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Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. 1 Peter 3:8-22

Most of you know that three weeks ago I celebrated my 65th year of life on this earth. 65 seems to be the benchmark age in our current culture by which one can then officially be defined as "old." It also the age by which we tend to measure and consider and evaluate what kind of lives we have lived and what kind of lives we are living and what kind of life we would like to live over that last years of our lives here on earth. The universally common answer we would all like to come up with, in considering all stages of our lives, is that we all would like to live "the good life." But the problem with that is answering the question: "What is the good life?" Entire books have been written to address this question. Philosophers and religious leaders of all ages – even today – have pondered that question, as the term "living the good life" can mean quite a variety of different things to different people.

In its basic form, living the good life is all about the exploration of that which gives us joy and satisfaction. It's about finding purpose and meaning in our lives and drawing happiness from that which we do. The truth is, every human being, in some way or another, aspires to live a good life. In the world we live in, the good life refers to a desirable state of life that is primarily characterized by a high standard of living or the adherence to ethical and moral laws. In its two different expressions, living the good life can be either expressed through an abundant, comfortable, prosperous lifestyle full of material belongings or the attempt to live life in accordance with the ethical, moral, legal and religious laws of one's culture or country. As such, the good life can be understood as the quest for comfort, wealth, and material possessions or the quest to create a worthwhile, honest and meaningful existence. It is also true that in our quest for a good life, we can end up completely disregarding the needs of other people, while others consider helping people a means of living a good life. And so what this means, in the world we live in, the question still remains regarding who decides what a good life is.

But that's not true for those of us are truly following Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. In the Kingdom of God, where Jesus rules in our hearts and reigns over our lives, we look to Jesus to get our definition for "the good life." He is the only one who can define what "the good life" truly is. All throughout the Word of God we read that "living the good life" the way that Jesus defines it means living a life that sets us free. But that does not mean we are free to do what we want to do but rather in Christ we have been freed from our bondage of sin to do what God calls us to do.

We have seen this in the larger context of Peter as the apostle has been addressing those who were being attacked and persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ – encouraging them (and us) as we live as aliens to bring glory to God a world that's hostile towards the gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter has also been explaining how born-again, Kingdom of God followers of Jesus should live as exiles in a world that rejects our message and how we can bear witness to the gospel by living in a way that pleases God. Since 1 Peter 2:13 Peter has been focusing on how we can be witnesses of the gospel by pointing people to Jesus Christ *through* our humble obedience as citizens as slaves/employees and as husbands and wives - to the authority of God the authority God has ordained within the social order we live in.

In last week's text, Peter concluded his appeal for our witness to authority, and this morning he then turns his focus on our witness for Jesus to the hostile world around us - through our relationships with one another, by telling us how to live "the good life" through Jesus. We clearly see this in our text for today as Peter uses the word "*good*" seven times in today's fourteen verses. Only true believers in Jesus can live a truly good life. The good life does not consist of a high standard of living or in the abundance of wealth and possessions or in the comfort and security of worldly success. The good life does not consist of the busy pursuit of finding pleasure and meaning and satisfaction and rewards and personal excellence and positional status in life through the endless activities that the world offers us. Living the "good life" as a witness of Jesus Christ means living a life that sets us free from all those things. Living the "good life" as a witness of Jesus Christ means to living a life that is worthwhile, that makes a contribution, that joyfully gives purpose, that satisfies and fulfills - *because* it is centered on the Kingdom of God rather than that Kingdom of Self because the good life is about God not us. The witness of the good life of Jesus is a life lived for the glory of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus lived the good life, and so we are also to live the good life Jesus lived. Jesus said, "*He who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him*" (John 8:29). Jesus lived the good life by always doing the things that pleased God. The good life of Jesus is living out the confession, "Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior and King" in all of life. This includes during times of suffering. The good life is what Paul describes: "*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*" (1 Corinthians 10:31). The good life of Jesus is glorifying God in everything we do. In Philippians 2:12-13 Paul speaks of living the good life of Jesus: "*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*" Followers of Jesus Christ live the good life of Jesus when they obey him from the moment they confess him as Lord. Stephen, Peter, and Paul all lived the good life of Jesus – even though they suffered for their faith in Christ. Stephen was stoned to death, Peter was crucified, and Paul was beheaded. But the Lord was with them, as he promised, to help them. Jesus said, "*Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20). Living the good life of Jesus will lead us to heaven.

