

# Hope For Our Idiot Culture

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[ 0 : 00 ] Glorious summer morning, when the whole of your creation urges our hearts to sing your praise. Still there is abiding in our hearts and in our society, a sickness unto death that defies all the glory of your creation.

So grant that we who are in the grips of the process of sin and law and death may breathe deeply of your life-giving Spirit.

As we study and open our hearts and minds to your word, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. And I'd like you to turn to 1 Peter 1, verse 13.

It's on page 216 of your pew Bible. It says, It says, Gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. But as he who has called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.

[ 1 : 51 ] Since it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. If people hang around horses a lot, you can tell by the smell.

If people get very involved in religion, you can tell by the stink.

Because religion, I think, stinks. And I mean that in the classical sense of the word, not just... But this says to be holy.

And the holiness of God, we're told, is to some people the stench of death.

And the holiness of God, we're told, is to some people the stench of death. But to others, it is the glorious aroma of victory. And so our association with God should mean that we have about us the aroma of holiness by long association with him.

[ 3 : 12 ] And that's why it says, be holy, for I am holy. That's where you're living, out of that relationship. In the same way someone devoted to horses lives out of that relationship.

So it's this relationship to God I've always been worried by. I don't like the smell of churches.

They're closed most of the week. And when you come into them, they have a kind of stale, saintly smell. Which isn't very saintly. It's just not very nice.

And so much of religion is, well, it stinks in the eyes of our world. And because we go to church, or because we're involved in church and associated with religion, we stink for the most part in the eyes of the people among whom we live.

But it's important that the place we live is in relationship to God. And the result of living in that relationship is that people will begin to recognize the aroma of holiness about the nature and character of God himself.

[ 4 : 36 ] And that's, I think, one way, at least metaphorically, of thinking of what it means to be holy, even as I am holy. Then you go back to the first verses of that passage, which talk about, verse 13, gird up your minds and be sober, and set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And the one word that I'd like to take out of that verse is the word, be sober. And it's the opposite of being drunk.

And the way you get drunk is to drink too much of something. And then you lose your sense of responsibility, and you lose some control of your tongue and of your behavior.

And you act not out of who you are, but out of the influence of the alcohol that's in you. And you are not yourself.

And so it says to be sober. Now, this week in the Manchester Guardian, our culture is described by one of the reporters of the great Watergate story as being an idiot culture.

[ 6 : 17 ] And he says we are an idiot culture because of the failure of the media to confront us with the reality of the circumstances in which we live.

And because, in effect, we live mostly out of the idiot box, we become an idiot culture that is transported by the latest horror, the latest pornographic story, the latest fall from honor of one of the leading citizens of our world.

And that's what the media does to us. It produces this idiocy. And he uses as the example of this that on that very day in our history, when the Allied powers gave consent to the reunification of Germany, which was a dreadful prospect 50 years ago, when the Allied powers gave consent to that, when Nelson Mandela on the same day went and visited Soweto, where the terrible massacre had taken place, that the media was totally involved in the breakdown of the marriage of Donald Trump and that's why he says we are an idiot culture, that we are, our fascination and attraction is for entirely the wrong thing.

We are drunk with the wine of our idiot culture, which we consume in great quantities. And I've told some of you of J.K. Galbraith's description of our society as the culture of contentment.

And because no issues ever cross our mind, and because we use the television to see the horror of the way other people live, and it stirs up in us a contentment for the way we live, then we are drinking the wine of this contentment, which stupefies us to the reality of the world in which we live.

[ 8 : 48 ] And this week we are having a seminar for some people all day Friday on a book called The Humiliation of the Word.

And that the Word by which God has communicated himself to us, essentially, has now been replaced by fast-formed images so that our minds are not involved.

We are entertained with images. And even though a picture is worth a thousand words, it means that we can lie a lot faster than we used to be able to.

And that's what happens. So you have that background of our insobriety, that we are drunk with the wine of the New Age.

We are drunk with the idiot culture that we are immersed in. We are stupefied by the culture of contentment.

[ 9 : 52 ] And you just need that as a kind of background. Contentment, the humiliation of the Word, the idiot culture, that's the background. Against that background, look at 1 Peter 1.13.

And what does it say? It says, Be sober. It says, Gird up your minds. And what that means is that all the sort of paraphernalia of these cultures that cripple us from doing anything or thinking anything or being anything or going anywhere with our lives, we're to strip that aside so we can see what the reason for our life is.

And then it goes on and tells us what the reason for our life is. Look at the verse. You'll see it right there in front of you. It's the grace.

It's the grace. It's the grace. The grace means a gift. the grace. The grace means a gift.

I mean, that's something that's given to us completely freely, and it says, set your hope upon the gift that is to be ours. Put your weight fully on the gift of grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[ 11 : 28 ] That's what you're to do. That's what we're to do. That's what we're here for, is to set our minds to be sober, to put our minds, to set our hope fully upon the grace that is to be revealed at the coming of Jesus Christ.

