



## **1 Peter 3:13-18**

**Prepared to Answer**

**November 21, 2021**

We are going to 1 Peter 3 today. After today, we will be spending five Sundays off of 1 Peter during Advent to go to some passages that speak about the incarnation of Jesus. And then on the first Sunday in January we plan on picking up where we left off in this book.

And for those of you who like to know where we're going in the long-term, our plan is to finish 1 Peter in the winter, then spend a number of weeks giving an overview of Christian doctrine using the Apostle's Creed as our guide to each week's main theme and passage, then we plan on doing 2 Peter in the spring, and some Psalms in the summer.

And, as we said at the beginning of this series, we started 1 Peter in this facility and we plan on finishing it in the new building, which is making very good progress right now.

Things are still looking good for us to make our move to the new location in December provided everything comes together with the city and our certificate of occupancy. But we are tentatively predicting that *December 19th* will be our first Sunday there, with our first wedding there the day before. We believe that's a realistic first Sunday there, not just a goal, and we will email and push notifications to the app to communicate the move, and until we get the C of O, the plan is subject to change.

(By the way, we are trying to do all of our announcements through the app these days - (I know, I'm announcing this). But we are trying to put more emphasis on centering the service on Jesus, with very little announced in service - so we would encourage you to get the app, turn on notifications (which we will use to send you announcements each Sunday and rarely when there is an urgent announcement during the week.) If we ever have snow closures, we'll push those out on the app as well (but we will try to make any closures a rare occurrence.)

So let's pray and then jump into 1 Peter 3:

**1 Peter 3:13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of**

**them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,**

So this book was written by Peter to teach Christians how to be Christians in a non-Christian world. And they were people who had to live out two realities - one was the reality of Gospel advance: the Roman world that they lived in would become nearly half Christian in the first four centuries. So God was mightily at work through His people.

But the other reality was the encroachment of darkness, hatred for Christianity, and the persecution of the church that would bring all kinds of temptation toward fear, and I'm sure they often felt like the faith was being snuffed out.

Both were happening simultaneously - God was at work advancing His Gospel, and the opposition to Christianity was growing. And I believe both are happening in our day - I can't predict the future but previous pandemics and seasons of unrest in our country have been followed by huge revival. After the Spanish flu and world war I and all the unrest from the pandemic, there was revival in the states. Everything hit the fan in the 60s with the cultural revolution and the hong-kong flu pandemic, and then the Jesus movement came in the 70s in which millions came to faith. But through it all, our culture has become increasingly secular and the church has felt more and more out of place.

We're going to have to learn to live with both realities for the rest of our lives - Gospel advance, and a hostile world. We have to hold to two realities - excitement for the future of the church and engagement on the mission to spread the good news of Jesus, and sorrow as it seems our sin-sick world is rejecting the cure. Faith that Jesus is building His church, but pain and loss that are trying to tell us otherwise.

When we become Christians, we expect,, "Well everybody is going to want this. God sent His Son to meet our deepest need, to lift the guilt and shame from our sin, to make us His kids, to guarantee our eternity, and we receive it as a gift, not as something we work for. This is the best deal imaginable, everybody is going to love this."

But then we quickly learn that not everybody loves this. For a number of reasons, but at it's core, the reason we don't turn to Jesus is that to turn to Him is to turn to all of Him<sup>1</sup>. We can't take half of Him. Jesus isn't a buffet we choose from.

He is a gracious Savior, but He is also Lord and King. He rules and we don't turn to Him while maintaining rule over our lives. He is God, and we like being our own gods and we grow very comfortable with other ultimate motivations in our lives. We like what we are living for.

And so Christians who are living for Christ and spreading the good news about Christ will often come up against hostility. Because our faith is not a private, secret faith, we are often talking to people about it, with a variety of responses, but some of them very oppositional.

Jesus and the people who live for Him are offensive to those with other ultimates, even on our best days, even when we're not trying to be provocative or offensive.

