

# Message Transcript

LIVING HOPE FOR EXILES | WE STAND FIRM

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So good to be with you today. If you would, just join me in prayer before we jump in.

Father, thank You so much for this opportunity, this moment when we can come at the very end of our week and the beginning of our week, however we see that, just to be with other people and to be able to lift up our voices to you.

Maybe some of us struggled with lifting up our voice just a moment ago because the kind of week we came out of was tough, it was difficult. But this is a place we need to be whether we feel like being here or not.

Maybe we had a great week. Things are going our way. But we know that we still need to acknowledge that even the good things in life, they are blessings we get from You.

So, regardless of bad week, good week, we still acknowledge You and we invite You to meet us in this place, that Your voice would become the loudest voice that we would be listening to. That we would lean in expecting to have some sort of an encounter with You, because there is something in all of us that needs further releasing and submitting to You.

God, I thank You for the incredible work that You have done so far already this weekend. We've just seen dozens and dozens and dozens of people who just spontaneously responded to You in baptism. And we know that we've got another service yet to go. So, we can't wait to see what only You can do. And we anticipate it and we thank You for it. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody said: Amen and Amen and Amen.

Hey, so good to be with you today. Feel free to grab a seat and as you are doing that, grab a Bible and find 1 Peter, chapter 3. We're going to be starting in verse 8, finishing up chapter 3 together.

As I mentioned in the prayer, this week is baptism Sunday. The first weekend of every month we just kind of designate that for baptisms. And we just decided, because of where the text is going—you'll see in just a minute that Peter is going to end chapter 3 giving us this great, compelling picture of baptism. So, we just decided to open it up.



And we had, I don't know, a couple of dozen baptisms planned this weekend, but I think we are already something close to 100 or more. I haven't seen the final number. Just lots of people spontaneously jumping in. And we've got one more service to go. And maybe there is somebody listening to the sound of my voice right now and you're going to be next.

I just want to plant that seed in the back of your mind that maybe God is calling you to do that for any number of reasons. Maybe you've never done it. Maybe you did it for wrong reason. Maybe you did it, you were sprinkled as an infant and you don't have any memory of it. Maybe today is going to be the day for you. And you'll see where we are headed in the text here in just a moment.

For those of you who are just now joining us, we've been in this series in 1 Peter called Stand Firm where Peter is encouraging a group of disoriented Christians to stand firm in the midst of a culture that is very disorienting.

Several years ago I had one of those gym memberships where with the membership you could drop in to any one of the locations around the city, but I never had any reason to. I would always just go to the one that was closest to my house.

But one day I had a meeting on the other side of town, so I decided to drop in to another location for a really quick work out. But when I walked in, it was the same gym, it felt the same, but the blueprint of the gym—everything was flipped around. You know what I'm talking about?

So, I walked in and the cardio machines instead of being on the left, they were on the right. And the free weights, instead of being on the right, they were on the left. And everything was kind of confusing and disorienting. And I didn't really like it that much because it just felt foreign and different to me.

But I got my workout in, and I was exhausted and tired afterward and I headed to the locker room. Did I mention that everything was flipped around? So, I'm really not thinking and I just walk into the locker room on the left, which is the men's room at my original gym.

I walked in, and to my surprise I saw two or three ladies standing in the men's room. And it was kind of confusing to me. I kind of stood there for a minute and I was looking at them, I'm sure with a creepy look on my face, and they are looking at me with a look of disgust and shock. And just as I'm getting ready to say to them, "Hey, I think you are in the wrong locker room," it dawned on me, no that was me.



Man, I turned and ran out of the locker room as fast as I could. I have never prayed so hard in my life that someone didn't go to our church, all the way out to the car, man.

Well, that's really kind of a helpful analogy as Peter is trying to help us, as Christ followers, those of us who are Christ followers, to get oriented or reoriented in a world that is very disorienting. He keeps referring to us as foreigners and exiles. Once you give your life to Jesus, it looks familiar, it feels familiar but everything has been flipped around.

So, we've just been going through this little book of the Bible. We've just got three or four weekends left. We're just going verse by verse through the text allowing the text to set the agenda so we can give voice to what God wants to be said in our lives.

We have a lot of noise going on in our lives right now—24/7. And we just want to amplify the voice of God by the reading and explaining and applying of His Word. Today we're in chapter 3, starting in verse 8. We're going to finish out the rest of the chapter.

And Peter is encouraging us to stand firm. He's saying, "I don't want you to just believe in Jesus or just view Jesus as some sort of good, moral example to follow. I want you to choose a much more difficult and much more rewarding task of making Jesus Lord over every area of your life."

And the analogy that we have been using all series long is that the Scriptures say that Jesus said, "Behold I stand at the door and knock," and if you let Him in through salvation Jesus comes in through the door of your heart, into your life, and then He wants to start wandering the hallways.

And He's going and He's checking doorknobs, "What's in here?" And your response to that question says everything. Are you like, "Yeah, Jesus. Go on in and have Your way. Do some renovations," or, are you throwing yourself in front of Jesus, "Hey, man. Nothing to see in that room. Why don't you go on down to this other one."

