

Look Ahead to your Eternal Home

1 Peter 1:17-21

¹⁷ If you call on the Father who judges impartially, according to the work of each person, conduct yourselves during the time of your pilgrimage in reverence, ¹⁸ because you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, not with things that pass away, such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was chosen before the foundation of the world but revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Last week we began a series of Easter sermons based on different readings from 1 Peter. 1 Peter is a treasury of hope for Christians living in a hopeless world. One of the great themes in this inspired letter is that Christians are strangers on earth. Peter certainly alludes to that in the Scripture before us. He mentions “the time of your pilgrimage.” Since we are strangers in the world and not of the world, we must always look ahead to our eternal home. The Apostle Peter helps us do that in the few verses before us. He reminds us of how Christ redeemed us so we can look ahead to eternal life. He also shows us that by raising Christ from the dead, God has assured us of heaven.

In the verses just before our text Peter urges his readers to live lives that show you’re really a part of the family of God. Peter urged them to “be holy.” Why? Because the God you serve is holy. In the opening verse of our text Peter offers another reason to be holy. It’s because you call on a Father who judges impartially. God has set the standard that we are to follow. And when he judges he cannot be bribed or swayed. That’s why Peter urges his listeners to conduct the time of their pilgrimage in reverent fear. Be holy? Is he serious? The bar is set way too high! That is exactly why we must turn back to our God in fear. Who of us can really say we’ve conducted lives that reflect being a child of God. Sinful flesh so often takes center stage. It only leads to an empty way of life.

But our Father has done something to fill our lives. Peter writes, “*You were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, not with things that pass away, such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot.*” Peter takes us to a hopeless situation that we were all in. We were held hostage. A price had to be paid to free us. But there wasn’t enough silver or gold in the world to pay it. It was way too costly. For centuries God had pointed his people the only price that would free them. It all started back in Egypt. God’s people were slaves there. And the king of Egypt, the Pharaoh, did not want to give them up. So God destroyed Egypt with ten disastrous plagues. You think the pandemic that has hit us is rough? How would you like to see our great river turned to blood and kill all the fish in it? You think when it warms the insects will be bad. Try frogs and flies, gnats, and locust getting into

everything. Worried about a virus without a cure? Try a plague that kills every firstborn in every family. But that death plague did not harm a single member of God's people. Why? Did they just have a stronger immune system? No, they had blood, painted on their door posts. And when the angel of death saw it, he passed over and did not harm a single one inside.

Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. God made that so clear with the scores of animal sacrifices made at each Old Testament worship service. That constant reminder went on for centuries. But then one day one a prophet points to a person walking toward him and says, "*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). Finally, one had come into the world to fulfill the Passover. And on a Friday of Passover week, while many a family in Israel had gathered to celebrate that ancient custom, that Lamb of God was nailed to a cross. There he shed his blood to free everyone from sin's punishment. Peter reminds his readers that the payment has been made. Despite their many failures at holiness, they are now free. They are free to look ahead to their eternal home.

Certainly, looking ahead to our eternal home, helps us through the difficult days that lie ahead. We've certainly had to make a lot of adjustments to the normalcies of life. It has even affected our worship life. But one thing has not changed—God's standard. If you want to enter eternal life? You show up with nothing short of holiness. How can people who struggle daily with sin, ever have any real hope of eternal life? We certainly don't look to ourselves. We keep looking to our Savior. He redeemed us with his precious blood. But we don't just look at his death. We look at the life he lived. He was holy as God is holy. His life was perfect. And he has supplied us with the holiness we need for eternal life. Not only does God forgive our every sin because of the price Jesus paid: his holy, precious blood. God now credits us with the holiness that Jesus lived. The Apostle Paul explains this in his second letter to the Corinthians: "*We urge you, on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him*" (2 Corinthians 5:20, 21). Right now the sporting world rests from having its contests played. But behind the scenes deals are being made to trade for players from other teams. Can you think of a more lop-sided trade than what our Lord made with us? His holiness for our sin. That's what we have in Jesus. He redeemed us with his blood. He supplied us with holiness. Now we look ahead to our eternal home.

Peter certainly wanted his first readers to know the reason they had hope in eternal life. It all rested in the precious blood of Christ that he shed to redeem them. Now they could approach their heavenly Father in prayer, knowing the Jesus made them righteous to do that. To keep them looking ahead to their eternal home, Peter has them look back at Jesus' tomb and see what God did there.

Obviously, Jesus' body was placed in a tomb because two friends made a bold request to take his body down from the cross. One of the friends named Joseph was no procrastinator. He knew his mortality, and he was thinking ahead. He already had a nice resting place—a tomb cut out of the rock—for when he'd leave this world. But he went with plan B when he and another secret follower of Jesus, name Nicodemus decided to bury Jesus there before the Sabbath began that evening. They made no secret about where to bury him. The women knew where it was. That way they could finish his burial after the Sabbath. Two of this disciples, Peter and John, knew where it was. They ran there Sunday morning to investigate Mary's theory that Jesus' body had been stolen. Even the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, who gave permission to bury Jesus' body, knew where it was. He gave orders to his soldiers to guard the tomb, as the Jewish leaders requested.

And the most important person who knew where Jesus' tomb was is our heavenly Father. Peter tells us that God raised Jesus back from the dead there and gave him glory. Completely satisfied with the ransom that Christ paid for mankind's sin, God raised Jesus to life on Easter. There was no reason to leave him there. Death was one of the enemies he had conquered. So how could he remain in his tomb. A thousand years earlier, the Holy Spirit had King David write this prophesy, "You will not abandon my life to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay" (Acts 2:27). By raising his Son to life, God has placed his seal upon his saving plan. Easter is our heavenly Father's way of saying: Well done, my dear Son. You have brought hope back to this sin-darkened world. Now all mankind can look past the grave, and know an eternal home awaits them. As I have raised you to life, so we will raise them as well. As I have welcomed you home after a job well done, now I look forward to having so many more sons and daughters join me in our heavenly home. How glorious that day will be!

We know there are so many souls who still need to hear what Easter is about. It's not about bunnies or candy. It's all about life. It's looking straight at death that we have earned with our sin, and seeing past it to an eternal existence that nothing in this world can compare. We've all experienced joy in life. The joy of a newborn. The joy of two lives becoming one. The joy of victory on the playing field and at the workplace. But none that can compare to the joy we experience in our eternal home. Think of the reunion, the loved ones who have gone before us. Think of the worship. Angelic choirs singing God's praises constantly. Consider the bliss that will never end. The holy pleasures will never run out. And all of it is yours and all of it is mine, because God raised his Son on Easter.

You know what kind of life God wants you to live, right? We strive to live holy lives because he is holy. We go all-out for holiness because he shed his precious blood and gave his holy life to die for you. We won't stop trying because God brought him back to life. Now you and I can look way past the grave to an eternal home where your room is ready. So live it. Rejoice in it. Share it because so many still need to hear it. Amen.