

Using Our Words for Witness Sermon – part 1

Good morning everyone and thanks for joining us for worship and now hearing from God's Word. I'm in a series looking at the importance of our words. And so far we've looked at various ways of using our words carefully. Towards others we looked at the concepts of **encouragement**, **affirmation** and **blessing** and last week we looked at how to use our words to praise and glorify God in all of His greatness. (Note: if you missed any of them, you can watch them on either the church's Facebook page or on the church's website.) This morning and **next Sunday**, we're going to look at how to use our **words and lives** to give witness of Jesus to others. And while, there's numerous texts we could use for this, I've chosen to center our thoughts on a passage in **1 Peter**. So, please turn in your Bibles to **1 Peter 3:15**. As you do that, let me give you a bit of background to this letter.

This letter is the **first of 2 letters** the apostle Peter wrote. It's quite clear from the content of the letters that the Christians he's addressing have begun experiencing persecution because of their faith. And perhaps some of them were beginning to wonder how they should respond to it. Should we try to hide our faith, perhaps some have been considering turning away from their faith. Life is tough for them, as it can be for many of you as well. But when things are dark – the light of a Christians' life can shine even brighter.

Please follow along beginning at 1 Peter 3:13

1 Peter 3:13-17 (NIV) *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened."*

*15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the **hope** that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,*

16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 17 For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

What's the scenario Peter is describing here?.

You're a Christian and you're routinely being persecuted for your faith by people who may not believe in God. That's a very real thing around the world and even within America Christians are coming under increasing persecution. At some point, someone stops and asks you to tell them more about your **reason for your hope**.

Three key questions spring up to me from this text.

1. **What would cause someone to ask about my hope?**
2. **How would I respond if someone asked about my hope?**
3. **Is my hope questionable?** (**is it obvious enough to prompt someone to ask?**) Because this text is presupposing that there's something different in the way a Christian lives their life that would cause others to not only notice but to want to know more).

Question #3 is for you and God to discuss.

Question #2 I want to look at **today**.

Question #1 I want to look at **next Sunday**.

Question #2 – How should you respond if someone asks about your hope? You could study the various evidences to support a belief in Christianity: such as **archaeological evidence**, **manuscript evidence**, **fulfilled prophecy**, **historical evidence**, **the intricate design of the universe** or even **the amazing design of our human bodies that points to the hand of a Creator**. And those are all really great things. And if you're so inclined, J.J. or myself could point you to resources that would help you with that. But that can also be overwhelming and I don't believe God calls each of us to that level of preparation. In fact, when Jesus was talking about the End Times, in **Luke 21**, he warns us that we will be brought before rulers to defend our faith. And Jesus tells us to not worry about it because *He will give us the words to say at that moment*. But I think there's some key truths every Christian should know in living their faith and telling others about their hope.

Peter began this letter talking about our **hope** as Christians. He said,

1 Peter 1:3 (NIV) *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*

Most everyone wants to have “hope” but much of the hope most people cling to today is merely **wishful thinking**, that may or may not happen. The reason this type of hope is uncertain is because you can’t count 100% in the factors involved to make that type of hope come to fruition.

- You don’t know if people with dissenting opinions will vote your candidate into office, or
- You don’t know if you’ll be able to continue to be employed, or
- You don’t know if your health will continue to hold up etc.
- You don’t know if changes in various structures within our society will be addressed

Many of you know from personal experience that our hopes and dreams can be **elusive at best**.

But Peter says that we have a “**living hope**” because of the fact that Jesus rose from the grave. All other religions may hope in a future beyond this world, but the founder of their religion currently lies in a grave. Our hope is “**living**” because Jesus Christ is no longer lying in a grave. And throughout this letter, Peter has several other reasons for our hope in a **very bright future** and a **meaningful present**.

So, grab your sermon outlines or a piece of paper and a pen as I quickly cover the basis for our hope, as expressed just in this letter Peter wrote. They are scattered throughout the letter. But I believe that if you can remember these 7 points, you can express your hope to anyone who asks you.

7 Foundation of a Christians’ Hope:

1. God came into our world in the person of Jesus

1 Peter 1:20 (NIV) *He (Jesus) **was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake***. Most of you have known this fact most of your lives and maybe it’s become **ordinary**. But don’t lose the **wonder and power** of this. God, who created this vast universe we live in, left the comfort and safety of heaven to come down to us. Not only did He come to us but **He became** one of us. And as he became us, He experienced **pain** and **temptation** and **suffering** and **betrayal**. And, partially because of that experience, He can relate to us as we struggle with life as well. That’s the similarities between us and Jesus. The vast difference is that He never sinned. Which makes point #2 possible.

2. Jesus died for our sins to bring us to God.

1 Peter 3:18a (NIV) *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God*. (see also 1 Peter 2:24). Our sins separated us from a Holy God. So, Jesus came to take all of God’s judgment upon Himself when he, the only perfect man to ever live, died on the cross.

3. Jesus’ resurrection gives us a living hope (He didn’t stay dead but 3 days later Jesus rose from the grave)

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4. Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at God’s right hand (right hand implies power & authority)

1 Peter 3:22 (NIV) *Jesus has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him*. Seated implies His work is finished and He’s in power. He stood to welcome Stephen as he was being martyred.

