

# FAITH IN TOUGH TIMES

## *1 Peter 3:13-22*

### ***INTRODUCTION: We live in Tough (or potentially tough) Times***

When we lived in Chicago, there was a Chinese restaurant about a block and a half away from our church building. It wasn't the kind of place you'd enjoy for dinner, but it had lunch specials for \$4.25! So, naturally, we cheap pastors went there about any time we had the occasion to go out for lunch. One day as we were eating, one of the other pastors in the church told me about something he overheard a Chinese man say. Instead of wishing success or happiness, the man said, "May you live in interesting times." Somehow, my friend didn't think that was necessarily a blessing.

If you watch the news, listen to the radio, or read the paper, you may have noticed that these are at least "interesting times." A few observations: we have fuel and food prices that are rising quickly. More and more people are losing their homes or are in other kinds of financial chaos. We have a governor on one side of the political aisle that wants to legislate a new definition of marriage that flies in the face of the teachings of our Scriptures and makes it more difficult to teach a God-centered morality to our children. We have heard public statements by prominent politicians on the other side of the aisle that perhaps we are bitter or ignorant for "clinging" to our "religion." New racial tensions are emerging in the church, in the marketplace, and in neighborhoods.

Pop culture figures, creating their own self-styled "spirituality", openly criticize those who follow Christ alone. In his movie *Expelled* Ben Stein reveals compelling if not disturbing testimony of scientists who have been fired, censured, and black-balled for merely encouraging the debate between evolution and intelligent design. Freedom of belief and thought seem to be threatened even in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

I am usually very optimistic, and I have many reasons to be, yet I cannot help but wonder if these problems will grow more and more acute, resulting in interesting times becoming tough times – for everyone, but especially for the people of God.

In many places in the world today Christians face tough times. Persecution is reality in many places – imprisonment for belief in Christ, harsh treatment, intimidation, forced labor, slavery, and even death.

We and our brothers and sisters around the world are not the first to face tough times. The group of Christians to whom Peter wrote faced tough times as well.

Nero, one of the most notorious Roman Emperors, began an all-out assault on Christians. He was infamous for burning them alive as torches in his garden parties. He blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians, creating horrendous anti-Christian sentiment among the masses just as some were beginning to sympathize with them.

And the Christians, being human, began not to stick together but to fracture. Many Christians who had come to Christ as Jews were horrified by the practices of Christians who had no foundation in Judaism. A tension began to build mostly along racial lines, and was exacerbated by views of traditions and practices such as circumcision, which was a required Jewish rite.

As Peter seeks to encourage the early church, he recalls two other dark moments in history.

The suffering and death of Christ was earth's darkest hour. He was falsely accused, unjustly sentenced, whipped, beaten, spat upon, struck, and finally, crucified. Satan had succeeded in killing the Son of God. He put out the Light of the world.

Noah's times were a lot like our times right now. Violence and corruption was the order of the day. You can read all about it in Genesis 6. I don't have time to explain this, but the human race had become polluted by the union of supernatural evil beings who united themselves with human women. The whole earth was becoming defiled.

It seemed like evil had won. How could God's purposes be fulfilled when everyone on earth had turned their back on Him?

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

You know the story... God told Noah to build an ark. It wasn't a quick process. Many of us have seen the movie *Evan Almighty* – so we all know it takes at least three months to build an ark... but that's with all the supplies prepared and shipped to your door!

Noah was about 500 years old when God told him to build the ark. Boy, you think you're slow at 55! Noah was 600 years old when the flood came on the earth. That means that the people of the earth had 100 years to repent. As Noah built the ark, he preached to the people (that's probably why it took a hundred years!). He told them that rain was coming. "What's rain?" The people asked, mockingly.

The Genesis account says that in the midst of the violence, corruption, and perversity of the world, Noah walked with God. He kept a clean conscience. Noah walked with God right onto the ark – along with all the animals, his wife, their sons, and their wives... only 8 people. God shut the door of the ark. It was final.

The rain began to fall.

The evil beings who came in to the daughters of men and sought to ruin humanity were sent to a maximum security prison called Hades. They were locked in that dark dungeon for thousands of years. One day, the door cracked open and the light began to shine in. “Could it be,” they thought, “Freedom? Did our boss the devil win after all and he’s come to set us free?”

Instead of the devil, the Son of God stood in front of them – not dead, but alive! He proclaimed to them that He was victorious. All people on the earth now and in the future could trust in Him to escape the corruption of the world. Their plot had failed. Satan’s plot had failed. Through the resurrection of Christ, God won the victory!

The Light of the world still shines. Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone!

Christ died to bring me to God. He rose again so that I might live with Him (John 14:19). As Peter ends this section of his first epistle, he says that just as Noah was saved from the waters that carried the ark, so the Christian is saved by what baptism represents... so God calls His righteous people to pass through water.

### ***Keeping the Faith in Tough Times***

The apostle Peter was writing to a church that had been scattered because of persecution. They were frightened and isolated, being ostracized by many around them, and persecuted by the Roman government and Jewish detractors who would follow behind Christians with false accusations, stirring up trouble against them.

