

Seek Peace and Pursue It

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here.

And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good that they don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it.

And so it's for that reason that we're glad you're here, because we believe that God has something to say to everyone in his word, whether you have been a Christian your entire life or whether you have questions or doubts about Christianity.

If you play volleyball, which is something I try to avoid as often as possible, you know that communication is incredibly important.

It's important to call the ball so that on the one hand, there's two things that can happen, right, if there's not good communication. No one calls the ball and it hits the ground. Or no one calls the ball and you have two players who come in and collide.

[1 : 10] And the ball hitting the ground. As many of you know, I was gone for the last four Sundays, and we actually had some pretty significant plays happen at this church.

And the ball did not hit the ground. And so I'm here to say thank you. We have leaders, and I don't just mean our elders and our deacons, although I do mean them, but our female leaders as well.

We have leaders who are eager to call the ball at this church. When I say that we are a community, one community following Jesus together, what I mean by that is that we are one community following Jesus together.

We are not a group of people who happen to randomly gather together on a Sunday morning to listen to Matthew Capone talk. Whether Matthew Capone is here or is not here, God's mission continues.

This church is not about any one man unless that man is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And so I'm grateful for all of you and for this church that continues to work more and more as one team together.

[2 : 21] It's also important for me to say this. Some of you have been here a while. If you've been here for two or three years, I'd say you fit into the old-timer category, since we have so much turnover at this church.

And if you were here a long time ago, all the way back in August of 2017, you knew, no, that was the last time that we had a pastor who was gone for four weeks.

And when our pastor was gone for four weeks, two Sundays later, he told us that he was going to another church in another part of the country. Because of that history, I'm going to tell you right now, next week, I am not announcing that I'm going to another church in another part of the country.

Whether you receive that as good news or bad news, consult together. We're in the book of 1 Peter.

And 1 Peter is a letter. It's a letter written by a man named Peter. And he writes it to churches in Asia Minor in the 60s A.D.

[3 : 25] Asia Minor is a part of the world that is now modern Turkey. And he writes to these people, as I told you, over and over again, because they are feeling out of place in the world.

And they are facing opposition from the world. They're feeling out of place in the world, and they're facing opposition from the world. And so Peter writes for two reasons. He writes to instruct them, and he writes to encourage them.

He writes to encourage them that Jesus is worth it. Jesus is worth living and loving for. And he's also worth suffering and dying for.

He doesn't just write to encourage them, but he writes to instruct them how they should live in the world as Christians who feel out of place. And not just how to live, but also how to respond when opposition comes.

Now, it was back in November that we left off from 1 Peter, and we left off in this section that addressed a variety of groups. These were groups who were, first of all, how to interact with government.

[4 : 32] Second of all, how slaves should interact in the household. Next, how wives should interact. And finally, how husbands should interact. That's where we left off, and we had governing principles that I mentioned earlier this morning about how each of these people should interact.

It was in such a way that they would be priests, right? They would represent God to the world by their behavior, and that they would proclaim God's excellencies as priests. That's 1 Peter 2.9.

And then also that their good works would cause people who accused them to be silenced. Those were kind of the categories that we were working through from 1 Peter 2, that they would live to bring honor to Jesus Christ.

We are picking up right where we left off, except instead of being one specific group that's addressed, Peter's now going to address the entire church. He's going to tell us, we're starting at verse 8, finally, all of you.

Now, our principles before were how to give honor and glory to Jesus Christ and how to silence opposition through good works. We find another principle in this section. We're in verses 8 through 12.

[5 : 35] How do we behave if we don't just want to bring honor to God, but we also want to be close to God?

Not just bring honor to God, but be close to God. This was hinted at when we left off. 1 Peter 3, verse 7, Now that principle is applied not just to husbands, but to everyone.

Verse 10. First of all, sorry, verse 9. Blessed, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. How should Christians behave in order to obtain a blessing?

And then we see at the end, verse 12, 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.

Do you want God's eyes to be on you? Do you want God's ears to be open to your prayers? Peter here is going to lay out the kind of behavior that characterizes people who are close to God.

[6 : 56] And so with that, we're going to turn to 1 Peter 3, starting at verse 8. You can follow along with me in your worship guide. It's printed near the end. You can open it up on your phone or on your Bible.

And remember as we come to this, that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold. And it is sweeter than honey, even the honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

That's why we turn to it now, starting at verse 8. Verse 10.

Verse 12.

Verse 12. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word.

