

A LETTER TO THE

STRANGERS IN THE WORLD

LESSONS FROM 1 PETER ABOUT
BEING CHRISTIAN IN A SECULAR
WORKPLACE

10 x 15min

BIBLE BITES

SHORT REFLECTIONS TO
GET YOU FOCUSED ON
FAITH AT WORK

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Bible Bites are short small group reflections where we let the Bible focus our thinking and discussion on how faith intersects with our work and workplace witness.



CITY BIBLE FORUM
Ask the bigger questions

INTRODUCTION

On 11th January 1947, *The Age* reported:

The Children's Special Service Mission is at present proving a great attraction for the youngsters of Mornington, many of whom have joined the church movement. The mission will be at Mornington until January 14. Beach meetings are a feature proving very popular with children. Successful results were obtained at Sorrento and Rosebud by the C.S.S.M and as soon as the Mornington program is completed the organisation will spend 10 days in Frankston.

A call to all people to join in citizens prayer meetings is being made in the hope of an evangelical revival throughout Melbourne in 1947. Meetings will be held in the Assembly Hall, Collins Street every Tuesday between 12.30 and 1.45 p.m. commencing next Tuesday.

This newspaper report reflects a time when evangelical Christianity assumed a noteworthy and newsworthy place in Australia's society. Christianity was intimately intertwined with culture. There was respect and even advocacy for church 'mission' activities.

The world is different today.

There is no assumption that Christianity is an integral and important element of our culture. There are no reports of conversions in Mornington missions. No promotion of or invitations to prayer gatherings for an evangelical revival. No assumption that mission to children is newsworthy. In fact we see the opposite.

More recently *The Age* claims that religious instruction to children in schools is discriminatory and its influence as pernicious. In 2016 it commented on a school Bible program:

Bible-thumpers not only proselytise to kids, they organise outreach camps so our children can "meet God" and have "faith in Jesus". It's creepy.

The very same paper which 70 years earlier published the success of outreach camps for children is denouncing religious instruction to children. How the world has changed!

However the newspaper simply reflects the values of the times. Today Christianity is no longer assumed or advocated for in the mainstream media or within politics. Instead believers face increasing marginalisation and hostility, particularly when we venture opinions on certain social issues. Christians are lambasted as offensive, judgemental, bigoted, discriminatory, homophobic, transphobic, heteronormative, extremist haters!

This anti-Christian attitude is somewhat understandable as the number of Melbournians considering themselves non-religious continues to rise. Now around a quarter of Melbourne residents report 'no religion' on census forms (23.5%). And an increasing number are actively hostile towards Christianity. We're not advocating we return to the ages past where Christianity enjoyed popular, social and political privilege and respectability. We're not even necessarily lamenting this change in culture. **Instead today our world more reflects the First Century where the Christian movement was criticised and marginalised.**

This is why 1 Peter is such an important book for us to read and understand. Peter explicitly addresses believers who were marginalised and alienated in their own culture. They were marginalised because of their Christian identity. They were lambasted because of their faith and the implications of that faith in their lives. They were dissipated with abuse.

Hence 1 Peter resonates with our experience of our world today. As we feel increasingly alienated in the modern world, we can read 1 Peter and learn how to live, how to view ourselves and God, how to respond to those who criticise us, and how to promote the Gospel.

We'll explore these themes throughout these short reflections.

1 Peter 1:1-2

¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ²who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

1 Peter is an important book for us to read and understand. Peter explicitly addresses 1st century believers who were marginalised and alienated in their own culture. They were marginalised because of their Christian identity. They were lambasted because of their faith and the implications of that faith in their lives.

Hence 1 Peter resonates with our experience of our world today. We can read 1 Peter and learn how to live, how to view ourselves and God, how to respond to those who criticise us, and how to promote the Gospel.

In these introductory verses, Peter comforts these exiles by affirming that they are chosen by God whilst being strangers in the world. They are "Chosen Strangers" (v.1).

Being chosen is a mysterious privilege. Our status as Christians is not accidental - he chose us according to the foreknowledge of God the Father (v.2). Moreover, God continues to work in us, transforming us by the sanctifying work of the Spirit to be holy and obedient to Jesus Christ (v.2) - believers have been chosen, and transformed. And this transformation makes us different. In a world which values individualistic expression, living a morally distinctive life will make us very strange indeed. A stranger perhaps?

