

1 Peter 4:1-11
Feilding Baptist
12.7.26

Call to Worship

Welcome to worship with Feilding Baptist Church!

On Shine TV on Friday night an explanation of Matariki was given. Several Christian leaders from Dunedin shared, and they finished with two passages from the Psalms/Waiata, that talk about God being made known. Sounds like our 1 Peter passage today.

Psalms 148:3-6 (NLT)

3 Praise him, sun and moon!

Praise him, all you twinkling stars!

4 Praise him, skies above!

Praise him, vapours high above the clouds!

5 Let every created thing give praise to the Lord,
for he issued his command, and they came into being.

6 He set them in place forever and ever.
His decree will never be revoked.

Psalms 19:1-4 (NLT)

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

1 The heavens proclaim the glory of God.
The skies display his craftsmanship.

2 Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.

3 They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard.[a]

4 Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world.

God has made a home in the heavens for the sun.

Message - Living Grace

Our response to God's grace is to bring glory to God.

Have you ever heard this? Or ever said this?

"I am ashamed of you."

"You are a disgrace to the family!"

"You are an embarrassment."

What is behind these negative statements? Reputations matter. Why do we do what we do?

Today's verses can appear as a list of do's and don'ts. And this will make us feel like failures. The ideal of what God expects, we just don't seem to be able to reach. And that is no excuse for any sort of behaviour. But these verses are far more than a set of classroom rules. These verses are about reputation, and that isn't ours, but God's. What we do affects how God is seen.

Reputation is the reason why I don't have a 'Jesus Saves' sticker on the back of my car. My driving isn't that great. Sometimes I go too fast. Sometimes I overtake impatiently. Sometimes I go too slow. I don't want my driving to influence what people might think of God. Our behaviour counts.

This has been a difficult passage to crack. But I believe after going through different layers, that the key are the two words in verse 11, 'so that'. Let's read;

1 Peter 4:1-11 (NIV - UK)

Living for God

1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body has finished with sin. 2 As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do - living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. 4 They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. 5 But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For 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.

7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. 8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 11 If 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.

May God bless these words to our hearts and minds.

'So that in all things, God may be glorified through Jesus...' Which takes us back to verse 1, that again starts, 'therefore', which takes us back to the previous verses (3:18-22). Jesus suffered, not for any masochistic reason, but so that we might be brought to God. Due to the resurrection of Jesus, we too can be saved. But we recognise that Jesus firstly suffered terribly, and had to die. In our following of Jesus, we too can expect that we might suffer too.

The suffering that the people Peter was writing to wasn't that different to how followers of Jesus might suffer now. They are slandered, excluded, laughed at. This wasn't state persecution, but rejection from the community. Their neighbours were embarrassed by them. For the Christians were no longer joining in on the aspects of culture that were against what Jesus calls us to live. Idolatry for example. We are to have one God. Not pander to several.

The Christians were refusing to burn incense to the emperor. This was a gesture to assure the well being of the empire. Not doing so earned Christians the reputation of being haters of humanity, and traitors to the Roman way of life (Jobes, 262). But we are called to have only one God.

The previous verses, at the end of chapter three, are helpful in that they remind us that Jesus' suffering was His pathway to victory, His pathway to life (3:18). Through His suffering, sin and death, and Satan, were overcome. So Peter calls us to keep that in mind, that we might share in that victory. As a soldier prepares for battle, 'arm yourselves also with the same attitude' (v1). Be determined to live with the end goal in mind. Discipline and grit are needed to live the Christian life (Schreiner, 199). We prepare ourselves for inevitable suffering. Don't expect the Christian life to be a life of ease, or a life of prosperity.

Then in v3 we have the list of evils. So initially these verses are about doing less, before seeing the alternatives. Which in fact shows that what is required is a change of focus, less in regard to living for selfish evil human desires. But more in regard to building community, and caring about and for each other. How does this flashy worldly stuff bring any glory to God?

Peter reminds us that God will judge us, that there will be a time where we will be called to account for our lives. We know that God is a righteous judge, and for that we can be relieved. What we have to be careful of, is convicting people ourselves. We are to leave that to God. It doesn't mean we can't call people to account, but the convictions are between us and God.