So Peter writes to prepare us for life in a world that isn't rolling out a red carpet for Jesus or His church, and at times even wants to bring harm to the cause of Christ and His people. But to be sure, he isn't preparing us to run and hide from that world, but to boldly engage with it in the hope that this Gospel we believe is compelling, Jesus will open the eyes of many to believe it, and His kingdom is advancing.

So Peter starts this section in verse 13 with this statement:

### **1 Peter 3:13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?**

Peter is definitely not saying that if you are zealous for doing good that nobody will harm you. Remember, Peter was put to death a couple of years after writing this. Which I would say qualifies as harm.

And in the next verse he will talk about the fact that we might suffer.

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<sup>1</sup> Chesterton: "The modern habit of saying "This is my opinion, but I may be wrong" is entirely irrational. If I say that it may be wrong, I say that is not my opinion. The modern habit of saying "Every man has a different philosophy; this is my philosophy and it suits me" – the habit of saying this is mere weak-mindedness. A cosmic philosophy is not constructed to fit a man; a cosmic philosophy is constructed to fit a cosmos. A man can no more possess a private religion than he can possess a private sun and moon."

So don't hear a prosperity gospel promise in verse 13. Christians who are really following Jesus will often have things not go well, we will often suffer, and even suffer more at times because we are Christians than if we weren't Christians.

And we have to be prepared for that. Because so many people who walk away from the faith say they are doing so because it didn't work - and their definition of "work" is make life easier.

But coming to faith made life harder, it created tensions, God didn't answer their prayers how they wanted, their endeavor to go out and change the world fell flat and didn't succeed, their kids didn't turn out the way they had hoped.

And there can be this feeling that God didn't come through like we expected Him to and we can think suffering is the evidence that our faith isn't working.

And if we don't read the Bible, we will miss the fact that so many people that walked with God experienced deep dark nights of the soul, depression, confusion, sorrow, and what seemed to be the silence and absence of God.

So many of the Psalms are written by people wrestling with God, and wondering how long until God answers. Sometimes God gives worldly prosperity to Christians, but not always.

The teaching of the Bible is that God does answer prayers, and at times He does bless us with health, or with wealth, or success, or prosperity. He can do that, and when He does do that we can receive that with thanksgiving, without feeling guilty for the good things He has blessed us with. But he doesn't always do that, and this book speaks so much about how to suffer that we should expect that in many seasons of our lives following Jesus will involve significant suffering.

But what does Peter mean when he says: **"Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?" 1 Peter 3:13**

He's not saying no harm will come your way, so he must be saying, "Who can really harm you?"

It all depends how we define *harm*. Yes, significant pain will come your way, and even death. But is that really that harmful for a Christian? Paul says something similar in

Romans:

**Romans 8:31 “31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”**

In this context in Romans, Paul talks about tribulation, ...distress, ...persecution, ... famine, or nakedness, ..danger, and swords that can be against us. But his point is that they can't ultimately triumph and can't be, in the end, successful against us.

Jesus said this in Luke 21:16-19:

**Luke 21:16-19 “16 You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. 17 You will be hated by all for my name's sake. 18 But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 By your endurance you will gain your lives.”**

So Jesus says to those first Christians, “you're going to lose relationships, you'll be hated, you'll be delivered up to the authorities and tried unjustly, some of you will be put to death”... “but not a hair of your head will perish.” They will kill you, but you'll be fine.

So who is there to harm us if we're zealous for doing good, Peter asks? Many will do us harm, but it won't be final harm. It won't be eternal harm. It won't stop us from participating in the final victory.

So our hard times are not evidence that God is not with us. The fact that lots of people don't like what we have to say doesn't mean something has gone wrong. But true, eternal, lasting harm that stops God from ultimately fulfilling His purposes in us and through us is impossible.

So let that encourage you. When the walls close in and the losses mount, what harm could really befall us if what we believe is true?

So Peter goes on...

