

Message for Sunday Morning, December 4, 2010
SERIES: I PETER (Making the Best Out of The Worst of Times)
MESSAGE 15 in series
Christian Hope Church of Christ, Plymouth, North Carolina
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Are You Ready?
Message 15 in I Peter Sermon Series
I Peter 3:13-17

This morning as we continue with our series of messages from the **Book of I Peter I would like for you to please turn with me in your Bibles once again to I Peter chapter three and let's read verses 13-17.**

READ----I PETER 3:13-17

P R A Y E R

I N T R O D U C T I O N

We spend a great deal of our lives “getting ready” for something.

- * An hour or two ago, most all of us was “**getting ready for Church.**”

Getting ready for Church means **taking your shower or bath.....shaving....brushing your teeth.....getting on your good Sunday clothes.....getting your offering check written.....and finding your Bible and Sunday School book.**

We “get ready” for Church!

* At this time of year we're also "getting ready for Christmas."

Getting ready for Christmas means **getting your house decorated.....getting your shopping done.....getting the groceries to make your favorite holiday recipesgetting your gifts wrapped.....and perhaps getting your house all cleaned up for company to come in.**

We're "getting ready for Christmas!"

We "get ready" to go to town.
We "get ready" to go out to eat.
We "get ready" to go on vacation.
We "get ready" to go hunting or fishing.
We "get ready" for work.
We "get ready" for school.

WE'RE ALWAYS "GETTING READY" FOR SOMETHING!

At the very heart of these verses we are looking at this morning is this matter of "getting ready."

For just a few minutes, I would like for all of us to consider TWO SOUL-SEARCHING QUESTIONS.

(NEXT PAGE)

Here is the first

I. Am I Ready To SUFFER For Christ? (vs. 13,14,17)

- 13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?
 - 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.
“Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”
 - 17 It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than doing evil.
1. For the first **300 years** of the Church’s existence, **Christians had no legal protection in the Roman government.**

To become a Christian in those days **meant risking everything!**

For some it meant **losing their freedom or losing their job.**

For some it meant **losing their home and all their material possessions.**

And for many, being a Christian meant **losing family members to martyrdom and perhaps even losing their own lives.**

2. Many Christians in the world today are **no strangers to terrible suffering. In fact, nearly 200,000 Christians are put to death each year for their faith in Jesus Christ.**

ILLUSTRATION

Let me give you just a few examples of some of the suffering our Christian brothers and sisters in other parts of the world have had to endure in just the past five years.

- In **IRAN**, a Christian minister by the name of **Hamid Pourmand** was sentenced to prison for **three years** for preaching the gospel. The Iranian government falsely accused **Pourmand** of being a **spy** and had him transferred to the notorious **Evin Prison**, virtually assuring he would never leave the prison alive.
- In **NIGERIA** muslim militants attacked the Christian community of **Demsa**, executing **36 Christians** and **displacing 3,000** from their homes.
- In **ERITREA** (a small province in northeastern Africa) **27 Sunday School teachers and students** were arrested on **February 19, 2005** and thrown into prison for **studying the Bible**. During a **two month period** a total of **214 Eritrean Christians** were arrested and imprisoned.
- In **CHINA**, Chinese authorities arrested a prominent **house-church leader** by the name of **Zhang Rongliang** hoping to shut down the Church. It was the fifth time in twelve years that Rongliang had been arrested. **While in prison Rongliang was brutally tortured and given electric shock treatments almost every day.**
- When I was in **INDIA** back in 2007, one of Churches where I was to preach sent word the day before my arrival warning me not to come because their preacher had been thrown into prison and religious extremist had threatened to burn down their building if they met for worship again.

I believe these few examples are just the “tip of the iceberg” of the kind of persecution and suffering our fellow brothers and sisters-in-Christ are going through around the world.

(Just as a side note: Isn't it odd that our American media will report terrible atrocities being done to animals, but you never hear any reports about the terrible atrocities being committed against Christians around the world? Just an observation.)

3. **John Piper** made a statement some time ago that really stirred my thinking. He said.....

“Christianity was born into a world of totalitarianism. It was NOT strange for Christians to be persecuted. What IS strange however, is that we are NOT.”
(speaking of American Christians).

4. I think everyone of us would like to believe our **FAITH** is strong enough to handle anything life throws at us.

Our faith has survived a variety of trials and troubles over the course of our lifetime. And certainly those trials and troubles have “toughened” our faith. But is our faith really strong enough to endure persecution and suffering?

5. Could my faith survive if someone were to **point a gun at my head and threaten to pull the trigger** if I didn't denounce Christ?

