

Living Christ's Way in Christ's World

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[0 : 00] Back in 2021, a Christian author named Stephen McAlpine wrote a book entitled Being the Bad Guys.

It's a book about what it means to be a Christian living in this age, and in it he wrote these words in his introduction. Only a few generations ago, Christianity was the good guy, the solution to what was bad.

Rather than being on the wrong side of the law, we were the law. Christian morality was assumed and passed mainly unchallenged, but then something changed. Over the course of the 20th century, we became just one of the guys, an option among many, a voice to be considered but not followed unquestioningly.

The problem is, that's not where we are now. The tide has shifted even further. Increasingly, Christianity is viewed as the bad guy. Christianity is no longer an option, it's a problem.

The cultural, political, and legal guns that Christianity once held are now trained on us, and it's happened quickly. It's come as a surprise, we're not sure how it happened.

[1 : 04] We don't like it, we don't feel like we deserve it, but we are the bad guys now. I just think that quote is quite interesting, because it captures maybe a bit of a flavor of Christian life in the modern West.

We're more and more aware that the Christian message is not only unpopular, but in the eyes of many, it's just unacceptable. You only need to look at the media's treatment of Kate Forbes in the SMP leadership competition in the last couple of weeks to see how some of the loudest voices in our society feel about the Christian message and Christian morality.

To quote an online news article from this week, Kate Forbes' SMP leadership bid is dead in the water, she only has herself to blame. Members of a socially liberal centre-left party such as the SMP would not elect a right-winger like her.

Her candidacy has become a joke. She's trying to use her faith to justify dodgy views that have no place in 21st century Scotland. And so that report, whilst not necessarily representative of a whole society, does tell us how some people think about living for Christ in this age.

They think it's completely wrong. And that anyone who does so is going to come under increasing pressure. So the question for us is, well, how in the face of growing hostility and misunderstanding do we live well for Christ?

[2 : 27] And that question's been important to Christians in every age and stage of history, and in fact is the normal reality for the people of God. So as we've been going through 1 Peter in our evening services, we've seen Peter giving instructions to people who live as exiles in this world, as people for whom life will feel like being a foreigner in the place that they live.

Peter's instructions have showed us how to be faithful whilst living under pagan authorities. And over the last couple of weeks, we've seen specific instructions for Christians as citizens, as slaves, as wives, and as husbands.

And in our passage tonight, Peter turns his lens back away to all Christians, telling his readers that even though they may be under immense pressure, this world is still ultimately under the lordship of Jesus.

And so that call to live his way and trust in him is one backed up by Christ's authority. And so that's what we're going to talk about this evening, living in Christ's world, Christ's way.

So first then, as we dive into the passage, we live for Christ in a world of evil. Peter starts off this section, as we've said, with the words, finally, all of you, so this is aimed at all of us, instructing all of his readers on how to live with two big instructions in verses 8 and 9, pointing us in two directions.

[3 : 57] The first is to point us in the direction of Christian community in verse 8. Peter says, Be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

If the people of God are going to survive in a hostile world, then the church is to be a place of unity of mind and purpose, and a place of mutual love.

When the world is hostile, the church is loving to one another. Some of you have probably heard the phrase, the church isn't a museum for saints, it's a hospital for sinners.

And therefore, a Christian community is a place where we strengthen one another with love, with compassion, with sympathy, with an acknowledgement that sin is really painful and gets at us, but also the hostility of the world is hard to bear.

There's no such thing as a lone wolf Christian that goes off in the world by themselves. Actually, every Christian needs the encouragement of a church. Even the missionaries that are sent out are sent from churches with the praise and support of churches and Christian communities.

[5 : 05] And with that, then Peter says, If that's how we're called to live inside the church, then we send our eyes outside in verse 9. Peter says, Don't repay evil for evil or insult with insult.

On the contrary, repay evil with blessing. Christians are called to show sacrificial love, not just to each other, but to the antagonistic world that they live in.

Christians are never to follow the pattern of revenge and aggression that the world so often follows, but to meet the evil they see with love.

Christians are called at all times to live in a way that is ultimately absolutely counter-cultural, that doesn't fit with the world they're in. And so what is the motivation to live that way?

Well, again, look at the end of verse 9. Because to this you are called, so that you may inherit a blessing. The Christian life, says Peter, is one where we live, as Christ calls us, seeking his blessing.

[6 : 12] And he goes on to illustrate this in verses 10 to 12, with quite an extended quote from Psalm 34. So if you keep a finger in 1 Peter, but maybe turn back to Psalm 34, just have a look at that.