Here's the deal. If you say that you are a Christian, you've been following Jesus for a while, but He's still standing inside the breezeway of your heart with His bags, then He's not Lord. And you need to allow Him into every room of your heart.



Listen, man. When you make that decision, it's going to not only feel countercultural, it's going to feel counterintuitive because your flesh and sinful nature, and my flesh and my sinful nature want to be lord.

It's much easier to treat Jesus like a good luck charm or maybe a benign Mr. Rogers of Palestine who just wants to make your life a little bit better. You call on Him whenever you really need a friend, rather than allowing Him into the rooms of your heart through confession, repentance, and the pursuit of holiness.

You've got to make that decision. Who is going to be lord here, Him or me? If you make that decision, then expect some resistance. Man, you make that decision then Satan is going to throw everything that he's got at you to discourage, disillusion, and to deceive.

In fact, I would even go as far as to say that Satan is perfectly fine with you acknowledging Jesus as Savior in name only. You are no longer a threat. He's like, "Hey, man. Knock yourself out. You want to go ahead and say that Jesus is your Savior, by all means. Go ahead and do that." What really makes you a threat in the eyes of Satan is when you begin to follow Jesus.

And I think this is really important for us, especially for those of us who grew up in a Bible belt and maybe in church, to be reminded of this. You can know of Jesus, and yet still not know Jesus. There is a difference.

I remember years ago I was at this men's night event and there was a big, burly, middle-aged man—I mean this dude was just a barrel of a man, big old beard, big old belt buckle, cowboy boots. He walked up to me bawling like a baby because he was talking about his grown, young adult daughter who had strayed away from Jesus. And he said this to me through tears, "I'm realizing that we raised her in church, but we didn't raise her in Christ." And there is a difference.

Hey, man. As we walked through chapter 2 together and as we walked through a good portion of chapter 3 over the last three weeks, Peter keeps drawing our attention to our model and our example to keep our eyes on as we are foreigners and exiles in this world. It is the example of Jesus, Himself.

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 are all about suffering and how bad things are going to happen in this life and how you're going to come across unrighteous governing authorities, and you're going to come across cruel bosses, and you're going to be married to an imperfect person.



And he says, "I want you to model the submissive example of Jesus." Jesus, Himself, is God in the flesh, which means that He submitted Himself and He lowered Himself to be clothed in human flesh.

Get this. Jesus submitted Himself to the discipline of His earthly parents, Mary and Joseph. He had never sinned. They had sinned. And I'll bet you that He saw it all of the time. And yet He submitted to their discipline. Man, that will blow your mind.

He was like, "I'm going to submit to the will of God, the Father. I don't want to go to a painful cross and die on a cross, but I'll do it because that is the way in which I can save God's lost kids." He is our model. He is our example.

There is just no getting past suffering, pain, and injustice in this world because we live in a sinful world full of sinful people. And our natural response to all of that stuff is to lash out, defend ourselves, and get even. Isn't that true?

That is true for me. I'm sure it's true for you too. We're good at it. And Peter is encouraging a countercultural response by modeling our lives after Jesus. And here's the way that we have been saying it: when you do that you create enough room for God to get into your life and do what only He can do.

But when you are busy fighting your battles, when you are busy defending yourself, when you are busy lashing out at others, when you are busy trying to correct wrong, here's what is happening. You are holding onto and trying to fight your own battles and God can't do it because your hands are full fighting your battles. He actually wants you to let go so that He can do it.

So far in this chapter we've talked about this uncomfortable thing called submission and now as he wraps up this chapter he says, "Let me just address the rest of you, in case I've missed anybody." That's really kind of what he is saying. So, look with me at verse 8. He goes:

"Finally," which means he's wrapping up his thoughts in this section of chapter 3, "all of you," if I missed anybody, "be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble." (NIV)

In rapid fire succession he gives us five qualities or characteristics of exiles in this world. He says, "This is how you can model yourself after Jesus." He says, "Hey, I want you," speaking to the church, "to be like-minded."



Now that doesn't mean that we would all agree on everything. But it means that we would be aligned on the essentials of the faith and the mission that Jesus went to a cross for. So, the church should look very diverse, but our diversity comes out of our unity in Jesus. So, he says, "I want you to be like-minded as to the essentials of the faith."

"I want you to be sympathetic," meaning that you would feel alongside of somebody else, take time to kind of get your eyes off of how it is affecting you and enter into somebody else's pain. That's what sympathy means.

He says, "Hey, I want you to love one another." In Christ we have a bond with people that we don't have blood ties with. So, in Jesus' name, we're fam.

And then he says, "I want you to be compassionate." Now, the Greek word for compassion there is one of my favorite words, it's the word splagma. It's such a fun word. It like, "Hey, I want you to have splagma." It's this deep feeling that works up from within. It's this compassion that wells up in you for others.