**1 Peter 3:14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,**

In this section here, Peter paraphrases a passage from Isaiah. Peter doesn't directly quote most of it, but is paraphrasing it:

**Isaiah 8:12-14 "12 "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. 13 But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. 14 And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.**

Peter was pretty loose in his paraphrase.

(One change he made was that "The Lord of Hosts" in Isaiah 8:13 became "Christ" in 1 Peter 3:15. "But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor" (Isaiah 8:13) - "in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy" - 1 Peter 3:15.

So here's Peter, who spent time with Jesus, totally comfortable substituting "*Jesus*" for "*the Lord*" when he paraphrases Isaiah's passage. The Lord of Hosts that Isaiah was telling us to worship, that's Jesus. So this is one of many attestations to Jesus's deity in the Bible, this one coming from someone who knew Jesus in person better than anyone.)

And in both passages, there is a call to not be afraid or troubled.

In the Peter passage he says not to be afraid of or troubled by the people that cause suffering.

In the Isaiah passage he says not to fear what they fear or call conspiracies the same things they call conspiracies.

And in times of crisis, we are tempted toward both kinds of fear:

1) The fear of people who could harm us for our faith. We fear the people who could take away our standing in society, our place of prominence, our power, our money, our jobs, or our lives. We might be tempted to be afraid of them and just keep our mouths shut about Christ because of the risk of speaking up.

2) Or, during times of crisis, we can fear mainly what everybody else fears. We fear losing all the same things they fear losing, we fear death, we fear sickness, we fear loss of money, we fear failure. We don't act like God is for us and nobody can ultimately harm us.

Also, especially during times of chaos when we are looking to make sense of the world, we start to adopt the same conspiracy theories the world around us has.

People come up with conspiracy theories to try to find some order to all of the chaos. Things in the world are so out of whack that there must be some secret cause, some secret knowledge that we could gain about the cabal of operators who are the unified cause of so many of our problems. We look for a unifying story to explain all of this.

But notice how that comes from not allowing the Christian story to make sense of all of it for us. Unless you have God over the whole system in your mind, you'll have something or someone else that takes His place.

So we take God's sovereign rule over all things out of the picture, and replace God with an evil cabal that's running everything. And we make connections where we shouldn't, we make assumptions, we convict people in our minds without evidence, we spread rumors, and soon we're far more obsessed with the idea that the illuminati control all things than that God is guiding history with His sovereign hand.

So Peter says don't fear the people who might try to harm us. Isaiah says don't fear what they fear or call conspiracy what they call conspiracy.

And both passages say to honor the Lord - Isaiah says to fear God, Peter says to honor God. The way we don't fear all the same things is we fear God rather than man. We fear more what it would mean if we lost God's approval than if we lost man's approval or all the things man can give us.

We honor Jesus as the one that matters the most. We honor Christ the Lord as holy, meaning He is above all other concerns, He is the highest priority. He is for us and with us, and if we treat Him like that, then we will have incredible hope that enables us to live very different lives.

And this kind of living will make the hope we have in Christ visible and give us amazing opportunities to speak of the glories of Christ. Look at verse 15 again:

**1 Peter 3:15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,**

The kind of person that honors Christ as Lord, fears God and not man, isn't given to all the same conspiracy theories others are given to, isn't afraid like others are, makes his or her hope visible.

People will look at someone like that and say, "You aren't afraid of the same things we are. Why? All of our hopes are wrapped up in our comforts here: in safety, in our lives, in being accepted by the world, in careers. But you aren't crushed when we take them from you - what is with you?"

The person that honors Christ as holy, that lives like Peter is calling us to live, will cause people to ask us the reason for the hope that we have.

1 Peter has called us to such a different life: a life where we don't fear the same things, we don't get all concerned about their conspiracy theories, and then in the broader context, loving one another deeply (1:22), not repaying evil for evil (3:9), seeking peace (3:11), keeping our tongues from evil (3:11), fighting the passions of the flesh (2:11), getting rid of all malice and envy and deceit and hypocrisy (2:1), submitting to rightful authorities (2:13), honoring everyone (2:17).