So we are to be a very forward-looking people, and through the shroud and fog of the culture of contentment, and through the shroud and fog of the idiot culture to which we belong, and beyond the images which we are confronted with by the thousands every day, beyond those, we are to see the grace that is coming at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Christ. Now, do you know what that means? It means that the reason that we are here today is because God has given us a gift.

God has done something for us which belongs to us. Most people, and examine your own hearts when you are asked to give for the gift day today, most people think that Christian faith is largely our giving something, our giving our prayers, our giving our worship, our giving our time, our giving our service, our giving all those things, that that's what Christian faith is all about.

That's what religion is all about. That's what ministers are all about. They stand here and persuade you to give and give and give until you say, I'm not going to give anymore. But that's not what we're here for.

[ 13 : 23 ] What we're here for, what the function of the church is, what we as a community are to bear witness to in the world in which we live, within the culture, the idiot culture, within the culture of contentment, within the culture in which the word has been humiliated in terms of the image.

within that, we are to hold on to the hope that is ours in the grace. That's what it says. The grace that is coming to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

You see, that's, God has given us that and we hold on to it in hope. And that's what our faith is all about. That's why we submit to the humiliation of being religion that stinks in the nostrils of our culture.

Because God has given us something. Something of inestimable value. Something that you could never earn. God has given us this.

And the fact that he has given it to us in Jesus Christ and that the whole of it will be made apparent to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ is what our faith is all about.

[14:47] You see, when it says, this grace, it means this thing that God has given us. You see, at the very point in our lives where we could quite justifiably expect and most people deep in the pit of their stomachs anticipate that there will come a time when the dread knock will come at the door and the wrath of God will be visited on us and we will stand under condemnation justly deserved.

That's the fearful anticipation that puts a cold hand on our hearts. But that's not what belongs to us. What belongs to us is that we set our hope fully upon the grace that is coming to manifest the love and mercy of God towards us.

And that's coming in the revelation of Jesus Christ. You see, there has been a revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

and God has revealed himself in his terrible humiliation. As God is stretched naked on a cross and lifted up in front of us that we might see him and know that is God.

But that same God who has revealed himself in this profound humiliation will also reveal himself in his glory when every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and every knee shall bow and all the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ.

[16:43] And that's the hope we live in. your hope may be disappointed by illness, by economic circumstances, by the loss of a job, by the failure of a marriage.

There's a million things that might have destroyed the hope that you had but nothing can touch this hope. Nothing can rob you of it.

This belongs to you and you can put your full weight on it. The hope of the grace that is coming at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And so it says as obedient children what it means by that is that well look at the rest of the verse.

As obedient children don't be conformed to the passion of your former ignorance. And that's the way we live. We live by our passions and our passions are informed by our ignorance.

[17:50] We don't understand them and we become the slaves of our passions. And we think that the whole of our life is the satisfaction of our most profound passionate desires.

And that's the way we live our life. And that's the way we are encouraged to live our lives. And that's the way we are constantly being stirred. So that what Peter calls in this the former ignorance, the passions of our former ignorance, all those are being stirred and stirred and stirred and stirred and create a great dissatisfaction in us.

And when money and wealth and opportunity and affluence and all the things give us the opportunity to indulge those passions, we cry in triumph and say, this is what life is all about, to give ourselves to the passions of our former ignorance.

But you can't do that anymore. And the reason you can't do it is very practical. that is that you are not here to be the slave of your passions.

That's not what your life is about. What your life is about is in the same verse, obedient children.

That is, instead of being slaves to our former ignorant passions, we are now to be those who choose by our lives to be obedient to Jesus Christ.

[19:34] And that word obedient means that we are listening for him. We don't have to listen very hard for the stirring of our passions, which draw us into slavery.

But we have to listen with great sensitivity as obedient children waiting for the command of the Lord to come to you in the circumstances of your life and show you what it means to be obedient to him in this moment, in this hour, in this day.

And you're, so that you see, in the light of what God has given us, the grace, the hope of the grace that is to be revealed in Jesus Christ, what he has given us means that in the meantime, during the course of our earthly pilgrimage, it's not to have the passions of our gut stirred to the point where we become enslaved by him, it's to be able to listen to he who is Lord, so that we might obey him.

We're not obedient children, one commentator points out, we are in a sense, we are different than that. We are those who are looking for the place of obedience.

We are those who are looking for what the obedience of faith means in our lives right now. So, that's what this verse says, it's a profound verse.

[ 21 : 25 ] Do you remember, I don't, I mean, you remember it as well as I do, so I just want to stir your memories as I dredge out mine, but you remember the resistance movement in, for instance, France or Denmark during the war?

An alien power had come in, taken control of the country, and when the war was all over, you either belonged to the resistance or you were among the collaborators.

