

Dedicate Yourself to Serving Your Savior

1 Peter 3:15-22

¹⁵ But regard the Lord, the Christ, as holy in your hearts. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is in you. ¹⁶ But speak with gentleness and respect, while maintaining a clear conscience, so that those who attack your good way of life in Christ may be put to shame because they slandered you as evildoers. ¹⁷ Indeed, it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil, ¹⁸ because Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in flesh but was made alive in spirit, ¹⁹ in which he also went and made an announcement to the spirits in prison. ²⁰ These spirits disobeyed long ago, when God's patience was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In this ark a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. ²¹ And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. ²² He went to heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Dedication is important to people. Dedication is what most people expect. If you are starting a new job, your employer expects you to be dedicated to your work. That means showing up on time. It means finishing what you started. Teachers want their students to be dedicated. They expect assignments to be completed on time. They want their students to use their God-given talents the best that they can. Dedication is needed in many aspects of life. It's needed in a marriage. It's needed in family life. And dedication is needed when it comes to serving your Savior. The Apostle Peter wanted 1st century Christians and us to remember that, especially when your life as a Christians is being challenged. Peter challenges us to be ready to share our hope. And so we might stay ready for this important mission, we remember how dedicated Christ was to saving us.

So Christians are ready to share their hope, Christ Jesus must be Lord of their hearts. Christ must be near and dear to them. And people will notice that. When troubles arise, they don't lose heart. They stay confident that their Lord is still in control. Some might question his control when holy week came to an end. He rode into that week to the praises of the Jerusalem crowd. By the end of the week he was hanging lifeless on a cross. And then buried. What a tragic end! In this Scripture, Peter mentions the spirits of unbelievers that are trapped in hell forever. Those souls personally knew what Jesus went through on that cross. He suffered hell's punishment for all sin while he was nailed to a cross. That was the only way to bring sinful creatures into a loving and lasting relationship with our holy God.

What proof do we have that his death was a victory? Peter tells us he was put to death in flesh, in humiliation. But then he returned to life in spirit, in glory. And in that glorified state, Peter tells us how Jesus went to preach to spirits in the prison of hell. He wasn't there to convert lost souls. Their time of grace had ended when they died in unbelief. The Apostle

Paul gives us a hint of what his message might have been. In his letter to the Colossians we read: *After disarming the rulers and authorities, he made a public display of them by triumphing over them* (Colossians 2:15). I like to compare Jesus' descent into hell to an Olympian winning a final's race. What happens when they win the race? They grab their nation's flag and take a victory lap. That's kind of what Jesus was doing when he descended to hell. He was announcing his victory. But it wasn't just lost souls in hell who learned about his victory. For the next forty days Jesus showed himself alive to his disciples on a number of occasions. And then he ascended to heaven where he has taken his place at God's right hand. Now he rules everything until the day he returns. Then every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue will confess him as Lord.

We need that reminder that Jesus is Lord. He has everything in his control. We don't always see it. But that doesn't matter. We live by faith and not by sight. And because he's in control, we have nothing to fear. We keep Christ as Lord in our hearts. We remember the sacrifice he made so we can be citizens of heaven. We ask God to forgive us for the times we fail to trust his control. And thank Christ Jesus for being so dedicated to win forgiveness for every sin. He willingly died for everyone. Yes, that victory is ours. How do we know? It's because Christ suffered, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven. He is seated at God's right hand ruling everything for the good of his Church, the body of all believers. We confess that truth each week and today right after the Gospel reading.

While all believers wait to join him in heaven, we must stay ready. Certainly, we must be ready for his return. No one knows when they day will be. We stay ready keeping Christ ruling our hearts. But Peter mentions another thing for which we must stay ready. Be ready to answer anyone who asks about your hope. Why when life fails you, you don't complain? Why is it, when many around us are living in fear, you stay calm. You don't seem to lose hope when so many are losing there's.

So what is it about being a Christian that people will notice? Peter did mention it in the last portion of this Scripture. You are baptized. Baptism is not just a ceremony that brings you into a church. Peter says baptism saves you. It's not a physical washing. It's a spiritual washing. Baptism washes you clean of sin. With sins washed clean, you now have a good conscience to stand before God. That cleansing of sin, that good conscience before God is yours because of Christ's resurrection. Paul tells us how baptism and Easter work together in his letter to the Romans, *"All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were buried with him by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life"* (Romans 6:3,4).

And that new life that we live as baptized children of God will be noticed. It will show itself especially in times of persecution. Peter urged his first readers not to fight back. If God willed that they must suffer for their good behavior, then so be it. Jesus did mention what it cost to follow him. It took a lifetime of denying oneself, taking up your cross and following him. That is not easy. But in the end when you are enjoying heaven, it's so worth it. Not just for you. Even for those who trouble you. What is your goal for that person or persons? You want to see them in heaven, right? You know the way to heaven. Our Savior last week reminded us: *"I am the way...No one gets to the Father except by me"* (John 14:6). So we must be ready at all times to share our hope.

Tell me, why can we face difficulties in life, and still seem to come out on top? Well, we take God's promises seriously. He promised he would never leave us. So we're never alone. He promised to work out everything for my good. So I never lose. And best of all, he promised me heaven. Now I know that I don't deserve to go there. I'm a sinner. But I have a Savior. And so do you. God's perfect Son became human like you and me. About 2,000 years ago, he entered this life without sin and he lived his whole life without sin. And by faith in Christ we get to wear his holiness. In exchange he took all our sin. He took the blame for every sin. And he went to a cross to suffer God's punishment for all sin. He died and he was buried. But he rose again. That's why we celebrate Easter. It's the day he became alive again. And then he showed himself alive for a little more than a month to his followers. And then he went home to heaven. But before he left he promised a place in heaven for everyone. And some day he'll return to take us home to heaven. That home is offered to you free of charge. It's free for you, for me, for everyone. When our life is over, we'll be home at last in heaven.

You never know when someone will ask you for the reason for your hope. But somebody will. That's precisely the reason God has left us on this earth. Before he left this earth, he gave us a mission to tell the whole world that he loves them. He loved them enough to give up his life for them so that they might live forever with him in heaven. Before you leave this world for heaven, pray fearlessly that God would use you to share your hope with others.

Are you dedicated? At work? In school? In family life? Are you dedicated in God's kingdom too? Your Lord was dedicated to saving you, willingly to die on a cross to pay for your sins. He then rose victorious and now is seated at God's right hand ruling everything. He wants you and me to stay dedicated. Keep Christ as Lord of your heart and be ready. Not just for his return, but for people wanting to know the reason for your hope. You may be just the person God has chosen to share your hope with a neighbor, a co-worker, a relative or friend so they can know Jesus and be saved. Are you ready for that call? Keep Christ ruling your heart. And wait for the Holy Spirit to do his work.