

1 Peter 2:11-12

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 February 2014

Preacher: Chris Roberts

[0 : 00] It's a really horrible thing, isn't it, to be falsely accused of something. To be accused of something you haven't done.

! At school, in our technology lessons, we used this machine called a vacuum former. I don't know if you've seen one of these machines. And at this machine, it would heat up plastic to a high temperature and then sort of suck it over a mould. Whatever you put in there, it would form the shape.

But I remember once, after a technology lesson, being accused of putting a banana in the vacuum forming machine and turning it on to see what would happen.

I hadn't done it. And I knew I hadn't. I suppose I've been framed for this crime. And it felt awful to be shown up in front of the class. It felt awful to be told that I'd done something wrong when I hadn't. To be in the right, but to be told you're wrong. False accusations, they hurt, don't they? When they come along. False accusations may be in the workplace. An unfair remark on a report by a member of staff.

[1 : 21] False accusations in court can destroy a life, can't they? False accusations can rupture relationships. False accusations really, really hurt.

But it's the kind of thing that Peter's recipients were to expect. Have a look at verse 12 again that Steve read there for us.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Knowing your good, but being accused of evil. Really, really hurtful. How do you deal with false accusations?

Well, we've reached a really important part of this letter. And maybe if you've been here these last few Tuesdays, you've sensed that. There's been a bit of anticipation about these two verses.

[2 : 24] And hopefully we're going to speed up a little bit in a couple of weeks' time when we come back to 1 Peter. But I want us to focus just on these two verses today. They're really, really important.

Just by way of recap, Peter's message so far has been to remind his recipients that being a Christian means being chosen by God, being given a new identity, being born again, and given an imperishable inheritance to set their hope upon.

And just like the Old Testament people of God, Christian people today are living in the world as exiles, as aliens and strangers on a journey through a wilderness.

We've called this letter God's travel manual, haven't we, before? So the first section of the letter has dealt with these sort of characteristics of the Christian identity.

Who Christians are, what they have, what their purpose is, and all of the huge blessings they have from God. And it's actually been relatively a happy section, a happy letter.

[3 : 35] Remember what he said in verse 8 of chapter 1. Though you do not now see Jesus, you believe and rejoice with joy inexpressible.

That's the Christian life. It's a life of joy. There's nothing more joyful than being on this journey as Jesus' people heading for this inheritance of glory when he appears.

But there have been hints of the difficulties that lie ahead. He's already said in chapter 1, a couple of verses earlier, you rejoice, though now for a little while you've been grieved by various trials.

So the Christian life is a bit of a mixture, isn't it? It's both inexpressible joy and it's grief. And in these two verses, Peter now prepares them for that grief.

Now you might be able to sense there's a sort of pause after his majestic first section. And he almost takes a breath of fresh air. And he begins, beloved, in verse 11.

[4 : 49] I urge you as sojourners and exiles. Now even before we carry on there, that sounds a bit like, doesn't it, the beginning of the letter in chapter 1, verse 1.

Where he says, to those who are elect exiles. And I think that's a device there he's using to mark out a new section in this letter.

But as well, he needs to remind them, doesn't he? Just like I said to you at the beginning of this letter, you're to remember that you are sojourners and exiles. You're aliens and strangers in a foreign land.

Because you've got this new identity as God's chosen people, the world is not your home. You're waiting for your inheritance. So you're to think of yourselves as foreigners in this world, as aliens in this world.

And there will be some grieving. Grieving because of the false words that people speak about you.

[6 : 00] You are doing the right thing by following Jesus. But other people will say that you are doing the wrong thing.

They will speak against you as evildoers. You will face the pressure of facing false accusations in this Christian journey.

It's the hurtful reality. Of the Christian life. Chapter 2 verse 15, just a bit further on from where we read. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

False accusations. Chapter 3 verse 9. Do not repay evil for evil, or reviling for reviling for reviling.

False accusations. Chapter 2 verse 23. Jesus had the same experience. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return.

[7 : 10] False accusations. Chapter 4 verse 4. With respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join with them in the same flood of debauchery.

And they malign you. False accusations. People around will say that you are evil when you are doing good.

And that can be so, so hurtful. So hard to bear. When people around us, even the closest people, our friends, our family, call us evil.

Now that could happen, and it does happen, doesn't it, over a number of issues. When people maybe realise what the Bible says is right about human sexual relationships, or marriage.

Or the exclusivity of Jesus' claims over other religions. Or the authority of the Bible. They're all good things. The Bible though now is a dangerous book, isn't it?

[8 : 14] And Christians are accused of being evil. And that really hurts. To be falsely accused. So how do we deal with that?

Well these two verses that we're looking at this afternoon, give us a pattern of behaviour that Peter will then apply throughout the rest of the letter to different areas of life.

