

In 1965 Bob Dylan released the best selling album, *Highway 61 Revisited*. On it was the song, *Ballad of a Thin Man*. It's toxic refrain helped fuel a movement to recognize change but it also haunted a generation.

Because something is happening here
But you don't know what it is
Do you Mr. Jones?

It was with those words that Dylan exposed the discomfort of the age. A culture shift was happening. Things were no longer what they had been. The clear moral markers that had guided generations were about to be demolished in the American society and today we are paying the price for the drug and sexual revolution. This disappearance of what had been normal and clear is discomfoting to say the least.

Something close to that happens in the middle of 1 Peter 3. Prior to that everything is clear, he is writing about good deeds and submitting to authority as Christians. The fact is that God's authentic community will always be known for submission and humbleness.

In verse 8 something happens that gives one the foreboding sense of change. When you read this you begin to feel that maybe you are on uncertain ground. The subject of submission drifts away and it is replaced by suffering.

Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. ⁹ Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it. ¹⁰ For the Scriptures say,

*"If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days,
keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies.*

¹¹ Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it.

¹² The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers.

But the Lord turns his face against those who do evil."^l

¹³ Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But 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. ¹⁵ Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. ¹⁶ But do this in a gentle and respectful way.^[c] 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 Christ.

¹⁷ Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong! 1 Peter 3:8-17 NLT

Like a good coach, Peter realizes that the best thing he can do is encourage them a little. Between calling us to submission and introducing us to the normality of suffering in the Christian life these words are transitional.

Vince Lombardi the famed Green Bay Packer coach is said to have been that best at knowing when to prod, push or encourage. After a painful road game loss the team fully expected Lombardi to take it out on them during the plane ride home. But his biographer records these words:

Instead of lambasting players for their mistakes (two fumbles and punt blocked for a safety) he let them indulge in some beverages on the flight home and spoke spiritedly to them about how they would right themselves for the rest of the season, and later that night he brought them all downstairs to the Elks Club with their families for a turkey diner. The Old Man could be gruff, awkward and unrelenting, but now he showed another side.

Peter is also showing himself to be an amazing coach with his words. He still has some tough things to say and write but for now he chooses to encourage a little. He knows his readers are going to need a little cheerleading if they are going to battle for the purity of their faith week after week.

May these words also stimulate us as Christians and the church toward godly submission and to share in the suffering of our Savior.

1. Be a blessing: receive a blessing

Our calling is to bless. It is the call of the Word of God.

Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.⁹ Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it.

You might think that the call to bless would be to bless God but in fact the heart of His Words are to prepare us to bless our enemies. Non-Christians will bless other people that they like. There is no real spiritual merit in that. It will take the active grace of God in a person's heart to bless one's enemies.

A.E. Mitchell was a folk artist. He made plaques with Biblical references on them. They were beautifully done and hand painted. Many of them hang in the homes and offices of his friends and family. His most famous by far was one that simply had one word and that was "Bless." He wanted his family to be known for blessing others.

Peter is simply reminding that of all people Christ followers or Christians should be known for living a lifestyle of blessing others. If you want this broken down in a practical manner all you have to do is look at the scripture and outline it.

- a. Sympathize with each other
- b. Love each other as brothers and sisters
- c. Be tenderhearted and keep a humble attitude
- d. Don't repay evil for evil
- e. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you
- f. Instead pay them back with a blessing

Recently I had a conversation with a professional that helps people for a living. As we talked the weariness of working with people was evident. Too be honest, many people are unkind to people who serve others. It's as though there is this entitlement based seething anger just below the surface of their put together exterior. Talk to waiters and waitresses and most will tell you that "church people" can sometimes be the worst to serve. (and the cheapest)

Every day we ought to review our words and conversations in the light of trying to be like Christ. What did you say to the last person you gave a piece of your mind? Chances are you probably don't have enough mind to spare. Did you really straighten them out? Did you feel better after you gave them your opinion of what they needed to do?

Peter is simply saying that we ought to be different as Christians than the non-Christians in the world. We should be kinder, more forgiving, more humble, more tender-hearted, less insulting and on the positive side we should be about blessing other people instead of ripping into them.

If you will bless others you will be blessed: *That is what God has called you to do, and He will bless you for it.*

2. Be a blessing: Bear a burden

Just be aware that being a blessing is not a magic formula for always receiving a blessing. We bless others because it is what Jesus would do and our goal is to be like Jesus in the relationships of life. Being a blessing will not spare you from bearing burdens. This whole scripture is preparing us for times that will come in our lives that will test our soul's resolve to be faithful to God.

For the Scriptures say, "If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies.

¹¹*Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it.*

¹²*The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers. But the Lord turns his face against those who do evil."*

I hope you can feel the hope in these verses. You don't need a commentary or a pastor to break them down. They speak for themselves if we can just have ears to hear. (1 Peter 3:10-12)

For the sake of biblical study let me tell you that in these verses Peter is quoting from Psalm 34. David was the author and at the time he was being chased by King Saul and under the threat of death. On two different occasions David could have taken the life of the man that was seeking to kill him and he refrained both times. (1 Sam.24:16-19) (1 Sam. 26)

Remember if you read this epistle from start to finish you would be reading in the context of submitting to authorities even evil ones. Not only will we be blessed for doing the right thing but we learn that God is trustworthy and faithful even when we are bearing burdens that may seem impossible to survive.