Christians are presented, like temporary aliens, as having no country of their own on earth. We aren't to be shaped by the things which drive people in this world. Instead, we live as strangers in a familiar city. We know the people, the language, the customs, the streets, the culture, but we are still strangers.

And yet... Peter concludes with a blessing and reminder: "Grace and peace be yours in abundance".

Indeed, this reminder permeates the letter of 1 Peter. For though we are are strangers in the world, we remain intimately connected to God - chosen by the Father, transformed through the Spirit, saved by the blood of Jesus.

Discussion

1. Do you feel parallels between 1st century Christian exiles and the modern workplace?
2. How does being a “chosen stranger” shape our self-understanding, particularly at work?

1 Peter 1:3-12

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

¹⁰Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. ¹²It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Peter opens his letter by addressing his readers as 'chosen strangers'. In verse 3 he explains how they became 'strange' to the world: they have been given 'new birth into a living hope'.

New birth means a new identity and a fresh start. Hope can be blind optimism, but biblical hope is a living hope of eternal life, which comes 'through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' (v.3). Peter Hitchens rightly outlines the implications of Jesus' resurrection for it, "turns the universe from a meaningless chaos into a designed place where there is justice and hope."¹ This

¹ Q&A Transcript 4th November 2013 [<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/qanda/txt/s3868791.htm>]

is the believer's inheritance! The hope of life beyond the grave, the salvation of our souls (v.9). Unlike earthly inheritances, this will never perish, spoil, fade (v.4).

This amazing inheritance brings joy amidst opposition (v.6). The trials Peter speaks about here are likely verbal where they have faced "social ostracism, unfriendly acts by neighbours".^{2[2]} Perhaps we can resonate with this kind of trials and suffering when we are unfairly called homophobic bigots? Or irrational nutbags who believe in sky fairies?

Indeed sufferings refine faith and to prove it genuine (v.7). Their faith already refined will continue to be refined, until the future time when Jesus Christ is revealed (v.7). And this results in praise, glory and honour. The pain will be worth it for the beautiful outcome.

This salvation, which the prophets searched intently for has been revealed to us (v.10-12). Hence we are enormously privileged. The spiritual blessings we possess are greater than anything that was envisaged by OT prophets or even angels.

So let us be encouraged and motivated by the great and amazing inheritance: new birth into a living hope which helps us deal with trials and adversity and gives inexpressible and glorious joy.

Discussion

1. What 'hope' do our colleagues have?
2. What are some of the 'trials' which we have had to experience in the workplace?
3. How does the joy of the salvation affect our lives at work?

² I. H. Marshall, *1 Peter* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1991) 14.

1 Peter 1:13-2:3

¹³Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

¹⁷Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

²²Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

²⁴For,

"All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall,

²⁵but the word of the Lord endures forever."

And this is the word that was preached to you.

^{2:1}Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ²Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

This section begins with a 'therefore', where Peter outlines the implications of the salvation - the new birth into a living hope (v.3) - he has outlined in the previous section.

This new birth brings a new paradigm of life. No longer do we live according to 'evil desires' which characterises pre-conversion (v.14), but being instead we are to keep mentally alert, self-controlled and focussed on the future 'living' hope of Jesus Christ. This means living holy lives.

To be holy means to be set apart, to be distinctive and pure. We do this, not to earn the favour of God, but because he who called us is holy. (v.15). We become like our Father in heaven, but we do this in this world, where we are 'foreigners' (v.17).

We live this way of holiness, because Jesus redeemed us (bought us) out of the the 'empty' alternative, by his precious blood. His death and glorious resurrection bring hope and not consigned to 'emptiness'.

Furthermore, we love because we've been born again of the imperishable word. Whilst everything in the world is transitory and temporary, the word of God is eternal and enduring. This is the word that we have received (v.25) and therefore we live the holy life of removing malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander.

This can be a challenge in a competitive workplace, particularly if certain performance measurement systems like 'stacked ranking' are used or if promotions are on offer. Yet, because we have tasted the goodness of the Lord (v.3) we can't return to the empty, temporary, impure way of the world. We are to live distinctive, holy lives.

Discussion

1. What does it mean to be holy in your workplace? (which of the vices in Ch2 v.1 are challenging?)
2. How have you tasted the goodness of the Lord in your life?

1 Peter 2:4-12

⁴As you come to him, the living Stone - rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him - ⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

⁶For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.”

