

THE CHURCH: A HUMBLE-MINDED COMMUNITY OF BLESSING

From 1 Peter 3:8-12
12.8.19

INTRODUCTION

Illustration: Pastor Farid in war-torn Syria (from Nov. 2017)

Transition: Seeking the good of others is hard. Harder when the 'other' is someone who's threatening your life! And yet, Christians, like Farid, are called to be humble-minded agents of blessing. It is the living out of this calling that lead to the salvation of Farid's persecutor; and it is the living out of this calling that lies at the heart our passage this morning. At the core of 1 Peter 3:8-12 is this:

Proposition: **A blessed inheritance awaits those who bless others; therefore, be humble-minded, turning from evil and seeking the good of those around you.**

3 PARTS TO THIS MORNING'S MESSAGE

1. How the community of God should be characterized (v. 8)

"To sum up..." I'm probably throwing a couple of you off right now since I've only just started my sermon. No, I'm not done yet BUT Peter is – at least with his thought that began in 2:12. If you remember (or look back), you know that over the last several verses, Peter unpacks what it looks like to have 'excellent behavior among the Gentiles'.

Everyone should submit themselves to the authorities God has placed over them as an expression of devotion to the Lord and in keeping with the example of Christ. Holy living is not something that Christians do in private; it's something that's done in public where we are able to represent Christ to the world.

This idea continued in Peter's encouragement to wives of unbelieving spouses and to husbands whose prayer lives are on the line when they fail to treat their spouse with honor.

Peter lands the plane by 'summing up' what he's said previously, addressing the church as a whole:

All of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted, and humble in spirit.

Four adjectives are used, not to describe what the church is like, but how the church community should be characterized:

Harmonious: a compound word that more-or-less means to be in agreement (lit. 'same-minded'), not about every little thing, but about the things that matter most. Christians should be characterized by the unity of their convictions – especially with respect to the issues discussed in the last chapter (submission to authorities, holy living, etc.)

Sympathetic: literally, "sympathetic" – it's where we get our English word! Christians should be characterized by our genuine concern for one-another as we "rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn." Christian sympathy is not superficial, but a deep care that joins in the emotional experience of others.

Brotherly: or 'having brotherly love,' the umbrella term under which the other adjectives fall and on which the whole of the law of Christ depends. This brotherly love is the overflow of a heart that recognizes God's grace in adopting *me* AND in adopting others into His family – a family we would have never picked ourselves. This is both beautiful and challenging, amen? But be encouraged: there is no challenge too great within God's family that cannot be overcome by brotherly love.

Kind-hearted: or 'tenderhearted' - Christians should be characterized by our gentility and a posture of tenderness towards one-another. This quality is rooted in God's kindness towards us!

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Eph. 4:32)

If God has dealt with us tenderheartedly, by the spirit of Christ, we are able to extend that same tenderness to others in the body of Christ. Thank you, Ty for modeling this so well!

Humble in spirit: a compound word, literally: 'lowly-minded' or 'humble-minded,' which isn't really different from being 'humble in spirit' except that it reflects the similarity between harmonious ('same-minded') a bit better.

At the heart of things, being humble-minded quality on which this passage AND the preceding unit of thought hinges. Humility, being 'lowly-minded' is the ONLY way to persevere in submitting to our authorities; it's the only way to persevere in serving a difficult spouse; it's the only way to persevere in leveraging one's strength and position to serve the weak rather than be served by the weak. If we're honest with ourselves, none of

that is doable without a hefty dose 'humble-mindedness.' It flew in the face of 1st Cent. Roman culture, and it flies in the face of popular culture today.

And yet, this virtue lies at the heart of the Christian message. Was it not Jesus who, being in the very nature God, did not leverage his goodness to his own advantage, but humbled himself and took on the form of a servant to die for wretched sinners like you and me? Thank God for a humble-minded savior!

Humility is central to the gospel message, it was central to Peter's flow of thought leading up to this passage, and it is central to Peter's message in these verses this morning.

So much so that humility is the pivot-point from how the community of God should be characterized to how the community of God should behave.

2. How the community of God should behave (v. 9a)

Not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead;

Verse nine may seem like a continuation of Peter's list in verse eight, but the grammar indicates that this is a new idea. Which makes sense since, rather than emphasizing how Christians should relate to one another, he emphasizes how Christians should relate to those outside the Christian community.

Note, however, that what's required for both kinds of relating is humble (or lowly)-mindedness.

Admittedly, returning evil for evil, bad for bad, injury for injury, seems to be very natural response – at least for me... and my kids.