So he talks later in chapter 2 about society. About living in the workplace. Servants and masters. At home. Husbands and wives. And at church.

How do we suffer well with false accusations? And you see, there is a purpose for this pattern. In the way that this will be to outsiders.

It will change those doing the accusing to people who will be true praises of God. Look at the end of verse 12.

[9 : 13] They will see your good works and glorify God on the day of visitation. The purpose of this pattern is to change folk from being false accusers to true worshippers.

So you don't have to be a kind of evangelistic specialist. You don't have to be a Billy Graham. It's a simple pattern that he lays out in these two verses. So there's a couple of things that I want us to try and remember here.

Firstly, this pattern is not about diving in or dodging out. It's not about diving in or dodging out.

Now, when it comes to the crunch, Peter knows the feeling, doesn't he? He knows the pressure of facing false accusations. Just think of the experience of the man who wrote this letter.

Now, if you will, just flick back with me to John chapter 18. It's on page 1090 of the Bible. John chapter 18 and verse 10.

[10 : 24] Now, this section, it comes, doesn't it, where Jesus is arrested. He is falsely accused and he is taken away to a false trial. Chapter 18, verse 10.

And Peter reacts, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Poor Malchus. So when it comes to the crunch, Peter does

that, doesn't he?

He's under pressure. And he is one for diving in and taking the fight to the accusers. He wants to go on the offensive, doesn't he, to pick a fight with those who bring false accusations.

He wants to take away the threat of pressure in one full blow with his sword. He doesn't think that pressure is good. He doesn't think that false accusations should be any part of Jesus' experience and his disciples' experience.

But isn't it interesting that in verse 11 of John 18, Jesus disagrees. Put your sword into its sheath, Peter.

[11 : 34] Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me? For Jesus, it's precisely through the evil and lies of other people that he will fulfil his mission to die and rise again.

False accusations are part of Jesus' mission, oddly. Peter wants to dive in and attack. But Jesus says no.

Now, I want to be really careful here at this point as we think about how this applies to us. Because I'm sure there are definitely circumstances where it's good for Christian people to fight for their rights and for biblical values in society.

And I know that's true. But on an individual level, might it be that some of us, and I know this for myself, have become slightly too militant about that.

In chapter 4 of Peter's letter again in verse 12, he says, Beloved, don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.

[12 : 49] I wonder whether some of us, if we're Christians here, have become almost surprised by the reaction of the world around us. The reaction of the world that doesn't agree with Jesus' teaching.

And so we go on the attack. Suing our employers. Or abusing our friends. Cutting off the ears of those people who won't listen.

And who don't agree. One writer speaks about Taliban-style Christianity. That points the finger and it shouts constantly down at the world.

Christianity that dives in to attack its accusers. Now the disciples were like this as well. You don't need to turn there. But in Luke chapter 9, as Jesus leads them through a village in Samaria, the people of Samaria reject Jesus.

So they go into Old Testament mode. They say, Lord, Lord, shall we ask fire to come down and rain upon these people? Now I've known at moments, and I've had folk coming up to me on the street and making remarks.

[13 : 59] Hurtful remarks. And at that moment, I have thought, Lord, shall I ask fire to come down and rain upon them? But it's ugly, isn't it? Jesus rebukes the disciples.

Taliban-style Christianity. It dives in to attack. That's one side of Peter, isn't it? But there's another side. He dives in, but he also dodges out.

Come back to John. Sorry there's so much flicking around. John 18 again. Page 90, 1090.

On the same page is his dodging out. He dives and he dodges. Let's look at verse 25. Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself.

So they said to him, you also are not one of his disciples, are you? He denied it and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, did I not see you in the garden with him?

[15 : 09] Peter again denied it. And at once the cock crowed. In the heat of that moment, knowing the false accusations that were going around, he denies knowing Jesus.

So he dodges it. He knows the pressure that we all feel. That's the other side of it, isn't it? Just keeping your head down.

It's not right to cause an argument for an argument's sake. But you might be the type of person who always just dodges the bullets. Never admitting what's right.

If I never say what's good, they'll never accuse me of being bad. And how Peter felt that, didn't he? He wept after this moment.

He dived in and then he dodged out. Both of which were pretty cowardly things to do, but we all feel it, don't we?

[16 : 13] We all understand those reactions. So let's just get that out on the table now, shall we? To be clear about that. We've all felt like that.

We've all wanted to dive in or to dodge out. We've all felt the pressure, if we're following Jesus, of being falsely accused of being evil.

But it's not about that. Facing false accusations is the painful but inevitable part of Jesus' mission, and so it is of ours too.

It's not about diving in, arguments for an argument's sake, or dodging out. So Peter gives us a pattern with a purpose.

So secondly, and our second and last point today, it's about turning from evil and turning towards good. Back to our two verses again in Peter.