And when this verse says to you, as obedient children, do not be conformed, it says, you belong to the resistance movement.

You are not to collaborate with the cultures of the society that you belong to. you are to listen to know what you have to do in obedience to him who is coming, who is Lord.

And that's how you're to live your lives. And for year after year, the resistance fighters fought on, passing by secret messages and codes the commands of things that needed to be done in order to resist the thralldom to the enemy that had taken possession of their country.

[ 22 : 45 ] And that's what the Christian church is for. You see, this verse, set your minds, gird up your minds, is repeated in chapter five when it says, be alert because your enemy, like a roaring lion, lion, is seeking whom he may devour.

And when we were in Africa, we were told the lovely story. You can drive out in these cars, out into the game reserves, and there half a dozen lions are lying sleepily on the grass, and you feel you could reach out and scratch their ears.

They look so passive. And the story is told to keep us in check of one keen man with his video camera who, seeing them, stepped out and was killed in minutes.

And his wife was there watching it. And I tell you that I watch the ravenous culture to which we belong in this West Coast City.

And I see people being eaten alive all the time. And recognize the danger. And as parents, you can watch your children being eaten alive.

[ 24 : 24 ] Because there is a real enemy. And he has real power to destroy. And your heart can't but break when you see the ravages of that enemy.

And the alternative is stated very clearly here. This demands acute sobriety. Gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope upon the grace that is coming to you with the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And don't be the slave of your passion but the servant of your Lord who has full right to command the whole of your life.

life. Don't be taken over. Don't be conformed to being a collaborator with the enemy.

You belong to the resistance movement. And you resist all that. The enemy would detract from the kingdom which must ultimately belong to our God and to his Christ.

[ 25 : 54 ] That's who we are. That's who we are as a congregation. It's what our function is. That's what we are to put our weight fully on. The hope that belongs to us in a culture of despair and hopelessness where the economy is wrong, education has gone wrong, medicine has gone wrong, sexuality is confused.

All those things have gone wrong. The whole constitution of our country has gone wrong. And the clear call comes to us as a witnessing community to gird up our mind and to set our hope fully upon not the wrath of God that must inevitably come, but on the grace of God which it is God's deepest concern to reveal to a world which he has loved and given his son to die for so that we might have hope.

hope is to be focused on Christ's coming in glory and revealing himself in majesty and in power.

Amen. Amen. again. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[ 27 : 46 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Let us kneel to pray. As you kneel, would you take your wine-colored prayer book and turn to page 54.

We will be using one of the prayers there to close. Let us pray. Amen. Father, we come to you this morning to exercise our hearts and minds in our collective ministry of praise and petition.

We come to the throne of your eternal majesty as your servants, anxious both to know your will and then knowing your will to do it. Yet we come not only as your servants, but more importantly as your children, your offspring, we come to the throne of your children, your children, and your children, your children, and your children.

[ 30 : 37 ] We come to the throne of God's sake. For that new nature given to us. We can eagerly anticipate the future before us because we know that all history will be consummated in the future revelation of the grace that is in Jesus Christ.

thus having this hope we pray for the world which you have created we pray that we might be prepared for action and not settle for the comfortable paralysis of inaction we think of the world about us we think of the famine that is ravaging southern Africa we pray for the efforts to relieve that situation provide emergency aid we pray for your church in that area that it might be strong in its response of compassion we pray as well for St. John's in our responsibility towards this world that we might be instructed and guided as to our responsibility in giving leadership in offering the gospel to the ends of the earth and in that regard we pray for those who have gone out from this congregation that you would be with them by your spirit strengthening and encouraging them we pray for our nation we pray for the negotiations currently being undertaken to design a new constitution we pray that our country might know continued unity we pray in particular for our prime minister for our minister and his cabinet for our premier and the members of his cabinet that they might be instructed in how to lead and guide us in paths of righteousness and justice we pray as well for our city for the mayor and the councillors that they too might see to the welfare of the whole community we pray for Christians involved in the governance of this city that you would give them wisdom and insight and courage to stand up for what they believe to be true and just and fair and now Father we pray for ourselves for this community of believers we pray for our national leadership at the National Synod beginning this week we pray for the clergy of this parish and staff of this church they might be encouraged and strengthened to serve you and to serve the parishioners in this congregation we pray as well for our own ministry the ministry of each member of this congregation as we seek to serve you in our professional life or in our schools on our jobs or in our homes that in all these things our lives may be so winsome with the aroma of Christ that people may inquire of us what makes our life different what gives us hope and meaning and an ability to act and think in a confusing and stupefied culture we would pray for those in our congregation who are facing bereavement and suffering and together we would pray the prayer for those in anxiety on page 54 in our prayer book together almighty God who art afflicted in the afflictions of thy people regard with thy tender compassion those in anxiety and distress bear their sorrows and their cares supply all their manifold needs and help both them and us to put our whole trust and confidence in thee through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen Amen