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SPEAKER

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Between Two Worlds

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TITLE

A Blessed Life

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1 Peter 3:8-12



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My name is Daniel, and it's a joy to be with you this morning to open the word. We're continuing in the book of 1st, Peter. We'll be in chapter 3 this morning verses 8 through 12, 1st Peter chapter 3, verses 8 through 12. And the title of this sermon is the blessed life or a blessed life. And what we're going to see this morning as we read these verses in just a minute is that Peter is laying before us two paths. Really God through Peter presenting us two options, two paths for us to walk on. And this is a familiar thing, it's throughout the Bible especially in the Psalms. If you read the Psalms one after another, presents one path or another that you can walk towards what is good, or you can walk towards destruction. And it is a gracious thing that God does.

He issues us this warning, this instruction of which way we should go. And this morning he presents us a path to pursue or obtain a blessing. And we see this in other areas of life. I was thinking of examples, the government does this with things like click it or ticket. And I got nervous this morning as I was thinking about that, I had to look it up and make sure that it wasn't just a Texas thing because I remember it from when I was a kid, but that wasn't a broad thing, to click it or ticket. There's just two choices set before you, you can either wear your seatbelt or you get a ticket. We do this as parents all the time, right? That if you finish your food, you can maybe have dessert, but if you don't eat those vegetables, there will be no dessert. Two paths that we lay before our children.

And Peter is going to lay out the same thing for us this morning as he quotes Psalm 34 and presents a way for us to pursue a life of blessing. So let me say one more quick prayer, and then we'll read 1st Peter chapter 3 verses 8 through 12 together. Heavenly father, would you be with us now as we open your word. God, we need your help. Apart from you, we can do nothing. We can't understand these words. We can't apply them to our lives. We can't believe them with faith. We need your help. And so God would you come and would you guide us into all truth the way you promise to do, will you use your word in our hearts the way that you promise to do. God, will you draw us to yourself. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

1st Peter chapter 3, starting in verse 8, it says this, "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, let him turn away from evil and do good, let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

As we think about these verses this morning, the first thing that I want you to observe with me and write down if you're taking notes is that Peter is alerting us to the idea that there are two ways to live. There are two ways to live. He starts this section by saying finally and so it looks like he's wrapping up this entire section where he's been going through and giving instruction to various groups of people about how they should live in light of the gospel, how they should live in light of what Christ has done for them and their new reality in Christ. Peter instructs them in chapter 2 to live honorably among outsiders. That was the general instruction. And then he's been going through one group at a time telling them what they should do in order to do that.

He gives instructions to citizens and servants and wives and husbands and what they are supposed to do. And now finally, he says, “Finally, all of you.” So what does he want all of us to do? And he says, “Have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called that you may obtain a blessing.” He calls us to have unity of mind. We should be united around what is most important. So these first instructions, these first few things, it seems obvious he’s talking to the community of faith, right? But when he’s talking about unity of mind, when he’s talking about sympathy and brotherly love and a humble mind, he’s talking about how we should operate among each other.

Unity of mind, fighting for what’s most important, clinging to him, being united around the gospel, our core beliefs, our trust in God. And then he’s talking about how we should be postured towards one another. That we would have sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart. We should love one another. We should be humble towards one another. Peter’s instruction here is for a group of people that were facing opposition. And one of the first things he tells them, he says, “All of you.” This group that’s facing opposition, the first thing that he instructs them is to cling to one another. When the outside world is opposing us or persecuting us, the first thing that we should do is care for each other. In other words, we need each other.

We need the church and this is a good reminder for us as well. What we get from church is more than music and preaching. The singing and the preaching are good and God uses those things in our lives, but we need more than that. In fact, even those things are enhanced by our relationships. We need encouragement. We need sympathy, we need tenderhearted care and we need to express those things to others. We need each other and we should be grateful for each other. That’s what verse 8 is about, how we should be living together. But then he goes to how we should be relating to, or reacting to those outside the church in verse 9. And this is where I get the idea that there are two ways to live.