Could my faith survive if persecutors made me watch the **brutal torture of my family?**

Could my faith survive if persecutors **threw me into prison and took away all my freedom?**

Could my faith survive if persecutors **burned down my house and destroyed all my material possessions?**

Of course there's no way to be absolutely sure unless we were to actually be put in those situations. And hopefully none of us ever will!

6. But let's consider a more realistic possibility.....

-Could my faith survive if **the people I work with made fun of me for being a Christian or teased me because I go to Church every Sunday?**

-Could my faith survive **if somebody in my own family mocked my faith at every family get-together?**

6. **So what are telling me preacher? Are you telling me I should go out and look for "persecution?" Are you telling me I need to become more "offensive with my faith" and incite the anger of others so I can say "I have suffered for my faith?" NO, I am not saying that at all!**

But what I am saying is this: Each and everyone of us who professes to be a Christian needs to be prepared to suffer for the cause of Christ if and when the situation should ever arise.

Now here's the second soul-searching question for us to consider.....

II. Am I Ready To STAND UP For Christ? (vs. 15-16)

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as LORD. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

1. Notice that very first sentence in **verse 15**.

v. 15a But in your hearts set apart Christ as LORD.

What does Peter mean by that? He means the **LORDSHIP of CHRIST** should dominate every area of our life.

Christ should be the **LORD of our possessions.... the LORD of our occupation.....the LORD of our marriage.....the LORD of our family....nothing should be excluded!**

2. As we continue in **verse 15** Peter now reveals why “setting apart Christ as LORD” is so important. And that is it makes us ready to “witness” or to “take our stand” for Christ.

(A) When should we be ready to take our STAND?

Peter tells us, *“Always.....ALWAYS be prepared to give an answer.”*

You and I never know when an OPPORTUNITY is going to arise to witness for CHRIST.

Every day we cross paths with others who might ask us questions about our faith and our beliefs.

“How can you believe in a God you can’t see?”

“How do you even know there is a God?”

“ How can you believe all that ‘stuff’ in the Bible?”

“ How do you know there’s a heaven and a hell?”

It might be a neighbor , a friend, a foe, a stranger, a fellow worker, a boss, a supervisor, a classmate or even a relative.

Regardless of who is asking, the point is..... those are some questions we need to *“always be prepared to give an answer.”*

(B) How should we be ready to take our STAND?

Look at **verse 15** again.....

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with GENTLENESS and RESPECT.

Peter is telling us that not only is important that we be ready to ANSWER QUESTIONS about our faithit is important to ANSWER IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT.

- (1) First, Peter tells us, “Always be ready to STAND UP for CHRIST, but do it with GENTLENESS.”**

That means we must guard against coming across as *superior....or....'holier than thou'....or..... judgmental.....or....argumentative...or "preachy."* Its hard telling how many people have been “turned off” to Christ because of the “sanctimonious, self-righteous” witness of Christians!

- (2) Secondly, Peter tells us, “Always be ready to STAND UP for CHRIST, but do it with RESPECT.”**

That means instead of “**putting the person in their place**” we “**put ourselves in the place of the other person.**”

-You have probably gone to Church most of your life. They haven't! Show respect!

-You have probably been taught the Bible from the time you were a young child. You know lots of things they have never even heard. Show respect!

-Believing in God and Christ and the Bible and heaven and hell comes easy for you. For them , believing is a real struggle! Show respect.

3. Peter makes one final point in **verse 16** and its one we don't want to miss.

*Starting in the last part of **verse 15**, “**But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.**”*

4. What Peter is telling us is this: **Nothing will give more credibility to our witness for Jesus Christ than truly “walking the walk.”**
5. It is only when **Christ** can be seen in our everyday lives that we are **truly ready to STAND UP for Christ.**

C O N C L U S I O N

In his book, ***Everyday Evangelism*** , **Tom Eisenman** tells this touching true story about a young man in his congregation.

David, a ninth grader, was big for his age and very tough, but at the same time he had a gentle, Christ-like spirit.

In his High School shop class, David was making a coffee table for his mother as a Christmas gift. He finished it just a few days before Christmas and left it in the shop so he wouldn't have to take it home and hide it.

On the last day of school before Christmas break, David went to his shop class to get the table and he was shocked to find out someone had stolen it.

David had a lot of friends and it didn't take him very long to find out who took the table. It was a younger boy who was real unpopular with the other students and rather small in stature. David easily could have beat the boy up. Instead he spent his entire Christmas vacation in the shop at school making another table just like the one he had made before.

When David finished the table he went to the house of the boy who had taken his first table. When the young boy opened the door and saw David standing there he was petrified. David just said, "I have something I'd like to give you and your family for Christmas." He handed him the new table.

The young boy burst into tears. He went back into his house and before long returned with the table he had taken from David. The boys talked.....and the younger one asked David to forgive him for taking his table.

Within a few weeks the young boy started attending Church with David. And in time, he accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.