1 Peter is full of instructions to believers facing tough times. I’d like to quickly focus on five of them that we can easily identify in this passage:

First, do good. (3:14a) That doesn't mean that you won't get into trouble – it just means that you are doing the right things, not the wrong ones.

Second, do not to fear. (3:14b) “Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated.” Peter is calling to mind some Scriptures from Isaiah 8:12 & 13 that say:

“You are not to say, ‘Conspiracy!’ In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread. “It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread.”

It's easy to see conspiracies – we have them from who shot JFK to who's driving up the price of canned corn at Von's. But seeing conspiracies under every rock gives too much credit to schemes of man. God alone – Lord Sabaoth, the Lord of hosts – is sovereign. He is holy. He is whom we should fear, not man.

Third, sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart.

1. This also hearkens back to the Isaiah passage... “It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy...” *Sanctify* is an old-fashioned word which means, in part “to make holy.” Well, how do we make God holy? He already is holy – the cherubim and the seraphim cry out before His throne, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.”
  - a. How many times a day do you say or text “OMG”? How many times do we make God commonplace in our lives? How many times do we disregard the presence of His Spirit in our hearts as we go about trying to please ourselves?
2. The other part of “sanctify” means to set apart. If Christ is God then He is unique – He is our friend, because He has invited us to be that, but He must have more than

friendship with us. He must be set apart, and set higher than any other affection in our lives.

3. “In your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.” It is an issue of faith. It is an issue of love. It is an issue of loyalty, and obedience. “If you love Me,” Jesus says in our gospel reading, “Keep my commandments.” The great hymn “Be Thou My Vision” says, “Thou and Thou only *first* in my heart.” He must have first place.

When Christ has first place in our hearts, as Lord, then Christ gives us hope. Going back to the Isaiah passage for a moment:

“It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread.” Wow, that seems harsh, but right after that we read, “Then He shall become a sanctuary.” If we regard Him as He is, then we can find our refuge in Him in tough times.

This hope oozes out of our lives and is seen by others. Some, out of jealousy, and others out of curiosity, may ask you how you can remain strong in a tough situation that makes others weak?

1 Peter 3:15-17 (NRSV)

<sup>15</sup> ... Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

So fourth, be ready to explain your hope. Why do you have hope?

If Christ isn't in you, then you can have no lasting hope. But if you have made Christ Lord of your heart, and if He is moving in you, then there is hope. Can you think of a time

in your life when you knew Christ was intervening on your behalf? And if you have this experience with Christ then you have hope. Be ready to share it!!!

And be ready to share it as condescendingly and curtly as possible, right?

“Yeah, what’s your problem? Don’t you know that Jesus can help you get over all the little things in your life that you think are such big deals? Get a life! Just let Jesus in your heart, man, and you can be as joyful as I am.”

No, the Scriptures say,

<sup>16</sup> ...do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

Remember, Christ is our Example. If we follow in His steps, then we will fulfill Peter’s fifth instruction: keep your conscience clear. 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglican scholar Andrew Fausset says, “profession without practice has no weight.”<sup>1</sup> The Methodist circuit rider Adam Clarke says that a clear conscience is “the testimony of God in your own soul that in simplicity and godly sincerity you have your conversation in the world.”<sup>2</sup>

### ***Our Response to Tough Times***

Appeal to God. He alone can give you a good conscience. It comes through trusting in what Christ did for you on the cross for your salvation, believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and setting Him apart as Lord in your heart.

That is what baptism represents.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Fausset, *Bethany Parallel Commentary of the New Testament*, p. 1380. Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, MN 1983

<sup>2</sup> Adam Clarke, *Bethany Parallel Commentary of the New Testament*, p. 1380. Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, MN 1983

Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. He entered the ark and was saved from the waters. Now, God invites all who trust in Jesus Christ to come to the waters of baptism and rejoice in the salvation that He gives to all who call upon the name of the Lord.

Rejoice in the victory that is yours in Jesus Christ. He is in the highest place, already ruling with His Father, in union with His Spirit on earth. The purposes of God overcame all attempts of the evil one to sabotage them – from the pollution of the human race in Noah’s time to the killing of God’s Son. Today Christ is in the heavens at the right hand of God – right where Stephen saw Him as we heard last Sunday. Already all angels, authorities, and powers are subjected to Him! Ain’t nobody gonna bring Him down, and one day, everyone throughout history will admit – in joyful willingness or in sorrowful resignation – that Jesus Christ is Lord.

*The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him.*

*His rage we can endure for, lo, his doom is sure... one little Word shall fell him.*

*That Word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them abideth.*

*The Spirit and the gifts are ours, through Him who with us sideth.*

*Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also.*

*The body they may kill; God’s truth abideth still!*

*His kingdom is forever!*

Do good.

Do not fear.

In your hearts, sanctify Christ as Lord.

Be filled with His hope.

Keep a good conscience.

Amen.