5. Jesus is coming back

1 Peter 1:13 (NIV) *Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed **at his coming***.

6. We have an inheritance awaiting our arrival in heaven

After talking about the living hope Christ’s resurrection gives us, he talks about what’s awaiting us. Jesus’ resurrection gives us a living hope and...

1 Peter 1:4 (NIV) *and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade* (in other words, it can't be looted, burned down or destroyed, it won't lose its value or luster).

7. We're being protected by God's power to receive this inheritance

1 Peter 1:5 (NIV) *who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.* The apostle Paul, in *Philippians 1:6* says that *"he's confident that God will carry onto completion the work He began in each of us."*

Our Response to these core truths should be:

1. Focus on Jesus and be filled with inexpressible and glorious joy.

1 Peter 1:8 (NIV) *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,*

Our belief in who Jesus is and what he did and is continuing to do for us, changes us from the inside out. And we're going to look more deeply at those deep personal changes next week. But for today I want to mention 2. Is this true of you? Because if it is, then people ought to be able to notice a difference between you and others around them. If you're filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, it's going to come out and people are going to notice.

2. Sufferings refocus us on living for God's will rather than temporary pleasures

1 Peter 4:1-2 (NIV) *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm (or equip) yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*

Sufferings can refocus our **minds attention** and our **hearts affection** on Jesus as we anticipate living with Him forever in heaven.

That leads me to my final point on how to live a life characterized by hope.

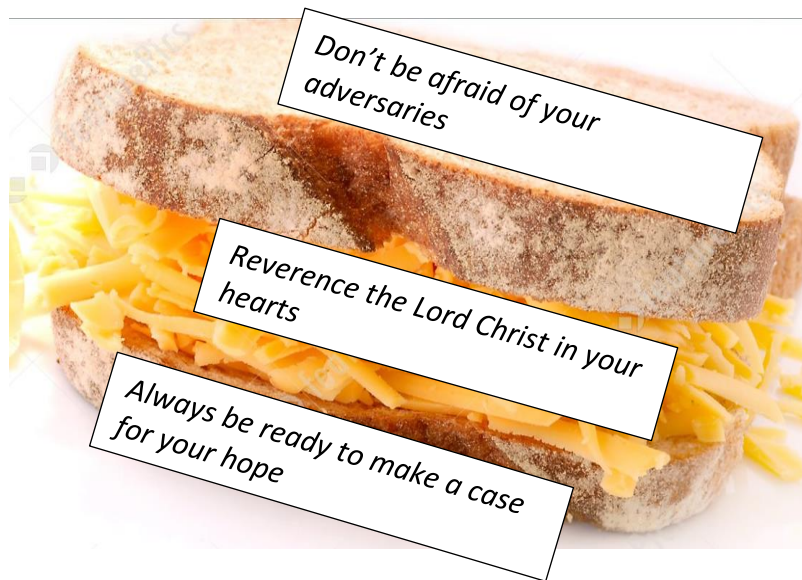
Let's go back to the original passage and I want you to recognize the **sandwich** that's contained in these verses. It's **a core action** surrounded by **two commands**.

1 Peter 3:13-17 (NIV) *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." 15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the **hope** that you have.*

Let's begin by talking about the **two commands**: the two pieces of bread.

- The **top piece** of bread is not fearing the threats of others against your faith
- The **bottom piece** of bread is always living ready to talk about your hope
- The **action** that prepares us to do both commands, the middle of the sandwich is to **constantly revere Christ as Lord in our hearts**.

To do this you need to spend time in God's Word **getting to know Jesus**. Continue to notice how he treated people who didn't quite have it altogether, in fact who were often a mess. Picture yourself as that person Jesus is healing or speaking grace onto. How did that make you feel? Allow these encounters with Jesus to continue to resonate in your mind and shape your heart.



Next week we're going to be discovering how you live your life in such a way that others will be intrigued and be curious about why and want to know more about your hope. So join us next Sunday beginning at 10am.

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1 Peter 3:13-17

3 Key Questions:

1. What would cause someone to ask about my _____?
2. How would I _____ if someone asked about my hope?
3. Is my hope _____?

Foundation of a Christians' Hope:

1. God came into our world in the person of _____ (1 Peter 1:20)
2. Jesus died for our sins to bring us to _____ (1 Peter 3:18a)
3. Jesus' _____ gives us a living hope (1 Peter 1:3)
4. Jesus _____ into heaven and is seated at God's _____ hand
(1 Peter 3:22)
5. Jesus is _____ (1 Peter 1:13)
6. We have an _____ awaiting our arrival in heaven
(1 Peter 1:4)
7. We're being _____ by God's power to receive this inheritance
(1 Peter 1:5)

Our Response to these core truths should be:

1. Focus on Jesus and be filled with inexpressible _____ and _____
(1 Peter 1:8)
2. Sufferings refocus us on living for _____ rather than
temporary _____ (1 Peter 4:1-2)

Think about: Are you living a hope filled life? Why or Why not?

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