And then he says, "I want you to be humble." And the Greeks would have despised humility because humility was something that weak people did. So, when Peter is telling them, "Hey, I want you to exercise humility," that was considered a vice. And so that would have just been flipped around from what they were used to hearing.

Five qualities of exile.

And then he goes on in verse 9 and he says:

"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult." In other words, don't get even. Don't try to get even, "On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." (NIV)

Why would I ever want to do that? Well, because God is keeping score. That's part of what it means for Him to be sovereign. And then Peter is going to quote Psalm, 34, verses 12 through 16 here in this New Testament letter. And the Psalm says:

"Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." (NIV)



So, through these verses Peter is bringing his words to us about submission to a close by continuing the theme that he has been using in the entire letter, that in any situation we find ourselves in we should aspire to respond like Jesus. And there wasn't any situation that Jesus found Himself in that we aren't finding ourselves in as well. Jesus would never ask us to do what He wasn't willing to do Himself.

You say, "Well, this life is unfair and it's unjust and suffering is going to come." Yeah, but the unfairness and the injustice that you experience and the suffering you endure is nothing compared to the cross. You want to talk about injustice? A sinless man died for sinners. That's injustice.

And Jesus did so with all humility. In fact, I love how the book of Philippians describes the very nature of Jesus. This is His attitude. And Paul would say to us: "In your relationships with one another,"

Think about all of that, all of what that entails: marriage, kids, families, friends, coworkers, the people you love, the people who get on your nerves, He says, "In your relationships with others,"

"have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God," He was God in the flesh, "did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage."

In other words, He never played that card. I would have, "Did I mention who my Dad is?" I would have done that. He never did that. He said:

"rather, he made himself nothing,"

He wasn't nothing, but He made Himself nothing. Now, that's not like some sort of twisted self-deprecation that's just that He made Himself low so that He could prop you up.

"by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him..." (NIV)

That's our model. That we would make ourselves low trusting that God would be the One to exalt us in His timing.



I don't know about you, man, but when somebody mistreats or maligns me, my natural response is to not go, "Well, I'll just make myself low." No, man. My natural response is to lash out, to puff up, to assert myself, become defensive, try to control the narrative. Anybody with me in that? Yeah, man. We're good at it. This is something I don't have to be taught how to do. I'm just naturally very good at it.

And Peter is saying, "You could do that. As a Christ follower you could do all of those things, or you could trust in the sovereignty of God and let Him do that for you."

Here's how I want you to think about it. Every time you try to control the narrative, every time you try to control the circumstances, every time you are like, "This is unfair," and you're trying to get control, you are essentially saying, "God, I don't trust that You will."

Peter says, "No. God is righteous. He has His eyes on you." And you're like, "Well, I've been waiting for God to sort it out for a long time." Yeah, how long exactly? How long have you been around here? God is infinite. You are finite. Would you trust that God knows what He is doing?

Verse 12 says that the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous. You know what that means? That means He sees. He's got you. He sees you.

But when I seek payback or I try to control the situation it says that He turns His face against me. What does that mean? That's not a threat. That's a warning where God's like, "Okay, if that's what you want, then okay." It's either, "Thy will be done," or He says, "Your will be done. Do whatever you want. You want to do this or do you want to let Me?"

Here's a question of application. Can I just ask you this today?

**What area of your life right now are you trying to control that you need to release to God?**

Take like 30 seconds to just think about that for just a moment. What area are you holding onto with a death grip? And you are trying to control it. And maybe you just need to pray, even right now, right where you are seated, "God, will you bring an area to mind? Because maybe I'm just not seeing it."

And it's an area that you think you need to speak into and control, but really what you're doing is you are holding onto that with a death grip. You are not letting God in.





Maybe it's your reputation, which is why it really burns you up whenever you are criticized. Maybe it's your career. Maybe you're really upset when things don't go your way or you get overlooked for a promotion that you think you deserved.

Maybe it's your kids, if you have kids. Without realizing it you've placed expectations on them in sports or academics that are unrealistic. And you say it's about giving them the things that you never had. But deep down inside, if you are honest, it's more about your pride. Maybe it's your marriage, or your health, or your finances. It could be anything.

What area of your life are you holding onto that you need to release to Him?

Now, it's only fair for me to ask you to do that if I give you mine. Can I give you mine? That's doesn't seem very convincing. I'll just move on. No, I'll give you mine.

Here's mine. And I thought about this last week. Here's the thing that I'm holding onto way too tightly and I'm in process to release to God: I care too much about what people think of me to the point where I can be resistant to feedback, even if it is coming from someone who I know loves me. How twisted is that?

Now, when I say resistant I don't mean like water resistant. I mean Teflon. You see, a big part of what... Here's the deal. We've got to be really discerning. Some of us are really, really good at things. We get a gift of something, the shadow side of that can be our Achilles heel, our weakness.

You see, part of what makes me an adequate preacher is the very thing that, if I'm not careful, can make me a nightmare to be married to or work with. Because what makes me an adequate preacher is that I'm a defender and an explainer. My trade is words. I use lots of them.

