

Why Should I? 1 Peter 3:13-22

Introduction

On October 28, 1949 a recent graduate of Wheaton College posted this note in his daily journal:

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.
(Jim Elliot)

His name was Jim Elliot.

A few months later, in early 1950, a former missionary to Ecuador told Elliot about the "Auca" Indian tribe, a small and fierce unreached people in the jungle. Elliot sensed a call from the Lord to reach this people for Christ. He began his preparations, and five years later, on January 3, 1955, he and four other missionaries landed their small airplane on a sandy strip of land about four miles from the main Aucan village.

Five days later, on January 8, 1955, these missionaries were speared to death by the very people they had come to serve. If you want to know more about his story, I refer you to a nice video titled "End of the Spear."

Elliot and his team were not the first, nor would they be the last people to lose their lives as they attempted to share their faith. It continues to happen even today, all across our world.

Open Doors is one of many organizations that serve the persecuted church worldwide. They estimate that:

- 322 Christians are killed for their faith every month
- 214 churches and Christian properties are destroyed every month
- 772 forms of violence (beatings, kidnappings, rape, arrest, etc.) are committed against Christians every month

When the Apostle Peter wrote these words in our Epistle lesson for the day, his readers were facing intense persecution for their faith. And many of them were starting to wonder if it was worth it.

"Persecution" is one of those words I personally handle with care, because in light of what I see and read in the Scriptures and in places like "Open Doors" much of what I see happening to me and around me is more like a "hassle" than outright persecution.

- Some people will disagree with me on that, and it's OK.
- Either way it raises a question that is every bit as relevant for Christians today as it was for the Christians who first read Peter's letter:

Why should I?

This month I am asking “Why” questions in my sermons. Last week was “Why Am I?” Today the question is “Why should I?” Why should I follow Jesus if it leads me on a path of hassle or persecution.

It is the very question Peter was addressing in this reading:

But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” (1 Peter 3:14)

If someone were to say to you:

You are always inviting me to church. You tell me I need to read my Bible. You witness to me. You tell me you are praying for me, so I know you want me to become a Christian. But why? Why should I follow Jesus?

How do you respond? In fact, let me turn the tables on you. Why do YOU follow Jesus?

To answer that “why” question, I am going to take you into our reading today from the Gospel of John and show you three reasons:

REASON #1: I RECEIVE AN ADVOCATE

Look at verse 16:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **advocate** to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. (John 14:16-17)

“Advocate” is one of the most difficult words in the Bible to translate, because no English word is a great match for it.

- Depending on your translation, Jesus is giving a helper, a comforter, a friend, a counselor or a companion.

The Greek word is *parakletos*. It means “someone who comes along beside for the journey.”

When we follow Jesus, we are given an “alongsider.” Pick whatever translation is most meaningful to you. The job of the Holy Spirit is to be ever-present in your life no matter what happens to you.

God never intended for His people to face the struggles of life alone.

But the Advocate is not there for everyone. The text makes it clear that this is a gift for Christians only. Put verse 15 with verse 16:

If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. (John 14:15-17)

Who gets the advocate? Those who follow Jesus.

You know that from your own personal experience. Have you ever said:

I don't know how people get through this without Jesus.

I've heard from many of you when someone you love dies, or you are facing a major surgery, or a family crisis.

Why should you follow Jesus? Because you are never alone. No matter what happens, good or bad. God through the Holy Spirit is always there alongside you.

- That in itself is reason enough. But WAIT ... there's more!

REASON #2: I GAIN LIFE

Look at verse 19:

Because I live, you also will live. (John 14:19).

When you follow Jesus, you live.

One of the most confusing passages in the Bible is a text that often gets read at funerals. It is where Jesus is standing outside the grave of His friend Lazarus. The text reads:

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. (John 11:25-26)

A few years ago, The Indianapolis Star published a letter that had been written by the Indiana Department of Social Services to a person who had recently died. It read as follows:

Dear Sir. This letter will notify you that your food stamps will be discontinued effective March 1992 because we received notice that you passed away. May God bless you. You may reapply if there is a change in your circumstances.

When the Bible talks about the "life" we receive as a part of following Jesus, it speaks of two things.

First is eternal life. Those who follow Jesus are promised a home in heaven when their time on earth is done. I don't know what that will look like, and frankly I don't much care. As long as I am there, I will be happy.

- That eternal life begins the moment I start following Jesus. One day you may well attend my funeral, but when you see me in that casket, remember this: I'm still alive.

Second, has to do with the quality of life. Jesus calls it “maximum life.”

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

In Christ, life has meaning and purpose. Without Christ, you can't really live.

- When you follow Jesus, there is new vitality, a super-abundance of life that comes with it.
- Why should you follow Jesus? Because it is only in Him that life becomes worth living.

REASON #3: I AM LOVED

Look at verse 21:

The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them. (John 14:21)

Gospel musician Bill Gaither was once asked: “Apart from the Psalms, what are the greatest Christian music lyrics ever written?” Without hesitation, Gaither sang:

Love of God":
The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell.
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled,
And pardoned from his sin.

When hoary time shall pass away,
And earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,
When men who here refuse to pray,
On rocks and hills and mountains call,
God's love so sure, shall still endure,
All measureless and strong;
Redeeming grace to Adam's race—
The saints' and angels' song.

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure—
The saints' and angels' song.

When you follow Jesus, that love is yours. What better reason could there be?

APPLICATION

An anonymous writer once wrote:

Have you ever messed up in life? I sure have! But one phrase brings me comfort: "I may make mistakes, but at least I got the most important thing right; I follow Jesus Christ as my Savior!"

When I first gave my life to Christ, I wasn't sure what to expect. I just knew I was tired of running and pretending. I needed peace and purpose, but I didn't know where to find them. Over time, I discovered that following Jesus was not about religion. It was about relationship.

Every reason I needed to keep going was found in Him. He has never failed me.

We follow Jesus because He is the way, the truth, and the life. Through Him we receive forgiveness, new identity, purpose, and eternal life. Following Him brings peace the world cannot give and freedom the world cannot take away. He offers healing, purpose, and eternal hope.

If you would like to know more about following Jesus, please ask me.

Amen.