It's on page 561 of the Church Bibles. At the top of that Psalm, in the bit that we often skip over, the kind of superscription that tells you about the Psalm itself, it says this, of a Psalm of David, when he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left.

This is a Psalm David wrote, giving thanks to God, recalling an event in his own history, in 1 Samuel 21, you can find it there. And he was fleeing from his rival Saul, and he was under such threat, that he went to live among the pagan Philistines.

But he wasn't safe of them either. And at one point, in order to be safe, he has pretended to have lost his mind. If you go and read the story, he even drools and let it run down his beard, so that people think that he's lost his mind completely.

And the pagan king goes, well, he's not a threat, he's insane, and chucks him out. And David escapes with his life. And it's a bit of a remarkable story, even within Samuel, which is full of those.

[7 : 32] But the song that David writes about it, is a song of praise for deliverance received. That with the Lord, his people are safe, and they lack nothing. And even in the most dangerous of situations, the Lord can deliver them.

But back in, but if you look down at verse 11 of Psalm 34, you'd read the words, come my children and listen to me, for I will teach you fear of the Lord. And so though David has been in a situation where the people in front of him were a real threat and a real danger, he teaches us that true fear is to fear the Lord first and foremost.

Trusting God doesn't mean that danger will disappear. But even in the face of real danger, a believer is blessed. God does not abandon his people under pressure, but calls them to live for him. And so back in 1 Peter, Peter is reminding his readers that living under pressure in an evil world has always been the calling for God's people, even the rulers of God's people.

Yet this life of hostility is, as David says, also one of blessing. So as we look through that quote in verses 10 to 12 of 1 Peter 3, the blessed life lived in fear of the Lord is one where people, in verse 10, keep their tongues from evil and deceitful speech.

[8 : 55] Verse 11, turn from evil and pursue peace. That is how a believer is called to live. It is this life of costly love that he's calling the church to live out in the world. But that life is blessed both in the present and in the future.

Through this letter so far, if you were to ask, well, what does a blessed life look like now, not just in the future, Peter? We'd have heard Peter saying, well, this is a life where you know Christ, where you've received grace from God, where you've been born again, that you've been made a royal priest in God's holy nation, where you possess the spirit.

And then in this passage, it's a life where you have the blessings of a loving Christian community, knowledge that the Lord has his eyes on you, and knowledge that the Lord hears your prayers. The Christian life, says Peter, is full of blessings now. But not only that, you will inherit a blessing in the end too. All that Christ has offered, all that Christ has promised, will come to God's faithful people.

So this Christian life is never just one of slavish devotion in a painful world with no blessing from Christ. It is a blessed life, even when it's painful, and one with that future promise of eternal salvation and eternal life with the Lord.

[10:17] However it may seem, God is on the side of his people with his face turned towards them, and he is against those who do evil with his face turned against them.

So it's him that we must fear, not the world. But what do we do with that? Well, we're going to dig even deeper on this as Peter digs into what that looks like in the way that we speak with our second point, speaking of Christ in the world of hostility.

Now, a few weeks ago, Robbie Laidlaw, who's just been leading the service, and I were speaking at a Christian Union events week on Aberdeen University campus. Over the week, we gave some lunchtime and evening talks, and people from the Christian Union brought their non-Christian friends along to hear the gospel.

And wonderfully, up and down the country for the last month or so, thousands of non-Christians have been hearing the gospel at Christian unions. And that's a really amazing thing.

It's a huge opportunity to share the gospel with people. But a reflection I've always had on weeks like that for Christian Union members is that it's often the first time that some have faced rejection for being a Christian.

[11:32] It's often, that might be in the case for you if you're a fresher here, but it's often the first time that people have been mocked for flyering for their Christian Union event, or where a fresher has plucked up the courage to invite classmates along to an event, and then been mocked for their outdated views and no longer welcome.

It is hard to live for Christ. And when we were, when I was working in the Christian unions, we often used this next passage as training for evangelism because it has so much to say to us about what it means to speak for Christ in the face of a hostile world or even a hostile university campus.

So what does it mean to speak for Jesus? Well, Peter goes on in verse 13 to say, who is going to harm you if you're eager to do good? And I think to any of Peter's readers, they might well answer, well, lots of people, actually, Peter, a lot of people want to harm us, and that's the problem.

So what does Peter mean? Well, Peter wants to reassure his readers that there is nothing eternal at stake in the world's persecutions. Even when the world seems like it's winning, God has already won.