And thank goodness we might say, for our Court system appears to be in disarray if you're keeping up with the news over the last ten days. Convicted criminals being set free on technicalities, or lack of evidence. And people being locked up after the misuse of power, and misuse of evidence (Allan Hall). And then there is the red card debacle at the football world cup, another misuse of power. Be thankful that God is judge!

The first six verses are a reminder to the people, an encouragement to the people to continue to do what honours God, to leave the stuff of their past lives behind. For you want to be in good stead with God when Jesus returns, verse 7.

The end of all things is near, starts the last five verses. Now, it's likely that Peter wasn't thinking about only the end of time. It is likely that Peter would not have been at all surprised to know that 2000 years later Jesus hasn't returned. Peter was well aware though, that life now is finite, that we don't know what tomorrow will bring. So we need to keep our affairs in order.

And for the people back then, State persecution did come, and things did get much worse, the end of all things did come near. People were killed horrifically for following Jesus. What the emperor Nero did to followers of Jesus was pure evil.

But what about us, in our laid back world. The lack of persecution doesn't mean we can continue to live the way we want because the end doesn't seem nigh. Well, actually, God's grace isn't given just for us to put our feet up. We have this magnificent verse, 10, where we are reminded about being good stewards of God's grace. The NASB says it so well, be 'good stewards of the multifaceted grace of God'. What sort of grace is this?!

This is a reminder that we're not to be as full toothpaste tubes, we are to be squeezed, the toothpaste, the grace, needs to come out. And how does it to come out? Peter outlines three things, love, hospitality and service.

Whoah, stop, which love have we got here? Is it brotherly love from last week? Nope, this is agape again, that unconditional sacrificial love. Loving love.

Just hospitality? No, v9, this is hospitality without grumbling! And thirdly serving one another.

Now, considering the verses in chapter two, I'm sure that Peter would not have been thinking for those three things to only be happening within the Christian community, but spilling out into the wider world, homes, workplaces, and community. But yes, it was to happen firstly, within the Christian community.

	Love	Hospitality	Serving
Home	1a	1b	1c
Work	2a	2b	2c
World	3a	3b	3c

So we can brainstorm how these would look in each area. But, if these things are to happen within the church first, how do they look? Church 4a, 4b, 4c.

This was a fragile and new church. This wasn't an era where you could change churches when one didn't meet with your expectations. If these tiny churches broke up, there would be nothing in that area. They needed careful nurturing. So sacrificial unconditional love between each other, hospitality between each other, and willingness to serve each other, was vitally important. This is how community is built.

These things, love, hospitality, serving, build towards v10, living grace, being faithful stewards of the multifaceted grace of God. This is an incredible image! How does it look to be faithful stewards of this multifaceted grace?

The diversity of gifts reveals the multifaceted character of God's grace. 'Gifts are not given so that believers can congratulate themselves on their abilities' (Schreiner, 214). They are bestowed to serve others. They are bestowed for ministry not the enhancement of self esteem. Spiritual gifts are not a privilege but a responsibility. So here is a call to faithfulness.

I can think of one church where the people showed incredible hospitality to one of their new people. It was a young person who had decided to follow Jesus, but the people in their household were not at all happy about it. They faced real persecution, especially after alcohol was involved. So the people of the church opened their doors to provide a safe haven for that young person.

Which leads us to, 'So that', v11. We do all this not for our glory, but that God might be glorified and praised. This gives meaning to our service, our hospitality, and our love. And this gives us hope for the future, not only a future here and now, but also in life to come.

One of the commentators comments on the hope that these verses provide;
'A belief that the future is full of hopelessness, despair, and futility becomes a self fulfilling prophecy when people live today as if that future were true. On the other hand, hope in a future that is meaningful and assured produces the confidence to live each day with the future in view (Jobes, 274).

We might suffer, but we will not be losers.

Benediction

(inspired by 1 Peter 4:8-10)

Go now into the world,
inspired by the extravagant love of God.
Live generously, with open hands,
loving one another as if your lives depended on it.
Be good stewards of the gifts you have received,
so that God may be glorified in all that you say and do.

And may the abundant love of God surround you,
may the extravagant grace of Jesus Christ sustain you,
and may the constant presence of the Holy Spirit
inspire and encourage you in every good deed and word. Amen.

from With Open Hands, a worship service written for the Canadian Foodgrains