

Living The Christian Life

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[0 : 00] Let's share in our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence.! May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher,! and your great glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

If you type the word hope into a Google image search, this is one of the first pictures to come up. Now some of you might be a bit mystified by that, but a lot of you, let's have a vote. Who knows where that's from? Good. Andrea was expecting that.

Anyone not sure? Oh, that's right. Some people are saying I'm staying out of this one. Well, this is of course the very early on scene in the first Star Wars film, confusingly called number one. Four? My sons will be disgraced at me for not remembering that. I'm confused, but it's the first one they made. I don't know. But anyway, it's called A New Hope.

[1 : 11] And hope is where Peter starts in our passage this morning, as we have had read this morning. He started talking about hope right at the beginning of chapter one, when he said that God had caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And then he continues here by telling us what we can set our hopes on. We read in verse 13. Peter's telling his readers that their hope is set on the promises of God.

When he says the revelation of Christ, he's talking about the return of Jesus, which we see Jesus promising in lots of places throughout the Gospels.

So our hope is on God keeping his promises, and he is a God, as we know, who keeps his promises. And as we read through the Bible, we come across this phrase, or something like it again and again, And here in Paul's second letter to Timothy, in chapter two, verse 13, we get this great description of God as a promise-keeping God.

If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. It's part of God's essential nature that he keeps his promises.

[2 : 42] It's not a choice that he makes in every situation, and then decides that on this occasion he's going to keep his promises. God can't deny himself, so he always acts according to his own nature.

But how then are we to react to this hope in God's promises? If we go back to the start of this verse, Peter says, Prepare your minds for action, being sober-minded.

Now I've gone too far. There you are. The older translation of this phrase uses the phrase, sort of this verse, uses the phrase, Gird up the loins of your mind.

And that's where we get this strangely dressed guy. So that's kind of a strange thing to our ears, gird up your loins, but you may have been familiar with it. But when someone's dressed in a robe like they tended to wear in that climate, if they want to run or engage in strenuous activity, they had to prepare themselves by tucking up the robe into their belt so that they were ready to go.

Maybe not very dignified, but very practical anyway. And Peter's not given advice on how to dress, of course, but on how to prepare ourselves to live as people who have this hope in God's promises.

[3 : 59] Because it's an active hope, not passive. It calls to mind the preparedness God commanded for his people on the night of the Passover, just before they fled from Egypt.

Pack your bags, get your shoes on, eat your meal with your staff in your hand, and be ready when the time for action comes. God does not call us in our Christian lives to believe, then sit back and wait.

We're called to do the work he's given us, his church and its work that has its foundation, has its foundation, our hope in the promises of God. And this is what Peter's talking about in the next couple of verses.

How do we relate to the world? As obedient children, then, we're not to be conformed to the passions of our former ignorance. Instead, we're to be holy in all our conduct. Be holy, for I am holy. Now, we've been made holy by Jesus' sacrifice, set apart by the Holy Spirit, as verse 2 of this chapter reminds us, for the sprinkling of his blood, which is, of course, a reference to Jesus' death on the cross.

[5 : 08] How we conduct ourselves in this world reveals who we are dedicated to. Now, when you see someone walking down the street on a Saturday, and they're wearing a certain color of scarf, you can just insert your favorite color of scarf in your mind here, you know which team they follow, because the scarf makes it obvious.

And when someone wears a T-shirt showing their favorite group or band, we know who they follow because they show us. And even more so, when a football fan or a music fan gets a tattoo of their favorite, we know that they are really dedicated.

Permanent reminder and a statement of their dedication. Now, Israel had their ceremonies, their rituals, and so on, to show their faithfulness and obedience to the God that had brought them up out of Egypt and made them his own people to be a light to the nations.

But for us, these practices no longer apply. We've turned from sin, submitted ourselves to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We are a people who belong to God, marked off and separate from the world by the way we live.

At least that's what Peter's telling his readers and us as inheritors of these instructions. But the reality is, very often, when we read a line like, be holy for I am holy, we don't feel anywhere near it.

[6 : 32] And what's more, we don't really know how we could ever get there. But we know there are followers of Jesus that we can look at and we can say, yes, that person is holy.

Now this, for example, is a magnificently named Smith Wigglesworth who were ministered all over the world in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

He was said to be so holy that people who spent time in his presence were overcome with a sense of their sin and pleaded with him to lead them to Jesus. Anyone on a train with Smith had no chance.

But there's a tremendous, and his was a tremendous ministry. I would not like to be compared to him because I know how short, how far short I would fall. If Smith is the standard, then most of us are in trouble.

But perhaps the clue to helping us is right at the start of verse 14. As obedient children, teaching a child how to do something takes time.

[7 : 33] Now you may remember when you learned to ride a bike or you may have taught your own children or niece or nephew or someone how to do it. And you can talk about it as much as you like.

And of course, talking about it is a good idea. Explaining what you're going to do, explaining what they should do. But in the end, the only really way to learn how to ride a bike is to get on and start pedaling.

And I doubt if anyone on their first try at bike riding, maybe in a park or along your street, did a very good job. You're very wobbly. You swerve around because it's hard to concentrate on pedaling and steering at the same time.

You lack confidence. You want to get off or maybe you fall off, hopefully if you're on the grass. But then with perseverance or maybe because your parents forced you against your will, you keep going and suddenly you get your balance and off you go.

You can ride a bike. What an achievement. And then the more you ride it, the better you get and the more confident you become. When we read be holy for I am holy, it's not like switching on the light.

[8 : 38] We don't just decide to be holy and that's it. But through obedience and perseverance with the help of the Holy Spirit hanging on to us as we wobble along in our walk with God, we become more and more holy.

