

1 Peter 3:8-18
(Psalm 34; Matthew 5:10-11)
“The Good Life”

Introduction

What is your idea of the good life? In our culture, the idea of the good life involves political and economic freedom, the opportunity to go where you want, marry whom you chose, work where you wish. It is tied to the idea of health and choices freely made and the possibility of pleasure and success. And as Christians living in this culture, we tend to think the same.

We seldom entertain the notion that following Jesus might ever cost us anything of significance. Of course we realize that there are certain behaviors that ought to be avoided, and certain others that ought to be cultivated. But if we are mature adults with friends who are mature adults, we suspect that consistent Christian behavior will enhance our reputation, not diminish it. If we are called to live honest, honorable, moral lives, then truly “who is there to harm us”? But to the first Christians, following Jesus might well cost them their freedom and even their lives. Yet Peter speaks of a life so good that even persecution and suffering could not diminish its goodness.

In fact, in the middle of this passage Peter asks the question that sounds sensible to us in our context, but that must have astonished his first readers: “Who then is there to harm you?” They might have thought, “Well, let’s count them: Nero, his governors, centurions, tax collectors, not to mention the leaders of other religions who feel threatened by the explosive growth of the church. One might better ask, ‘Who is there to help us?’” And that – in fact – is the question Peter sets out to answer. It is because of the One who has promised to help us that we have here a picture of life that is good no matter what happens, no matter what comes, no matter how painfully we may suffer.

Peter has already written of our “living hope” (1:3), of a promised “inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1:4), and of the invitation to follow in the steps of the One who suffered in order to redeem us. Now he calls us to “unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind” (3:8). Clearly, these are the things that make for peace in every relationship and that draw people into community rather than thrusting them away. But what must we particularly attend to, even as we rely upon the Holy Spirit for the strength to bless rather than curse those around us and so to receive the promised blessing (3:9)? Peter first quotes Psalm 34, that gives a snap shot of the key areas of life where we must keep watch over ourselves, and then he turns to the question at hand, namely, how can we keep pursuing the good life in the face of rejection, suffering and pain?

Body

1. Peter quotes the psalmist's instructions on pursuing of the good life (3:10-12).

If you desire the good life, be careful what you say (v10).

If you desire the good life, be careful what you do (v11).

If you desire the good life, be careful whose approval you seek (v12).

2. Peter addresses the reality of suffering's effect on the good life (3:13-17).

If you suffer while pursuing what is good, nothing can harm you (v13).

If you suffer while pursuing what is good, God will use it to bless you (v14).

If you suffer while pursuing what is good, God will use you to get glory (v15f).

Conclusion

Peter concludes by reminding us that it was through Christ's suffering that we were brought home to our heavenly Father. We must be willing to go wherever Christ leads and to face whatever he permits to come, always guarding our words, our actions and the longings of our hearts, so that our fellowship in Christ's sufferings might be the cause of even greater blessing to us and to those who stand witness to the lives we live.