Finally, 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. For, "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." 1 Peter 3:8-12

In these five verses Peter gives us ten commandments (ten imperatives in the Greek) that are foundational to living "the good life" of Jesus. Born-again followers of Jesus Christ can obey these ten imperatives by the power of the Holy Spirit. True believers are able to live the good life of obedience to Christ because they are filled with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Paul tells us this in Ephesians 5:18: "*Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*" - and in Colossians 3:16: "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.*"

The witness of living the good life of Jesus Christ is *unity*. The first command is that we are to “*have unity of mind.*” What this means is that those who are living the good life are to “be of one mind” based on their faith in Jesus, which is based on Scripture. True followers of Christ are unified in their understanding of the absolute authority of the Word of God. Peter speaks of this because disunity, especially in a Christian home or church is the work of the devil and the flesh - whereas, unity of mind is the work of the Holy Spirit. Wherever there is fighting and quarreling, self-centeredness and disobedience to the Holy Spirit, it means someone gave a place to the devil. In Romans 16:17-18 Paul warns us: “*I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.*”

In Romans 15:5–6 Paul declares: “*May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” The witness of living the good life of Jesus Christ is *unity* and we are to *live together* in unity. Ephesians. 4:2–6 tells us to, “*Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*” The good life of Christ is unity with one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God the Father over all.

The witness of living the good life of Jesus Christ is *sympathy*. The Greek word for “*sympathy*” here means “to suffer together.” As our high priest, Jesus sympathizes with us in all our troubles and comes to our aid in every difficulty. The Hebrews writer says, “*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:15-16). Our Lord Jesus is able to sympathize with us, and, therefore, we are able to sympathize with others. Paul also speaks of this in Romans 12:15: “*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*” The problems of our brothers and sisters in Christ are all of our problems. A true church is not a group of disconnected individuals coming and going without sharing and sympathizing with each other. We are all together as one in the body of Christ.

The witness of living the good life of Jesus Christ is also *love*. The Greek word for “*brotherly love*” speaks of “a deep love of the heart.” Of such brotherly love, Jesus said, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” (John 13:34–35). John writes, “*We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother*” (1 John 4:19–21).

We are brothers and sisters by adoption. In one sense God is our heavenly Father and Jesus is our older brother. Unlike Cain, who killed his brother, we are to die to save our brothers and sisters. We do so by the love shed abroad in our hearts in abundance by the Holy Spirit. The first fruit of the Spirit is sacrificial love. It is not *just* saying, “I love you.” We must love with both heart and actions.

The witness of living the good life of Jesus Christ is *compassion*. The Greek word for “*a tender heart*” here speaks of a deep movement you feel in your gut that makes you move forward to solve the problem of the other person. We find this in the story of the Good Samaritan. Aman was beaten, robbed, and left for dead. The Levite and the priest did not help. But the Samaritan stopped “*But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion*” (Luke 10:33). He was moved with compassion and which caused him to sacrificially help him.

Peter is saying if we are living the good life of Christ we will feel deeply moved with compassion to solve the problems of others. This is what will happen if we are truly born again, and if we are truly living the good life of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul affirms this in Ephesians 4:32 when he writes, *“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*

The witness of living the good life of Jesus Christ is also *humility*. The Greek word for “humble mind” is literally translated “to be humble minded.” We see this clearly in Jesus; he was humble not proud or arrogant. If Jesus is humble, we should be humble. He said, *“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Matthew 11:29). Jesus is our Lord, yet he did the humble job of a slave, washing the feet of his disciples. In Philippians 2:5–8 Paul wrote, *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* The good life of Jesus is a life of humility.