Our executive pastor, Greg Anderson, one time said to me, he goes, "Hey man, getting into a debate with you is like boxing a shadow. I can never land a hit." And I was like, "Thank you." And he said, "That's not a compliment."

And in those moments here's the deal, man. I have to ask myself, "Why? What's going on in here [my heart] that causes my first response to be one of defensiveness rather than, "Hey, man. Thank you for sharing that. Thank you for giving me that feedback. I need to consider it."? What's going on?



Here's where it gets really, really twisted up for me. The very thing that equips me to contend for the faith, Jude 1:3, through preaching often times gets blurred with my identity, where compliments go to my head and criticism goes to my heart.

And God is like, "Man, you're going to have to let go and stop trying to control how people view you," which means that I need to cauterize the nerve that needs to be liked and affirmed so I can defend the faith without becoming defensive in my relationships.

So, that's mine. What's yours?

What do you need to let go of, man? You're just holding on with a death grip and you are like... Really, essentially what you're saying is, "God, I don't trust You. I don't trust that You will come to my defense. I don't trust that You will sort this out, so I feel like I've got to do it."

Well, Peter has clearly been reading all of our mail as we go on. Look at what he says next. He goes:

"Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good?"

Think about that question for a minute. Because I read that and I go, "I can think of a whole bunch of people." And then he goes:

"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." (NLT)

You want to know what those verses are? Those verses are how to become bullet proof. That's what those verses are. He says, "Generally speaking, most people aren't going to want to cause you harm if they know you are trying to do the right thing. But not always."

So, what he is saying is that whether suffering comes or criticism comes or somebody slanders you whether you deserve it or you don't deserve it, God can still use it.

One of the biggest things that trips up so many of us has been a question for generations: it's the problem of suffering. That has caused so many people to walk away from God or to deconstruct. Maybe you've wrestled with it or are wrestling with it right now in your life.



And the question of suffering and pain is a really challenging one in the life of any one of us, let alone a Christ follower. As near as I can tell there are three reasons for suffering.

One is just that suffering comes into my life due to my own sinful choices. Isn't that true for you? Sometimes I just make a dumb choice. I make a sinful decision, and I suffer, and the people around me suffer for it. It's because I made a sinful decision.

Another reason for suffering is the sinful decisions of others. You had nothing to do with it, but just because you're in proximity to somebody else, their sinful decision got on you and now you are suffering for it.

The third is we just live in a fallen, jacked up, broken world and suffering is going to come because this world is not as God intended.

Those are the reasons for suffering. Here's what Peter just said, "Whether you suffer because of your sins, somebody else's sin, or just the results of a fallen world, God can still use it if you stand firm."

In the Old Testament, case and point is a young guy named Jospheh, a little naïve when he was younger but who isn't? And he's trying to do the right thing but his brothers mistreated him, sold him into slavery into Egypt. Even there he's trying to do the right thing, but he gets imprisoned.

And yet God still used his suffering to bless a whole bunch of people. Later, much, much later, Jospheh would say to his brothers who sold him into slavery, "You meant to harm me but God meant it for good to save lives."

So, listen man. I know that it sounds trite to say, "Hey, man..." And listen, I'm not saying, "Hey, man. You know, God will make lemonade out of those lemons." That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying this, "Man, you stand firm and hold on because it doesn't matter that suffering comes into your life, the reasons for it, you hold on and play the long game because God is sovereign and in control."

His eyes are on the righteous. So, you can trust Him to come through in whatever situation you are in, whether you are suffering for doing right or you are suffering due to your own sin. God can redeem it. And the way in which people handle suffering... Eventually you're going to be asked a question about it and that is where Peter draws our attention to next in verse 15. He says, verse 15:

"Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it."



I love that. He's like, "Hey, man. Living counterculturally by making Jesus Lord of your life, you're going to be misunderstood, misconstrued, misrepresented therefore it's eventually going to be questioned. And when it is questioned Peter says always be ready to explain it. It's this idea of: don't be flatfooted, be at the ready. Ready to give a reason for the hope that you have.

You might say it this way: The living hope that you experience is the living hope that you must be ready to explain. Here's the question: Are you ready to explain? Do you just have an explanation at the ready?

Now, I get it. Sharing your faith with others isn't easy, it's kind of uncomfortable, especially in this cultural moment that we are in. Maybe we don't feel like we have enough knowledge, maybe we don't know exactly what to do or what to say or maybe it's been ingrained upon us that we don't impose our beliefs on other people.

I'm not talking about some slick presentation. I'm not talking about out debating somebody. Listen. It is not a debate. If somebody wants to debate you, just quietly go, "Hey, man. That's good. We don't need to debate." Because if it took just a really sharp debate to convince somebody to follow Jesus, all it takes is a better argument to argue them right out of it. If there is not a supernatural coming to Jesus, it doesn't matter. Don't get drawn into these debates.

Sharing your faith with others isn't about knowledge alone. It is about living your life in such a way that provokes a question, "I don't know if I believe what you believe, but I believe that you believe it and your lifestyle is hard to argue with. So, can you tell me a little bit more about that?"

