



Pursuing Christ in a Pagan World

Series: Pursuing Christ in a Pagan World

1 Peter 3:13-22 (13-16)

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As we look at this text from Peter this morning, if you have been paying attention as we have been going through this letter, you may notice that we are on familiar terrain. The subject matter of these verses is themes that we have touched on in other places in this letter. Peter tells us: We are to be zealous for what is good and righteous -- (1Pe 1:14-16) We are to honor Christ as Lord -- (1Pe 1:3) Christ must be our cornerstone. We are to live in a manner that makes accusations against our character a lie -- (1Pe 2:12, 15) Much of what Peter says in verses 13-16 is familiar ground, but what is new in this text is this: the need for us as Christians to be ready to give a public defense of our hope in Christ; a defense to be given with humility, in the fear of the Lord, and backed up by a consistently righteous life that makes unbelievers wonder at the reason for our hope in the first place and gives us an opportunity to definitively proclaim to them the gospel. So let's understand the flow of Peter's thought this morning and let's begin with:

1) An encouragement to fearless and faithful pursuit of Christ. (v. 13-15a) Peter starts by saying: Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? Now what does Peter mean by this? Certainly he does not mean that if we live a righteous and faithful and godly and Christ-pursuing life that everyone will like us and no-one will seek to do us harm, that cannot be his point, it goes against one of the main themes of this letter -- that God has made His light to shine upon our hearts so that we might see and savor the glory of Christ our Savior by faith and in light of our hope, be willing to suffer persecution, affliction, mockery, derision, hatred, rejection – whatever faith in Christ requires. Trial, difficulty and suffering are a part of following Christ in this fallen world. Scripture repeatedly reminds us of this, so that is not what Peter is saying here.

What he is saying is this: As one who is Christ's, as one who is zealous for what is good, as one who is zealous for righteousness, as one who desires to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God(Col 1:10), as one who has been redeemed by the blood of Christ and made the child of the Living God – we are eternally beyond harm regardless of what man may do to us. We are

forever beyond the harmful reach of Satan, the harmful reach of His demons, the harmful reach of ungodly men and women. Peter is encouraging us by emphasizing, by driving home, the glorious truth that no amount of persecution, no amount of hatred for Christ's sake can harm our souls. Whatever may come against us, it can never injure us in the ultimate sense. Persecution, whatever form it may take, cannot ever jeopardize our election, cannot touch our standing with God, cannot endanger the divine favor shown to us in Christ. What did Peter tell us last week? For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. The face of God's blessing has been turned toward us. (Rom 8:31-33) There is no-one who can truly harm us because the real harm, the eternal harm, the divine wrath that is reserved for all unrepentant sinners – that eternal harm has been fully extinguished, having been poured upon the head of Christ, the holy Lamb of God and so we are freed from the fear of any true harm. With the Psalmist we can say: (Psa 18:2-3) In the midst of suffering, in the midst of trial, God promises never to leave nor to forsake us. (Rom 8:35-39) He will not leave or forsake us but will give sufficient grace in every case to those that are His.

In fact, Peter goes so far as to say: But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Where would Peter get that idea? Jesus! (Mat 5:10-12) When we find ourselves persecuted for the sake of Christ, our faithful following of Him and our testimony for Him, He promises that our future awards will be great and in this confident expectation we can rejoice and worship and be thankful. Paul did this. Writing of the opposition that He encountered for preaching the gospel, he tells Timothy at the end of his second letter to him: (2Ti 4:14-18) If God is with us we have nothing to fear. And what is it that takes away that fear? What is it that extinguishes fear? Peter tells us. He writes: Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy. Do not be afraid, but in your hearts honor Christ as holy or it can be translated: sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts; in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord; or in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. It is this, Peter says, that extinguishes fear in our hearts.

What does Peter mean? To honor Christ as holy, to sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts means to set Him apart as the greatest and most glorious being in the universe; to set Him apart as the one most worthy of adoration, praise, and humble obedience and submission; to honor Him as one without peer, without comparison or rival. It is to put Christ in a category completely His own, to give Him the highest place, the exalted place; to regard Him as the soul's utmost treasure; to esteem, honor, and love Him above all else; to regard Him as your soul's glory, joy and crown; it is to honor Him with ultimate, faithful obedience; to worship Him gladly and only; it is to live to please Him and to glorify Him; it is to venerate and adore Him above all others – it is all these things...