Notice the contrast that he lays out, “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called that you may obtain a blessing.” Two clear ways to live. And one he said leads to obtaining a blessing. Peter lays out these two paths. And the one that leads to blessing is a life of grace towards each other, where we’re living together with unity of mind and sympathy and brotherly love and where we’re living with grace towards the outside world. We bless instead of returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling. So let’s think about these things. How do we live with grace toward one another in the church? What does this look like on a day-to-day basis? How do we apply these things?

Well, first we have to know each other. We cannot do what Peter is asking us to do here if we don’t know one another. We have to have meaningful relationships within the church. We can’t have unity of mind, sympathy and brotherly love if we just come in and out of services and never speak to anyone. You have to join a life group or find a place to serve, get to know people in the church and let them get to know you. Then once we do that, we’ll start to find lots of opportunities for extending grace to each other. We’ll have lots of opportunities to be quick to forgive and slow to keep a record of wrong. We can care for each other during difficult

times or trials. We can pray for each other. We can fight for unity, which means clinging to the things that are most important and leaving room for disagreement on things that are less important.

And one of the things that is grieving to me as I see it in the world and see it leaking into the church is that we as a people are becoming more and more polarized. It's like we've lost the ability to disagree with one another. We can't have a difference of opinion but still be friends or neighbors. People are either allies or enemies. But it should not be this way in the church. We are a family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, and we should have lots of room for different opinions about things that are not gospel issues. It's okay for us to have different opinions about things. We should cling to Christ, his life, his death, his resurrection. We should cling to the things that the Bible clearly teaches and then everything else we should hold more loosely. The first application point that I want you to write down this morning and think about this week is let's see our church family as a gift from God to cherish.

Let's see our church family as a gift from God to cherish. That's what Peter is instructing us to do if we're going to obtain this blessing. The other thing he's wanting us to do is extend grace to those outside the church. What does that mean? It means loving people that don't agree with us. It means treating every person like they are made in the image of God. It means that we shouldn't expect people who are not Christians to act and think like Christians. Instead, we should work really hard to bless people, even people that would curse us or oppose us. We did a study leading up to Easter in our life groups where we talked about blessing the world around us and thinking about how we should relate to those who are not Christians that are in our lives.

And we use this acronym bless to remind us how we should be relating to people in the world around us. And it's bless, B begin with prayer. So we should be praying for them. L, listen with care. Is showing them that we care about them by listening to them, asking questions and listening with sincere desire to learn more about them. Eat together, building relationships by sharing meals. Inviting them into our homes and sharing a meal together, going to lunch with someone. Serve with love, finding a tangible way to serve them. And finally sharing our story, what God has done in our lives, sharing with them what he is doing, that they might be invited to partake as well.

We want to think about blessing those around us. The second point of application this morning for us to think about this week is let's bless the world around us. Peter calls us to live with grace toward one another, and then to live with grace towards those that are outside the church. And he gives these instructions and he makes it clear there are two paths before us. In the next few verses he's going to reinforce that choice by quoting Psalm 34. In Psalm 34 he asks the question, "What man is there who desires life and loves many days that he may see good?" In other words, the Psalmist is asking who wants to live a blessed life, who wants to have many days and see good things, who wants to live a life of blessing?

In other words, who desires this blessing? The second point I want you to write down this morning is a question and the question is this, which of the two do you desire? Which of the two do you desire? Of course, referring to the previous point that there are two ways to live. And now Peter wants us to wrestle with this question of which one do we desire? Verse 10 says, “For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking to see, let him turn away from evil and do good, let him seek peace and pursue it.”

If you want to live a life of blessing then pursue these things that God has set before us, follow his word, listen to his instruction, turn away from evil and do good. So now we have to stop and clarify what this means and what it doesn't mean. We could easily misinterpret what Peter is saying here and think that he's teaching this, that if we just have really good behavior, we'll earn God's favor and then he'll give us lots of good stuff. It's like we can twist God's arm by acting a certain way and force him to dump good stuff into our lives. I don't think that was what Peter is saying at all. In fact, this is really important for us to understand and it's nuanced, so you have to carefully think about it.