It’s here - at the end of the first five imperatives, Peter then says, *“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”* (verse 9). What this means is that when we are living the good life of Christ - and someone treats us badly, we may want to repay evil for evil, but we must not do so. We must follow Jesus’ example. Peter had wrote of this before in 1 Peter 2:23: *“When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”* This is the good life of Jesus. Jesus himself said, *“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you”* (Matthew 5:10–11). Paul wrote of this also in Romans 12:17–21: *“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”* Paul also wrote, *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them”* (Romans 12:14). Why should we bless when people do evil to us? Because God has given us a “blessing.” We’ve been made rich in every spiritual blessing in Jesus. We have been predestinated, called, justified, sanctified, and we are going to be glorified.

At this point Peter continues speak of the imperatives that are foundational to living “the good life “of Jesus by quoting directly from King David’s word in Psalm 34:12–16. He begins by quoting verse 12 as a qualifier, saying: *“Whoever desires to love life and see good days”* (i.e. - whoever want to live in the love of eternal life, and enjoy the good life of days here on earth, must obey the following imperatives that follow) *“Let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.”* Peter is telling us here that the other witnesses of living the good life of Jesus Christ, are seen those who control their minds and their mouths, and those who keep their tongue from speaking evil and turn away from evil, and those who do good and seek peace and pursue peace. And they humbly and obediently do so because *“the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer”* – and also in knowing *“the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”* God blesses those who live the good life of Jesus and condemns those who do not.

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:13-17

Here Peter reminds us that living the good life of Jesus Christ does not protect us from suffering. The truth is, we will suffer persecution if we truly do live out the good life we have in Jesus. Suffering for Jesus is the lot of every true born-again Christian. Peter asked the question: “*Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?*” The answer is – a lot of people! Peter’s response? Even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don’t worry or be afraid of their threats. Worship Jesus Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope in Christ, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Jesus. Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, than to suffer for doing wrong!

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. 1 Peter 3:18-22

1 Peter 3:18 is *the* key statement in the Bible on the substitutionary atonement of Christ, that he suffered and died as the righteous one in place of the unrighteous, in order to bring us back to God: “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.*” This is also the gospel – the good news that Jesus died on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins of rebelling against and rejecting God, to rescue us from eternal separation from God by rising from the dead and giving us a new life. When we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are reconciled back to God into the Kingdom of God, adopted into the family of God, enabled to love others as God has loved us, and given the free gift of enjoying God forever. And in all these things, we are then empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out the good life of Jesus through the witnesses of unity, sympathy, love, compassion, humility, controlling our minds and mouths, keeping our tongues from speaking evil and turning away from evil, seeking and pursuing peace – even in the midst of resistance and suffering.

Peter ends his teaching about living the good life of Christ with the phrase “*he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison.*” There is debate about how this should be interpreted, but it is most commonly believed to be a reference to demons, or the offspring of demons, imprisoned at the time of the flood of Noah. Chained, in hopes that the execution of the Messiah would release them to further evil, they heard the risen One proclaim His victory and their doom. Peter then continues on the same theme by drawing a comparison between salvation in the Noah’s ark and baptism. In both instances, believers are saved through the waters of judgment, since baptism portrays salvation through judgment.

But the mere act of baptism does not save, in that the passing of water over the body does not cleanse anyone’s sin. Baptism saves us because it represents inward faith in the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. Peter closes this section by proclaiming the triumph and unchallenged rule and reign of Jesus Christ. He is honored and glorified when we suffer for righteousness. Living the good life of Jesus means living a life that sets us free to humbly obey the call and commands of Christ to point the world to Jesus!

*I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.
Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!*

*I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.
Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.
This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.
The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.*

*Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!
The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.*

*Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good?
Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.
Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*

*The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.
The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.
When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.
The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.*

*Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.
He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.
Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.*

Psalm 34

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Pastor Leland Botzet

Arrowsmith Baptist Church