Here's the beauty of that moment. That might come 60 seconds into meeting somebody. That might come years into a relationship. Be ready and don't miss the moment. Be ready.

I wonder, if when Peter wrote this, he had a flashback to that night that he denied Jesus, "I wasn't ready." He had this person at the campfire say, "Hey, don't you know Jesus?" And he was not ready. In fact, he freaked out and said, "I don't know what you are talking about."



Two months later, in the book of Acts, Peter boldly proclaimed a message to which three thousand people responded and gave their lives to Jesus—two months. What happened between the trial and the bold teaching in Acts 2? Did he go to seminary and get his Master of Divinity? No. Did he have this crash course in apologetics? No. He didn't have any of that.

Here is the difference. In one instance he wasn't ready. In Acts, he was ready. And what made him ready was the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit that lived inside of him, is the same Holy Spirit that is living inside of you. So, you need to be ready. In verse 16 he says be ready to give a reason for what you have:

"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 Christ. Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong! (NLT)

In other words he is like, "Hey, man. You've got to be ready here." And he's like, "I want you to do this with gentleness and respect," meaning that screaming at somebody in Jesus' name isn't going to change them. And winning the debate in the comment section of social media isn't likely going to convince anyone. So, don't forfeit your witness by being abrasive, mean, and harsh.

Now, some of us need to hear that. Others of us, we don't have that problem. Others of us go the other way. We're too nice and too affirming. See, that's why I think we need to understand what doing this with gentleness and respect means and what it doesn't mean. Gentleness and respect means don't be a jerk, don't be mean, don't be abrasive because the same grace that others need is the same grace you need.

However, doing this with gentleness and respect doesn't mean withholding the truth out of fear. It doesn't mean affirming sin in the name of love. It doesn't mean being unclear about the gospel message because you don't want to offend.

See, oftentimes our tendency to share our faith can be expressed in any number of ways. Maybe you can resonate with them. I've actually felt all of them: I don't know that I know enough, I don't know if it's my place, I don't want to come across as one of those legalists, I don't want to be harsh.

Or this one. I hear this one a lot: Well, Jesus just loved people. Yes, He loved people and He also spoke truth and that's the tension between truth and grace. All truth, they likely won't hear you. And all grace, it won't change them. You've got to have the tension between truth and grace. You know where that tension can be found? In two things, it's right in the text.



## **Be bold.**

Let me encourage you with this: Be ready to explain it by being bold. You've got to be bold. And boldness does not mean being mean. Boldness does not mean being harsh. Verse 14 says, "Don't worry or be afraid of their threats." That was going to require boldness on their part to be able to explain the hope that they had.

In Isaiah, chapter 8, God tells the prophet not to be fearful of the response of the people as he is about to deliver a hard message to a hardened culture.

So, can I just say this to you as your pastor? Those of us who are living as exiles in this world, be aware of those who want to excuse sin by saying things... Here's what they will do, they will pit Jesus against the truth of God's Word. That's one of the most common deceptions and lies that I am seeing in our culture right now.

Here's what I mean. They will say things like this, "Well, Jesus never spoke to sexuality and marriage." Here's the big problem with that statement. He did. He did.

Or they will say this, "Well, Jesus just came to love and accept, not judge." No, no, no. He came to love and accept and Jesus also judged. But He did it out of love so that they might see and come to a knowledge of the truth.

So, anybody who ever says, "Well, Jesus was just loving and accepting and nice," they have not read Matthew 10 because in Matthew 10 Jesus gets a little spicy. Look at what He says. I'm just quoting Jesus here, not the nice guy. Matthew 10:28:

"Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (NLT)

Wow. A few verses later:

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (NIV)

So, listen. What in the world is Jesus saying here? Is Jesus advocating that we take a sword to people? No. Jesus is saying, "I brought the sword of truth to separate the truth of God from a lie." That's why the Bible is called a double-edged sword.



And Jesus said, "I've come, not to just keep the peace by affirming everybody in their sin, but to divide truth from a lie so that you might come to know the God who loves you so much that He sent His Son to die on a cross for you."

Understand this. I'm pointing all of this out so that you will not be steered or manipulated by the whole Jesus was nice claim that is see all over culture right now. Listen to me. Jesus said hard things in love.

In fact, the people who love me the most, if they never say hard things to me, they don't love me.

Listen. You can be bold and still be kind. Clarity is kindness. What is not kind is to affirm someone in their sin that separates them from God's love for all eternity. That's not kind. You can be clear without being harsh.

There is a time and a place for nuance, but if we're not careful we'll become so nuanced that we end up saying nothing. And if you believe that people really are lost and apart from the Lord, then it is the height of selfishness to fail to point them toward Jesus.

I think what we need right now is not a bunch of harsh, mean Christians online. And what we don't need is a bunch of squishy affirming Christians online and in the world.

Here's what we need: brokenhearted boldness. "I am brokenhearted over the condition of this world. I'm brokenhearted over the condition of what sin has done in your life and in mine. And yet I want to boldly communicate that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. And, man, you mean so much to me that I cannot fathom you being separate from God for all eternity."

