

# The Good Life

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Date: 12 February 2023

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you. Tonight's reading is taken from 1 Peter 2, beginning at 1 11, and you can find it on page 1218 in the Church Bibles.

1 Peter 2, verse 11. Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. 1 Peter 3, verse 11.

Live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Slaves, in reverent fear of God, submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?

[ 1 : 50 ] But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it? This is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threat.

Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. Thank you, Andy, for reading.

Thank you. So, yeah, me and Fern, my wife, who are here this evening, we both used to come to St. Silas. So it's really special for us to be here.

[ 3 : 05 ] But I also actually became a Christian here as well. So I feel like it's like coming home, really. And I didn't just become a Christian here, but I actually learned how to live as a Christian, which is really important.

And I think 1 Peter is certainly helping us with that, and it will tonight as well. So let's pray together before we look at that together.

Let's pray. Father God, we come to you this evening and we ask that you would create a space in our life, create a quiet and a still moment to come before your word and to hear your voice.

We pray that where your word challenges us, we would be humble to receive it. We pray where your spirit prompts us to move, that we would respond.

And we pray that you would unite us together as one. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, tonight Peter calls us to live a good life.

[ 4 : 25 ] But what is a good life? If we were to go back a couple of verses from the passage that we're in, we'd expect a good life for a Christian to be a very good life indeed.

In verse 9, Peter says, We are God's chosen people. We are a royal priesthood. We are God's special possession.

And I think that sounds great. But actually, most of the time, day to day, week to week, most Christians find being a Christian quite difficult.

And so, while there's many people on our social media feeds who are aiming for the good life that looks like sitting on a yacht in Monaco, many of God's chosen people, his royal priests, we're just aiming to keep going, to keep going to church, to keep loving God, to keep loving people, and maybe not taking too much slack at work or in our communities for being a Christian.

The good life for a Christian tends to be less about success and more about dealing with suffering, less about supremacy and more about submission.

[ 5 : 47 ] And the reason for this? Well, because, dear friends, as Peter says in verse 11, we are but foreigners and exiles.

In heaven, we are very special. Royal, we are a holy nation under the reign of King Jesus. But on earth, we're simple pilgrims traveling to our heavenly kingdom.

And before we take up our place in heaven, we must take up our cross as we follow Jesus. Peter had to learn this lesson, just like all of us, how to live as a Christian in a non-Christian world.

That was the situation Peter found himself in when his master was taken away by Jewish and Roman authority to be crucified. Peter was faced with the question, how do I now continue to live as a Christian?

It's something these first readers needed to learn when they were living in Roman provinces in a non-Christian culture under non-Christian authority.

[ 7 : 00 ] And if we today are to survive in a context, in a culture that is not Christian, then we need a strategy.

And that's what we get in verses 11 to 12, a survival strategy. Now, there was a time hundreds of years before Jesus when God's people desperately needed a survival strategy.

They were living as exiles in Babylon. God had judged their sinful behavior and sent them into exile. As they lived as refugees, crying by the rivers of Babylon, they desperately longed to go home.

And it was a longing that was embedded with guilt and shame because it was their own sinful ways that had resulted in their exile. They were a scattered people clinging to Isaiah's prophecy that God would send his servant to rescue them, to suffer and die for their sin and gather them as his flock, like a lamb in his arms.

Now, hundreds of years later, as Peter points to at the end of our passage, God's people have that promised servant in Jesus who suffered and died for our sin, who is the good shepherd, who gathers us into his arms.

[ 8 : 31 ] So when Peter calls them exiles in verse 11, he's drawing on that old imagery, but it lands very differently for followers of Christ. We don't fear exile and judgment because of sin, because we have Jesus.

But we are still waiting for his return. We are still pilgrims waiting to reach our home. And on this journey, says Peter, we must still abstain from sin.

Jesus has paid the price for our sin, but the sin in our lives, it still does something. It wages war against the soul.

This is the first half of the strategy, and the second comes in verse 12. Let's look at that. Live such good lives among the pagans, that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

There's a situation here of living a good Christian life, abstaining from sin, and yet being accused of doing wrong. And Peter knows that in this situation, it's tempting to give up and respond with sinful instincts.

[ 9 : 57 ] When you feel an injustice is done, when you are accused of doing wrong, even though you know it's right and good, Peter says, don't be tempted to give in.

Stand firm and dazzle them with goodness and bring glory to God. Now this doesn't necessarily mean that your accusers, they'll become Christians and glorify God, we hope.

But God's glory is also seen when he judges the wicked. Because God is so just and so good, it wouldn't be right if he left the wicked unpunished.

If they see your good deeds and they see Christ in you, but they don't turn to God, then still glory be to God when they are punished for that.

Chapter 3 quotes a psalm, and I think it sums it up really well. Look across to the right. Chapter 3, verse 10 to 12. Verse 10 to 12.

[ 11 : 33 ] Notice the powerful weapon that is given to Christians. The most powerful weapon we have in this survival strategy for Christians in a non-Christian culture.

Do you see it? It's prayer. God's ears are attentive to our prayers. The good life for a Christian is grounded in prayer.

Is there anything more beautiful than a person whose first response to anything is prayer? Is there anything more comforting than to know that someone prays for you?

We're not called to respond with our instincts in difficult situations. God calls us to face things like slanderous accusations by quietly and gently turning to God in prayer and responding with

goodness, kindness, and gently and quietly bringing glory to God.

And the amazing thing for us as exiles is it's not that we just pray to live good lives so we're rescued from every bad situation. God has already rescued us in the most important sense.

[12:54] Our souls are safely tucked away with him. We pray for good lives because we love God. We want to bring glory to God in every situation, to stand firm, to keep going, and through our good deeds and our prayers, we change the world.