I want to say clearly to you that we cannot earn any more of God's favor. Those of us who are in Christ are clothed in the righteousness of Christ therefore we have perfect favor with God. When Jesus was baptized he came up out of the water and God, the father made this pronouncement over him, “This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.” He was well pleased with Christ because of Christ's perfect obedience and that obedience is ours, which means that his pronouncement over you if you are in Christ is, “This is my son or daughter in whom I am well pleased.” He has perfect favor for you. Now, if you're not a Christian, you could have this same favor before God. As Christians we didn't do anything special to earn God's favor. We just believed God. We believed his judgment about us, that we are sinners.

We believed in his son as our rescuer. We believe that Jesus lived a sinless life and died in our place so that we could be forgiven of our sins. We believe that Jesus was raised from the dead and because of this belief, this faith, we are saved. And you can be saved by believing these same things and putting your trust in Jesus Christ. This belief that we have is what gives us favor with God, not our performance. So in what way then does turning away from evil and doing good bring a blessing? I think it brings a blessing in two ways. I think it brings a promise of a future blessing that Peter was talking about back in chapter 1, verse 4 when he said that there a blessing, there's an inheritance that is kept in heaven for us, unfading undefiled. It's kept there by our faith. All right.

So when we act in this way, when we do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling, we are proving that we believe that Jesus has done that for us. We're following Jesus's example because he died in our place. And so it gives us this assurance of faith, which means we have this promise, this blessing that is waiting for us, but it also points to a blessing that we have today. And we have to be clear about this too, because there's a lot of... We could pile into this idea of blessing that maybe shouldn't belong there. So this blessing is not a life free from suffering. A blessed life is not a life without trials. In fact, Peter is going to go on to say in chapter

5, “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace will restore.” You notice that he says, “After you have suffered.”

He’s talking about future suffering that is sure to come. A life of blessing is not a life without suffering. And this blessing that he’s talking about is not necessarily a material blessing. Turning from evil and doing good does not always bring material blessing. In fact, sometimes it costs us material things. The blessing that he’s referring to is given in verse 12, where it says, “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer.” The blessing is intimacy with God. It is the presence of God. It is knowing that the Lord sees you and is with you. It is knowing that the Lord hears your prayers because they are not hindered in any way. So how can we understand this? It’s still a little confusing.

How can we have perfect favor with God, but at the same time, we can be blessed with greater intimacy with God if we turn from evil and do good? Well, this is one of the areas where I was most helped when I became a father. These categories were really blurry to me and they were hard to understand and hard to parse out. And then I started having kids and I began to understand how you could have a fixed relationship and favor for someone, but your relationship can change. I have three kids and they’re my kids and they will always be my kids. And I have favor for them because they are my children. In fact, I remember when this dawned on me early on I was a couple of weeks in to having my first child. In fact, I think it was about two weeks and I was holding my oldest son in the middle of the night and I remember thinking I would do anything for him.

I love him more than I could have ever imagined I could love him. And I remember it dawned on me in that moment that he didn’t do anything to earn that love. He couldn’t respond to my love in any way. He couldn’t give it back to me. He couldn’t smile at me. He couldn’t say, “Dad, I really love you too.” In fact, at that time all he did was really cause me a lot of grief. He kept me up in the middle of the night. He was constantly stressing me out. I had no idea how to take care of him and yet I loved him. He had my favor and that favor cannot change, will not change.

