

Some events are so monumental that they change the course of history. The invention of the printing press. The airplane. The atom bomb. The computer. All these are what we sometimes call “game changers.” We experience game changing moments when something so big and so impactful literally changes the course of our lives. A game changer could be a person who walks into your life and changes your perspective or an event that changes your trajectory.

God created the church to be a game changer. We have been called out of the darkness to go back in and light up the world, to preserve a dying culture. The world should be a better place where the church is present. In a cynical age when the church is irrelevant at best and dangerous at worst, it is good to remember the church has always been a game changer in areas like philanthropy. Where the church is strong, there exists a culture of giving unmatched by any other people in history. The first hospitals were founded by the church. In education, places like Harvard, Yale, and other Ivy League institutions were established to promote Christian education. The church was the pioneer and champion of human rights and human dignity stemming from the biblical belief that each person is made in the image of God.

1 Peter 3:8 begins with “finally.” Peter is not signaling the end of his letter but he is summarizing a section emphasizing the importance of cooperating with those in authority for the sake of the gospel. In 2:12 he says, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable (kalos = good) so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” His encouragement to these persecuted Christians is that it is possible to be a game changer, to change the opinions of even those who are hostile to the gospel.

We are called to be game changers. The question this morning is, “Are you?” “Are we?” I want to attach five thought provoking questions to five game changing behaviors that spring forth from this passage so you can answer the question, “Are you a game changer in the world?”

1. Are you part of a team that truly cares for one another? v. 8. We live in such a divided country that the Washington Post recently reported that after last year's bitterly contested presidential election, politically divided families cut their Thanksgiving celebrations short by an average of 20 to 30 minutes. (Washington Post, 11/15/17). By contrast, God's people live together harmoniously. People who live this way are noticeable. The literal translation of “harmonious” is “one mind” or “single-minded.” Peter goes on to describe the characteristics of a harmonious team.

- They live together sympathetically. They feel what each other feel.
- They live together as family, literally, brothers (philadelphoi).
- They live together compassionately (good bowels).
- They live together humbly.

One writer sums it up this way: “Rather than seeing themselves as one more civic institution offering religious goods and services...they lay aside their occupations and preoccupations and they attend to one another. Hostility is converted into hospitality, strangers into friends, and enemies into guests.” Darrell Guder. That is how the early church found favor with the people.

Acts 4:32-33 describes the first century church this way, “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him

was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”

Even in the second century, Tertullian, the father of Western theology, summarized society’s view of Christians, “See how they love one another (for they themselves [pagans] hate one another); and how they are ready to die for each other (for they themselves are readier to kill each other).” When we gather together with other believers and demonstrate a sincere concern and sympathetic love for one another, we become a winsome witness in a divided world.

2. Do you speak well of others? God calls us to be blessing machines. **vv. 9-12.** God blesses His people to be a blessing. The part of Psalm 34 Peter quotes emphasizes the way we speak. Those who love life use their words to bless and not curse. What does it mean to bless?

The word bless is eulogeo. Have you ever heard someone at a funeral give a eulogy? It means good words. Someone is going to stand up and speak well of the deceased. Peter is telling us that we were called to eulogize other people. It is amazing how favorable our opinion is of those who say good things about us! I’ll never forget a note I got from a professor who said, “You are God’s choice servant to this generation.” That man was brilliant!

3. Can you give a clear and convincing explanation for the hope that is in you? vv. 13-15. There are two assumptions made here; the first is that there is hope within you. The second assumption is that our attitude and behavior will result in others being curious about what we believe. Then we need to be ready to answer.

One of the things that strikes me when I read the gospels is that they had no intentional evangelism program. They never went door to door to pass out tracts. No evangelistic campaigns. They simply loved each other and cared for one another and the people took notice. Luke says, “they enjoyed the favor of all people.” For years the church taught its members to be pitch men for Jesus. Just memorize the sales pitch and go around looking for people who will listen to it. God didn’t call you to sell anything. The Gospel is not a product it’s a lifestyle. It is not to be sold it is to be lived. You are not a salesperson you were called to be a blessing.

God calls us to live on another level than those who make this world their home. Orville in Baghdad...His way of life resulted in an emotional request from a man who liked what he saw and wanted to learn how to be like that. Chris and Cheryl Read sat with a Syrian refugee family, the mother asked, “You are Christians aren’t you?” When they said yes, her comment was, “I knew it. The only people who ever cared about us and helped us were Christians.”