And as we go deeper into chapter 2, Peter gets more specific about situations that will make this kind of response, this survival strategy, seem more and more challenging.

And I think some will even say foolish and a little bit naive. But God calls us to go deeper into prayer, always to turn to him, always to follow Christ, even in suffering.

In verses 13 to 20, we see that God calls us to suffer for Christ. And if you thought responding to slanderous accusations with goodness and prayer was tricky, then you're going to be really shocked about this.

Peter says in verse 13 and 14, and then in verse 18, that Christians are to submit to all human authority. And in verse 20, he says, submit even if that results in suffering, because that is what pleases God.

[14:27] Let's just have a look at those verses together. 13 and 14, submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority, or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

And then down to verse 18, slaves in reverent fear of God, submit yourselves to your masters, not only those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

And then if you look at the end of verse 20, if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable, this is pleasing before God.

This is really challenging. But God says, through his word in verse 15, for it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

Many people will think this is a weak response, naivety, and even avoidance. But this lesson to submit, it's not about being inactive, it's not about withdrawing from the world or becoming a monk, however tempting that might be.

[15:58] There is a call to live in the world. Look at verse 16. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil.

Live as God's slaves. Live an active life. Go live in the world. Go to the marketplaces, discuss politics and the public square.

Be an engaged citizen. Vote. Build buildings. Paint pictures. But don't use that as an excuse to live sinful lives. Instead, always remember we are God's slave.

We belong to him. He is our ultimate authority. And if you notice in verse 17 and 18, Peter says, the only person we are to fear is God.

God. Some people say the word slave in the original Greek is less like slave and more like house servant or house manager, but at the end of the day, in these times, there were slaves and things were really awful for most people who had some kind of master or authority above them.

[17:14] Verse 20 shows us getting a physical beating was on the cards for doing your job wrong. And Peter says, no matter how awful it gets, only fear God.

Submit by doing good. And he adds, if you do so, it pleases God. Always do good because how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong?

Instead, what is commendable for God, what pleases him is suffering for doing good. Suffering because you're always living for him.

Suffering because you don't fear humanity, only God. This lesson that Peter gives us was one that he had to learn the hard way.

His apprenticeship to Jesus, it didn't always go smoothly, let's say. One day, Jesus was with his disciples and he said that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of human authority.

[18:23] And Peter, being Peter, took Jesus aside and rebuked him. Never, Lord, he said, this shall never happen to you. What did Jesus say?

You're right, Peter. I'm totally wrong there. Suffering isn't very pretty and I don't know what I was thinking. No, Jesus said, get behind me, Satan.

He told Peter that Peter only had concern for human things and no concern for God. And he looked at all his disciples and said, whoever wishes to follow me must take up their cross.

we are called to follow Jesus even into suffering. Today, in Scotland, we don't face the death penalty as punishment for living as Christians.

But I think we're seeing it's going to get more and more difficult. It may be the death of your career. You may at the moment struggle with living godly lives when you're out having a few beers with your colleagues and your friends.

[ 19 : 36 ] You may struggle to gladly admit what scripture says about sexuality and marriage. But we could be entering into a season in British life where the pressure is going to get much more intense.

But at the same time, we live in this time where there is a pressure to do the right and the good thing.

And so, some might say, well, in this cultural moment, it's actually an easy time to live good lives, isn't it? There's a strong voice crying out to make a good and positive impact.

But what do we do when that strong voice goes against what the Bible teaches? Well, that's when we need to look to Jesus as both our example to follow in submission and suffering, but also the reason we can follow him in this way.

In our final point, I want to quickly cover three things. In verses 21 to 25, I want us to see how Christ is our example, the importance of what he did at the cross, and the significance of him as our shepherd.

[ 21 : 03 ] Follow along as I read those verses. From verse 21, to this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats.

Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

So Jesus as example. On the night Jesus submitted himself into the hands of human authority and was crucified, Peter saw his master, his lord and king die for Peter and for the sins of all God's children.

[ 22 : 29 ] It's really important to realize that when Jesus submitted himself to the hands of authority, he was submitting to their punishment but not compromising on God's law to follow Roman law.

That's the example Jesus is to us. Submission to human authority is far less about playing by the rules of authority and much more about accepting the punishment they give us for living as a Christian.

He accepted the punishment but there was no deceit in his mouth, verse 22. He did not retaliate when insults were hurled at him, verse 23.

And this is really important. He entrusted himself to him who judges justly. The earthly judge may sentence you to prison and he may judge your deeds as wrong but you must submit to that.

Submit to that punishment and entrust yourself to God who judges justly. Your boss may discipline you, may even fire you, your friends may reject you, your family may abandon you but we are called to endure it as Jesus did.

[ 24 : 04 ] Secondly, the importance of what Jesus did at the cross. What we have here in verse 24 to get technical for a moment is atonement theory.

And the aspect of atonement we're looking at here is called penal substitution. And it's probably one of the most important aspects of what Jesus did at the cross. Imagine you have a debt and someone else pays your debt on your behalf.

It's a pretty nice thing to imagine. This is what Jesus did with our debt with God. Notice verse 21 that Christ did not suffer so that we would have an example.

Christ suffered for you as a perfect sinless king. He took our sin in his body onto that tree where he died so that we could die to sin and live for righteousness.

Christ took upon himself the very wrath of God, the wrath of the curse that we deserve so we could be free to live.

[ 25 : 21 ] And lastly, we must talk about the significance of Jesus as our shepherd. There's a lot here today about submission and suffering as a Christian, but Peter gives us this wonderful verse 25 to remind us that we may be seen as strangers and aliens, exiles and foreigners, traveling

