

Introduction

Good morning. Everybody doing alright? I don't know about you, but for some reason I've had a hard time getting into the Christmas spirit this year. I think I listen to too much news or something. You know, you have all this talk about the fiscal cliff and how the world is basically going to end if they don't work out a solution before the end of the year. And I try not to let stuff like that bother me, but every time I turn on NPR or look at the paper, I keep seeing the same stuff. You got the civil war in Syria. Now they're worried about nuclear weapons from North Korea. And then when you think about all the messed up stuff that's been happening here. You got the professional football player who shoots his girlfriend and then drives to the team headquarters and shoots himself in front of his coach. You got the shooting at the mall in Oregon. The Dallas Cowboy who killed his best friend in a drunk driving accident. And then when you top it all off with what happened in Newtown, CT. 28 people including the gunman gone. And when you see that 20 of the victims were a bunch of 6 and 7 year olds....man, it breaks your heart. And it's hard to get hype about Christmas when you keep getting punched in the face by the reality of how much evil there is in the world.

But as I was thinking about this, it hit me. All this nonsense that I've been seeing in the news is exactly why I should be hype about Christmas. The Son of God came; He was born into this world, and because of that we have hope. Evil doesn't have the last word. Because He not only came but died and rose again, we know that one day, hopefully soon, all this nonsense is gonna end. Because He came, we get to look forward to the day when the only tears that we'll shed will be tears of joy. That's why we celebrate Christmas. We celebrate because we have hope now. We celebrate because God's Son came to rescue us from the evil that we brought into the world.

But it's tough because the evil is still here. It's not gone yet. And we get confronted with its reality on a daily basis. And I'm not just talking about what we see on the news. We come face to face with it. We've all been hurt by some evil stuff that somebody did to us. All of us. And unfortunately some of us more than others. And it wounds us. And some of those wounds are deep. So deep that even though it happened a decade ago, it still hurts. The evil that we can do to each other never ceases to amaze me. And the question that I want us to think about this morning is, "How do we respond to evil?" How are we supposed to deal with it? If we're honest, most of us deal with it by dosing out a little evil of our own. But we're gonna see this morning that we've been called to something higher than that, much higher. And only by God's grace, will we be able to answer that call. So let me pray for us. And we'll dig in. Let's pray.

Body

We're still working our way through 1 Peter, so go ahead and grab your Bibles if you haven't already and turn to 1 Peter. If you didn't bring a Bible we have some underneath the chairs in front of you. The easiest way to get there is to flip all the way to the back at Revelations and flip to your left a few books. You'll hit Jude, 3rd, 2nd, & 1 John, then 2 Peter, and then 1 Peter. And we're gonna be in 1 Peter 3, starting at verse 8.

Peter has been teaching them how to live and respond to hostility within the context of various relationships. He talked about their relationship to the government and then the various relationships that they had within the households back then; he talked to slaves and how they should relate to their unbelieving masters, and wives and how they should respond to their unbelieving husbands. And he also addressed husbands and warned them about abusing their power against their wives. And in this morning's passage he addresses the entire church again

and deals with the issue of how they should respond to evil. This is what he says. **Read 1 Peter 3:8-12.**

Right off the bat Peter says that we need each other. Verse 8 basically says that we can't respond to evil the right way without being a part of a strong Christian community. We need each other in order to fight this fight. We can't do this thing on our own. Suffering will break you if you don't have a support system to help carry that burden. We wouldn't have made it through this past summer if we didn't have you guys. The rides to the doctor, folks picking up the kids, watching the kids, helping to clean up around the house, getting to use someone's car, the prayers, all of that stuff made our burden just that much lighter. Community gives you strength to go farther than you can go on your own. And it breaks my heart when we have folks here struggling, getting beat up by life, who won't tap into the power of community because you won't let anyone in. I know I keep asking this, but who here really knows you. And not just the Sunday morning you. The real you. And if the answer is, "no body", then you haven't experienced any community here.