[17:17] Turning from evil and turning towards good. So this is the pattern with a purpose. Now if you look at 1 Peter 2, verse 11 and 12 again.

Notice how handling false accusations of good and evil will start when we see that there is a war within our own hearts over what's right and wrong.

So before we speak and debate and evangelise to outsiders, I don't like to use that phrase, the big issue is what's going on in the insiders?

He says, abstain from the passions of your flesh which wage war against your soul. Now as far as I can see, that's the only place in the whole letter where Peter talks about war of any kind.

Christian people are not to be militant to non-believers, not crusaders. But we are to be aggressive with our own hearts.

[18:27] There is a war going on, not out there first of all, but in here, in my desires. As sojourners and exiles, we're now citizens of a different country.

But that won't mean we'll immediately forget all of our old customs. Peter calls that the flesh, the things that we used to love.

Now maybe you've gone on holiday and you've done that. I know as a family we used to go to France to enjoy this great cultural metropolis, this great cultural centre and magnet of France.

And yet we would pack our luggage full of British things, cornflakes and lime shred marmalade and all the rest of it. You can take the English man out of England, but you can't so easily take the England out of the English man, can you?

And the real war is not with the world around us, but within our own hearts. To abstain from loving what we used to love in the old country.

[19:35] To not pack our luggage with the things from the world around us. Now if I asked most of you here, if you're a Christian, at what is it that holds you back from being a fully committed, fully thankful, fully faithful Christian?

I'd imagine that nine times out of ten, you'd say, well it's my heart. It's my heart. It's the struggle within. To turn from evil.

Deep within. And those desires, they wage war, Peter says, against us. It's relentless. From the moment that we wake up in the morning, to the moment that we fall asleep, the war is on.

Desires attacking the soul. It's a bit like those magic candles, isn't it? On birthday cakes. Have you seen those? You blow them out, don't they? And for a moment they're gone, but then a second later they burst back into flame.

It's just like that in our hearts, with the desire for evil. We think we've got an issue sorted in our hearts, and then it comes back.

[20:47] Greed and pride and jealousy and self-pity, it's relentless, isn't it? In our own hearts. But dealing with confusion over right and wrong in the world must begin first in the heart of the Christian person.

It's turning from evil. And it's turning to good. Have a look at verse 12 again. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

So it's to turn from evil. That's the pattern. But it's also to turn to good. Christians are to be known as much for what they are for as for what they are against.

They're to be seen as good, no matter what it costs them, even when falsely accused. Not diving in for an argument, or dodging out, but turning to good.

As we close, let me give you a story of friends up in Scotland who were involved in a church and still are, a really great church, thriving church, in the centre of Glasgow.

[22:11] And it's been serving the community for years now and sharing the gospel. A really thriving place. And they decided that things were going so well, they wanted to renovate their old

building in the centre of Glasgow.

It was right on the high street, a really good position. They wanted to let more people come in and make it a more inviting, welcoming place.

So, over a period of a few years, the congregation raised just about two million pounds from their own money. So they remortgaged their houses.

They had staycations instead of vacations, saving a bit of money. Some people gave generously towards the fund. Hugely sacrificial.

And eventually, they built this building and the vision was complete. And it's great. I've been there myself. It's light and warm and welcoming place. And it's been a real blessing to the church and the community around it.

[23 : 16] But there came a point where the church, this particular church, was put in a difficult position. The wider denomination of churches that they belonged to sadly moved away from teaching the truth Jesus is teaching in the Bible.

They'd stopped turning from evil. And so this city centre church faced a dilemma. They would either stand for the truth or they would lose their beloved building.

And it was a hurtful type. The minister of that church was constantly in the news. You may have seen it. Being falsely accused of all sorts of hurtful things.

It was a desperate time for the people of that church. But they had to decide to turn from evil and remain faithful to Jesus.

They lost their building. It was so painful. And on the last Sunday there were many tears. It was a depressing time.

[24 : 25] It would have been so easy, wouldn't it, at that point to hate their false accusers, to attack them. But as they left the building for the people who had abused them, the church had to make one more sacrifice.

They decided that week to clean every inch of that church building, leaving it in the best state they could for those coming in.

It would have been easy, wouldn't it, to leave it in a mess to spite them, to send them a message. But they turned to good.

They kept their conduct honourable. Why? Well, it's a pattern with a purpose. So that there might be those who see the good deeds of Jesus' people, and when he returns on the last day, as once false accusers, they are then true praises of God.

False accusations. They really, really hurt, don't they? So how are Christians dealing with them? Are we known in the world as Taliban Christians?

[25 : 42] Are we constantly diving in and biting people's heads off? Or are we just dodging out? Or are we fighting the battle that goes on within, turning from evil, that we might turn to good?

It's a pattern with a purpose. Let's pray. Amen.