When someone has hurt us, we may say we want justice, but what we really want is revenge. We want them to hurt like we've been hurt. And this is why it's so easy to justify our own sin: because we've been sinned against! When someone causes us pain, we want them to share in that same pain.

But notice what lies underneath that impulse. Is it not the belief that we don't deserve pain? That suffering shouldn't be part of our lives – especially suffering at the hands of others?

On one level this is true. People *shouldn't* inflict suffering on others. Folks shouldn't act to insult or injure. That isn't just or right.

But life with Christ is neither just nor right. If it were, there would be no life in Jesus! Christ came to bear our sin – our sin! What's just or right about that? Can we even begin to fathom the evil in our hearts – the evil we have committed against God? If you're honest, you can't. And yet it was God, who, instead of wrath, instead of justice, blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:2)!

If Christ returned our evils, our insults towards him with blessing, we should not be surprised that Christians are called to behave in the same way.

Not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead;

Peter instructs the community of God how she is to behave (specifically in the face of persecution). And while we have an example in Christ, Christians have another reason to return blessing for evil.

3. Why the community of God should behave this way (vv. 9b-12)

For you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing

Why should Christians return blessing for evil done to them? Because that's what we're called to! This is the 'job description' of a Christian. *Because we are called to the very purpose (returning blessing for cursing), we do not return evil for evil. Why?*

That you might inherit a blessing / in order to inherit a blessing

In context and in light of everything Peter has talked about thus far in his epistle, the blessing he's referring to is the Christian's eschatological inheritance from chapter 1. [Read 1:3-5] Our future salvation from the injustices and trials of the world today is the blessing we are to inherit *IF* we fulfill our calling to bless and love those around us.

Yes, according to Peter, the blessing of our future salvation is conditioned on our obedience in the present. But wait, isn't our salvation based on faith and not works (obedience included)? Yes. God's gift of faith does

the saving. But the faith that's given is never a by-itself-faith. It is *always* accompanied by faith-full obedience.¹

For this reason, it is perfectly appropriate for Peter here (and James elsewhere) to condition the glorious inheritance of a Christian on the demonstration of his or her faith through their obedience in blessing others.

One commentator sums it up this way, "We have now seen on numerous occasions that living a godly life does not earn salvation but is an evidence of it. Peter was hardly suggesting that believers will live perfectly and that such perfection was necessary to obtain an inheritance. But he was insisting that a transformed life is necessary to obtain the inheritance."²

And this idea is nothing new, of course. It goes all the way back to Psalm 34 – a psalm about the Lord's deliverance of his afflicted people. [Read 10-12]

Peter quotes verses 12-16 in order to highlight this old covenant reality and its new covenant implications. A few observations:

- A. The 'good days' are not to be understood in terms of flourishing in this life, but in the life to come. After all, this life is merely a shadow of what's to come.
- B. By quoting this psalm, Peter unpacks what it means to be a people who are committed to blessing others (keeping oneself from speaking evil; turning from evil; doing good; seeking and pursuing peace). It's a far more comprehensive vision of blessing than simply saying 'God bless you' to folks, right?
- C. The great comfort of this life is *not* that things will get better in the short term, but that we have God for the long-term. His eyes are towards the righteous; his ears are open to the prayers of those whose lives are characterized as agents of blessings (turning from

evil, pursuing peace). This is the only path to life and peace with God; all other paths are opposed to God and will incur his judgment.

CONCLUSION

To wrap up, we've seen that members in the community of God are to be characterized as agents of blessings with one another. It's also clear that we are to be agents of blessings with those outside the church – especially to those who persecute us! We do so because we have received blessing in Christ and because our future deliverance depends on it.

But where do you fit in this? Have you experienced the blessing of God in Christ? Have you laid down your rebellion and embraced the blessing of Jesus? If you haven't, now is the time. Don't wait.

If you have, how would your interactions within the community of God be characterized? Are you a agents of blessing here at Trinity? Do you actively seek the peace and well being of others at church? Are you committed to harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, kind-heartedness, and humility?

How about beyond these walls?

Can you remember the last time someone hurt you? Did you return their injury with blessing? Is it too late to be a blessing to them? What would it look like if you decided today to seek that person's good in exchange for their mistreatment of you?

Trinity, a blessed inheritance awaits those who bless others; therefore, be humble-minded, turning from evil and seeking the good of those around you.

None of this is easy, but take heart. The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.

¹ Though often attributed to Luther, John Calvin was the first to coin the phrase, "faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is never alone" in *Antidote to the Council of Trent*, under Canon 11, paragraph 1.

² Thomas Schreiner, *TNAC*, vol 37 (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2003), 168.