But particularly, it is to reverence His Lordship and His Sovereign rule over everything. That is what Peter means for us to see here. That is why he quotes here from Isaiah 8. In that context, the faithless King of Judah, Ahaz, had allied himself with the pagans of Assyria to ward off an invasion from Israel and Syria. Because Isaiah opposed a godless alliance with these pagans, he was being accused of conspiracy against the king. God's Word comes to him saying: (Isa 8:12-13) Notice that Peter has no hesitation in identifying the Lord of Hosts with Jesus Christ. More than that, he does it in a passage that calls do total devotion to the Lord in all of His transcendent glory, in a passage which calls for fear – for reverence and awe at God's sovereign power. Peter is telling us to stand in awe of His Lordship over the universe, to bow before His sovereign rule. Now here is the key, make the connection -- to break the choking grip of the fear of man we must confess Christ's Lordship with more than mental agreement. We must confess it with our heart. At the very center of our souls there can be only one Lord and that one Lord is Christ. We cannot hold to this truth theoretically, it must master us. Too often we allow other masters to invade our hearts, to claim superiority over us. Our own selfish desires, the opinion of other people, the wisdom of the age, the pressures of the circumstances we find ourselves in, the fear of death, the fear of failure, the fear of the future – all of them and more seek to enslave us, and unless Christ is set apart in our hearts as holy, set apart as Lord we will find ourselves under the false mastery of these tinhorn dictators as they make us to be tossed to and fro. But beloved, if we set Christ apart as only Lord in our hearts, we will find freedom from them all, especially from the fear of man and the fear of death – in submission to His Lordship all other masters flee.

The way to counter fear is to replace it with a greater fear. The fear of the Lord conquers every other fear. And so in our hearts, we are to honor Christ the Lord as holy. He is to reign in us, in our hearts, in the center of our being – that is meaning of heart. He is to rule over our intellect, knowledge, thinking and wisdom, over our emotions, over our will, over our personality. In the very center of our life there is to be one Lord. I love the words of the Psalmist in this regard: The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? (Psa 118:6) He does not say that he will never face suffering, but he does say that he will not fear. The favor of God to Him greatly outweighed anything that he had to face. He was confident and calm, strong and steadfast because God was for him and so he had no reason to fear. And that is true for all of us who have set Christ apart as holy, who have set Him apart as Lord, who find our treasure and our hope in Him. What can man do to us? He can do nothing more than God allows. At worst man can kill the body and nothing more. In fact listen to what Spurgeon says here: The mightiest man is a puny thing when he stands in opposition to God, yea, he shrinks into utter nothingness. It were a pity to be afraid of such a pitiful, miserable, despicable object as a man opposed to the almighty God. The Psalmist here speaks like a champion throwing down the gauntlet to all comers, defying the universe in arms; a true Bayard (a famous French knight), without fear and without reproach, he enjoys God's favor, and he defies every foe. And so may

we defy every fear and every foe that cripples the hearts of unsaved men and women and in so doing live:

2) A life that provokes questions with lips that provide answers (v.15) Do you see what Peter is saying? If we live lives that are fearless and faithful to Christ because we honor Him in our hearts as holy, that kind of life will provoke questions...it is a life that sticks out. Christians have their lives set on a completely different foundation, live according to a completely different principle – the Lordship of Christ, and that changes everything. It liberates us to live very differently, to live with hope that transcends every situation and every trial and the foundation for that hope is the saving love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who gave himself, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. In saving us from sin and death, in granting us an eternal inheritance with the saints in heaven, and in promising us his care while we are in this world, He has liberated us from having to protect ourselves, protect our interests, from having to grasp for every advantage, every pleasure, every satisfaction of this world while we are in it, for fear that when we leave this world we will have no more. That is a different kind of life from the world. We are not living for the baubles of this world but for the treasure to come and in that is freedom to live as Christ lived and to love as Christ loved – and that kind of life, just as it did with Christ, will cause questions, questions that need to be answered. What will we say when someone asks us the reason for the hope that is in us?

Christ is not honored by us by a baseless, thoughtless hope. When someone asks us the reason for our hope, we have to have more to say than: “It’s the way I grew up.” “My dad is a pastor.” “All things considered, it seems like a good religion.” “I’m not sure but I like the music.” “It makes me a better person.” We have to have more than the cultists who come to our door with well-planned out scripts. When force to depart from their scripts, they don’t know what to say. We have to have more than a memorized, well-articulated, point by point presentation of the gospel that is doctrinally precise but lacks heart. We are being asked the reason for our hope. We are being asked our reason for hope in future grace and blessing. We are being asked what it is that shapes our lives so differently from everyone else’s. We are being asked the reason for our hope and hope is not mechanical; it is not divorced from emotions; it is not sterile. Hope has heart; hope has life; hope has guts to it. If you’ve got it, you feel it deep in your soul. What would you say? “My hope is in Christ who loved me and who gave His life for mine.” “My hope is in Jesus Christ who died for me on the cross.” “My hope is in Jesus, the only Son of God, who took the burden of my sins away.” “My hope is that Jesus Christ will finish the work that He began in me when saved me by His blood.” “My hope is in Jesus Christ whom God the Father put forward to be the wrath bearer for my sins.” “My hope is in Christ alone – the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and who bore my sins in His body on the tree saving me from the judgment that is to come.” “My hope is in Christ who has brought me from death to eternal life by His death and resurrection.” Where does your hope

lie? Where does your heart find rest? It cannot be merely lip service; you must feel it in your heart. It has got to be real. There must be a mix of your mind, and your will, and your emotions, and your personality, and your knowledge – Christ must be sanctified in your heart as Lord.