One of my favorite responses, a friend of mine told me this one time, he said somebody knew that he was a pastor and this guy was pretty well known as an atheist and was really, really smart and he always like to ask questions to kind of knock people off balance.

And he looked at my friend who is a pastor and he said, "Hey, man. Nice to meet you. I heard you are a pastor. So, I don't believe in God. Am I going to hell?" Right out of the gate. Nice to meet you.

Here was his response, "If you don't know Jesus, yes. But you don't have to. And I'm not happy about it. I'd like to show you a better way." And he said that began a friendship between the two of them. And that brother goes, "That's the first honest answer I've ever heard."



So, man, you can be bold. Here's the second thing.

### **Be Ready.**

Verse 15 says to always be ready for the reason you have. And a big part of being ready is knowing the truth and being able to discern what is false. Listen. Satan is the father of lies, which means that he twists, distorts, and deceives. And the only way to understand the distinction between the truth and a lie is to know God's Word.

That's the first play. Actually there is a seven or eight step process toward going from belief to unbelief otherwise known as apostasy. The first step is to doubt God's Word. So, if you start doubting God's Word, that's always Satan's first play.

If you go back to the Garden of Eden when he's talking to Eve in the Garden, what's the very first thing that he says to her? "Did God really say?" And he continues to pose that question now a days.

And what he immediately said after was just a partial truth mixed in with a lie. That's his favorite. He said, "Did God really say that you can't eat the fruit of any of the trees." And Eve was so astute that she picked up on it. She was like, "No, He didn't say that. He said there is just one."

And Satan was like, "Oh, you know your stuff." So, then he just went nuclear and he's like, "Well, God just doesn't want you to be like Him." And that tripped her up.

If you were to take the same conversation it's, in a way, Satan's conversation with Jesus when He was fasting in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights. He tried to distort the truth to Jesus. And every single time Jesus responded by quoting God's Word.

Here's what that says to me. Jesus was the perfect, sinless Son of God and when tempted Jesus responded with the truth of God's Word, which means if Jesus needed to quote God's Word to help distinguish truth from a lie, then I need to too.

What makes you think you don't? That's why you need to be in it every single day. That way when you read something online, when you read something in a book, when you hear something in a podcast, you're astute enough to go, "Hey, man. That's a lie. That's a distortion."





The book of Romans says in the last days many will call good evil and evil good. I suppose we are in the last days because that's happening. I see it everywhere. People are celebrating evil and they are hating what is good.

1 John, chapter 4, verse 1 says:

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God,"

Every single ideological statement, every single belief, every single thing that you hear out in culture is either from the Holy Spirit or affirmed by the Holy Spirit or it is from unholy spirits. So, you test the spirits, "Is this from God?" Because:

"many false prophets have gone out into the world. (ESV)

John 8:31-32:

"If you abide in my word," which means stay connected to it, "you are truly my disciples' and you will know the truth." (ESV)

And part of my responsibility as your pastor, I've not felt this weight heavier... In 30 years of ministry, I have not felt this weight heavier than right now. I really do believe there is a resurgence going on, a revival, an awakening, call it what you will. We're flexing it this weekend with all of these spontaneous baptisms.

With that comes greater resistance. And with that comes greater distortion of the truth. As I've said before, Satan is not going to roll over. He's just going to up his game. And I feel it. And I see it all over social media. I see Christians being deceived with distortions of the truth and gradually falling away.

Part of my responsibility is to be a watchman and to help equip you. I came across this verse in Ezekiel 33:6 this last week that smacked me right across the head. Listen to what it says. It says:

"But if the watchman sees the enemy coming and doesn't sound the alarm to warn the people, he is responsible for their captivity. They will die in their sins, but I will hold the watchman responsible for their deaths." (NLT)

I've got to tell you that verse right there is enough, almost, to make me want to quit and go sell insurance. Much less risky occupation. In fact, if I would have read that verse as a 19-year-old kid who answered the call of God to go into ministry, I might have not done it because I don't know if that I signed up for that.



Look at James. It says not many should get to teach and preach because they're going to be judged more severely. Which means on judgment day I stand in two lines. A line for my personal life. God's going to judge everything done in my personal life. And then I stand over in this line where God is going to judge everything that I've done in ministry. That's going to be fun. It's going to be loads of fun. Pray for me on that day.

Here it says, "Aaron, as a watchman, if you see the enemy coming and you don't sound the alarm, and if people die in their sins, I hold you responsible." So, every time I take shots online for teaching unpopular biblical truths, I reread that verse and I go, "Okay, I'll take that. I'll take that trade." If it means upsetting you or upsetting God, I'll take upsetting you any day of the week and twice on Sunday.

Here's the deal. If preaching... I had a mentor say to me a long time ago, he said, "Aaron, are you sure you want to preach? Because if you're serious about upholding the truth of God's Word, it's like willingly throwing yourself into oncoming traffic." I just know I'm going to take a hit for some things. But God has a bigger Mack truck.