⁷Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”

⁸and,

“A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹²Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Buildings that last need a strong foundation. In verse 5, Peter describes believers as living stones of a spiritual house built upon Christ as the “cornerstone”. A “cornerstone” is the first stone laid for a building. It is the foundation and sets the orientation for all subsequent parts of the building. Notice the order: Christ is first. He is the foundation, and shapes the orientation for all the work we do. And whatever we do, it is only acceptable to God through the work of Christ (v.5). Note also that not everyone sees this cornerstone as precious. He has been rejected by men (v.4, 7) and causes people to stumble because of their disobedience.

But for those who believe... A chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession (v.9). This is who you are, fellow believer! God has called us out of darkness into His ‘wonderful light’ - not by our own accord but by God’s mercy alone (v.10). Once they were outsiders from God but they are now being built into God’s spiritual house to declare His praises. They are called to live distinctively, set apart from the world around them (v.11). But how? And why?

‘Live such good lives among the pagans, that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.’ (v.12) That others may come to Jesus himself as they observe the difference Jesus makes in your life and the way you live.

Discussion

1. How does having Christ as cornerstone make you feel?
2. What are some ways you can live distinctively as God’s chosen people in the workplace and who can we be praying for that they may come to see Christ as a precious cornerstone?

ATTRACTIVE SUBMISSION PART 1: GOVERNMENTS AND MASTERS (2:13-25)

5

1 Peter 2:13-25

¹³Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. ¹⁶Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

¹⁸Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²²"He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth."

²³When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." ²⁵For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

In 2:12 Peter explained that our "good deeds" will form a key part of our witness. Now he tells us the chief "good" that he has in mind - submission (2:13, 18; 3:1). He explores three areas of life³ where, by our submission, we display something

³ This study covers the first two areas of submission. The third is covered by our next study.

beautiful and attractive that might be seen (2:12; 3:2) by the pagans and lead to them glorifying God (2:12).

The first area of submission Peter directs to all his readers - submitting to governing authorities. It's possible that the Christians of Peter's day were accused of being subversive citizens. Peter suggests that their response to these "ignorant" accusations should come not in the form of words but deeds. "By doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people" (2:15). By submitting to the King and his governors their accusers are left with no argument against them! Again the power of deeds is on display.

The second area of submission is directed specifically to household servants (2:18). In 2:12 Peter warned that doing good might be a trigger for some people to treat Christians poorly and here we possibly have an example of that. The servants are told to submit to their masters, even "those who are harsh" (2:18).

How might this act of submission form part of the witness of those servants? The very next verses explain. In behaving like this they are living like none other than Jesus, their "example" (2:21ff). The significance of this cannot be overstated. Peter is saying that even the lowest in society can bear witness to something of the truth and beauty of the Gospel through how they live.

Discussion

1. What does submitting to authorities look like in our context today? How might this display something attractive to those around us?
2. In what ways do you find it hard to submit to poor leadership/authorities? How might Jesus' example motivate you in contexts where you are under a "harsh master"?

ATTRACTIVE SUBMISSION PART 2: UNBELIEVING HUSBANDS (3:1-7)

6

1 Peter 3:1-7

¹Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ²when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. ⁴Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, ⁶like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

⁷Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

In 2:12 Peter explained that our "good deeds" will form a key part of our witness. The chief "good" which Peter has in mind is submission. In 2:13-25 he outlined two areas where submission is displayed through submission to authorities and slaves to harsh masters (2:13, 18). In this section he outlines a third area: submission in the marriage relationship.

Unless you work with a spouse, this section appears irrelevant to our workplace relationships. Indeed the passage provides instruction for a Christian wife's behaviour with her non-believing husband (v.1). Peter is saying, where words fall on deaf ears, actions may draw people to Jesus. Note that the husband is 'won over without words' (v.1).

The concept is the same as described in 2:12, that unbelieving pagans give glory to God because of the power of a transformed life. In this case, a life of purity and reverence. Peter goes on in verse 3 to describe true beauty. Beauty ensues attractiveness - we are drawn to something of beauty because it is attractive. Peter writes that beauty should not come from 'outward adornment' (v.3) but from the 'purity and reverence' of the wife's life (v.2) and that this beauty that

comes from the inner self, the 'unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit' (verse 4). All of which are of great worth in God's sight.

Submission is a dirty word in our society, because it implies inequality and servile subservience. Yet Biblical submission is radically different. Husbands are implored to treat their wives with respect and to be considerate to them (v.7). Moreover there is no inequality as Peter affirms the absolute equality of men and women as 'co-heirs' of the gracious gift of life (v.7). Indeed so radical for the times was the treatment of women within Christianity that in 370 A.D. the emperor Valentinian issued a decree that Christian missionaries were to stop calling at the homes of pagan women!

