

Jesu Juva

“Christians in an Unchristian World: Love”

Text: 1 Peter 3:1-22

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The chapter of First Peter that we are considering tonight, chapter three, is very much a continuation of chapter two. In fact, if I were the one in charge of deciding where the chapter break would be, I would not have put it here. For after emphasizing who we are in chapter one - that we are baptized children of God, and that this is our first and foremost identity - Peter continued in chapter two to stress our life together - how God is building us together as His Church, like living stones in a living Temple in which His Spirit is dwelling. And he then began to spell out in some very practical ways how we then live this life together in holiness - set apart from the ways and thinking of the world; set apart for godliness. We submit to those in authority over us - the government, our bosses, teachers, and others - even if we suffer for doing so. For we have a Good Shepherd who went through the same thing, and is caring for us.

And so tonight Peter continues with our life together in speaking of husbands and wives - verses that always cause no small amount of controversy when read in our world today as being demeaning to women. And if taken out of the context of the rest of the Scriptures, perhaps they are. But whenever one speaks of husbands and wives according to the Scriptures, always lurking in the background is Christ and His Bride, the Church. And that our marriages are not only defined by that, but are to be images of that. Of a husband who loves His bride so much that He willingly lays down his life for her, and of a bride who in return, willingly submits herself - never forceably - to her husband. And that with such a relationship, *both* are raised up and exalted.

And so for an example, Peter points to Abraham and Sarah - an example which has no small amount of irony for us. For first of all, we know that Sarah was a very beautiful woman. That is why Abraham seemed to be always afraid that someone else was going to kill him and take her for a wife. And yet, Peter says, she is an example not of outward beauty but of inward, *the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit*, whose *hope was in God*. And because of her trust in God, she submitted herself to Abraham and obeyed him, even *calling him lord*. Which doesn't mean she never spoke up or stood up for herself - indeed she did, telling Abraham to send Hagar and her son Ishmael away. And the Lord told Abraham to listen to her and do what she said (Genesis 21)! But in *calling Abraham lord* and submitting to him, there is the acknowledgement and belief that the Lord had given her to Abraham and Abraham to her and that her true Lord was working good for her through her husband. And so she sees the Lord *in* her husband, working

through him in that calling, for her. And here again is a picture of Christ and His Bride, the Church, who calls Him Lord and Saviour, and from whom we expect every good.

But here then is also some irony with Abraham, for, Peter continues, ***husbands are to live with their wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel***, and yet Abraham did not seem to do this when not once, but twice, he allows Sarah to be taken and almost made the wife of the Pharaoh (Genesis 12) or Abimelech, the king of Gerar (Genesis 20) because he was fearful for his own life! *Abraham was a sinner too*. And while many get upset at these verses that call the woman ***the weaker vessel***, it first says that they should be ***shown honor***. And so the picture here is this: I have lots of things in my house and I do not treat them all the same. For example, I have a pair of work boots and I have some very old and delicate books. The books I take special care of because they are not as strong and sturdy as the boots and are precious and valuable. I do not throw them on the floor or take them out into the mud and snow. That is how husbands are to treat their wives - as valuable and precious and worthy of being shown such honor. These verses have nothing to do with power and physical strength, and everything to do with how we regard one another. And again, consider how valuable and precious Christ considered His Bride, and how He has honored us.

And so in all our life together, Peter continues, ***all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.***

That is what we *should* do, that is how our life together *should* be, in *all* our relationships. But as I pointed out with Abraham, and as you know from your own life, it isn't always so. We are sinners and sometimes big and spectacular sinners. And that is why, at the end of this chapter, Peter points us again to Jesus. There is our hope. The righteous one who died for the unrighteous ones, ***that he might bring us to God***. And He did that, as Peter spells out, through His death, His descent in hell, His resurrection, and His ascension. He took the punishment for our sins and died for them. He then descended into hell and conquered it too. He broke open the grave in His resurrection. And He who submitted Himself perfectly here in this life, has now ascended and ***all powers have been subjected to Him***.

And all this has been given to you in your ***baptism, which now saves you***. Not because it ***removes dirt from the body***, but because it removes sin from the soul. Because that water is your union with Christ in His death and resurrection and His gifting to you all that He did for you. It is where you become His Bride and receive Him and all that He has. Like Noah safe in the ark and saved through water, you are safe in Christ and saved through that water.

And thus safe and secure, forgiven and protected, in your heavenly Bridegroom, we are now enabled to live a new life. The baptized, united in Christ, as Christians in an unchristian world. That life is going to look quite different than those in the world and what they're used to, and so, Peter says, ***always be prepared to make a defense*** - to give an explanation - ***to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you***. Tell them of Christ and His forgiveness and the new life He has given you. And, Peter says, ***have no fear of them*** - of *any* enemy - for what Christ has given to you they cannot take away. And if you suffer for this life and faith, Peter says, ***you will be blessed***. Which doesn't mean it will be easy, but it does give us confidence that our Saviour who has all powers subjected to Him, can and will use everything in this world and life for our good; for our blessing. We may not always see it or understand how, but faith simply says: *yes! Amen. It is so.*

Now, you may have noticed, I haven't really mentioned "love," which I listed as the theme for this chapter tonight. But though I haven't mentioned the word, I really have been talking about it all along. For while the world thinks of love primarily as an emotion, the Scriptures speak of love as something that is done; a part of our will that then expresses itself in our lives. We see it in Christ Jesus and what He has done for us. He didn't just say "I love you," He did love, especially on the cross. And that love He has now given to us, that in all our relationships in this world and life, living as Christians in an unchristian world, we can do the same. ***Not fearing anything that is frightening***, Peter said, for perfect love drives out fear. The perfect love which is Christ, His forgiveness, His promises, and His victory.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.