And so instead of turning inwards and hiding, a Christian is to turn back outwards to win the world for Christ. And so he continues in verse 14 telling us not to fear the world's threats or to be frightened.

[13:05] Again, the implication is the world will be a threatening, frightening place. But the verse he uses in verse 14 partially quotes a passage from Isaiah. And if you were to go back and read the passage in Isaiah, the next verse would be, the Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy.

He is the one you are to fear. And so another time in this passage, Peter has picked up something from the Old Testament all about fearing the Lord and not fearing the people of this world.

So Peter is telling us that we have a choice either to fear the world or fear the Lord. And at a certain level those things are kind of exclusive to one another. Whether we fear God or man will decide how and when we speak.

And so in verse 15 Peter's instruction gets right to the heart first. Those who fear the Lord are called to revere Christ as Lord in their hearts.

To get the kind of vertical alignment right first before they start to look out to the world. Because if we're looking at Christ and the fact that he reigns which this passage will later come on to then the power of the world doesn't look so very big.

[14 : 23] Verse 15 says always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. Because faithful living in a hostile world will provoke questions.

There will be a sense in which when we try to live for Christ it will go against the flow of our society. People will start asking questions. They may ask them kindly, they may ask them aggressively but they will ask.

And the only way to answer these questions says Peter is to be prepared but also to answer Jesus' way to do so with gentleness and respect. people are not one for the gospel with a shouting match either in person or online.

It's not a Christian's job to win arguments but to win people for Christ. Got to remember that the message that we send out comes wrapped in a messenger and that messenger is to be like Christ. And so we are to do this says verse 16 with a clear conscience speaking Christ's words in a way that if people insult us because of what we've said about Jesus that the way that we lived in front of them would provide such a powerful apologetic for Jesus that they would eventually be ashamed of the insults that they have leveled against us.

[15 : 49] And ready as verse 17 says to suffer and insulted for doing good not using Peter's instruction as an excuse to just live against the pattern of the world antagonistically.

The dilemma for any Christian is seeking to care more about what God thinks than about what the world thinks about you. And that's what fearing him first looks like because this world has got a loud voice and sharp teeth and gets vicious but this instruction from Peter is that in living a distinctive life that we trust Christ with what we have can't be taken from us and the way that we live can then be used to bring other people to know the Lord.

In that confidence we need not fear the world but can instead speak to it to reach it for Jesus even when it costs us something. We live distinctively because we're called to but also because it provokes the world to ask us about the hope that we have and gives us an opportunity to speak about the Lord Jesus.

So when the question comes up at the pub well you're a Christian what do you think about Kate Forbes and what she believes? What are you going to say? When your classmates or schoolmates ask you why you aren't joining in with one of their causes or giving money to it or dressing up for it how do you respond?

When a parent at the school asks you why you're bringing up your children in a different way to them how will you respond and what will you say? And if you're sitting now thinking well actually I really don't feel prepared to answer those questions well we all have the opportunity to learn to do that.

[17 : 35] When I became a Christian I didn't have a clue how to talk about Jesus just a lot of enthusiasm and made a lot of mistakes. And it was beginning to learn through some books that I read and through some videos that I watched and conversations I had with Christian friends that really helped me think actually how do I talk about Jesus well?

When someone on my biomedical science course asks me about Christianity and evolution and am I going to be ready to talk about that? And the questions did come and there are wonderful opportunities to talk about Christ there.

So if you don't feel prepared to give a reason for the hope that you have you are always able to learn. You could read a book like Questioning Evangelism by Randy Newman or maybe something like Confronting Christianity by Rebecca McLaughlin as resources that help us think through how do we answer well?

If that's you go to the bookstore at the back there's some books there that we would love to talk to you about that will help you with that or come and talk to Robbie or myself or a member of the staff team we would love to help you begin to think actually how do I be prepared to give a reason for the hope that I have and to do it in a Christ-like way?

