

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY: 1 PETER 3:13-22

TOBY SUMPTER

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INTRODUCTION

Peter's exhortations to submit to authorities and to bless all men is unpacking Peter's conviction that the Church is the new priesthood, called to be the new "spiritual house" of God (2:4-5). This new house necessarily competes with the old one, but Jesus has promised to "visit" them soon (2:12, Lk. 19:44).

DEFENDING THE SANCTUARY

The apostle has explained that the Church is the new temple of God by battling sin and doing good works (2:11-12). Peter continues explaining this task by asking who will harm "zealots of good" (3:13). Being zealous for good would seem harmless enough, but Peter also knows that zealots are persecuted as trouble makers. But if they suffer for justice, they are "blessed." Jesus says this kind of treatment is reason for rejoicing because we know our reward is great in heaven and because we join the ranks of the prophets (Mt. 5:10-12 cf. Js. 1:12). Peter says not to fear "their fear" nor be disturbed (3:14). This is a quotation from Isaiah 8:12, and Peter may be urging Christians not to fear the Romans like the Jews do. The opposite of "their fear" is to consecrate the Lord God in their hearts and to be always ready to give a defense to those who ask about their hope (3:15, cf. Mt. 13:10-13). The command to "sanctify" God is strange since almost never do we sanctify God. Rather it is we who need to be sanctified by Him. How do we sanctify God? In the Isaiah passage Peter has already quoted, Yahweh says that not only should they not be afraid of the "fears" of their enemies, they should also "hallow" Yahweh of Hosts, let Him be their fear (Is. 8:13). Given how the OT usually uses this language for sanctuary, people, and furniture, it's almost not surprising for Isaiah to continue and say that Yahweh "will be as a sanctuary" (Is. 8:14). However, he will be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to the houses of Israel (Is. 8:14, cf. 1 Pet. 2:8, Is. 29:23). Ezekiel uses similar language: "Then the nations will know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore" (Ez. 37:28). Elsewhere, God promises to vindicate His holiness among the nations (Ez. 38:23, 39:27). When we hallow/fear God, He hallows us in the midst of the nations (e.g. Mt. 6:9). As we are faithful to our calling to be and build the house of God, God defends His house, He promises to be our sanctuary.

A LIVING HOPE

This hope is the "living hope" they received when they were begotten again through the resurrection of Jesus (1:3). Elsewhere Paul says that "hope" is the ultimate result of suffering (Rom. 5:1-5). If we are zealous for good, sanctifying God in our hearts, then we may have a good conscience when we are defamed as evil doers (3:16). And this incongruity will ultimately result in shame and conversion (3:16, cf. 2:12, 15, 3:1). Peter repeats that it is better to suffer for doing good because this is what Jesus did (3:17-18, cf. 2:20-25). But even here Peter reminds his audience that Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust. Peter makes what may seem like a strange digression here, but the context helps. First, the point is the vindication of Jesus who was made alive by the Spirit. His victory was proclaimed specifically to the disobedient spirits in prison (3:19) who witnessed God's patience while Noah was building the ark (3:20). Why does Peter think this fits with this context? Here is a situation where God's reputation was on the line and His faithful servants were severely

tested. And not only that, this testing takes place in the context of building a house. And Peter knows that numbers can sometimes seem daunting, but God has saved as few as eight souls before when the whole world had gone mad. Finally, water is the clear and obvious sign of vindication. When did it become clear that God was right? That Noah was right? That the ark was the place to be? When it started raining. And Peter says it's the same for us. The water is the sign that now saves us, that appeals to God as a good conscience (cf. Heb. 10:22). Here, Peter comes full circle by referencing the resurrection of Jesus. We are to strive for a good conscience before God and man, zealous for good, blessing those who persecute us, but our hope is grounded in the resurrection (1:3, 21). The water appeals to God on the basis of the resurrection.

CONCLUSION & APPLICATION

We are called to do good and expect persecution in full assurance of faith. This is just a fact we have to get down in our bones. If we follow Jesus, we must expect to suffer.

The way Peter continues to draw off of these Isaiah texts should impress how analogous he sees the first century Church situation to Israel's context at the end of the era of the kings. The house of Israel was destroyed, but a new house emerged from the ark of exile because God is faithful. The first century church endured great persecution at the hands of unbelieving Jews, but God vindicated His people in 70 AD when the real zealots were revealed.

All of the judgments of God throughout Scripture and down through history all point to the resurrection of Jesus which is our living hope. This hope is living because Jesus is alive. And every baptism is a reminder to us and to God of His promises of resurrection both now and at the end. He is at the right hand of God and all powers have been made subject to Him, including every power in our lives (3:22). If that's true, hope must be spilling out of us, and we must be always ready to give an answer to those who ask us about the house we're building. And our answer is baptism: Look, it's already started raining.



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