Howard Hendricks said it this way:

### **A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pews.**

And so if we get squishy up here and if we get unclear up here, then we're basically leaving a whole group of people to be picked off by an enemy who distorts the truth. Beware of being steered by short statements that often sound compassionate but distort biblical truth.

I just want to give you just a few short examples of these phrases that can steer you. And the reason why they steer you as a Christian is because they are hard to respond to in the moment without sounding harsh. But there is a response and I want you to be bold and I want you to be ready. Here's the first one:

### **"Love is love."**

Have you heard that one? Man we hear that all of the time. And here's what is meant by it. You shouldn't question how somebody defines or expresses love.

But that statement is known as something called a tautology, which is a circular statement not really saying anything. So, emotionally that is the power. What it implies is that all expressions of love are automatically valid and equal, you shouldn't question it.



But, logically, it doesn't hold up. Saying "love is love" is like saying "anger is anger" or "water is water" true, not helpful.

Biblically, God is love. 1 John 4:8. And His love defines what is truly good, 1 Corinthians 13:6 says this, "Real love rejoices with the truth."

Here's another one:

### **"Jesus never judged anyone."**

Meaning this: Jesus was only accepting and He never confronted sin. But we already established that He said some hard things motivated by love. And Jesus came, not to do away with the Old Testament, He often preached from the Old Testament and He said, "I've not come to do away with it, I've come to fulfil it. Jesus did talk with and eat with sinners, and I love that about Him. He also told them to leave their life of sin.

Here's another one:

### **"My truth/your truth"**

Meaning this: truth is personal and subjective for each individual. But biblically our experience may be unique, but truth isn't relative. Jesus said He is the way the truth and the life, John 14:6. And when two truths collide, both can't be right. God's Word gives us an unchanging anchor when opinions shift.

I'll give you one more:

### **"God made me this way."**

Meaning: My desires and inclinations must be good since they are natural. Biblically we are made as image bearers of God, Genesis 1, but corrupted by sin, which means that natural desires can be distorted due to our sin nature and need to be brought under the submission to and worship of Jesus—transformed by His Spirit that is now living and working within us, 2 Corinthians 5:17.

I have a natural inclination of eating chocolate cake 'til I puke, but yet you would step in and say, "Hey, that's not good for you."



I want to be really, really clear with you right now. All are welcome here. God loves you as you are. But God loves you too much to leave you unchanged. And, ultimately, when we accommodate an affirmed sin in the name of being loving, we are diminishing the suffering that Jesus incurred at the cross on our behalf.

Guys, if sin was meant to be affirmed and overlooked, then Jesus went to a cross for nothing. No, sin needs to be confessed and repented of so that real freedom can be found.

See, in verse 18 it says:

“Christ suffered for our sins once for all time.”

Meaning that you don’t need to keep dying for your sins over and over again. He did it once for you.

“He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.” (NLT)

Peter is saying, in the midst of the world, that you are going to experience suffering and criticism and pain—stay on message. And if there were no such thing as objective truth and sin, then Jesus went to a painful cross for nothing.

The One who never sinned, died for sinners. He transferred our sin to His account and He transferred His righteousness to our account. The best trade ever. And the cross made it possible for unrighteous sinners to gain access to a righteous God.

So, in Christ your sin debt is canceled in full. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus there is no record of a believer who owes God anything. Your record is expunged, Hebrews 8, verse 12.

So, there is no reason for you to walk around continuing to wallow in your shame or guilt. Now, you might be convicted but you bring that to Jesus and you confess it and you hand it to Him once again. And He says, “Yep, got that one too. Yep, got that one too. I paid for that one as well.”

Then in verse 19, he almost kind of shifts gears and says something really weird, but there is a reason why he says it. He says:

“So he went and preached to the spirits in prison—those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat.”



This is kind of an odd passage. It almost seems to come out of nowhere. In fact, the former Martin Luther said that was the most confusing statement in the New Testament, so much so he wasn't fully sure what Peter meant by it.

So, in my 10 seconds remaining, let me explain it to you. Alright? It's actually somewhat of a simple meaning.

Hey, people are moving around the room, that's because they are getting ready to go get baptized. Or they are mad at me. Could be either one. I just know everybody is like, "Man, where are they going? Aaron must have really ticked them off." That could be true too.

Listen, in the Bible, in the Inter Testament literature, the word spirits means this: supernatural beings, not human beings. Here's what Peter just said, "Jesus went and He preached to them," that word preach means proclaimed a message, announced something.

He seems to be saying this. I don't know how this works but this just seems to be what Peter is saying. After Jesus was crucified, but before His resurrection Jesus went to a place where rebellious, fallen angels, or spirits, were kept, proclaiming His victory over Satan and declaring that their judgment was unalterably sealed.

And the central theme of Jesus' announcement is this, "I've conquered the grave. And I've conquered you. It is over and there is nothing you can do about it. They are mine." Jesus isn't trash talking, Jesus is truth talking.

