

“Jesus can make all things better” (19)

A rabbi and a soap maker went for a walk together. The soap maker said, "What good is religion? Look at all the trouble and misery of the world! Still there, even after years-thousands of years of teaching about goodness and truth and peace. Still there, after all the prayers and sermons and teachings. If religion is good and true, why should this be?" The rabbi said nothing. They continued walking until he noticed a child playing in the gutter. Then the rabbi said, "Look at that child. You say that soap makes people clean, but see the dirt on that youngster. Of what good is soap? With all the soap in the world, over all these years, the child is still filthy. I wonder how effective soap is, after all!" The soap maker protested. "But, Rabbi, soap cannot do any good unless it is used!" "Exactly my point!" replied the rabbi.

With so many wars and conflicts which have happened throughout the years, some in the name of religion, as Christians we should never give up on the good fight of faith in this world. And when we're going to fight, we need to fight as God asks us too not as the world thinks.

I don't know about you but you can hardly turn on TV screens or read a newspaper without hearing something about the actions of certain militant fundamentalists. Sometimes that phrase has reference to extremists of the Islamic faith, engaged in what they call Jihad which means a holy war, or struggle. And there are other times when it's applied to professing Christians, who resort to physical violence in support of their cause, such as the radical pro-life movement.

But as Christians who follow the true **Prince of Peace**, we must never forget that the Kingdom we're fighting in is a spiritual kingdom. And because its nature is spiritual we cannot expand this kingdom through physical means. When Jesus is being questioned by Pilate, Jesus says in **John 18:36** "My Kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, then my servants would fight, that I wouldn't be delivered to the Jews. But now my Kingdom is not from here."

When Jesus was being arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, Peter launched out and cut off one of the priest's ears and Jesus rebuked Peter and said in **Matthew 26:52** "Put your sword back into its place, for all those who take the sword will die by the sword."

In other words when we're called upon as Christians to take the land for God, we've not to use physical weapons but spiritual ones. Loved ones we are engaged in a spiritual struggle, both without and within. **Ephesians 6:12** "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world's rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

So our fight is spiritual and we must fight using spiritual weapons. **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** "For though we walk in the flesh, we don't wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

And I say all that to prepare our minds as enter **1 Peter 4** where Peter is going to remind us to arm ourselves in our service to the Lord. **1 Peter 4:1** "Forasmuch then as Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind; for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."

Now remember Peter has been focusing on suffering throughout his first letter so far and here he is reminding us that we need to have the mind set of a willingness to suffer for being a Christian. In other words we need to have the attitude or mind set of Christ Himself.

He's already reminded us of that back in **1 Peter 2:21-23** "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps, who did not sin, "neither was deceit found in his mouth." Who, when he was cursed, didn't curse back. When he suffered, didn't threaten, but committed himself to him who judges righteously."

He also reminded us of that back in **1 Peter 3:18** "Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."

But have you ever wondered why as Christians we should be willing to suffer? You know as Christians we're more than willing to study the Bible with someone.

We're more than willing to pray to God whenever we have a need. We're more than willing to come to the front and preach and teach every Lord's Day. We're more than willing to serve God and each other in anyway we can. But ask me to if I'm willing to suffer for being a Christian, well I will leave you to answer that question. And just in case you're wondering, [why should we be willing to suffer for Christ?](#) Let me give you two reasons.

Peter has already said to us that we should be willing to suffer for Christ because He willingly suffered for us. He was willing to die for us so that we might live for righteousness sake. [1 Peter 2:24](#) "Who his own self bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed."

When you really think about what Jesus went through for us, [is it really too much for Him to ask us to endure hardships for Him?](#) So we should be willing to suffer for Him but not only because He was willing to suffer for us to bring us to righteousness.

But also because when we endure hardship for Christ we're not likely to allow sin to have dominance in our lives. Peter says [1 Peter 4:1](#) "Forasmuch then as Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind; for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." Peter says when you suffer for Christ the chances are you're trying your best to stop sinning.

Think about it, if we truly believe that Jesus died for our sin. If we truly believe that He died in our place. [Would we want to deliberately keep on sinning and crucifying Him over and over again?](#) You see loved ones that's why we constantly have this sin struggle inside of us. That's why we struggle when we see people in the world caught up in sin and see the damage it causes.

And Peter understood this, that's why following on he writes in [1 Peter 4:2+3](#) "That you no longer should live the rest of your time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past time doing the desire of the Gentiles, and having walked in lewdness, lusts, drunken binges, orgies, carousings, and abominable idolatries."

