

I.N.I.

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 1, 2016
I Peter 3:15-22

In Christ Jesus, who has called us both to **WITNESS** to His name and to **WATCH** for His return,
Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last Sunday in our study of this first epistle of Peter we were told that we must submit to our master even if that means suffering. We mentioned at the time that most of chapter 2 and the first half of chapter 3 dealt with this subject of Christian submission: submission first to the Lord, then to government, to employers, to each other; yes, submission even in suffering.

In our section of study this morning Peter once again mentions this thought of submitting to suffering even for doing good. We must remember that Peter was writing to Christians who were experiencing suffering. They were being ridiculed for their faith in Jesus. Some were being unfairly treated, others ostracized by former friends. Some were being persecuted by threats. Peter's response to them is not one of sympathizing with them in self-pity, but of encouragement to stand firm! Sixteen times Peter mentions **SUFFERING** in his epistle, but sixteen times he also mentions **GLORY**.

Summarizing Peter's words we could say:

"We have been called **to salvation through Christ;**

therefore as Christians we have been called **to submission in Christ;**

therefore we should not be surprised that in this life

we have also been called **to suffer for Christ."**

In the verse just prior to our text Peter writes: **BUT EVEN IF YOU SHOULD SUFFER FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE, YOU ARE BLESSED. "AND DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THEIR THREATS, NOR BE TROUBLED."** Instead do this:

CHRISTIAN, IN YOUR HEART SET APART CHRIST AS LORD!

We read verse 15: **BUT SANCTIFY THE LORD GOD IN YOUR HEARTS, AND ALWAYS BE READY TO GIVE A DEFENSE TO EVERYONE WHO ASKS YOU A REASON FOR THE HOPE THAT IS IN YOU, WITH MEEKNESS AND FEAR.**

Peter says: **SANCTIFY THE LORD GOD IN YOUR HEARTS.** This means **SET APART**--set Christ apart as the one Lord, the one Master, in your heart. Jesus said we cannot serve two masters, either we will hate the one and serve the other, or we will serve the one and despise the other. There cannot be two Lords in our heart: ourselves and Christ; our wealth and Christ; this world and Christ; our possessions and Christ; our recreation and Christ! There can only be one or the other. Is Christ the one Lord, set apart in your heart?

Well let's see what we Christians will do when Christ is Lord in our hearts. Our first point:

CHRISTIAN, IN YOUR HEART SET APART CHRIST AS LORD!

I: BY BEING PREPARED TO GIVE A DEFENSE (ANSWER)

TO THE HOPE THAT IS IN YOU.

Do we know, are we able to proclaim to those who ask us what our hope is? Are we always ready to do this, not just at our Confirmation examination in church, but everyday wherever we are? Are we prepared always, day in and day out to testify, to give an answer to others about the one and only hope we have? If not, why not? We should be able to.

The word in the Greek is defense, it also means an answer. It comes from the practice of the Athenians where every citizen had to be able to defend himself personally if he or she were brought to trial. Imagine, there were no lawyers there! Peter says: "if you are put on trial for your faith, be ready, be prepared to state your case clearly and convincingly." That doesn't mean that we all should be able to get up and preach a twenty minute sermon, or be able to write an in depth theses on Christianity, or an essay on the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus; but it does mean that we should be able to express and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ plainly and simply--to be able to give a personal witness about what Jesus has done for us to others.

What did Jesus say to His disciples just prior to His Ascension? **YOU SHALL BE MY**

WITNESSES! IN JERUSALEM, IN JUDEA, IN SAMARIA AND THE ENDS OF THE WORLD. These words were spoken also to us. In Luke, Jesus told His disciples to **PREACH (PROCLAIM) REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS IN MY NAME TO ALL NATIONS, BEGINNING IN JERUSALEM.** In Matthew, Jesus gave us the Great Commission: **GO OUT AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS** by baptizing and teaching them all that He has commanded us.