4. Do you seek to do good from a clear conscience? vv. 16-17. Peter moves from speaking to doing; from words to deeds. We are to seek the good of others not from an ulterior motive but from a clear conscience. I love the words of MLK, “Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and fails to be concerned about the economic conditions that corrupt them, the social conditions that damn them, the city governments that cripple them, is a dry, dead, do-nothing religion in need of new blood.” Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Christian Doctrine of Man,” delivered March 1, 1957. The church should have little interest in people who

have strong opinions about how certain groups should behave but won't walk across the street to see why they behave that way let alone lift a finger to help.

5. Are you willing to endure hardship for a higher purpose? vv. 18. Jesus is the perfect example of wrongful suffering. He committed no sin yet was treated like a common criminal. According to 2:21, this is our calling as Christians. If He suffered unjustly, what makes us think that we won't? Is a disciple above his teacher? But Jesus is not just an example of wrongful suffering, He is also the perfect example of purposeful suffering. Christ suffered "that he might bring us to God." His suffering was unique, "the just for the unjust." When we suffer, we are not bearing the wrath of God for the sins of others. But Peter's whole point is that "Wrongful suffering, patiently endured, is so remarkable that it becomes a powerful form of witness leading unbelievers to salvation." Grudem. We have been called to follow Christ's example. When we endure hardship, and remain faithful in spite of suffering we build a credible testimony.

This section, **vv. 18-22**, is one of the toughest to interpret in the entire NT. What does Peter mean when he says Jesus preached to "the spirits in prison?" There are dozens of interpretations of this passage but I'm going to take the approach of one Bible commentator from a previous century who said, "There are various opinions on the meaning of this verse, with which I need not trouble the reader, as I have produced that which is most likely." Adam Clarke

First, **Jesus is the messenger of salvation.** In the pre-flood days, Jesus, in the Spirit, appealed to this wicked world through a righteous man named Noah. He was chosen by God to warn his neighbors about a universal flood that was to come. "Every blow of Noah's hammer was a call to repentance." He was persecuted for what he preached. Peter is telling us that those who ignored Noah's words are now in prison, a term for that place of the dead who are awaiting final judgment. Peter uses Noah as a prime example of someone who overcame this negative world and preached a positive message. "Noah is called a 'preacher of righteousness' (2 Pe. 2:5). He preached God's truth for 120 years (Gen. 6:3), and during that time was certainly laughed at and opposed. Jesus promised that, before His return, the world would become like the 'days of Noah' "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man." Mt. 24:37-39

Why does Peter tell us this? So that we will be encouraged by the fact that wherever we go, whenever we speak up for Christ, we can be confident that Christ will preach through us. We are the media for His message of salvation and judgment. Jesus is the messenger of salvation and...

Secondly, **Jesus is the means of salvation.** Here Peter uses symbols to explain some deeper essential truths. "The Flood pictures death, burial, and resurrection. The waters buried the earth in judgment, but they also lifted Noah and his family up to safety. The early church saw in the ark a picture of salvation. Noah and his family were saved by faith because they believed God and entered into the ark of safety. So sinners are saved by faith when they trust Christ and become one with Him." Wiersbe, p. 95

Does a person need to be baptized to be saved? Verse 21 says, “Baptism that now saves you.” This is a good example of why context is so important. He goes on to clarify that he is not talking about an external physical act (the removal of dirt from the body) but an internal transaction (the appeal to God for a good conscience). Baptism is an external symbol of an internal process in which I become conscious of my sin and of my need for a Savior. The act of baptism is a public proclamation stating that we are conscious of sin and conscious of our need for a Savior. We have responded to God’s call to repentance and we have gotten on the boat.

I want to challenge you this morning to be a game changer.

1. Don’t forsake the assembling of yourselves with people who care for one another.
2. Be a blessing machine. Speak well of people. We learned it as kids, if you can’t say something good about someone, don’t say anything at all.
3. The holidays are upon us so let’s pray that God would arrange some conversations that would allow us to give a reason for the hope that is within us.
4. Do good from a clear conscience. “I don’t know any needy people.” Then do some research. We find the time to research recipes and restaurants and search for good deals on Christmas presents. Take some time to find out where the needs are in our community.
5. Remember Jesus Christ. Living as a game changer begins by saying “yes” to Jesus. “Setting ourselves apart from the world so that we might reach the world is not so much a series of no’s as much as it is an immense YES to Christ and all He gives.” Kent Hughes, *Set Apart*, p. 22.

He “died for our sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God.” All He asks is that we bring others to Him. Because Jesus is a game changer.