But that pushes us on to our final point if we're seeking to live and speak for Jesus what we need is confidence in Jesus and so our final point then is trusting Christ in the world that he rules now I'm sure you have noticed in the reading that Bethany read for us that the final section from 18 to 22 contains some verses that are a little tricky and things that we are maybe not used to hearing a good thing to ask them when we come to a passage like this is not just what does the text say but how does this text fit into the context in which it is placed so if Peter has been showing us how to live Christ's way in Christ's world that is antagonistic to the gospel giving us that choice to either

fear God or fear the world then what he's writing here will be related to that he wants to encourage us finally that though the world is antagonistic Christ is still absolutely victorious in every way so in verse 18 he just reminds us of the gospel and it's a wonderful verse

[19:53] Christ also suffered once for sins the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God he was put to death in the body but made alive in the spirit so it's clear Christ died once for sins defeating them by the exchange of his life for ours on the cross through this we have been forgiven and in his resurrection we have been brought to new life with God that death on the cross looked weak and shameful but it was actually his glorification and the thing through which he became our saviour so if you skip forward to verse 22 at the end of our passage you see after Jesus' resurrection and ascension we read he went into heaven and is at God's right hand with angels and authorities and powers in submission to him so friends Jesus has died risen ascended and reigns forever and he rules the world completely the weak feeling of living as a Christian today doesn't make any sense of those any of those truths less powerful it doesn't in any way reduce the power of Christ's victory or what he has won for us no matter how hostile the world is those things will not change well the question for us is well what is Peter doing in the middle bit here and how does that give us confidence in that victory so in verses 19 through 21

Peter references the flood narrative from Genesis 6 to 9 this story is from a time in the Old Testament where one of God's people lives a righteous life fearing the Lord in a society that rejects God similar to David similar to what Isaiah said in that story only Noah and his family are saved from the waters of the flood only faithful people are saved from that big watery judgment against the world and yet God was very able to preserve his people and save them it's another example again of people living faithfully under pressure but it reminds us that these people live faithfully knowing that God will bring judgment on their enemies on those who are being hostile so how does Peter use that story here well Jesus after his resurrection and ascension according to verse 19 goes and makes proclamation to imprisoned spirits who were disobedient in the days of the flood now we generally read proclamation and assume proclamation of the gospel but Peter doesn't say proclamation of the gospel he just says proclamation

Christ's victory over sin and death shows to the believing people that God is in the right but it shows also to those disobedient who have passed that actually God was right still that God was right in judgment and did come to the defense of his people Peter doesn't say where Jesus went to make this proclamation only that it was made this message then is also seen in relation to baptism that symbolic picture of washing clean of a person the judgment being taken away and being raised out of it both the flood the kind of washing away of the sin of the earth and the judgment of Christ's death on the cross are examples of judgment falling and yet the people of God being saved through judgment the death and resurrection of Christ alone saves us and that gives us a clean conscience and baptism is a picture of that salvation and it is reminiscent of the flood and so whatever detail whatever you make of the details of this passage and whatever you believe about the interpretation I think you end up reaching the conclusion that God is absolutely able to save his people through the judgment of the world and that has always been the case and that will never change and the big thing to give us confidence is Christ went through that and is resurrected and ascended now so our confidence stays in him so Christ is the message people need to hear he is the only way to escape the judgment of God and it is only through his death on the cross that is the message that we are sent out with as the people of God the resurrected Jesus ascended and now reigns and that means we are not to fear the world but to trust in Christ in the world that he alone rules all Christians are called to live with the knowledge that this world is under judgment that if we believe in Christ we are safe in him from that judgment and whilst living with hostility is hard living for Christ being a very tough thing our eternity is absolutely assured because he has already won but the challenge on the other side of that

I think Peter leaves us with is to look at the world under the judgment of God it is a world that is lost and deeply in need of a saviour and we look past the hostility and the pain that we receive for believing in Jesus in order to go and reach that lost world with the gospel the assurance that we have because Christ reigns doesn't turn us in on ourselves it sends us out into the world to face pain and suffering for the sake of getting the gospel out because an eternity under God's judgment is far worse than any hostility or pain we might feel in trying to get that message across so we must maintain confidence in the gospel that we have to be prepared to answer anyone who asks us about the hope that we have and even under the deepest pressure to trust that Christ will sustain us

in our efforts to bring others to saving faith we follow Jesus pattern of death and resurrection suffering now but knowing the blessing of God each day making the most of the opportunities we are given that others may come to know Christ so friends don't fear the world fear the God who made the world and trust that Jesus his one and only son died for us let's pray

[26 : 18] Lord Jesus we thank you that through your death on the cross you've taken the punishment for our sin away and that we can live forgiven lives Father thank you that through the resurrection of Christ you've brought us into your kingdom and that he reigns and rules now we pray that we will be people who maintain confidence in living for you in this world and that through our lives you would bring others to know you we pray this for Jesus name's sake Amen Amen Amen guys I come to Him .

I come to the earth