[8 : 25] Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you have given us your words. We thank you that your Word is not dependent on any one man, but we thank you that your pastor, but that you promise no matter what, it will not return to you void, but that your Word has power in and of itself.

And so we ask this morning that you would have mercy on us, that you would use the power of your Word to go deep into our hearts, that it would shape us and form us in the ways that we interact with each other here inside the church, and it would also shape and form the way that we interact with others outside the church, especially when they speak against us.

We ask all these things knowing that we don't deserve them, but that Jesus has earned them for us, and so we ask them in his name. Amen. I mentioned before that Peter has been giving a lot of different instructions to different groups, and now he's going to turn to giving instruction to everyone inside of the church, and as he gives instruction about what kind of behavior leads people close to God, there's going to be two main categories.

First, we're going to see behavior inside of the church. How do we interact with other Christians? Remember, this is a community that's facing opposition.

How do they function as a community together? So how do we interact inside the church? And second, how do we interact outside of the church? If we're facing opposition from the world and feeling out of place in it, how do we interact with people coming in from the outside who want to say bad things and do bad things to us?

[10 : 09] So we're going to simply focus on those two things this morning, inside and outside. Peter begins with his instruction inside of the church right off the bat with this fire hose in verse 8.

Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. And we could summarize these in two categories. By the way, if that felt like a lot, that is.

Take a deep breath. Verse 8 just gave you, I think, about five different things that we're supposed to do together, all of us in the church. Category number one, sympathy, brotherly love, and tender heart.

In other words, treat each other like a family. Treat the other people in the church as if they are your mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters and cousins.

These are people you're related to. You know if you are someone who has resources, you think differently about requests that come to you for assistance from family members than you do from anyone else.

[11 : 11] You might say something like this, normally we wouldn't step in, but this is family. Peter is telling these people to treat each other like a family.

Put the good of the community above your own good. That's the sympathy and the brotherly love and the tender heart. Second, don't just treat each other like a family.

Put the common mission above your own preferences. Put the good of the community and what it's doing over your own good. Have unity of mind.

Have a humble mind. Those two aren't coincidental, by the way. It takes a humble mind to have unity of mind. You actually have to recognize that maybe you might not be right about everything, and maybe some of the things that you feel strongly about are secondary issues that aren't going to help contribute to the church and its mission.

We talked about this several times before in Philippians chapter 2. We talked about being question people rather than answer people. And this was back in the fall of 2018.

[12 : 18] Remember, I encourage you all then to go and figure out what the needs are of other groups in the church. So if you're a widow, figure out what the needs of the homeschool families are.

If you're a homeschool family, go and figure out what the needs of the young singles are. The goal is for us to be seeking the good of each other rather than pushing for our own agendas. We saw this again in Nehemiah chapter 3.

I told you about coffee pot people versus K-cup people. K-cup, if you are unfamiliar, you can go back and listen to Nehemiah chapter 3. I'm not going to rehash all of it, but remember, K-cup people are interested in their own preferences.

They want a specific drink, even if it's not being brewed for anyone else. Coffee pot people recognize there's only one thing being brewed, and that's where we're going as a community.

It's not about our individual preferences, but our one mission together. That's what these people need as they're feeling opposition from the outside. Not to be torn up by disagreements about things that matter less, but to be unified about what matters most.

[13 : 23] They need to have unity of mind and humble minds. I warned you, by the way, in Philippians chapter 2, that we were going to have a test coming up.

If you're an old timer, you were here back in 2018. And you knew that the test was we were going to be talking about a worship service change time. And you know what happened?

We had a worship service change time, and you all were 1 Peter 3 kind of people. We had one leader who said something like this, this change is actually not good for me and my individual family.

But I also recognize that this change is good for us as a church in our mission, that it's going to help us to make and grow disciples. And so I'm 100% behind it.

We had another family in our church who took Philippians chapter 2 to heart, and as they thought about the worship time service change, they went and thought and asked different groups in the church how it would affect them.

[14 : 23] And then they wrote the elders a letter about the ways it might affect different groups, not their group, and what they thought the time should be as a result of that. We have Philippians chapter 2, Nehemiah chapter 3, and now 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 8 kind of people in this church.

And that is the kind of congregation we want to be. A congregation that has unity of mind and a humble mind. What do we need?

What do we as a congregation need to pursue our one mission together? What is good for everyone in the community? How can we fight for the interests of each other and not just our own interests?