And notice that Peter doesn't give us a list of stuff that we have to do. This list tells us who we need to become if we're going to experience real Christian community. If we're gonna truly be family, we need these key ingredients. **To experience community we have to have unity of mind.** This doesn't mean that we agree about everything, but it does mean that we're on the same page when it comes to the big issues of life. When we talk about God, are we talking about the same person? Even cults like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses talk about God and Jesus, but they mean something altogether different. They're not talking about the same God that we worship. When we talk about salvation, are we on the same page? Do we all believe that we're saved by grace through faith in what Jesus did on the Cross? If you look at our doctrinal statement, you'll see these 10 statements about what we believe about these big issues of life. And what stood out to me when I looked at it was that every single statement starts off by saying, "We believe." That's the important thing. "We believe." "We believe" means that we're on the same page. "We believe" means that as a church we're committed to these things. It means that we share the same values. It means that together we're striving to see God glorified through our lives because we're convinced that that's the most important thing. That's what unity of mind is all about. And this unity only happens to the degree that we allow Scripture to shape how we see the world. That's how we experience unity of mind.

And the next key ingredient is sympathy. Sympathy is the ability to step into someone's shoes and feel what they feel. It's like when Paul says to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep. It's when you're willing to enter in to your brother or sister's life and to go with them through the struggle. It's when you see something happening to them as something happening to you. And you can tell when someone is truly sympathetic because they're not the ones that will sit there and tell you that they know how you feel. They're not quick to offer advice or tell you what you need to do to fix the problem. They're just there. They're with you. Holding your hand, giving you a shoulder to cry on, a listening ear. They're just there to help. Because when you can relate to the pain, you know that that's what people need most. Just someone to be there. It's hard to feel alone when you're a part of a community full of sympathetic people.

And brotherly love is at the heart of Peter's list. This is the second time that Peter has brought this up. You might remember that this is all about loving each other like family. The kind of love that doesn't give up on each other. The love that we have for our family is as close to

unconditional love as we can get. And that's the kind of love that we're called to have toward each other. One of the things that used to always confuse me was how supportive family members are of criminals. You see the trial and even though the guy is guilty as sin, and everybody knows it; his family knows it. But they're still right there in his corner. Hoping and praying for leniency. And when that guilty verdict comes in, you see the tears; you see the heartache, and no one ever cries harder than momma. And it never made any sense to me. I was always like, why are they there for this guy? Don't they know what he did? And it doesn't stop at the trial. Family makes the sacrifice to go visit. It doesn't matter how far away the prison is, someone in your family is gonna find a way to be there. They're gonna write, and they won't stop until you get out. That's what family will do. I've seen it with a friend of mine from high school. The guy was guilty. He helped plan a murder. And his parents and siblings have been there for him. They go visit and write the dude all the time. And he's been locked up for over 10 years now. And what's crazy is that he should've already been out. But he keeps doing silly stuff. The guy got an extra 6 months because he incited a riot because he wanted more pancakes. No joke. And even after all of that, they still keep visiting; they still keep writing. Because even when you mess up, family doesn't give up on you. Even after everyone else has given up. Family doesn't stop loving you. And that's the kind of love that we're called. Where we know that the people in this room won't stop loving us if we mess up. That's just how you treat family. You keep loving 'em.

And the next ingredient is having a tender heart. That's when you see someone struggling and you feel something deep inside that makes you do something. This is talking about feeling compassion for people. And compassion always moves you to action. And we've gotten to see this on a national scale this weekend. Most of us didn't even know there was such a thing as Newtown, CT. It didn't exist before Friday. But when you hear about 20 kids getting gunned down, you got to do something even if it's just praying for the families. There were candle vigils all over the country because people felt compelled to do something. Even Google added a candle to its homepage. And when it's a big national tragedy like that, you don't have to be that tender-hearted to feel something. You have to have a pretty hard heart if you didn't feel anything when you heard what happened. But when you're tender-hearted, it doesn't take a national tragedy for you to feel compelled to do something about the suffering that you see around you. When you hear about the struggle that someone is having with their child, it moves your heart, and you find out what you can do to help even if it's just to pray. When you hear about someone losing their job, your heart breaks for them, and you got to do something to help out. You can't help but care about your brothers and sisters when you have a tender heart.

And lastly Peter says that we need to have a humble mind. That's being able to put the needs and interests of others before your own. Humility says that I'm not the most important. And that's hard to do. We naturally put ourselves at the top of our priority list. And what's crazy is that I see this even in the little 7 and 8 year olds that I coach. We let the kids pick their own numbers. And we're starting basketball right now, and I individually ask the kids what number they want. And it was crazy because almost every single one of them said they wanted number 1. And that's the one number that we won't let anyone have because that's a pride thing. And one kid asked me why he couldn't have number 1, and I said it's because the team always comes first. And then he said, "Well, I want number 2 then." But we have this natural, selfish desire to put our wants and interests before everyone else's, and that's the exact opposite of humility. When it comes to community, humility says I'm gonna put my agenda on the back burner for the sake of the community.

