christ, leads to speaking for Christ, and then following out, from that, flowing out from that, what's the result, well, here Peter gets really realistic, for us, Peter refuses, to kind of gloss over, the difficulties, and the challenges, of the Christian life, he doesn't kind of, soften the sharp edges, as he calls God's people, to be willing, to suffer, for Christ, verses 15 and 16, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile, your good behaviour, in Christ, may be put to shame, for it is better, to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil, now wouldn't it be great, if in life, if whenever we did, the right thing, we got the right results, you know, if A plus B, always equaled C,

I've been watching, the bake off a few times, I'm sure, I'm not the only one, always these people come in, oh I work every single time, at home, and yet this time, the result has been different, it's not risen, it's not proved, all these other kind of, baking terms, if we just knew, that if we did the right thing, we would always get, the right outcome, that's how many people, try and approach life, isn't it, even how Christians, can sometimes be, be tempted, to view things, if we just do what God wants, then everything will always work out, just as we expect, just what we, just what we would like, we'll have this, smooth path going forward, and that if things are, are hard going, well somehow, we've missed the mark, and we're bearing the consequences, but that is not, what Peter says, that is not what, the whole of the Bible says, Peter says, we live for Christ, we speak for Christ, not to guarantee, an outcome, but we do that, whatever the outcome, might be, you might remember, or you can, you can flick back, if you like, to chapter 2, verse 12, that kind of key, summary verse, where Peter says, those opposing God's people, might see their good deeds, and glorify God, that idea that people would, would witness,

Christian conduct, and come to put their trust, in Jesus, and yet here in chapter 3, Peter writes, how people revile, your good behavior, in Christ, Christ, and so the question is, well is Peter, kind of contradicting, himself here, has he changed his mind, halfway through the chapter, of course not, he's highlighting, isn't he, how different people, will respond, in different ways, when they see, the gospel lived out, and when they hear, the gospel spoken of, you know, this pattern of life, that he's been laying out, this holy engagement, this giving, the reason for the hope, that we have, God uses that, to bring people, to himself, that's part of God's plan, for building his kingdom, we've seen that, in the last few weeks, incredible, that God would be at work, in our kind of mundane, day to day, life and interactions, to be pointing people, toward him, but also we see here, that at the same time, as some respond, positively to that, others respond negatively, others respond, with hostility, toward God's people, that God's people, can suffer as well, for Christ, and again, see here, that the relevance, to our particular, current situation, the main suffering, that Peter is addressing here, is not yet, the physical abuse, or the crucifixion, of Christians, that will come, but at this point, are still just over, the horizon, at this point, in the Roman Empire,

I know the current issue, that these Christians, are facing, is slandering, is reviling, is a spoken, a verbal denigration, of God's people, and of their reputation, again, that hits home for us, doesn't it, what will people, say about me, if I live this way, and make these choices, how will people, talk about me, either to my face, or behind my back, if I speak about, having a hope, that comes, from Jesus, so often, it is a kind of, a spoken, suffering, that we fear, and it's so easy, just to play that down, and say, well you know, that's nothing, there are people, around the world, who are giving their lives, for Jesus, and that's true, there are people, who are dying, for their faith, but that doesn't mean, that for us, that what people say, is nothing, actually that is, the primary situation, that Peter, is dealing with here, what are people, going to say, about God's people, what are people, going to say, to God's people, and the Bible, doesn't deny the reality, of how that feels, and the challenge, that that is, but it says, despite that, to be willing, to suffer that, for Christ, verse 17, for it is better, to suffer, for doing good, if that should be,