Loved ones we can read about wars happening all over the world but the real war needs to be won in the inside first. And Peter says this is where the real battle begins, this is where the real battle is fought. It's a battle between a person's soul and a person's fleshly lusts. And what he is reminding us of loved ones is that unless we first win the battle for our own soul; we have got ultimately no chance of winning the souls of others. [Do you understand what he's saying?](#) He's saying we seriously need to take a good long look at ourselves before we can help anyone else.

[I heard a story about a guy in the army who was getting ready for a full inspection parade by a General Sergeant Major. Everything had gone smoothly until the General came to a certain soldier, looked him up and down and snapped, "Button that pocket, soldier!" The soldier, more than a little rattled, stammered, "Right now, sir?" "Of course, right now!" was the reply. Then the soldier very carefully reached out and buttoned the flap on the General's shirt pocket.](#)

You see loved ones the General had been quick to note the youngster's uniform problem, but hadn't noticed his own. [And we do that all the time don't we?](#) We see the faults of others stick out like a missing tooth, while our own faults are often hard to spot.

No wonder Jesus says in [Matthew 7:3-5](#) "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but don't consider the beam that is in your own eye? Or how will you tell your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye;' and behold, the beam is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye".

[Why is it that the small specks in other people seem major, but the planks in our own eye seem excusable?](#) Loved ones let's quit dwelling on the faults of others all the time. The church needs builders and workers not a wrecking crew. We need to get ourselves spiritually right first before we can help others.

[A few years ago at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. At the gun, they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run the race to the finish and win. All, that is, except one boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times and began to cry. The other eight heard the boy cry. They slowed down and looked back. Then they all turned around and went back. Every one of them. One girl with Down's syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "This](#)

will make it better," Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for several minutes. People who were there are still telling the story.

Now why would people do that? Why are people still talking about that event even today? Well it's simply because deep down we know this one thing. What matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves. What truly matters in this life is helping others win, even if it means slowing down and changing our course for a moment.

No wonder Paul wrote in **Galatians 6:1** "Brothers, even if a man is caught in some fault, you who are spiritual must restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself so that you also aren't tempted." Paul is saying work on your own faults, and when you're spiritually mature enough, you go out and seek to help others in a spirit of gentleness. Because if you go in too soon and you're not spiritually mature enough, there is a real danger that you may end up getting caught up in the sin too.

You know I didn't become a Christian until I was thirty years old and when I look back at those first thirty years, I can truly say for most it, what a complete waste of time. And when I look at some of my old friends and new friends who aren't Christians, it saddens my heart because their lives remind me of how I use to be. I wasted so much time on alcohol. I wasted so much time on drugs. I wasted so much time in relationships I should have never been in. I wasted so much time causing my family grieve. I wasted so much time with my friends, doing what they were doing. And when I remember my first thirty years of my life and I look at my non-Christian friends and the way they live their lives, they really motivate me to keep on going.

And that's what Peter says in **1 Peter 4:3** "For we have spent enough of our past time doing the desire of the Gentiles, and having walked in lewdness, lusts, drunken binges, orgies, carousings, and abominable idolatries." Peter says as a Christian you've spent more than enough time in the world doing what the non-Christians do. And please don't think well I haven't done anything which Peter mentions there.

Because the apostle Paul has another list for you to read over in **Galatians 5:19-21** "Now the works of the flesh are obvious, which are: adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these; of which I forewarn you, even as I also forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God."

Now loved ones there are a few of my sins in that list and I don't know about you but it gets tiring trying to fight those inners struggles. But the point Peter is trying to make is that now is time to live out the rest of our lives for the will of God. Yes you were caught up in sin with the world but today you're a Christian and today you should be living to please God. Yes you did sinful things in the past to please yourself and please your friends but today you're a Christian and today you should be living to please God.

And today as we think of ourselves standing strong for the faith and fighting the good fight, let's not forget that the battle begins within ourselves. And so when we as Christians live out the rest of our lives for the will of God, we need to be prepared for the fact that we will likely be criticised by others.

**1 Peter 4:4** "And they are wondering that you no longer go with them in this violent wasting of life, and are saying evil things of you." It's strange but true, I spoke earlier about the first thirty years of my life and at that time I had a lot of friends. Well I thought they were friends until I became a Christian and then I soon found out different.