And I don't think we always go in one direction either. Sometimes we go forward but sometimes we go backwards and sometimes we stand still. But we have this great advantage. God wants us to be more like Him.

He's on our side on this. He's done everything we need and He's beside us willing us on, forgiving our mistakes, showing patience when we're slow and rejoicing with us when we draw closer to Him. This is the meaning of this often repeated phrase describing God in the Old Testament found here in Exodus 34. Wonderful verse as you read through the Old Testament it comes up again and

again.

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Now in the next few verses Peter introduces the subject of redemption.

[9 : 47] First of all in verse 17 he's reminding them who God is. He's your Father who judges impartially but still judges. so conduct yourselves with fear.

Not fear as in being scared of God because that goes against what we just said about God but fear as in reverent respect. One of the first things we read in the book of Proverbs in chapter 1 verse 7 the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

In other words it's wise to fear God in that we keep in mind who He is and who we are. But then in verse 18 to 19 we come to redemption.

Knowing that you are transformed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers not with perishable things such as silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Now we're all probably familiar with the concept of redemption. When Peter was writing one of the things that people would have thought on hearing this word was the freeing of a slave.

[10 : 56] A person as we know was owned by another person and I read recently that the Roman Empire there were up to one million slaves which is a lot considering how many actual Romans there were.

And as an aside it's right to point out that in our world today there are estimated 46 million slaves in forced labour or sexual exploitation and including over 130,000 in the UK.

And it's good for us to pray and support organisations like Tear Fund who have made it their goal to fight against this terrible evil and support those they're able to rescue.

So that's just a little aside mentioning that it's good for us to think about these things. But in Peter's time when a slave was freed and by someone else it was called being redeemed or ransomed.

And depending on the individual it might come at great cost. That's the background Peter expected his readers to understand when he said they were ransomed from the futile ways inherited by their forefathers.

[12 : 03] What he means by that is the sin that those before us committed and the sins that we also commit. Now silver and gold are exactly what it would take to ransom a slave.

But Peter makes it clear that they are of no value in our redemption from the sin that separates us from God. This is the second time in the letter and in this chapter that Peter has reminded them of the things that the world attaches great value to have to have no value compared to what God offers us through Jesus.

Earlier he reminded them that the trials they faced were more precious than gold because gold perishes but our relationship with God is eternal.

Here he's dismissive of silver and gold as things which have value compared to Jesus' blood. No one none of us anyway can pay the price to redeem a soul from death.

Only God can redeem his people. We can't redeem ourselves. All we could offer at best is corruptible silver or gold and we've already seen that they have no value here because it's not money but a life that must be given to ransom our lives.

[13 : 19] That life was Jesus. He paid with his blood. He was God's lamb of sacrifice, the chosen and willing servant of the Lord who bore our sins on the tree.

Peter wrote to those people who read his letters what he himself had heard Jesus say as we read in Mark 10 45 for even the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to be given to give his life as a ransom for many and nothing of what we have been talking about here can we do by ourselves.

Everything that's been done to redeem us from our separation from God was done because or sorry wasn't because God owed us a favor or because he was obligated by some debt.

The only obligation God has as we've already seen is to his own character as a loving creator who made us to know him and love him. God rescued us through Jesus because we could not rescue ourselves in a thousand years of trying and so the word became flesh and dwelt among us and in him was life as we read in John chapter 1.

So now we come to ask what should our response be? Peter mentions the word obedience at the start of our passage and he mentions it again in verse 22. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

[14 : 52] Love one another that sounds familiar to us and Peter here again is hearing the Lord Jesus speak and we find that in John 13 verse 34 and 35 a new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you you are also to love one another by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another.

That's how Jesus told his disciples that they should be recognized by their love for each other and Peter is telling his readers that this is their response to all God has done for them love one another. But Peter doesn't leave it there he adds the word earnestly go back to that one now we can understand that this means we should be honest in our love not being lip service but loving with all our heart I don't know about you I can maybe manage that with a small number of people but loving everyone like that is well beyond me but just as we start to think about how far short we follow this standard how far short this standard we're following let me add that the word earnestly in this verse as I read is the same word used of Jesus when he was praying in the garden of Gethsemane and now it's become a whole new level of difficult Jesus prayed so earnestly!

in that garden that his sweat came out like drops of blood this is the kind of love that will allow us to put away all malice and deceit and hypocrisy and slander as we see in verse 2 of chapter 2 I think I've lost my way with my slides a bit and this is the sort of love Jesus showed us in his hour of suffering and separation from the Father were upon him and now Peter is saying to us love one another earnestly and I don't know if that sounds possible to you it doesn't sound very possible for me to love one another in the same earnestness that Jesus used in praying in the garden but verse 2 does give us some hope just like being holy is not achieved by switching on a light neither is loving others as Jesus loved us like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up in salvation if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good and of course we know that babies can do very little for themselves they're mostly noisy and quite smelly sometimes but as they grow they get better and more able to do things and we are the same but that doesn't let us off the hook we might be babies in some respects in our walk with God but we need to grow in our knowledge grow in our holiness and grow in our love for one another not by our own efforts thankfully but by the work of the Holy Spirit encouraging us challenging us loving us and helping us to be the person

God wants us to be Peter's writing to people here who have been scattered because of persecution and living like exiles away from where they call home but they were still called to live as obedient children and live holy lives and love each other in a way that people would see the difference in them from everyone around them that's the same call for us just like them we are succeed and fail and move forward in the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus is the hope for our world and we are who he has chosen to share that hope with others so let's pray and trust and obey and see God working in us and through us let's pray together Lord we're so conscious that often we fall short of what you would want us to do our desire is to follow you and obey all you ask of us so we pray that you will strengthen us and build us up through your Holy Spirit so that we can be a witness to your love in Jesus name

[18 : 53] Amen