A life like that is radically different and so shockingly beautiful that it is inevitable that *people will ask* the reason for the hope that people who live like that have.

If you wonder when we will ever have opportunities to share our faith in a world that seems hostile to it, Peter says that opportunity comes often when they ask you about it. They see your hope and ask you for a reason for your hope.

*Fifteen years ago, many of you will remember, that in Lancaster County, PA, a man named Charles Roberts walked into an Amish one-room school house and shot ten Amish school girls, killing five of them. He then killed himself. And of course we can't imagine a worse tragedy or even fathom any sorrow that could be greater than those parents and that community felt.*

*Shortly after the tragedy, news stations started interviewing parents and members of the*



*Amish community, and one after another they shocked the people interviewing them because they expressed forgiveness.*

*Parents who had just buried their children then attended the murderer's funeral to express grace and support to his widow, and the murderer wasn't Amish, but there were more Amish people than non-Amish at his funeral. In their sorrow, they were caring for his widow, expressing forgiveness, offering grace. Which was astounding, and news outlets started writing stories about it.*

*And the effect on me at the time was to ask about their faith. I started wondering "what do Amish people believe?" And I went to google to figure it out - I was looking for the reason for the hope they had.*

*I'm an outsider to their community, I don't live how they live, I don't reject all they reject or affirm what they affirm. Their lives are in many ways very strange to the English like us. But seeing the beauty of their lives, at least for a minute, caused me to want to know more.*

When someone lives in such a shockingly strange but beautiful way, people ask the reason for the hope they have.

And remember, Peter is writing to a culture that was increasingly hating Christianity and Christians. But he says, *"This still works there."*

The increasing secularization of our culture will not stop the gospel from spreading through people who live beautifully distinct lives who are ready to give an answer for the hope that they have when they are inevitably asked.

Which is the next thing to look at here: we are told in verse 15 to be ready to make a defense. And that word for "defense" is *apologia* in the greek.

And it is a reasoned argument for what we believe.

And Peter says that if we are first honoring Christ the Lord as holy, we will be asked, and we should be prepared to give a reasoned answer for why we live that way.

The order is important - there are plenty of Christians who aren't concerned with honoring Christ as Lord, but who want to honor their own intelligence and ability to

debate and win an argument. They are ready to give an answer, but aren't living with Christ the Lord as holy.

But if we live like Christ is holy, then we will be asked, and we should be ready with reasonable answers. This doesn't mean we have all the answers or that we can always give a technical answer to every possible skeptic.

But it does mean we are ready to defend the validity of the faith we have, give reasonable answers to people who ask questions, and be equipped to communicate the Gospel and the reasons we believe it and the reasons we live like we do in response to it.

How do we get there?

**One, recognize that it's a lifetime pursuit.** And disciples are learners and followers. We work on following Jesus with our ways, but also learning his word. And there are so many free resources available to us to be able to study the bible, listen to the bible, study it together, read commentaries on it, listen to teaching on it, that we all have access to the information we would need to learn to become doctors of theology for free. That's a brand new thing to have that amount of material available to everyone and whole theological libraries in our pockets that we should never be lacking in what to read and study. If you're new to it all, ask a pastor or a wise Christian friend where to get started.

It will take hard work, it will mean less entertainment and more Bible - it doesn't come without sacrifice.

**Two, give the majority of your time to studying Jesus and his scriptures.** The best way to be able to recognize a counterfeit hundred dollar bill is to really know what a real one looks like. Then you'll be able to spot all kinds of fakes. And there are all kinds of fake religions and fake saviors that come your way, but if you know the real thing, you can spot them.

Three, consider the people you interact with the most during the week who don't believe, and make some effort to wrap your mind around what they do believe. It might be their religion, but it is usually just secularism and the religion of the self. (I can't recommend enough Carl Trueman's book the Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self to understand where most people are coming from today. Hard read, but a lot to learn.)

