



WEST VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

9:30 am Bible Class—all ages
10:30 am Sunday Worship
5:00 pm Proverbs study (online)
7:00 pm Wednesday Bible Class

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A Christian's Mission as Found in 1 Peter 3

In challenging times, people commonly move the goalposts in life from thriving to surviving. More than one suffering saint has said on Sunday morning to a brother or sister, “I’m doing well just to be here,” and, depending on the source of his or her suffering, that might be an accurate statement. When the church at large though finds itself “grieved by various trials” (1 Peter 1:6) from a community that is against it, it receives no permission from the Lord to merely survive. The darker the situation, the more members of the church are called to “shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15), with each member doing his or her part to promote numerical and spiritual growth in the overall body of Christ (Ephesians 4:16).

1 Peter can at first appear to be a handbook for survival in the face of trials. Closer examination though reveals frequent allusions to the church being not just an institution of transformed people but an institution that exists to transform people. 1 Peter 3 for example offers no less than three glimpses of each Christian’s mission.

As the chapter opens, Peter continues a discussion of submission to human authority structures by turning to the home. As Christ humbly submitted himself to those around Him, even to those who mistreated Him (1 Peter 2:21-25), Peter calls wives to “likewise, be submissive to [their] own husbands” (3:1). This instruction does not change if a wife is married to a non-Christian who does “not obey the Word.” In Roman society, a wife was at a severe disadvantage to the pater familias or father of the family who held all legal rights over her. Yet the aim of the wife married to a non-Christian was not merely to remain faithful but to win her husband. “Without a word” does not imply any kind of prohibition against a wife instructing her husband but instead implies a husband who has not obeyed the message his wife and others have communicated. Peter tells the wife not to give up, but to persist in godly living so as to persuade her husband.

Peter moves from the home to an encouragement to Christians not to allow their conduct to be determined by the behavior of others. If they bless when others curse (v. 9), they will typically experience a good life and always experience the blessings of an attentive Lord (v. 10-13). However, “even if [Christians] should suffer for righteousness’ sake,” he says, they should consider it a blessing and not be afraid (v. 14). Again, not being fearful is not simply remaining faithful, but instead it is so reverencing God in one’s heart that one is continually ready to give a defense for the Christian hope (v. 15). Peter does not envision this defense being rendered at a friendly and opportune time, but when one finds himself suffering “for righteousness’ sake” (v. 14) and among those “defame[d]... as evildoers” (v. 16).

As Peter affirms at the close of the chapter, a Christian’s strength for consistently bearing witness to the resurrected Lord comes from having accessed the power of that resurrected Lord in baptism (v. 21). Yet, even in the midst of illustrating the saving and separating power of Christian baptism by comparing it to Noah’s ark, neither Peter nor the Spirit inspiring Him could avoid reminding Christians that their individual salvation is not their exclusive goal. Noah was not called merely to build an ark and save himself, but to be “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5). As he pursued that mission, the preincarnate Jesus (John 1:1-5) worked with him through the Holy Spirit to preach to those pre-flood spirits who are now in the prison of torments, awaiting judgment (1 Peter 3:18-19). The message to Christians here is simple: they may be on the ark of salvation through their baptism, but the desire of the Lord was, is, and always will be for there to be as few souls “in prison” as possible and as many souls on board as possible. Never was a time darker than the days of Noah; if Jesus desired for Noah to shine in such an environment, He certainly desires for us to do so in ours, whatever it may be.