And the reason I say that is because out of the many friends I had only one maintained his friendship with me because it wasn't based on alcohol and drugs. And when I spoke to my so-called friends after becoming a Christian they found it completely strange that I just didn't want to get involved with that lifestyle anymore. They looked at me as if I was from another planet and it wasn't until a few months later that the penny finally dropped. They thought I was strange not because I was a Christian, not because I believed in God.

But because I didn't want to join in with them anymore with their drunken nights out and drug fuelled evenings in. And it wasn't long before the slandering came around and people started calling me every ungodly name under the sun, all because I didn't want to do what they still did. And let me tell you that's tough when you're a young Christian and I struggled with that ridicule for many months until I finally spoke to someone about it.

And a wise old Christian took me to **Matthew 5** and read verses 11+12 “Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you”.

He took me to **1 Peter 4** and read verses 13+14 “But because you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory you also may rejoice with exceeding joy. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed; because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. On their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified.”

He said Mike, when this happens it’s time to rejoice. And so I did until I realised I didn’t truly know how to deal with it, **what do I say and do to these people who are having a go at me and calling me all sorts?** The same wise old Christian took me **Matthew 5** again, this time **verse 44** “But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you.”

And once again he took me to **1 Peter**, this time **chapter 2:12** “Having good behaviour among the nations, so in that of which they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they see, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

He said Mike respond with love and good conduct and who knows maybe one day because they’re watching how you respond this may lead them to come to know God and glorify Him. And the biggest lesson that wise old Christian taught me was let God be the judge. **1 Peter 4:5+6** “Who will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For to this end the Good News was preached even to the dead, that they might be judged indeed as men in the flesh, but live as to God in the spirit.”

So many times we want to lash out and defend ourselves and give people a piece of our mind, but Peter says, let God do the judging. So many times we want to stand up for our rights but Peter says let God do the judging. So many times we want to set the record straight about a particular event but Peter says let God do the judging.

Now like I said a few weeks ago when we looked at **1 Peter 3:18-20**, here again we have another little passage which can be taken out of context all so easily. **What does Peter mean when he writes that "the gospel was also preached to those who are dead?"** Well he doesn’t mean that Jesus or Peter preached the gospel to them when they were dead.

Like we said a few weeks ago they are not been offered a second chance of salvation, they are dead and they’ve had their chance. But what he means is that gospel was preached to them when they were very much still alive but by the time Peter writes this letter they are now well and truly dead.

Now again we could spend some time looking at all the different theories of this text but in doing so we may end up missing the point. And Peter’s point is quite simply, God is the judge. And not only is He going to judge us as Christians, He will judge all those who aren’t Christians. As Paul reminds us in **1 Corinthians 5:12+13** “For what have I to do with also judging those who are outside? Don’t you judge those who are within? But those who are outside, God judges.”

And make no mistake about loved ones; God is ready to judge the non-Christian. He is ready to judge all those who live according to the flesh, whether they are still alive or not. Peter said that in **1 Peter 4:5** “Who will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”

And so if God is ready to judge us all, as Christians we must be willing to let Him do just that, judge. Or as Paul says back in **Romans 12:19** “Don’t seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God’s wrath. For it is written, “Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord.” God will deal with people justly when it’s time but loved ones until then we need to keep offering peace and mercy.

And we do that through preaching the good news, telling people that they don’t have to live with their lives full of sin anymore, Jesus is here to help. We offer peace and mercy to those who live according to the flesh through us living lives which are full of kindness and mercy.

As Paul says in **Romans 12:20+21** “Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his head.” Don’t be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”.

A little girl came to her mother one day pleased to show her some fruit which had been given to her. The mother said the friend was very kind, and had given her a great many. "Yes," said the child, "very, indeed; and she gave me more than these, but I have given some away." The mother asked her who she had given them to, and she answered, "I gave them to a girl who pushes me off the path onto the road and makes faces at me." Her mother asked why did she give some to her? The little girl replied, "Because I thought it would make her know that I wanted to be kind to her, and maybe she will not be so rude and unkind to me again."

That little girl understood Paul's words in **Romans 12:20+21**. So loved ones yes we have to fight sometimes in this world but not with guns and tanks but with the mind set or attitude of Christ Himself. Yes there are wars going on throughout the world but there are more important wars to win and that's the war of sin which we battle with everyday within ourselves.

And when we begin to win that war, we can then begin to win others over for Christ. And instead of kissing someone where it hurts and saying **this will make it better**. We can live godly lives and offer peace and mercy and proudly proclaim through the gospel that only Jesus can make all things better.