That means that your preparation to give a defense to those that ask you is not some pursuit of answers for every possible objection. When Peter says: honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense – he is telling us that there is a very close connection between honoring Christ in our hearts, setting Him apart and always being ready to make a case for our hope. If we are going to be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in us, there must be an active, ongoing, delight and enjoyment of Christ as Savior, Lord, Treasure, Hope, Friend, Deliverer, Rock, Master, Fortress, and King. The idea is not to amass every possible answer for every possible argument that could possibly be raised, but to enjoy communion with our Lord – setting Him apart as the most important pursuit of our souls. As the Psalmist wrote: (Psa 62:5-8) Now please understand, I am not saying that you do not need to be able to explain the gospel fully and accurately. You do. You must be able to speak of God's holiness and of man's sin; of God's wrath against sin and of Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away wrath by taking away the sins of those who believe. I am not arguing for doctrinal ignorance – I am arguing for doctrinal truth turned to faith expressed in hope that is personal and powerfully yours. Jesus Christ, the only Lord and Savior, is set apart, honored, is sanctified by the joyful hope that His people put in Him and proclaim of Him.

This is the reason that so many of us aren't as free and open in testifying of Christ as we ought. We do not feel the hope of Christ as deeply as we should. If our hearts and souls are not filled with joy at the hope of Christ in us, when the opportunity comes to give a reason for the hope that is in us, we have nothing to say. Instead of seeing the opportunity to speak of Christ as a joy, we see it as a job. If being a Christian means to us accepting certain doctrines and keeping a list of do's and don'ts, if it is going through the motions of church life and putting on an outward morality and uprightness – if that is all it is and not a glorious rescue of massive proportions by the lover of our souls, if it is not a gracious, undeserved deliverance from certain death through the sacrificial death of the only holy Son of the Living God who loved me and gave Himself for me so that I might be His own; if it is not the pursuit of our dead hearts by the Living God at unimaginable cost to Him so that He could bless us with blessings unquantifiable because He loved us before the foundation of the world and we are a people for His own possession – if it is not He gave Himself for me --- if it is just some truths to be believed with the mind but not personal to the heart, then we may be able to make a case for doctrine, but we will never be able to make a case for the hope within us because there isn't any hope brimming up within us. But if we are Christ's that cannot be. That is not the goal of the gospel. As Paul wrote the Romans: (Rom 10:10; 15:13). In order to give a reason for the hope that is in us, we

must abound in hope and we abound in hope as we search out the promises of God in Christ in His Word, as we meditate on His character and His cross and His glory, as we commune with Him in the Word of God and in prayer. The greatest preparation that we can engage in is to daily make our hearts happy in God, so that we can be ready to give answer for the hope that really does reside in us.

We give account Peter says with gentleness and reverence. Gentleness and reverence could also be translated as meekness and fear. Here is what Peter is telling us. We should not be argumentative because we are not seeking to win an argument; we are seeking to win a soul. Let us not be arrogant because we have nothing to be proud of except our Savior. No pride is more offensive than pride in being a trophy of grace. We should not be belligerent, because their hostility and hatred is to the Savior, not to us. We should not have a "holier than thou attitude," because we once stood in their shoes; we once stood on unholy, unsaved ground. We should not be looking down on others, but instead should be seeking in love to be a stepping stone for them, not a stumbling block. Our Lord was "meek and lowly of heart." May we put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, we should give our defense "in fear." May we operate in the fear of the One whom we have sanctified in our hearts. The reason we do not speak to men as we ought and as often as we ought is the fear of men. "What is he going to think of me if I say that?" "Will he be upset or offended?" "Will he think that I am foolish to believe as I do?" These questions are beside the point to the God-fearer. As we give this defense, we need to be sure that we do it with:

3) A conscience that is clear, not condemning (v.16) Bold words will not honor the Lord if they are not supported by a consistent life. We should proclaim the gospel, but clearly what Peter is saying, as he has already once before, is this: Our lives will either validate or violate the words that we speak. That is why integrity, authenticity is so vitally important. We have talked about this before and so I won't belabor the point except to say that this is obviously an important issue to Peter and one that can gut the gospel in an instant. It is hard to speak of a soul-transforming hope when your soul hasn't been transformed. But on the other hand one of the most compelling arguments is the argument of the faithful Christian life. Live so your conscience is clear. Beloved, before we close this morning, I want us to see this Scripture enacted. I want us to see what this looks like in the Word of God.

4) A powerful example of a public defense of hope in Christ-- (Acts 25:24-26:29)

Paul was going throughout the world proclaiming the gospel -- that Jesus Christ is the Son of God that He came to this earth taking on a human form, was crucified for our sins and was buried but arose again on the third day. The particular issue of the gospel message that particularly incited hostility frequently was Paul's declaration of the resurrection of Jesus. The

resurrection validated all that Jesus said about Himself and his atoning work on the cross so it was often attacked. Paul is before King Agrippa and he is now given the opportunity to defend His hope, and he does so with power and with authority. (Acts 25:24-26:29)

Application:

1) Where does your hope lie? Is it a fervent, obvious, real hope? Hope has heart; hope has life; hope has guts to it.

2) Are you faithful to give an answer for the hope that is within you? Can you do it? What do you have to say?

3) Does your life give weight to the words of your lips?

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