[20 : 39] God's will, than for doing evil, Rico Tice, in the book, that we recommended, over summer, honest evangelism, he speaks about, speaking for Christ, he uses the phrase, crossing the pain line, you know, the challenge of speaking, because we don't know, what the response, to that might be, often it might be, far more positive, than we expect, I heard a statistic, recently saying, that a majority, of ex church goers, would accept, an invitation, to try church again, if someone would just, invite them, now that the response, from those, who've never been to church, would be much higher, than we might expect, so it's not all, kind of doom and gloom here, but also, Peter's wanting, to make us aware, that response, is not uniform, and we need to be, prepared for that, that whatever the outcome, which we don't know, before we start, that as well as, living for Christ, speaking for Christ, we need to be willing, to suffer for Christ, to put up, with what people might say, as a consequence of that, if that is God's will, and so that's the first half, of the passage, where we brief, in the second, but I hope it's given us, this really practical picture, of living, as a Christian in the world, this kind of three step path, to living for Christ, speaking for Christ, suffering for Christ, as we think about, those kind of things, and those are the kind of actions, those are the kind of conversations, we can perhaps, picture ourselves, having, in our Monday to Friday lives, as we live as God's people, to seek to be his witnesses, in the world, again that big theme, of 1 Peter, living as elect exiles, bearing witness, to Jesus, as the true king, but again the Bible recognizes, as we've seen, the challenge of that, and so Peter now moves on, to give us the solid foundation, that we need, to be willing, to live, and to speak, and even suffer for Christ, and that foundation, is the victorious suffering, of Christ,

Christ, and this is verses, verses 18, down to 22, do have a look, down at your Bibles there, this is where, as we mentioned at the beginning, things get a little bit, complex, one of the great theologians, of the Reformation, Martin Luther, said of these verses, this is a strange text, and certainly, a more obscure passage, than any other passage, in the New Testament, I'm still not certain, what it means, it's always an encouraging thing, to read, when you're like, preparing a sermon, for Sunday, the good news is, that while we are not, this morning, in the next 10 minutes, going to solve, every single issue here, that overall, the big picture, the message, is clear, and these verses are here, as a message, of encouragement, and that encouragement, is this, that the strength, the resources, the foundation, to carry out, all that we have been, speaking about, that is all found, in and through, the victorious, suffering, of Christ, and really, that summarized for us, in verse 18, there, you know, you worry, that in living, in speaking for Christ, people aren't responding, well to that, that you're suffering, are you doing something wrong, were Peter's first hearers, had they missed the mark, because they were being, ostracized, from their community, had they fallen out, of God's plan, well Peter says, look how God, has used suffering, in his purposes before,

Peter writes, for Christ also suffered, once for sins, the righteous, for the unrighteous, that he might bring us, back to God, a brilliant verse, that brilliant gospel truth, that righteous suffering, suffering, suffering for doing good, the righteous suffering, of Jesus, is right at the very heart, of the gospel, and that through that, through his death, on the cross, in our place, through the righteous one, Jesus who came, and lived the perfect life, dying for our unrighteousness, for all the imperfections, that we carry out, day after day after day, through his sacrifice, we are brought, to God, through his suffering, Jesus has made, that forgiveness possible, he has redeemed us, to be his people, now and for all eternity, if our trust is in him, and his once for all, sacrifice for sin, and that victory, is confirmed, that trust, that hope is certain, because Peter said,

Christ rose again, put to death in the flesh, but made alive, in the spirit, that resurrection, is his vindication, of his victory, his resurrection life, and I think this is what, verse 19 is getting at, which is one of the complicated bits here, his resurrection life, being the declaration, to sin and evil, that they are defeated, that they will not have, the last word, in Jesus' creation, in his kingdom, and so for those of us, who trust in Jesus, sin and evil, no longer have that hold over us, that in Christ, we are able to live out, this life, which he calls us to, Jesus has won, Jesus in his resurrection, has declared that victory, and so we can have, that confidence, and that hope, and then we get on to the, the Noah, and the baptism bit, in chapters 20 and 21, here's another place, where there are pages, and pages, and pages you can read, and I can lend you those, if you'd like, but really to kind of, simplify it for you,