A lecturer was giving a lecture to his students on stress management. He raised a glass of water and asked the audience, "How heavy do you think this glass of water is?" The students' answers ranged from 20g to 500g.

"It does not matter on the absolute weight. It depends on how long you hold it.

If I hold it for a minute, it is OK.

If I hold it for an hour, I will have an ache in my right arm.

If I hold it for a day, you will have to call an ambulance.

It is the exact same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes."

"If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, we will not be able to carry on, the burden becoming increasingly heavier."

"What you have to do is to put the glass down, rest for a while before holding it up again."

We have to put down the burdens periodically, so that we can be refreshed and are able to carry on. Whatever burdens you are having now on your shoulders, let it down for a moment if you can. Pick it up again later when you have rested...We are called to bear some burdens but allow yourself to lay them down when you can.

3. Be a blessing: Believe through the battle

Fear and blessing often travel together. David felt that in Psalm 34 but he never quit believing. To be a blessing we must have a continual faith that is stronger than our humanity. Faith is not of works; it is the gift of God. We should pray for stronger faith and believe through our battles.

¹³ Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But 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. ¹⁵ Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. ¹⁶ But do this in a gentle and respectful way.^[c] 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 Christ. ¹⁷ Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!

Let's look at this verse and unpack it together. Peter acknowledges that you and I may receive harm for trying to do good but he also reminds us that God will reward us for making right choices.

We are told to worship instead of worry. (v. 14c and 15)

We are told to maintain Christian hope and be ready to explain it.

We are told to be gentle and respectful

We are told to keep our conscience clear.

We are reminded that suffering for doing right is always better than suffering for doing wrong.

One saint who weathered the storm, proving the sufficiency of His grace, was Jeanne Marie Bouvier de la Motte. She lived during the long and extravagant reign of Louis XIV. Madame Guyon, as she was later called, was born April 18, 1648.

Madame Guyon was to become a thorn in the flesh of her king, who lived in debauchery. Born into nobility, this tall, exquisite beauty caught the attention of the courts of France at a very early age. Her presence was demanded at every party and social event...and it was her pleasure to be the center of attention. She knew what went on in those inner circles because for a while she was part of them. Everything in Paris catered to her pride. And yet Jeanne Marie's soul had been awakened to the things of God. Because her mother was more concerned with social affairs and caring for her favorite charities than with raising her daughters, Jeanne Marie had been sent off to a convent when she was only two and a half years old.

The dichotomy of lifestyles pulled at her conscience. Finally the Lord won, and Madame Jeanne Guyon fell in love with the One who died for her. That love would be tested repeatedly in fires of suffering which would be kindled time and time again for the rest of her life. Yet, each fire only consumed more dross. Her flesh was left in ashes, and the gold of her relationship with her Savior gleamed in an ever-greater purity.

Her pen became a sword, slashing through the sin of the times, revealing many of the heretical teachings of the church. Her fame spread throughout Europe. But not everyone

was happy with her writings. Many of the church prelates were infuriated. Louis XIV winced, writhed, and then came to the end of his endurance.

Madame Guyon was imprisoned far below the surface of the earth. Her cell was lit only by a candle, but she still had pen and paper. After ten years in her dungeon, bent low over the linen parchment on the table, squinting as the candle flickered in the draft, she moved her quill across the paper to write this poem. It has survived the centuries not only as a testimony to the sufficiency of God's grace, but also as a monument to the certainty of His promise that He will not give us anything we cannot bear.¹

A little bird I am shut from the fields of air
Yet in my cage I sit and sing to Him who placed me there;
Well pleased a prisoner to be,
Because my Lord, it pleases Thee.

Naught else have I to do, I sing the whole day long,
And He whom most I love to please
Doth listen to my song.
He caught and bound my wandering wing, but still He bends to hear me sing.

My cage confines me round, abroad, I cannot fly
But though my wing is closely bound, my heart's at liberty.
My prison walls cannot control the flight, the freedom of the mind.²

The point is that the child of God that is walking with Him each day will be a blessing even when life is turned upside down. We should strive for it. Long for it and desire to be like Jesus more than anything else in our lives.

Be a blessing.

Billy Graham said, "The strongest principle of life and blessings lies in our choice. Our life is the sum result of all the choices we make, both consciously and unconsciously. If we can control the process of choosing, we can take control of all aspects of our life. We can find the freedom that comes from being in charge of our life. So start with what is right rather than what is acceptable.

"If you don't make a decision, then time will make it for you, and time will always side against you."

Keep the faith. Persevere. Move forward.

1. Paraphrased from Dorothy Gawne Coslet, *Madame Jeanne Guyon: Child of Another World*.
2. Poem by Madame Guyon.