And our relationship through the years it takes on different temperatures at time. It doesn’t always feel the same. There are times when he is disobedient, I have to be corrective and it strains our relationship, but it doesn’t change the fact that he is my son and he has my favor. But there is a sweetness that comes when we are walking in step and we’re seeing eye to eye. And there’s a joy in our relationship that we both experience. Their performance as my kids is not the ultimate driver of our relationship. And our favor and status with God are fixed because of our faith, because we’ve been clothed in the righteousness of Christ, but our relationship can be strained or it can be sweet based on how we are living. The blessing of obedience is an unhindered relationship with our heavenly father.

And another thing I wanted to remind you all this morning, if some of you are thinking, “Well, my relationship with God is cold. It feels distant. I’ve been stiff-arming God for a long time.” I want to remind you that his disposition towards you is fellowship. He wants the sweetness of a relationship with you. I learned this in

parenting as well, that when my relationship with my kids is strained, I don't like it. And as soon as I see any hint of repentance or a change of heart, I run towards it. Just like the father in the story of the prodigal son, our God is the same way. He scans the horizon looking for anyone who is drawing near to him. And James chapter 4 says, "If you draw near to him, he will draw near to you."

He says we should keep our tongues from evil and our lips from speaking deceit. "Turn away from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it." Why does he pick these things when he's giving instructions to Christians who are being persecuted? So he addresses things that they would have been tempted to do. They would have been tempted to speak harshly about those that were persecuting them. They would have been tempted to return evil for evil and fight back with the same tactics, but Peter reminds them that Jesus's example calls us to something different.

Jesus was radical in the way that he treated those who cursed him and persecuted him. And as Jesus was being crucified, he was spit upon, he was mocked. He was being abused in every way and insulted and the guards struck him on the face and over the head with a rod and then they nailed his hands and feet to a cross and they stood him up between two criminals. And then in Luke 23:34 he says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And this is what Jesus was referring to in chapter 2, verse 23 when he says, when he was reviled, he did not revile in return. And when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued in trusting himself to him who judges justly. So the next point of application that I want you to write down is let's choose a life of blessing by following Jesus's example and blessing other people.

Let's choose a life of blessing by following Jesus's example and blessing other people. Now this is where I hope you're looking at what you're writing down and a question mark is popping up in your head and you're thinking, "So you're telling me that if I'm going to pursue this blessed life, then what I have to do is bless those around me even if they are persecuting me?" And I hope it sinks in with everybody here in the room and everyone watching online that this is not an easy thing to do. In fact, the one thing that we should not do this morning is pretend that this is an easy choice. Yes, Peter has clearly laid out for us two paths, but it's not like there's an easy choice before us. It's not easy because the example of Jesus that we're being called to here does not come naturally to us. We don't return good for evil naturally.

We don't take insults and naturally want to return blessings. The last point that I want you to write down this morning is choosing the life of blessing requires faith. Choosing the life of blessing requires faith. Verse 12 says, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." The immediate blessing that Peter speaks of here is that the eyes of an unseen God would be on you and that the ears of an unseen God would be open to your prayers. And apart from faith, that isn't really much of a blessing. In order to choose this life of blessing, you have to believe that a life of doing the hard thing with God's help and God's presence is better than a life of doing the easy thing without him.

Or the writer of Hebrews puts it this way in Hebrews 11, verse 6, “Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” In other words, why would you obey God and draw near to him unless you genuinely believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek after him? And the answer is you never would. So the question that everyone listening to Peter’s words here must answer is this, do you believe that God exists and that he fulfills his promises? Do you believe that God is good and that he directs us towards things that lead to a blessing, even if they’re hard? Do you trust him and believe that he wants what is best for you? If you don’t, you will never choose to do these things. Why would you? If God is not real or if he is not good then you should just do what is easy and look out for yourself.

You should live for yourself, which is what most of the world is doing. It is faith that teaches us. It is faith in the goodness of God and his desire for our good that teaches us to listen to him. Faith teaches us to say no to evil and pursue good. Even though sin promises us pleasure, faith teaches us to say no. Faith allows us to believe God when he says that that sin may provide a temporary pleasure but it leads to destruction. Faith allows us to believe that God offers us something far better pleasures at his right hand forever more. Even though the world promises us satisfaction, faith in God teaches us to forsake the things of the world and seek after the things that he says are good.

