



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

How Easter People Are to Live in a Good Friday World: Obediently

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Rev. Steve Kramer

TEXT: 1 Peter 1:13-21 (ESV)

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

So what now? I remember hearing that question frequently when I retired a few years ago and asking it of myself. A new chapter of life was beginning for me, so it was a very good question to be considering: "What now?" It's a good question for Easter people as well who have been born again through faith in Jesus Christ. They have a whole new life before them and it's eternal. So, what now? How am I to live out the rest of my days in this world?

The apostle Peter has the answers to that question in our reading for today. He says, "Therefore preparing our minds for action and being sober minded." The first word there is "therefore." That word points us back to what Peter has previously pointed out,

that as believers in Christ, your God's saved people with a living hope through the resurrected Jesus, you're Easter people. And because of that, therefore he says "Get ready for some action." We prepare our minds for action. Here we learn that Easter people aren't to just sit around waiting for Jesus to return and be so heavenly-minded that they're are no earthly good. God has saved them for a purpose – to serve him in a Good Friday world that needs him. Peter says that will require them to have their heads on straight. Easter People are busy preparing their minds.

The mind is an important thing. It's our control center. It guides us. Mental preparation and proper mindset matters. Ask any athlete going into an event, getting ready. Prepare your mind is literally in the Greek girding up the loins of the mind. Tucking that mind in and getting ready to move. Understanding God's will for his own and the battle before them. I'm reminded of a verse in Romans 12 written by the Apostle Paul. He says, "Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. That by testing you may discern what is the will of God and what is good and acceptable and perfect." We renew our minds – that comes through getting to know God's Word. We live with him there. It's there that he reveals his will for us, his commands, his purposes, his promises, and the truths that we need to keep in mind each day.

We also pray before we go into action. We ask God to help us to serve Him and to use us to His honor and glory each day. We know that's what Jesus did to prepare his mind each day and remember the Garden of Gethsemane before the cross. That's how he got prepared. Let me ask you, do you prepare your mind to serve God each day when you get out of bed? I know from personal experience how easy it is to race into a day not tuned into God, not remembering whose I am and God's promises and purposes for me and prayer tunes us into God.

He goes on to say, "Not only have your heads on straight by having prepared minds, but he says, be sober minded and set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." What does it mean to be sober minded? Well, when we think of the word sober, we think of it in the context of alcohol, don't we? And that's a helpful image for us here. Consider how drunkenness can affect a person. It clouds one's judgment, slows reflexes, dulls minds, causes a loss of control. Peter could be talking about literal drunkenness here, I suppose, but he could also be referring to drinking in worldly promises and priorities and patterns which can inebriate our

minds. He says instead of that, set your mind, your hope on the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus returns. Keep your big picture thinking. God's in charge. Keep that in mind. Remember who you are now and who you are headed towards – God. Remember that Jesus has prepared an eternal inheritance for you. So, live in the light of that truth and that promise as you conduct yourself in the present time.

Then he moves to obedience. “As obedient children, don't be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. Obedient children.” That's what Easter people are to be. You've been made children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and you're saved by Him to be obedient to God's will. The sixth article of the Lutheran Church's Augsburg Confession is entitled *The New Obedience*. It's ours, and it tells of the relationship between saving faith in Christ and our obedience. And it states this.

It is taught among us that such faith should produce good fruits and good works, and that we must do all such good works as God has commanded. But we should do them for God's sake, and not place our trust in them as if thereby to merit favor before God. For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ. As Christ commanded Himself says. So, you also, when you've done all that's commanded, you say we're unworthy servants.

We're just doing our job. Easter People are obedient to God and not to worldliness.

I appreciate what Evangelist and Pastor John Stott wrote several years ago as we are considering these instructions from 1 Peter. He writes,

All around us, moral standards are slipping. It used to be assumed that absolute truth exists in opposition to error, and absolute goodness exists in opposition to evil. But nobody seems sure of these things any longer. People are confused whether there are any absolutes left. Instead of truth, pluralism reigns. Instead of righteousness, relativism reigns. And against these trends, we are called to obedience. Jesus said Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. And the one who loves me will be loved by my father and I will love them and show myself to them. The only way to prove we love Jesus is with our obedience. And he rewards our obedience by manifesting himself to us. So you'll come to know him better and have him be real in your human experience with obedience.