One of the things that I do when I have time off is I increase the wattage on my reading. And one book that I dived into was the book Leadership in Turbulent Times by Doris Kearns Goodwin, which tracks four different presidents.

If you're familiar with her, you know she's a presidential biographer. And so this book covers both Roosevelt, Lincoln, and also LBJ. And she tells the story of Abraham Lincoln trying to get the Emancipation Proclamation passed.

[15 : 38] In doing this, and also to unite the Union, right, the struggle of the entire Civil War, but she focuses on the Emancipation Proclamation. Now Lincoln had assembled a group of men who were all Republicans, but outside of that, about as diverse as they could get.

They were diverse in their viewpoints and their preferences. They represented a variety of groups within the Republican Party. He didn't choose yes men. In fact, he chose people who had been his rivals as the ones to accompany him on the journey.

He had one mission, however, with them together. And so what did Lincoln do with this diverse group of people? By the way, sounds a little bit like the church.

They were all Republicans. All kinds of thoughts about all sorts of different things, right? They disagreed. We're all Christians. All sorts of thoughts about all sorts of different things.

We disagree. If you want to find a disagreement in the church, just find any two people and start talking to them. Well, Lincoln had sympathy, a brotherly love, and a tender heart.

[16 : 48] Goodwin talks about the ways in which he acted to build thick relationships with people on his team. His Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, he would go and he would hold hands with him in the telegraph office.

And they would wait together to receive updates from the battlefield. He forgave quickly. Lincoln had people on his team who had publicly insulted him.

And because his mission was so important and because he had a humble mind, he didn't care who was on the team as long as they were on the mission with him.

And so he invited them to come join him. He shared meals with soldiers in the Civil War, eating their beans and their hardtack. There were times when teenagers would face a death sentence because they had been conscripted.

Maybe they were 16 or 17 years old and scared. Maybe too young to be facing war. They'd run away from battle. And as a deserter, they were facing the death sentence. Lincoln would often pardon them.

[17 : 51] In fact, they began to call him Father Abraham. Because he had, we might say a fatherly love, but a verse 8 kind of love for them.

He had a brotherly love. He wasn't just a hard charger with a mission, didn't care who got in his way. But he was leading them as one community together, as a family.

And so it's that way that he began to be recognized as their father. We see the same thing and long for the same thing in this church. Some of you have seen that happen in your small groups.

You've built relationships with other people who have come alongside you in suffering. People who've come alongside you in need. They've had sympathy and compassion.

You had a financial need. They came and helped you out. Maybe the deacons never even knew about it. Some of you have found this kind of community in our Band of Brothers Bible study on Saturday mornings. You've found that you learn more than just about the Bible together.

[18 : 54] That group, if you don't know, begins not by studying, but by praying together. They're sharing their lives, helping each other out as they can. Some of you have found that in our women's Bible studies.

If you were at Elaine Bevel's memorial service yesterday, you heard many people share about her presence, not just in our church, but in previous churches. Being a strong and important part of the community.

Lifting people up and caring for them. We also need to have unity of mind and a humble mind. Lincoln, as I mentioned before, brought in people who disagreed with him, people who he knew disagreed with him.

He accepted the suggestions and the critiques of others. He brought multiple drafts of the Emancipation Proclamation before his team, and they would give him feedback. Sometimes they'd tell him, you need to change this. Lincoln had a humble mind, and so sometimes he would.

He didn't just start out from the beginning saying, well, this is going to be my way or the highway. Clearly, I am the smartest person in the room. I won the election, so I have a mandate to do whatever I want.

[20 : 00] Instead, he went to his brothers asking for input. After success, he said this. He refused to take credit. He said, I have only been an instrument. It's the anti-slavery people of the country and the army that's made this happen.

This is John 3.30 kind of language. Remember, John the Baptist speaking about Jesus says this, he must increase, but I must decrease. He must increase, but I must decrease.

The Christian community should be one in which people are so convinced that Jesus is the one whose honor and glory is of greatest importance, that they are uninterested in their own ego and ambition.

Nothing else matters except our one mission that God has given us together, that we would make and grow disciples, that we would baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and that we would go on to teach them everything that Jesus has commanded.

That is what matters. And then we could say, like Lincoln, when we see God give fruit to our efforts, we have only been an instrument. That's what it means to have a humble mind and to be of one mind together.

[21 : 21] Peter then tells them, not just verse 8, but verse 9, do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called.

Lincoln modeled this as well as he led this group of people. He wrote letters expressing how angry he was at certain people. And then he would file them and never send them.