This is what it takes to experience community. I'm convinced that this is what God wants to do here. This is what He wants for His church. He wants us to be on the same page. He wants us to step into each other's shoes and be there for each other. He wants us to love each other like family. He wants us to be moved to act when we see someone here struggling. And He wants us to put our agenda on the back burner for the sake of our brothers and sisters here at Crossover. But this requires that we get involved in each other's lives. It requires that we be intentional about spending time together, getting to know each other beyond Sundays. And I keep stressing this because community isn't optional. This isn't Christian extra credit. God saves us to be a part of His family. And we're called to be family. And it's crucial because without the support of God's family, we won't be able to live out the call of verse 9.

Look at verse 9 again. This is where Peter directly addresses how we're to respond to evil. Instead of repaying evil with evil we're called to bless people instead. Peter steps it up a notch. Before he only talked about being able to endure when you suffered unjustly. That was hard enough. To sit there and let someone get away with doing shady stuff. To have to sit there and just grin and bear it. I'm sure when he said that, people struggled a little bit. And now he's saying that that isn't enough. Now he's saying that we have to bless those who do evil against us. We have to bless those who talk about us. This is one of those commands that we just don't take seriously. You see it. It's as clear as day. Kind of like when Jesus says to turn the other cheek. It's right there, but it's so hard that we figure that God can't possibly be serious about us obeying it. I hate to admit it, but I can't remember the last time that I blessed someone who made me mad. It's just not a part of our DNA. And this is why community is so important. Not only because we have some people who can support us and be there for us when somebody does some shady stuff to us. But this also becomes the place where we'll get plenty of practice on how to repay evil with a blessing. We're gonna rub each other the wrong way. Feelings are gonna get hurt. Someone here is gonna make you mad. But because we're committed to each other, we have the freedom of messing up and owning up to it and knowing that we're not gonna give up on each other. That can only happen in the context of community. And when you can learn to do this with your brothers and sisters, there's hope that you'll be able to do it with those on the outside.

But our natural response is to retaliate. That's what we do. That's what we teach our kids to do. Ronnie and I realized that's what we've been teaching Priest. Temple can be a bully sometimes. Priest will be playing with a toy minding his own business, and Temple will just walk up and take it from him. And we'll see it, and we want Priest to man up and take it back. Half the time he doesn't even care, but it's the principle of the matter. And I remember how proud I was the first time I saw him get up and go get his toy back. But as I see passages like this I realize that we've probably been teaching him the wrong response. In retrospect we probably should have taught them how to share or how to take turns. But it's tough because we don't want our son letting people push him around. But there are other ways to teach your kids to stand up for themselves without retaliating. But that's what we do. It comes so natural that that's what we teach our kids if we don't really think about it.

That's why it's so hard to obey this command. But the question is, "why do we retaliate?" **One of the reasons is that we have a Judge Dredd mentality.** Judge Dredd is this comic book character, and they've even made a couple of movies about him. But he's from the future where the law enforcement guys do it all. He's the judge, jury, and the executioner. He makes sure that justice gets served. And we like to play that role. Because for some of us it's about justice. If you make me hurt, it's only fair that I hurt you just as bad. And that's what it's about. Unfortunately

that's not usually how it goes down. Somebody hurts us, we hurt em back, then they hurt us again, and then we get them back again, and every time it gets taken up a notch. About 95% of gang violence is this right here. They shoot one of us, we shoot two of them, now they come back and shoot 3 of our guys; now we got to get 'em back. One of the crazy things that they said in the documentary is that no one really knows how the fighting between the Crips and Bloods got started. Somebody shot somebody first, and it's been bloodshed ever since. And really the only way to combat this kind of retaliation is being convinced that God is a fair judge. When you realize that no body gets away with anything and that everyone has to face the Judge someday, you can let Him take care of making sure that justice gets served.

And another reason that we retaliate is good old fashioned pride. Pride won't let anybody else have the last word. And you see this play out in marriages probably more than anywhere else. Your wife says something that rubs you the wrong way (and that's usually how it gets started). And then you'll say something because you can't let her have the last word. You're the man, you wear the pants in the family. And she's not gonna let you have the last word and so she says something else. And you keep going back and forth until somebody says something that you both regret. And it all started because one of you was trying to save face. This one takes humility. When you're humble, you're able to focus on the real problem, and it doesn't become an issue about who got the last word.