And sometimes we learn what they believe by listening to them. Be able to know what your opponents actually believe, instead of just knowing that they're just blanket-wrong about everything. Don't feel that you have to have answers for every question, but gaining a reasonable knowledge of the beliefs of the friends you're interacting with the most can be very helpful.

And that's to help you obey the last part of verse 15, which is to do this with gentleness and respect.

Respect the people who oppose your faith enough to listen to them. Be able to repeat their arguments back to them in a way that makes them say, "Yes, that's exactly what I believe."

Be secure enough in your faith that you can keep yourself under control, calm and tranquil - that's the gentleness there.

And allow what you believe about your neighbor - that even the person who seems most dead-set against Christ is made in the image of god and is worthy of dignity and honor - allow that to shape your demeanor in those conversations.

And when we're called to give our answers with gentleness and respect, you can't get away from the fact that God does care about our tone.

The idea that "tone matters" is mocked a bit in our day, sometimes even among people who share our beliefs.

So somebody makes a true argument against a bad belief, but they do it like an absolute jerk. They're belittling their opponents, assuming their opponents are idiots, mocking them, they're all haughty and superior.

And someone posts "your tone is terrible, not like Jesus at all."

And they reply with "Oh, it's all about tone! This person believes this horrible life-destroying lie and you're worried about my tone. If only you cared as much about the truth as you did about me being mean. Here come the tone police."

Peter says, “Oh, give an answer. Give a good answer, a well-prepared answer. Have the conversation. Make the defense of the faith. But do it with gentleness and respect.” Tone does matter.

Peter calls us to be: people who know our stuff and can give an answer, but who do so with gentleness and respect.

Also, he goes on in 3:16-17:

**1 Peter 3:16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.**

So notice first of all that he says, “when you are slandered.”

If there’s any hope that being nice, caring about your tone, answering with gentleness and respect will keep people from slandering us to their friends, on social media, or in other ways, we can drop that hope. We will be slandered.

And this certainly happens today. The reputation that Christians have is that we are haters. In the court of twitter we have been found guilty of bigotry and hatred, of being annoying antagonistic evangelists, of being ignorant and unreasonable.

The Christian faith is not what it is being made to look like, and most Christians aren’t like that. Most of the Christians I know are thoughtful, kind to the people they disagree with, even more compassionate toward people they believe to be in sin than they might be toward others. They give of themselves sacrificially. They have reasons for what they believe. They are open to learning both what the word of God teaches them and what the world God made teaches them in legitimate science. They are humble.

But they’re slandered left and right.

And the same way, churches are in general a powerful force for good in the world, for mercy ministry, for teaching, for unifying people who might otherwise be at odds, for restraining immorality, for encouraging honesty, for providing hope and community, for strengthening mental health. They are there when disasters strike, they help their members and non-members alike in countless ways.

But the reputation of the church is in the toilet in our day.

But the problem is, we all know some Christians that do all the things that people who would slander us accuse us all of doing. And I have had countless run-ins with corrupt pastors that abuse and churches that harm. Unfortunately, some of the slander is true.

So Peter says: keep your conscience clean. Don't let the slander be true of you. It will come. But if you're suffering from being spoken poorly of, make sure you don't deserve it.

**1 Peter 2:12 “12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”**

There is no way to be spoken of highly by all. We will be slandered. But keep your conscience clean, keep serving them, keep doing good, don't let the accusations stick.

But isn't that the worst feeling? Being falsely accused?

Not too long ago there was somebody online claiming to have been a member of our church (he had never been a member here), and he was claiming some things that were just utterly false about what our church believes and practices. And some people who were actually way more familiar with our beliefs and practices jumped on and, with gentleness and respect, tried to straighten him out.