Why is Peter telling us this? He's telling us this for this reason, to encourage us to stand firm. Do not give up and do not give in. We might be the away team and it feels like we are down by 30 in the fourth quarter and life is hard and unfair and this world seems like a dumpster fire, but Jesus has won the victory on our behalf. And we are not living for it we are living from it, so you stand firm. That's what that means.

And then he says, let me just finish this up:

"Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood. And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now Christ has gone to heaven. He is seated in the place of honor next to God, and all the angels and authorities and powers accept his authority. (NLT)



So, Peter is inviting you to go public with your faith. He said, "Hey, man, if Jesus has achieved a victory on your behalf, you can live with confidence as exiles in this world. Now, have you been obedient by going public in your faith?"

See, the power of baptism is not in the physical act, but it's actually saying, "I'm not ashamed to go public with my decision to make Jesus Lord and Savior." And in doing so we are actively participating in Jesus' death, His burial (a watery grave), and resurrection as a new creation in Christ.

And it doesn't save you; it is an act that symbolizes what saves you. And it is important. It is a sacrament where you are saying, "You know what? This is what is happening to me on the inside." Verse 21 calls it a response. Not the removing of dirt from your body, although that does happen. When you baptize enough people it does get pretty rank in there, but a clean conscience before God.

Can I just lovingly make this appeal to you? If you are ready to place your trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord today, right now in this moment, you need to be baptized as your first act of obedience. If you have placed your trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, if you have never been baptized, can I ask you why not?

And you might come back to me with any number of reasons. You might say, "Well, Aaron I was sprinkled as an infant. I don't feel like I need to do it again." Or, I hear this a lot, "I feel like I would be disrespecting my family if I got immersed because I'd be saying that the sprinkling wasn't good enough."

Now, let me just say this. With great empathy and sympathy I would say to you, "Man, I totally respect the fact that you want to be honoring to your family." But how about you do this?

How about you go back to your family and thank them for your sprinkling as an infant because here's what they were doing, they were dedicating you to the Lord. They were saying, "Hey, we want to do everything we can to set up your life on a solid spiritual foundation so you will grow up to know up to know Jesus." And that is an incredible thing.

Here's what you do. You go back to them and you thank them and you say, "Okay, so now I know that. I want to make this decision my own. I want to build on the foundation that you set for me." And I'll bet you that they will be okay with that.

Here's the problem with... I actually have no problem with sprinkling but here's the deal. Here's the problem with sprinkling, it's that they have a memory of it. You don't. And you deserve a memory of it. You deserve a spiritual birthday where you can look back and say, that was when I drew the line in the sand and I went all in for Jesus.



Maybe you're afraid of what others may think. I get that. It's a big room. You're like, "Oh, man. It's a little intimidating getting wet before all of these people. Nobody looks good wet." However, faith faces its fears and overcomes them. Maybe you weren't planning on getting baptized today, but you are in good company because most of the baptisms in the New Testament were unplanned. In fact, the baptism of obedience should be done right away. And today is the day of salvation. Do you want to know why? Tomorrow is not guaranteed. And I don't say that to scare you. I say that because that's just a fact.

If you are like, "Well, I need to get some things cleaned up in my life first. I've got some sin issues and I've got some addictions. I need to clean some stuff up first." You fundamentally don't understand the gospel because you don't do any cleaning. Jesus does all of the cleaning.

You are like, "I've got some more to learn." Of course you do. Of course you've got more to learn. That's called growth. And here's all you need to learn. Here's all you need to know right now. There is a Creator, and you are a creation. He is righteous and you're a sinner. He is holy and you are not. You need Jesus, so Jesus came. You are saved by grace through faith through the finished work of Jesus on a cross.

There. Now you know. So, now you take that knowledge and you do something with it. A baby is not ready to be a grown adult, but a baby is ready to be delivered. And now you are not ready to be a full-grown Christian, but you are ready to be delivered. And you need to act upon that right now. You've got the rest of your life to grow.

There are only two reasons not to get baptized. Either you don't believe that Jesus is who He says He is or you don't want Him to become Lord of your life. And if either one of those are true, just stay back.

But if you do believe that Jesus is who He says He is and you do believe that He did what He did and you do want Him to be Savior and Lord, then now is the time. Today is the day for you to publicly profess that in baptism.

Maybe today is the day. You'll look back on this for the rest of your life and say, "That was the day I went public proclaiming my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." So, you stand firm and you come in obedience.



Father, we thank You that Your Word penetrates the truth from a lie. We thank You that You are a God of both truth and grace. We thank You that You came for sinners and You died in our place so that Your righteous account could be transferred to us and You took on our sin and our shame.

So, Father, today I pray that if there is somebody who needs to respond to You that they would do it right now in this instant. And I pray if there is somebody who needs to be baptized and they've been putting it off, that they would, in an act of obedience, find themselves walking toward that door, coming down front to do that today.

We're going to sing, we're going to worship, we're going to celebrate as we watch people do this. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody said: Amen and Amen and Amen.

