

1 Peter 3:8-22 Bible Study

- 1 **Read 1 Peter 3:8.** List the ways that Peter calls for Christians to treat each other. How might the context of this letter help us see why this is so important? (cf. 1:22; 2:17).

Be in harmony (= 'like-minded'), sympathetic (lit. = 'suffer together'), love one another, compassionate and humble. Summed up with the idea of love.

The context of 1 Peter is particularly that of suffering Christians – it is especially important to love each other when things are hard... we are in this together – God calls us together to stand firm (e.g. 5:9).

(NOTE: 'finally' probably concludes the section that began in 2:11 – i.e. how to live such good lives among the pagans...).

When have you felt the encouragement of a fellow Christian(s) when things have been hard?

When do you find it hard to love/be united/have compassion toward other Christians?

- 2 **Read 1 Peter 3:9-14.** Having shown us how to treat fellow Christians, how are we called to treat those who oppose us as Christians? How does the quote from Psalm 34 support this exhortation?

Don't retaliate; but even more so, respond to evil/insult with a blessing (v9).

→ *It might be interesting to ask what it means to 'bless'.*

Clearly it is the opposite of evil... so we treat people well, despite their treatment of us. In addition, there is also wrapped up the idea of treating them so well, that they might actually turn to God in repentance and inherit the ultimate blessing (cf. 2:12).

Psalm 34 carries with it the ideas a) God is watching over his people and is with them; and b) God will punish evildoers – particularly here showing that being treated badly is no excuse for bad behaviour... God calls us to be holy and to live accordingly.

NOTE: Ps 34 carries all the weight of the context of David, who is on the run from Saul at the time of writing. He refuses to repay evil for evil... and at the same time is full of joy as he trusts in God's promises, protection, and relationship.

- 3 **Read 1 Peter 3:14-17.** Peter draws a distinction between fearing other people, and fearing God (cf. Isaiah 8:11-13 as background – Peter quotes part of Isa. 8:12). How do you think getting this attitude right will affect our ability to do the second half of verse 15?

If we fear other people, we are unlikely to be bold in challenging them with the call to repentance and faith. But if we fear God (=revere/set apart) we will happily speak of him, recognising his place in our lives, and his place as ultimate ruler of this world. Fear is a powerful motivator...

- 4 What do you think it means to 'give a reason for our hope that you have' (v15)? When might you do this? What guidelines are given for how we are to do this and how does this relate to 'keeping a clear conscience'?

Ultimately, our hope is based on Jesus finished work for us at the cross. Thus, we should be able to explain to people that we have a great (certain) hope of a perfect eternity with God in a new and perfected creation... and that this has been bought for us by Jesus in his death and resurrection.

The idea is that we might explain this when someone asks why we are acting differently. Ideally this is when we are displaying attitudes that take the big picture into account and value 'heavenly things' not 'earthly things'. (Cf. 1 Thes 4:13ff as an example of how we might be different)

Gentleness and respect. The goal is not to look self-righteous, but to faithfully proclaim the truth, and to potentially win over the person. At least, in v16, they will end up being ashamed of how they treated you / spoke of you because you will be vindicated in having treated them so well.

When we treat people well, we will have a clear conscience – even if they don't respond well, we will know before God that we acted appropriately and in love and we can have a clear conscience.

- 5 **Read 1 Peter 3:19-22.** Acknowledging that there are some difficulties in what parts of this passage might mean, can you work out from the main idea what motivation is given for not fearing others and for being willing to speak to the truth? Does this encourage you?

Notice it is a very gospel-focussed motivation!

V18 - Christ has died/suffered for us such that we have a relationship with God that we couldn't earn, but is safe and secure because he has 'brought us to God'. (A great summary of the Christian message!)

V18/22 – While Christ suffered, he was vindicated when God raised him from death and seated him in heaven with all authority over all things. Therefore, there is no one / thing to fear because Christ is Lord of all and in control of all.