And when his files were opened many years later, they would find these letters at the bottom. It would say, never signed, never sent. An angry man came to him at one point, Edwin Stanton, who was his secretary of war, I mentioned him earlier, so angry at one of the generals.

And he said, I'm going to tell him exactly what I think. And Lincoln said, no, you're not. Write a letter. He came back with the letter. He said, I'm ready to send it.

And Lincoln said, don't send it. Just file it away. It did you a lot of good. Another one of Lincoln's cabinet members, Montgomery Blair, wrote a letter that was public, that criticized Lincoln.

[22 : 30] He came to offer his resignation letter in hand when it became public and offered to resign. And Lincoln said he had no intention of reading the letter that had become public.

He had no interest in taking revenge on this man. And he said to him, forget it and never mention or think of it again.

He didn't repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but instead blessed. He told his cabinet members that they could disagree among themselves, but they could never disagree publicly.

And he said, I would be wrong to me and wrong to the country. Why? Because in Lincoln's words, it was a challenge too vast for malicious dealing.

What they were up against was too important and too great, too significant to have any kind of squabbling. But instead, this diverse group of people had to be united around their one purpose and their one mission.

[23 : 43] That's what Lincoln used to unite these people. Brotherly love, unity of mind, and a humble mind. Now, Lincoln's mission was critical to the history of this nation.

It's not without great significance. God has given us an even greater mission. That is of significance to the entire world.

How much more important is it, brothers and sisters, that we have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

We cannot repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but we must bless. And that's where we're told Peter tells us that that's where God puts his blessing.

He blesses those who bless, verse 9. And for those who bless, his eyes are on them, and his ears are open to their prayer. We must have humble minds, sympathy, brotherly love, tender hearts.

[25 : 12] Now, I promised you, not just inside the community, but outside the community as well. If you remember Jesus' words, in Matthew chapter 5, he says this, For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?

Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Peter's instruction here for them is not just that they would be a good community where people could find relationships, although it is. It's not less than that, but it's more than that.

Remember, they're priests to the nations. They would be a people that help others know God. And others would know God because of the way that they act in the world, the way they act differently.

I gave you verses 8 and 9 for inside of the community. 10 through 12, by the way, just is supporting material. It's a direct quote from Psalm 34, which we read earlier this morning, so you might think about it this way.

[26 : 20] Why are verses 8 and 9 true? Peter's giving his citation here. Verses 8 and 9 are true because, guess what? Churches in Asia Minor because of Psalm 34.

If you don't believe me, believe David. Verse 8 applies to just the community of the church. Verse 9 is both the community inside and the community outside.

And so if we interact with each other by treating each other like family and putting others' interests above our own, we interact with those outside very simply by verse 9-ing, by blessing when they curse.

Now, I could give you a long explanation, but there's really nothing else to be said. When others speak ill of us, when they do evil things against us, the way we respond, and we read part of this too in our preparation for worship, the way we respond is blessing them.

People speak evil about us, we speak good about them. When people do evil towards us, we do good towards them.

[27 : 34] Love your enemies and bless them when they curse you. Now, we have some opportunities to practice that now, but we have a lot to learn from the church historically and geographically when it comes to blessing enemies because we live, as I mentioned, when we began 1 Peter, in a place where the church faces very little persecution.

You may remember we don't even make the list of the top 50 most persecuted nations in the world. In fact, this is the easiest, one of the most comfortable places to be a Christian. However, that's certainly not true in other places and other times.

If you're familiar with the history of East Germany, the history of communism, the name Erich Honecker may sound familiar to you. This was a man who came up with the idea of the Berlin Wall, and after he came up with the idea, he was actually the one who led the effort to build it.

This was in the 1960s. In the 1970s and 80s, he rose throughout the communist ranks very quickly and ultimately became what some call the most powerful man in East Germany.

He was the leader of the Communist Party. And not only was he the leader of the Communist Party, but his wife was in charge of the education ministry. And together, they were ultimately responsible for much of the persecution that happened to Christians during that time.

[29 : 00] There was also a man named Uwe Holmer who was a pastor living in East Germany. And he suffered under the rule of Honecker.

He, eight of his ten children, were unable to attend higher education because at that time, the policy, Honecker's wife, education policy, was that pastor's children could not have a higher education.

And so he and his family directly suffered from the policies of this man. Of course, in the 1980s, the late 1980s, communism began to fall, and Honecker quickly found himself not the most powerful man in East Germany, but actually the least powerful.