If you were asked today, “What is the basis for your hope of eternal life” would you be able to answer plainly and simply? **MY HOPE IS BUILT ON NOTHING LESS THAN JESUS’ BLOOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS!** Would we be prepared to say to others that we were conceived and born dead in sins, headed for hell---that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”--that there is “none who does good, no not one?” Would we be prepared to say that God’s Law led us to despair of ourselves, of our own efforts, of our own works, because it clearly showed us that we cannot attain that perfect love that God demands? Would we be able to proclaim that the Holy Spirit worked repentance in our hearts to look alone to Christ for forgiveness of our sins and the righteousness that alone can stand before God? **NOTHING IN MY HANDS I BRING, SIMPLY TO THY CROSS I CLING!...THROUGH JESUS’ BLOOD AND MERIT I AM AT PEACE WITH GOD!**

With this confession in our hearts and upon our lips we would be able to then:

II: BE WILLING TO SUFFER FOR DOING GOOD.

Peter writes in verses 16-17: **HAVING A GOOD CONSCIENCE, THAT WHEN THEY DEFAME YOU AS EVILDOERS, THOSE WHO REVILE YOUR GOOD CONDUCT IN CHRIST MAY BE ASHAMED. FOR IT IS BETTER, IF IT IS THE WILL OF GOD, TO SUFFER FOR DOING GOOD THAN FOR DOING EVIL.**

With the heart knowledge of Christ’s willing suffering for us--the JUST ONE for the unjust ones--we too will be led to squash our sinful nature which rebels even when punished justly for doing wrong, and we will be willing to suffer for Jesus’ sake. By professing the truth of the Word, by proclaiming the hope that is in us, by refusing to compromise our stand on the unchanging Gospel of Christ we may have to suffer; suffer ridicule, suffer the loss of hoped for blessings, suffer the pain of loneliness and misunderstanding of our friends; maybe someday even suffer physically for our faith.

But when Christ is **SET APART AS LORD IN OUR HEARTS WE WILL also:**

III: TRUST IN JESUS’ SUFFERING AND DEATH FOR US.

Peter writes in vs. 18: **FOR CHRIST ALSO SUFFERED ONCE FOR SINS, THE JUST FOR THE UNJUST, THAT HE MIGHT BRING US TO GOD, BEING PUT TO DEATH IN THE FLESH...** Peter says, “Look to Christ’s suffering.” He suffered unjustly for all of us. He, the only truly righteous, perfectly loving person in this whole world was put to death for us, as payment for our sins, once for all; for all sins, for all time; for all people! That’s where our strength lies in our suffering for Christ. It does not lie in our faith, or in our Christian character, or in our Christian friends, but in our Savior and His Word. The Lord tells us through the Apostle Paul; **I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME.**

Therefore even in the face of Christian suffering, Peter is saying, “with Christ set apart as Lord in your heart, trusting in His suffering and death for you; respond with a good witness of your faith in Christ and joyfully see the will of God being accomplished in your suffering. God still is in control and will work out everything for your eternal good.”

Peter goes on to speak of Jesus’ resurrection and descent into hell. We read verse 18b-20: **BUT MADE ALIVE BY THE SPIRIT, BY WHOM ALSO HE WENT AND PREACHED TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON, WHO FORMERLY WERE DISOBEDIENT, WHEN ONCE THE DIVINE LONGSUFFERING WAITED IN THE DAYS OF NOAH, WHILE THE ARK WAS BEING PREPARED, IN WHICH A FEW, THAT IS, EIGHT SOULS, WERE SAVED THROUGH WATER.**

Yes, Jesus did physically suffer and die and yes, Jesus did physically rise again from the dead. And the first thing that Jesus did was descend into hell to proclaim His victory to His enemy Satan and to all of those lost souls in hell. Jesus did not descend to hell to suffer; His suffering was complete on the cross when His Father poured out His wrath and damnation for your sins and mine upon His Son.