See notes at end for some thoughts on vv19-20 IF your group want to think about that more.

- 6 Finish by thinking about what opportunities you might have this week to share the hope you have. Think also about when you find it hard to talk about it, and what you could do to help you be more confident to speak up next time.

Excurses – Notes on 3:19-20.

Most commentaries will give a good summary and consideration of each view.

The main questions that need to be answered are:

- **Where did Christ go?**
- **When did he go there** (in the days of Noah, between his death and resurrection, after his resurrection)?
- **Who did he speak to** (unbelievers who have died, unbelievers in the OT, fallen angels/spirits)?
- **What did he say** (second chance of repentance, the completion of his redemptive work, a call to repentance, coming judgement)?

Here are the three main views that I outlined on Sunday:

1. **Jesus descends to hell after his death and preaches the gospel to the spirits of those (people) who were disobedient in the past.**

This seem to be the least likely option as it is would be a unique idea in the Bible that seems contradicted by verses like Heb 9:27. We respond to God in this life. (Perhaps the idea of ‘purgatory’ is a helpful illustration of how we can take an obscure verse and build a whole doctrine on it – which is not a good idea!)

2. **Jesus proclaims his victory at the cross to the (evil/fallen) spiritual realm when he ascends to heaven.**

The ‘sprints in prison’ could equally be referring to ‘human spirits’ or to angels. (See 2 Pet 2:4, Jude 6 for verses that support the idea of spiritual realm, not humans. Other inter-testamental literature could support this too). If this is the case, then Jesus proclaims his victory as he is installed as king at God’s right hand – hence the summary in v22 that all powers are in submission to him.

Therefore, Peter would be reinforcing Jesus’ victory and his authority giving assurance to persecuted Christians that Jesus is in control and powerful to vindicate them, just as he was vindicated.

2 more technical things that could support this view a) is the chronology – Jesus preaches after his resurrection; and b) Jesus was raised in the realm of the Spirit (as opposed to being put to death in the realm of the flesh – cf. Rom 5) and so he is preaching in the new, spiritual realm.

3. **Jesus is preaching the gospel of salvation/judgement through the prophet Noah at the time of the flood (Gen 6-7).**

While I am quite sympathetic to option 2 and it may well be the best option, I think this is the most likely option to best make sense of the context.

1 Peter 1:11 talks of the ‘Spirit of Christ’ preaching through the OT prophets. 2 Peter 2:5 calls Noah a ‘preacher of righteousness’. Thus, it makes sense to understand Christ preaching the gospel of repentance and coming judgement through Noah. The spirits of those unbelievers are ‘in prison’ *now* (i.e. at time of Peter’s writing) but Noah was preaching to people back in Gen 6.

In addition, Noah is an appropriate example of a minority faithfully preaching the truth amidst opposition and ridicule. And in the end, Noah was vindicated – he was saved from judgement. Therefore, this parallels the context of the Christians that Peter is writing to (minority, under pressure) and the message (keep speaking the truth, even when opposed; and you will be vindicated in the end).

I emphasise again, the main idea of v18-22 is quite simple. Options 2 and 3 above (or variants of them) both give different strength to the overall argument and therefore are both possible interpretations. We don’t lose much by not being certain of their exact meaning.

Comment on being ‘saved through water’.

While not at all a main point of the passage, it is interesting to think about how the water of the flood might be linked to the water of baptism.

First and foremost, the water of baptism points us to the death and resurrection of Christ – the thing that actually saves us! (Hence, it’s not about a physical washing – removal of dirt – that saves, but the clear conscience that has been purchased for us by Jesus resurrection – v21). Also remembering v18 – we have been bought to God (= rescued) by Jesus through his death and resurrection, not anything we do – including being baptised.

And so, the reassurance here is that just as the waters of baptism remind us of the God’s saving work in us, so we also remember the waters of the flood and God’s saving work then. Baptism is to be a helpful reminder of the reality of God’s work – our union with Christ in his death and resurrection and all the benefits that brings.