I think Peter is, is comparing, that the situation, of those in the church, those baptized, into God's family, that's us this morning, that's his, his first readers as well, he's comparing their situation, with the situation, for Noah, and his family, prior to the flood, as a lesson, and as an encouragement, from history, as a sign of God's, unchanging character, the comparison being, God's people like Noah, a minority, surrounded by those, who refused, to believe, a people seeking, to live out righteousness, in a world living, very differently, a people who are warned, that judgment, is going to come, even though, it might not look like it, and even though, the world thinks, that that is a crazy, idea, and you'd be crazy, not to just get everything, that you can, here and now, but ultimately, a people knowing, that God will keep his promise, and trusting, that he will provide, the rescue for Noah, and his family, the rescue of the ark, from the flood, for the church, those baptized, into God's New Testament, family through Christ, and his victorious, suffering, that he will, surely save those, who trust in him, now there's that encouragement, that it is worth, sticking with God, living out this life, he calls us to, living for Christ, speaking for Christ, suffering for Christ, if it comes to that, how are we able, to do that, how are we able, to walk out, into that kind of life, with confidence, well it's because,

[28 : 36] God rescues his people, he has done that, through Jesus, he's done that, through his sacrifice, in our place, and we can be certain, of that victory, because, this section again, finishes with an emphasis, on Jesus' resurrection, as the definitive proof, of his victorious, suffering, that we are saved, through, the resurrection, of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven, and who is at the right, hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers, having been subjected, to him, and so here, and now, we might feel, weak, being part of the church, might feel a bit, weak, we might worry, if we live like this, what will people say, what will the consequences be, what will the knock-on effects be, the problems, of our life, the dangers, loom large, and yet the truth is, as God's people, we are siding, with the one, who will one day, be revealed, as the ultimate victor, the only certain, unchanging, and eternal hope, when Jesus returns, and comes, to take his people home, our passage, this morning, began, did you have a look, back up to the second half, of verse 14, we began, have no fear of them, nor be troubled, as when we fear the world, that we are tempted, either to retreat, and try and hide away, as God's people, just to separate ourselves out, or just to kind of assimilate, just to blend in, to do what everyone else is doing, we don't want to stick out, we don't want to suffer, the Bible instead, as we've seen, calls us to this, distinctive life, of holy engagement, which we've seen, laid out, in such practical terms here, in our actions, in our speech, in our willingness to suffer, our willingness, to put up with, what people might say about us, because of what we say, about the hope we have in Jesus, that is the outworking, of not fearing, that Christian life, in the world, but again, what's the foundation, what is the reason, we don't need to fear, it's because, the victorious suffering, of Jesus, the righteous, for the unrighteous, has brought us, to God, it's because, he is now, enthroned in heaven, as the Lord, over all things, and it's as we look to him, resurrected, ascended, exalted, glorified, that we no longer, need fear, but can live our lives, fully for Jesus, our hearts, honoring Christ, the Lord, as holy, the one who died, but rose again, and can live secure, in his great love for us, and the eternal home, that his victorious sacrifice, has secured for us, let's pray together, heavenly father, we thank you, that we can have, a certain hope, in our eternal home, with you, because of the work, of Jesus for us, and because he, suffered, for our sins, the righteous, for the unrighteous, to bring us to God,

Lord, we thank you, for the forgiveness, that makes possible, and the certainty, we can have, that in Jesus, we can have, eternal life, Jesus who rose again, and who ascended, to your right hand, from where he reigns, and rules over all things, from where he watches over us, as his people, and gives us the strength, to live for him, day by day, Lord, we ask that his, victorious suffering, would give us the confidence, to live for him, in every aspect of life, that knowing the, unshakable reward, he has won for us, we would live for Jesus, speak for Jesus, and be willing, to suffer for Jesus, if that is your will, that we wouldn't fear, what others might think, or say, but would rather, be determined, to live, honouring Christ, the Lord as holy, in response, to his great love for us, and so, please be with us, this week, and help us, as we think about, how to put this into practice, in the nitty gritty, of life, and the different places, the different relationships, in which you've put us, but always keeping our eyes, fixed on you, and on our risen, saviour Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray,

Amen.