And I had this anger well up in me because there was just no truth to it at all. A lot of times when people don't like us, there's at least some truth to what they don't like. We do teach that Jesus is the only way, that the Bible is God's inspired word - and if someone doesn't like that, at least they don't like something that's true about us. But this guy was lying through his teeth about what we believed and practiced. And that can be so frustrating.

But rather than responding in a way that would make some of the accusations true, we are called to not repay evil for evil, to be wronged without doing wrong in response.

And the place Peter calls us to look for our strength is the same place we always look, to Jesus. Peter is calling for a high level of obedience and a radically different life from us, and we're never told to do anything in the NT without being reminded of what's been

done for us:

**18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,**

Remember the gospel we believe.

It goes like this. We were unrighteous.

But Jesus, the only righteous one, God himself, came and took on flesh and lived among us.

And all of the accusations of sin that would rightly stick to us were hurled at Him.

He never sinned himself, but went to the cross to suffer for our sin.

He was falsely accused. He was spoken evil of. He was lied about. So they could get Him to the cross where He gave His life for us. And He never sinned in the process.

And he turns around and offers forgiveness and grace to people like us that put Him there. He offers this gift of grace where if we recognize that we are the ones who are sinful, we come to an end of ourselves, we give up our efforts to make ourselves OK, and we put our faith in Jesus crucified for our sins, then we are forgiven.

And that's what brought us to God.

We know God today because God himself was accused unjustly, was slandered, was accused of doing evil. And they even killed Him for all that stuff that He didn't do.

But he was made alive by the Spirit.

He lost it all because the world was hostile against Him. He didn't fear what they feared, He didn't even fear death. And, because of the power of the Spirit, death didn't finally and ultimately harm Him. Because He rose again.

And we are His followers. Meaning we follow Him through the world where all kinds of injustices might be thrown our way, we can lose a great deal, but the things we lose for His sake we find in the resurrection. Our lives that are legitimately damaged because of

our reputation as Christians, a bad reputation that many of us didn't earn, will be made whole and new in the future when we rise again with Him, in the power of the same Spirit that raised Him from the grave.

And if we believe that, then we can endure hostility, but still live a life where Christ is holy and honored, a life that is so filled with visible hope that is inexplicable from the outside, so people have to ask why we are so full of hope.

### **Prayer of Confession**

This prayer is modified from the original entitled "Troubled Hearts" on page 148 of the prayer book, Prone to Wander, by Barbara Duguid and Wayne Duguid Houk.

Heavenly Father,

Many of us come before you today with troubled hearts and minds. We are fearful about losing our relationships, our health, our finances, our families, our futures, and many other things. We have a hard time believing in you in a way that would bring comfort to our hearts. Instead we greatly doubt your love and concern for us, your being for us, and that nobody can really harm us. We are not calmed by the thought that you are with us. Father, forgive our unbelief.

Jesus, thank you for your fearless faith. Thank you that for the joy that was set before you, you persevered through far greater pain and suffering and loss than anything we will ever suffer--in fact, through greater pain and suffering and loss than we can even imagine.

Thank you that just as you rose from the dead, we will rise. Thank you that you have promised that you will wipe away all our tears and comfort our grieving and broken hearts.

Holy Spirit, help us to believe in Christ. Help us to believe that in his death we died, and that in his resurrection we are raised to new life. Give us the joy and peace that should flow from that reality, as we continue to face the broken world in which we live, especially as we face some opposition and loss because of our faith.

Help us to live in the light of our full forgiveness, and give us great confidence in the sufficiency of your grace to us in Jesus Christ. In his name, we pray, amen.

### **Sermon Discussion Questions:**

1. In what ways does turning over all of ourselves to Jesus create tension and hostility between us and the world?
2. How does Peter's exhortation about expectant suffering contrast with the prosperity gospel?
3. How does enthroning Jesus as the most valuable in our hearts feed our hope in Him?
4. What do our lives look like when "Christ is honored as Lord" in our hearts?
5. Can you think of a time you were spoken negatively about because of your faith? What was your response?
6. How can we grow in our readiness to give answers for our hope?