And for some of us retaliation isn't our thing. We won't just come right out and attack you back. No, we're the passive aggressive types. We're the kind of people that'll be mad at you, and you won't even know it. And what happens to these type of folks is they just simmer under the surface with bitterness. And it just festers and lingers, and they end up taking it out on everybody but the person that really hurt them. And to me this is the toughest one to deal with because it takes the conviction that God is able to use even the shady stuff that people do to you to accomplish His purposes in your life. You have to really believe that God is in control. And that's hard to do. Especially when you're talking about some traumatic stuff. But if you're convinced that no one gets away with anything and that somehow God is gonna workout even this evil for your good, then you can let go of the bitterness.

And it takes being convinced of God's justice and being humble and knowing that God can use even your hurts for His purposes to get you to the point where you won't retaliate. But we're called to go beyond that. We're called to bless. We're called to show people grace. To treat them better than what they deserve to be treated. And really to bless someone is to ask God to show them favor. It's asking God to be gracious to them. Can you imagine praying for the very person who hurt you? But that's what we're called to do.

And to be a blessing has always been a part of our call. God saves us so that we can be His instrument of blessing to others in the world. And basically what Peter is saying here is that that call doesn't change even when people are being shady to you. We're still called to bless. Our salvation has always been about more than just us. Even the very first call centered around being a blessing. When God called Abraham to begin to put His plan of salvation into action, it was a call for Abraham to be a blessing. Look at what God says in Genesis 12:1-3. **Read Gen. 12:1-3.**

God promised to bless Abraham in order to make him a blessing. And He said that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him. And did you notice that God told Abraham that He would take care of the ones who were shady. He said don't even trip about those guys.

I'll take care of them. I just want you to be a blessing. And He's saying the exact same thing to us right here in 1 Peter.

We're called to be a blessing, and at the end of verse 9 Peter says something that can be confusing. He says that we're called to bless others so that we may obtain a blessing. And here he's talking about the blessing of salvation, and it almost sounds like he's saying that we have to earn our salvation. That we have to bless people in order for God to save us. But keep in mind that he's talking to people who he already said were born again. The only reason that he thinks that they can repay evil with a blessing is because they're already saved. Peter is saying that doing this is evidence that you've already been saved.

And if you look again at what he says in vv. 10-12, you'll see that he's making the case that if you've been saved, you're gonna turn away from evil even if someone tries to provoke you. In these three verses. Peter quotes from Psalm 34. And it says in verses 10-11 that if you want to experience God's goodness; and many scholars believe that this is a reference not only to experiencing God's goodness in this life but also in the life to come. So in other words, this is talking about salvation. These verses say that if you want to experience God's salvation, then you turn away from evil and do good. And verse 12 promises us that God listens to the prayers of the righteous and watches over them and that He turns His face against those who do evil. And Peter quotes this passage to make his point. That if you want to experience God's blessing, you do good, you bless people even if they cause you harm. Even if they hurt you. And if you do good, you know God will hear you and watch out for you because that's what He does for the righteous.

Conclusion

There's only one problem. Because of the reasons that I stated earlier, we can't turn from evil and do good when someone does evil to us first. That's just not who we are. We might be able to fake it. But we're not the people who can just turn around and sincerely pray for the people that hurt us. And when you look at the requirements set out here. Doing good. And the promise that God hears the righteous. Man, we're in trouble. And if I stopped the sermon right here, we would be in trouble because none of us would ever do it. But there was one who did. Jesus lived that perfect life. He completely turned His back on evil. And they crucified Him for it. And when He was hanging up there dying on the Cross what did He do? He blessed the very people who killed Him. He said, "Father forgive them because they don't know what they're doing." That's what Jesus did. And here's the kicker even though He truly was righteous God didn't listen to His prayer. He asked God if this cup could pass, let it. And even though, Jesus never did anything wrong God turned His face against Him. Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." God treated Jesus as if He lived our sinful evil lives, so that He could treat us as if we lived His perfectly righteous life. We become righteous through Jesus. And it's when we rest in that righteousness and entrust ourselves to God as the faithful judge who has made a way for us to truly be free can we have the power to say no to evil even when someone does it to us first. When we trust in the One who did this for us, we'll be set free to live this out in our daily lives. We'll be blessed and be able to be a blessing to those around us even when they don't deserve it. Let's pray.