Faith allows us to believe God when he says that he’s not trying to keep something from us, instead he’s offering us the very best inheritance. He offers us himself. He offers us his presence, his watching eye and his listening ear. This is what God lays before us and faith teaches us to choose it. So what evidence does God offer us that he is truly good and that he has our best in mind? Romans chapter 8, verse 32 says, “He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him, graciously give us all things?” Paul points to the sacrifice of Jesus and says, “If God would do this for you then how could you not believe that he is good?”

How could you not believe that he wants your best? How could you not believe that he’s pointing you towards the things that are good and things that are right and things that lead to blessing? So why do we continue to choose sin in the things of the world if these things are true? Why do we choose these lesser things? It is because we have moments when our faith flickers. Like a flame that’s running out of fuel, our faith can grow weak or dim at times. And one of my favorite stories in the New Testament is in Mark chapter 9. This is a story of a father who has a son who’s being tormented by an evil spirit. And this father brings his son. He hears about the disciples and Jesus and what they’re doing and he brings his son to them hoping that they will be able to help him.

And when he gets there, Jesus is not there. And so he presents his son to the disciples and he says, “Can you help me? Can you help my son?” They’re unable to do it and this crowd is there and there’s a buzz around and Jesus is coming back and he asks, “What’s going on? And the man replies to him, in Mark chapter 9, verse 17, “Teacher, I brought my son to you for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him,

it throws him down and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out and they were not able.” And he answered them, “Oh, faithless generation. How long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.” And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy and he fell on the ground and rolled about foaming at the mouth.

And Jesus asked the father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood, and it has often cast him into fire and into water to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus said to him, “If you can? All things are possible for one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe, help my unbelief.” This is the cry of a father who wants desperately to help his son and he hears the words of Jesus. And Jesus is saying that if you believe this is possible. And so he wants with everything in him to believe. It doesn’t say, “He cries out, I believe.” But even as he says it, he senses the hesitancy in his heart. He senses his own doubt and he cries out right behind it, “Help my unbelief.”

I love this story because it encapsulates my heart so well. I hear these things that Peter is saying and I believe them to be true. I believe that it is far better to give away everything in this life and to bless those around me because that’s what Jesus has done for me, and yet faith flickers. It’s weak. And there are moments of temptation when I don’t believe the promises of God and I want to believe them so badly. It is faith that would teach me to say no to evil and pursue good. It is faith that would teach me that it is far better to have God’s watching eyes and listening ear than anything the world has to offer me and yet my faith is weak at times. So the last thing I want you to write down this morning is let’s ask God for faith to believe his promises.

Let’s ask God for faith to believe his promises. It is this faith that will allow us to turn away from evil and do good. It is this faith that will help us to believe that his presence and his listening ear is better than what the world has to offer us. And if you’re not a Christian and you’re here this morning and you’re listening to these promises of God and this good news about Jesus who came to live in our place, the life that we could not live and die in our place, the death we deserve to die and he was raised from the dead, put your faith in him. Trust in him. He is full of compassion and forgiveness. Confess your sin, believe in Jesus and ask him to be the Lord and savior of your life. If you are a Christian here this morning, choose the life of blessing.

Bless those around you in the church and outside the church. Ask for faith to believe God’s promises and live in obedience to his word. Pursue God’s presence, his watching eye, his listening ear and forsake everything else. Let’s pray and ask God for this faith. Heavenly father, would you grant us faith to believe your promises, to believe that there is no greater blessing than to live under your watchful eye with your listening ear attentive to our prayers. God, I pray that that would be the desire of our hearts. I pray that our hearts would be undivided in this desire. That it will be what we long for more than anything else. God, would you give us faith. When our faith is weak, would you strengthen it. Would you help us to walk faithfully before you. That we pray these things in the name of Jesus.



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