Discussion

1. Do you think that deeds alone can bring to bring someone to Christ?
2. How might the concept of living attractive lives impact the way you interact with your colleagues?

SUFFERING FOR DOING GOOD AND GIVING ANSWERS (3:8-22)

7

1 Peter 3:8-22

⁸Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰For,

“Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. ¹²For 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.”

¹³Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” ¹⁵But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— ²⁰to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Have you ever had people at work mock you for being a Christian or discredit your beliefs? How are Christians to respond to inevitable opposition? 1 Peter 3 gives us some guidelines:

Be eager to do what is good, especially to those who oppose you (v.9-13). A life characterized by doing good is difficult to attack (v.13). This may include offering to help a colleague with a technical issue or talk through a problem or get them a coffee. Those who find fault with you as a Christian will ultimately become ashamed of their slander (v.16).

Overcome fear of speaking as a Christian by putting the Lord first (v.14-15). Only Jesus deserves to be revered as Lord of all. If you look at your situation from a biblical perspective you can see that honouring Jesus (who has all angels, authorities and powers in submission to him - v.22) is far more important than feeling afraid or embarrassed because someone ridicules you for your faith in him.

Always be ready to answer someone who asks you to explain your faith in Christ (v.15). If you identify yourself with colleagues and friends as a practising Christian and you are eager to do good (v.13), you will inevitably get questions and comments. Peter urges us to “be prepared to give an answer” (v.15). This may feel daunting, but there are many helpful resources. Also notice that the manner in which we provide answers is important, ‘do this with gentleness and respect’. Hence let us always be ready to give answers about Jesus, our ultimate source of hope (v.15).

Discussion

1. What opportunities do you have to do good to others while also identifying as a Christian?
2. What have you found helps you to “be prepared to give an answer for the hope that you have” (v.15)?
3. Describe a situation where it was especially important to give an answer with gentleness and respect (v.15)

IN THE GLORY OF ETERNITY: ATTITUDE (4:1-11)

8

1 Peter 4:1-11

⁴Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. ²As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. ⁵But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

⁷The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen

“Since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves with the same attitude.” (v1) Sometimes Christians can forget what a confronting and peculiar command this is. What does it mean? And what does it look like for Christians in the workplace to “arm ourselves with the same attitude as Christ who suffered in his body”?

To share the same attitude of Christ's suffering is not to go out of our way to seek out suffering (indeed Jesus did not seek out suffering for the sake of suffering!). Rather, it is to share Christ's attitude of following God's will, above any “fleshy” desires (v2) (as Jesus did, even to death on a cross); to be driven by the Spirit, and not by the body (v6).

Christians who share in this attitude, can expect suffering and ridicule (v3-5.) And perhaps that is our experience in the office. Is the expectation of ridicule so strong as to already silence us?

Here Peter reminds us that “the end of all things is near.” And therefore we should keep that front and centre. Our eternal perspective shapes our thoughts and compels our prayers (v7). And indeed, it shapes our daily lives - through our love and hospitality, using whatever gifts we’ve been given, we are to faithfully speak God’s words, serving through God’s strength (v8-11).

All this, for God’s glory and power.... when? Not just today, but lasting for ever and ever. Amen.

Discussion

1. Do you think the expectation of ridicule already silence (or mute) us?
2. How does an eternal perspective change our prayers and daily living?
3. What does this look like for you in your prayer for the workplace and your working life?

IN THE GLORY OF ETERNITY: REJOICING (4:12-19)

9

1 Peter 4:12-19

¹²Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸And,

"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

¹⁹So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Continuing his exploration of Christian suffering from 4:1-11, Peter says suffering should not come as a surprise to followers of Christ – it's not strange; it's the norm.

Moreover, insofar as any of us suffer "as a Christian" – as distinct from suffering because of immoral actions (v15) – we should not feel ashamed. Rather, rejoice! For, even as we share in Christ's past suffering, knowing that his future glory will inevitably be revealed means that we can (and should) rejoice today. Indeed, through claiming this (retrospective) promise, the author makes the counter-cultural claim that being insulted for Christ is in fact a blessing (v14). Praise God, he says, that you bear his name (v16)... indeed, it's sobering to imagine what this future judgement looks like if you didn't (v17-18).