He was kicked out of office in October of 1989, right before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and he found himself quickly homeless. His daughter would not take him in.

The Communist Party had no interest in taking him in. And in fact, the people of Germany hated him. And so he was at risk for his life.

[30 : 12] Who took Eric Honecker into his home? Uwe Holmer, the pastor, who had suffered under this man's persecution, decided that his obligation, out of obedience to Jesus, was to take this man into his home and care for him.

And I'm going to read a little bit now from a book called Candles Behind the Wall, which tells the story of the church and communism, but also tells the story of Eric Honecker and Uwe Holmer.

It says that his wife stood behind the decision to take in the Honeckers, but their children were skeptical initially. Remember, these are the children who were denied education by this man's wife.

At first, their chins just dropped to the floor, his wife reports. That's totally crazy. The very people who couldn't stand the church, one of them erupted. But when they thought it over, they realized that their parents were right.

It's clear that if you've been asked to do it, then you should. At this point, you might be thinking that this is going to be a very sentimental story. Honeckers are going to convert to Christianity, and the nation's going to love them.

[31 : 24] You could not be more wrong. Neither of these things happen. In fact, the Holmers begin to be hated by the people of Germany for taking in this man. Word got out immediately, and the public was outraged.

Crowds of angry people swarmed in front of the Holmers' house from the day the Honeckers moved in. The telephone rang incessantly. Letters poured in, 3,000 in all, over the next months.

All the pent-up resentment and hatred for the abuses and inadequacies of the entire communist regime was focused on this one man. And as far as the average person on the street was concerned, anyone who would take him in was either collaborating with the communists or insane.

So here's this man who was persecuted under communism, takes in his persecutor into his house, and receives not thanks from the community around them, but hatred.

Who would be so crazy as to love our enemy in this way? They should have taken Honecker out and put him up against the wall and shot him, just like in Romania exploded a man from the neighboring village.

[32 : 31] I would have gladly shot him myself. I don't understand why they did that for such a pig. He is the worst kind of scum there is. It goes on to chronicle that crowds gathered outside their house every day protesting.

The family received five separate bomb threats, and the police told them they could not protect them. And yet the Homer family continued to shelter this man who had persecuted them.

When we are convinced by God that what we do is right in his eyes, then there is nothing that can shake us. This is Homer explained when asked how she and her husband responded to the bomb threats.

Public outrage became so great that Uwe Homer finally wrote a public letter explaining why it was that they had taken in their enemy.

And we'll end with this. It has become clear to us in a new way that to forgive is not an easy thing. Injustice is a reality, and the remembrance of it grows easily in our hearts, turning to bitterness and dividing us from one another.

[33 : 44] And here he begins to preach. In light of that, God's forgiveness becomes even greater for me. It was not easy for him to forgive either.

His holiness demanded fair justice and punishment for our sins. To make forgiveness possible, he laid our sins and our punishment on Jesus, his son.

Only then was the path to forgiveness cleared. Forgiveness is granted to everyone who asks for it, every single person. The Homers did not take the Hunnickers in because they were good, moral, religious people.

They took them in because, and only because, they knew how much God in Christ had forgiven them. And they were able to bless their enemy because they knew that they had been enemies to God, and God had taken them in.

It was because, and only because of the gospel, and because of Jesus' death and his resurrection, that they were able to love their enemies in this way. He goes on, In recent days, it has become apparent to me in a new way how much it cost God to forgive my sins.

[35 : 03] The joy of this gives me the strength to forgive other people. The Lord has charged us to follow him and to take in all those who are troubled or burdened, to follow his commandment to love our enemies, and to live by the prayer he taught us in these words, Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

We want to live by Christ's example. Brothers and sisters, we want to live by Christ's example.

We live by Christ's example when we love each other as family. And even more, we live by Christ's example when we love our enemies. And we do it because his example was his sacrifice, that he loved us when we were his enemies.

And so that's how we can bless those who curse and seek peace and pursue it. Please pray with me. Dear Father in heaven, we are overwhelmed by your love if we know it and understand it.

We're much worse than we think. We deserve even greater punishment than Eric Honaker. And yet we've received even greater love through Jesus.

[36 : 30] We ask that you would help us to know and understand that forgiveness more and more, that it would change our hearts, that we'd be willing to give up our agendas for the sake of our community, and we'd be willing to give up our comfort to bless those who curse us because that's what Jesus has done first.

And so we follow him in it. We want to live by Christ's example. And so we ask these things in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.