Instead, Jesus descended into hell to proclaim His victory, that He had won; He had crushed Satan's authority over mankind. He descended to tell the whole world that He had come back to life and is ever victorious over all of mankind's spiritual enemies.

This He proclaimed to those souls who died in unbelief at the time of the flood, when only eight people survived. Eight people were saved through water. Here Peter looks upon the flood as the means of saving these eight people who were in the ark. The water lifted them up and thus saved them from destruction.

Peter applies this to us as our fourth point.

**CHRISTIAN, IN YOUR HEART SET APART JESUS AS LORD:
IV: BY LOOKING TO YOUR BAPTISM IN CHRIST.**

Peter writes: **THERE IS ALSO AN ANTITYPE WHICH NOW SAVES US; BAPTISM (NOT THE REMOVAL OF THE FILTH OF THE FLESH, BUT THE ANSWER OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE TOWARD GOD) THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.**

These words are so clear, plain and comforting. Baptism saves us, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not a washing of water alone, a washing away of dirt from the body; but a spiritual washing away of sins through Christ's death and resurrection. In Acts 2:38 this same Peter declared in his Pentecost sermon: **REPENT, AND LET EVERYONE OF YOU BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS.** Again in Acts 22:16 Paul, after his conversion is told: **ARISE AND BE BAPTIZED, AND WASH AWAY YOUR SINS.** The reason there is forgiveness in baptism is because Christ's death and resurrection is tied into this Sacrament. We read Paul's words in Romans 6: **OR DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT AS MANY OF US AS WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST JESUS WERE BAPTIZED INTO HIS DEATH? THEREFORE WE WERE BURIED WITH HIM THROUGH BAPTISM INTO DEATH, THAT JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD BY THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, EVEN SO WE ALSO SHOULD WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE.**

We were baptized into Christ's shed blood, by being baptized into His death. That is why Baptism saves us. That is why Baptism does forgive sins. But Peter also says it saves us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul also writes in Col. 2:12: **(WE WERE) BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM, IN WHICH YOU ALSO WERE RAISED WITH HIM THROUGH FAITH IN THE WORKING OF GOD, WHO RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD. AND YOU, BEING DEAD IN YOUR TRESPASSES AND THE UNCIRCUMCISION OF YOUR FLESH, HE HAS MADE ALIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM, HAVING FORGIVEN YOU ALL TRESPASSES...**

Peter says, "Look to your baptism and take heart! You were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection and now have the pledge of a good conscience before God." In other words: a conscience cleansed of its sins! May our baptisms so serve us as a reminder to drown our old Adam in us, our sinful flesh through daily contrition and repentance and that day by day a new man should arise and live in the presence of God in righteousness and purity now and forever.

Finally Peter says:

**CHRISTIAN, SET APART CHRIST AS LORD IN YOUR HEART:
V: BY BEING ASSURED OF ALL OF THIS THROUGH JESUS' ASCENSION.**

This coming Thursday we will celebrate Jesus' ascension into heaven. His ascension was the fulfillment of His mission here on earth. Everything was complete. His perfect life was lived. His perfect substitutionary death was given. His resurrection back to life was accomplished and now He ascends to rule all things, to have angels, authorities, powers and dominions all subject to Him. There is nothing that has not been put under Jesus' feet.

Christ, the Lord of our hearts and lives, will guard and protect His Church of believers here on earth in the midst of all tribulations and persecutions. It is indeed **HIS STORY!** He controls it, He rules it as He wills to the glory of His name and for the welfare of His believers.

Who is Lord of your heart? With Christ as Lord and Savior we have one who has redeemed us, who has given us the Holy Spirit to testify of Him to others, who has called us into His family through the regeneration of baptism, who will deliver us from every evil and who someday will take us to be with Him where we too shall live and rule with Him forever and ever.

To our crucified, resurrected and ascended Lord be glory and honor and praise now and forevermore.

Amen.