In a world that can diagnose "guilt" as unhealthy and inauthentic self-denial, this verse can be jarring. And similarly, the remedy – to entrust our very being to the one who made us (v19) – rubs up the wrong way against modern values of self-sufficiency and self-actualisation. But so too is our "rejoicing"... especially

rejoicing amidst suffering. For, ironically (and gladly!) it is in Christ that our true self is revealed.

Discussion

1. Are you or anyone you know “suffering in Christ” in the workplace? What about “rejoicing”?
2. “What will become of the ungodly and sinners?” how does this non-politically correct question make you feel about yourself and your fellow workers?

1 Peter 5:1-14

¹To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ²Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

⁵In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,
“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

¹²With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

¹³She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴Greet one another with a kiss of love.
Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

In the final section of his letter, Peter reminds us that though we are 'chosen strangers' in the world (1 Peter 1:1-2), we are not alone. We are in this together.

Peter makes a twofold appeal - first to fellow elders, and then to “you who are younger.” He calls for the elders to be shepherds (v1-4), watching over God’s flock not from a position of power - not to “get ahead” or “for a power trip” - but out of a willingness and eagerness to serve those whom God has entrusted to their care. Be an example to the spiritually young Christians, Peter says, and when the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive an eternal crown of glory.

Peter reverses the appeal for young Christians (v5-6), calling for submission to spiritually mature Christians - a running theme of witness through this letter. What counter-cultural career advice! Indeed God opposes any prideful know-it-all, but will lift up the humble in due time.

Indeed, as Peter tells his reader to “be alert and of sober mind” against the prowling enemy, we can stand firm by remembering our solidarity with suffering believers throughout the world (v8-9). They too are strangers living in a foreign land... but only for a “little while” before God calls us home in glory (cf. 1:4).

Discussion

1. How are you “in this together” with other Christian workers - in your workplace, or from your local church? (as an “elder” or as one who is “younger”)
2. How can you encourage other Christian believers in the workplace to stay alert and stand firm in their faith? (perhaps by praying with them!)

FURTHER READING

MORE

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The “Madness” of Wilberforce & the Attractiveness of a Gospel-Transformed Life”

By Andrew Laird

“If this is madness, I hope he will bite us all”

When William Wilberforce became a Christian his mother was horrified. For years she had strived to “protect” her son from the “madness” of the evangelical Christianity of the day, most notably promoted by the Methodists. When she discovered he was being influenced by his Methodist uncle and aunt and introduced to such undesirable characters as John Newton she quickly acted, moving Wilberforce away from them.

But her attempts in the end came to no avail; Wilberforce in his early twenties became a Christian, the “great change” as he called his conversion. And change is an apt word, because it soon became obvious to all around that Wilberforce was a different man. Of course the “great change” would work itself out most famously in Wilberforce’s fight to abolish the slave trade. But right from the start his conversion wrought a change in him, a change that was attractive.

Returning home soon after his conversion Wilberforce’s family and childhood friends were surprised to see a different man. As Eric Metaxas writes in his biography of Wilberforce, there was “a marked absence of the irritability and harsh temper [Wilberforce] had sometimes displayed”.⁴ His family and friends observed him to be “not only as well as ever, but somehow better”.

However it was a comment from a family friend that is most telling of the impact of Wilberforce’s conversion on those who knew him as a child. Those who derided the Methodism of Wilberforce’s day often labelled it “the madness”. To become a Methodist was to go mad. And yet the newly converted Wilberforce seemed anything but mad to his family and childhood friends. What they saw was attractive. So much so that one

⁴ Eric Metaxas, *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the heroic campaign to end slavery*, 73. The information regarding Wilberforce contained in this article is derived largely from Metaxas’ superb biography.

Mrs. Sykes, a long-term family friend, remarked upon meeting the changed Wilberforce, "If this is madness, I hope he will bite us all".

This is a profoundly telling comment. Not only was the transformation in Wilberforce's life obvious to those around him, it was attractive. They wanted what he had. This is the attractiveness of a Gospel-transformed life. The kind of life that Jesus spoke of in his Sermon on the Mount, where he urged his followers to "let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

The example of Wilberforce raises for us a few questions. Do people know of the faith that lies behind our daily actions and words? Does our light shine brightly? When people see our lives does it attract them to the Gospel? Do they want what we've got? The Gospel is good news. In Christ we have been given life, and life to the full. Are we living as though it is good news? Because while many today might still think that Christianity is madness, if we live an attractive Gospel-transformed life, others might want it to bite them too.