

Aspire to Holiness (1 Peter 1:13 - 25)

The title of this sermon is Aspire to Holiness. I've had several folks ask me about it this week, "What do you mean, Aspire to Holiness?" Being the jerk that I am, I told them they would have to come this morning to find out. Praise the Lord, all three of them are here!

Peter began his first epistle by focusing our attention on what God has done. He has begotten us again to a living hope. We were all dead in our trespasses and sins. Our cosmic rebellion demands a just punishment by a holy God. Our sin is a capital offense. Our just wage is death – eternal death. Dying, we would die forever, suffering in hell with no hope of escape. But because God loved us so much, He sent His one and only Son to take the hit for our sin. Jesus entered His creation through the womb of a virgin, lived a perfect, sinless, human life, then sacrificed that life on the cross for you and for me. And by conquering sin and death, He purchased an inheritance for all who would accept Him by faith alone.

Since we are not holy, God covers us with the holiness of Jesus Christ. It is imputed righteousness, imputed holiness. It is more precious than gold that perishes. Though it will be tested by the fire of earthly trials, that fire will only refine our faith. It is being burnished to a glorious state and our ultimate salvation is reserved in heaven by the grace of Almighty God. You see, God is not done with us yet.

Peter wants to make sure our attention is focused on what Jesus has accomplished on our behalf. We need to give Him praise, honor and glory for His amazing love, for His amazing sacrifice. But this morning, we will see that He soon turns to our appropriate response. If Jesus has saved you, what do you do now in response to this wonderful gift? Well, let's take a look:

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because "ALL FLESH IS AS GRASS, AND ALL THE GLORY OF MAN AS THE FLOWER OF THE GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND ITS FLOWER FALLS AWAY, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:13-25)

Peter opens this passage with the phrase: *Therefore gird up the loins of your mind*. It is a command, something you must do. Yes, your salvation is the work of God. We can take no credit for it. The Father elects, the Son pays for your sin, and the Holy Spirit

brings you to faith. God is working in you to both will and do for His good pleasure, but you are not to be passive. You must respond.

Salvation is a covenant. God agrees to save you but you agree to make Jesus your Lord. That's what Paul is talking about in Romans 10:9:

... that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

You are confessing that Jesus is your Lord. He is your *kurios* (κύριος). That means you are His *doulos*, His bondservant. That means from the point of your conversion, you have committed to letting Jesus call the shots. You are pledging your obedience.

It's not going to be easy. The devil, the world and your own flesh will militate against it, so you need to prepare.

In the first century, men wore flowing robes or tunics. They were like a dress. Those robes would get in the way if they had to run, do physical labor, or go to battle, so they would tuck the ends up into a sash or a belt to give them freedom to move. It was called "girding one's loins." So to gird the loins of your mind is to prepare your mind for obedience to Christ.

We are to be sober – that is, we are to take our Christian walk seriously. We are to rest our hope fully on God's grace as revealed to us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our righteous behavior will never justify us. The best we can do, according to Jesus, is to be unprofitable servants. We will never exceed His expectations, but we are to try to meet those expectations.

Verse 14 says that we are to be as obedient children. When you come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, you become a child of Abraham. More than that, you become a child of God, a member of Christ's own family. There needs to be a family resemblance. You need to be an obedient child.

... not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; (1 Peter 1:14)

You know, unsaved people act like ... unsaved people. Why in the world does that surprise us? They are dead in their trespasses and sins. How can they possibly honor Christ and glorify God? They are ignorant, just like you once were. But if you have accepted Christ, you are no longer ignorant. You no longer have an excuse. You have the Holy Spirit within you convincing you of sin, and righteousness and the judgment to come.

Are you obedient to the Lord you confess? Well, if you are honest, you have to at least say "Not always." No wonder Jesus said in frustration:

"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

Christian, you need to ...

... put off ... the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

You need to learn to be an obedient child.

... but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (1 Peter 1:15-16)

That, my friends, is a very high standard. In fact, for us it is an impossible standard. The standard is God's holiness. It is a pristine holiness. It is an awesome holiness. God's holiness is what we must strive for. We are not going to get there while we inhabit these vessels of flesh. But we must aspire to that holiness. We must reach for it. Holiness, holiness is what God wants for me.

It does matter how you live. Salvation is not a get out of jail free card. Some people act like that. Once they get their "heaven card" stamped, they don't think it matters how they conduct their life here. Honestly, you cannot tell the difference between their life and the lives of the reprobate unbelievers that surround us. Theologians call it antinomianism and it should never be named among us.

And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; (1 Peter 1:17)

Understand that Peter is writing to Christians. He is writing to you and to me and he is saying that we need to fear Almighty God. No, it is not the craven fear of the reprobate. It is not the sort of fear demonstrated by the demons who know they will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire but we need to recognize, to acknowledge who God is. He is to be regarded with the utmost reverence and although we are invited to come boldly before the throne of grace, we need to do so in humble submission, acknowledging His overwhelming holiness.

He will judge us according to our work, says Peter. There will be no partiality. Do you want to hear the words "Well done, good and faithful servant"? I sure do.

As Christians, we are all called to lend our support to the work of the kingdom. We are called to use our particular gifts to edify the Church, that is, to build up the Church. On the Day of the Lord, there will be an accounting. What have you done to contribute to the advancement of the Gospel? What have you done to share the good news with those in your sphere of influence? What have you done to build up the body of Christ?

Turn to 1 Corinthians, Chapter 3. Paul speaks about how Christians will be judged for reward.

*According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, **each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.** If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)*

Paul is talking about Christian ministry and every one of us has a ministry. We were left here on earth to glorify God. We were left here on earth to be His witnesses and we will be held accountable. If we are unfaithful, we will suffer loss, but notice that your salvation is not at stake. Even if you suffer loss, you yourself will be saved, yet so as through fire. You will be saved, as long as you trust in Jesus alone.

But don't sell yourself short. Aspire to obedience. Aspire to holiness.

We need to take our Christian walk seriously. We need to live our lives in such a way that we bring glory and honor to our Lord. You need to *conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear*. The best way to do this is to remember the cost of our redemption.

... knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

How much does God love you?

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

The cost of your redemption is infinitely high. The Son of God Himself was sacrificed to purchase your salvation. You need to hit your knees daily, crying "Thank You, thank You, thank You Jesus!" Run to the cross and meditate on the enormous price Jesus paid for you.

He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Peter 1:20-21)

This was God's plan all along. That's why Peter said Jesus was foreordained before the foundation of the world and although the Old Testament prophets testified as to what was going to happen, they couldn't fully understand it. But it has been clearly made manifest to you who believe. It is history for us, who put our faith and hope in God. Oh, what a glorious Gospel!

How do we respond to this glorious Gospel? We respond by aspiring to holiness. We respond by striving for obedience, by actively seeking out God's will, diving into the Bible to pursue our continuing sanctification.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2)

Do everything you can to live like a real Christian. Pursue holiness through love. What's the greatest commandment? Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. The great commandment is the Law of love.

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, (1 Peter 1:22)

Love fulfills the Law. Love perfects holiness. Strive for holiness through love. Because if you confess Jesus as Lord and believe God has raised Him from the dead, you have been born again. Your old self has been crucified with Christ. Your new life is found hidden in Him.

... having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because "ALL FLESH IS AS GRASS, AND ALL THE GLORY OF MAN AS THE FLOWER OF THE GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND ITS FLOWER FALLS

AWAY, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:23-25)

The word of the Lord endures forever. Embrace it. Study it with everything you have. Become saturated with it. Live by it. Aspire to the holiness found in the Word of God.