Obedience is the way of life for Easter people. Peter says, “So don't be conformed to your former passions.” Don't go back to the old ways of living. Don't let the old pressures fashion you and shape you. Don't allow your life to be shaped and influenced

by old ways of thinking and living that you lived before Jesus rescued you. Throw these things away. The old priorities and values and ethics, the false gods, idols, worldly philosophies which displace God in its truth and make sin look so normal. No longer chase after satisfying the lusts and appetites that were once so important to you, because they're all dead ends. He says, be holy in all conduct.

We were uncomfortable with that word “holy” when applying it to ourselves, because what comes to mind is people with holier than thou attitudes or serious looking folks with pinched faces and beards and long robes who never laugh, or a monk that isolates himself from this impure world. But holy isn't about that. Holy actually means set apart to be different. Easter people in Christ are to consider themselves as set apart for God and His purposes. As God is holy, set apart and distinct and different from humankind, and acts and thinks differently, who says my thoughts are not your thoughts, so Easter people are to live new lives reflecting the character of the Holy One to be different, set apart. And pursuing this life, you'll sometimes find yourself out of step with the prevailing values of the culture and stick out like a sore thumb, because now you're marching to the beat of a different drum. But do it anyway, because holy people conduct themselves this way with fear before God for the rest of their lives. They fear God above everything else. Peter's not talking here about a panicky sort of terror. He's because we also know God is our father. But Easter people do conduct themselves with awe and reverence and a healthy sort of fear that seeks to please instead of displeased their heavenly Father. He's the most important audience to Easter people.

The first motivation for living with this fear is God's character as father and judge. The last day is coming, Peter reminds us, when we'll all stand before him, and we certainly want to hear him say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” I find this woman's story to be a helpful illustration for us to understand this. She said,

I used to think that living in the fear of the Lord is like driving down the street while watching the policeman in your rear view mirror. But actually there's a better picture for the fear of the Lord. It's like a teenage driver who suddenly spots her father's car in her rear view mirror. Seeing him back there puts her on notice to be on her best behavior, to use her blinkers and stop at the yellow light and to keep both hands on the wheel. But it also tells her that her father cares enough to follow her. It tells her she's safe. Her father isn't trying to trap or trick her. He's trying to help her develop good habits, not just to be careful on this trip, but to obey the laws and stay safe until she gets home. She's driving on her own,

but not completely on her own. And so it is for the people of God. The fear of the Lord means we live with our heavenly Father, always in our rear view mirror. It's a mix of reverence and trust and love as we keep our eyes on him.

The other motivation, of course, for conducting one's self with fear the rest of their life is gratitude and love for what God has done for us through His son, Jesus. Listen to these words, he points out.

You were ransomed. God has ransomed you. You were slaves to sin and death and the devil. But he bought you. He redeemed you, set you free from the futile, empty, useless ways inherited from your forefathers who worship false gods.

The ransom paid was the precious blood of Christ Jesus at the cross like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. So, trusting in Jesus, the lost are found. Those far away from God have been brought near to God. They were perishing, but now they have been forgiven and have eternal life with God.

The image of the lamb without blemish takes us back to the Old Testament, by the way. In Exodus 12, an unblemished lamb was slaughtered and its blood was put on the doorposts of the Hebrew slaves homes' in Egypt. This blood protected their firstborn children from God's deadly judgment when he passed over all the land of Egypt, striking down all the firstborn in Egyptian households. They were saved by the blood of the sacrificed lamb that day, and it resulted in the liberation of all the Hebrew slaves so they could go to the promised land and live as God's chosen people, serving his purposes for them to be a blessing to the nations. Believers in Jesus, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, are now free from slavery to sin and death, freed to serve God.

Peter goes on to point out that it doesn't end just there, that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was manifested to us. He came into this world for our sake, and He gave his life as a ransom. But God also raised him from the dead and gave him glory. He endorsed him. And then we're told why God did all this for us: so that we could have a restored, saving relationship with God as believers in Christ and be filled with faith and hope in God the rest of our lives and into eternity. Easter people live with a deep confidence and certainty, you see – that God has the final word over this world and those who trust in his son belong to him forever. And they serve him in this Good Friday world. Nothing can ever snatch them from his hand or separate them from his love. Their fear and obedience is grounded in gratitude to God for what He's done first for us. He's gone to great painful lengths to make us his own.

So, let's go back to the opening question for Easter, people. So, what now? Well, last week we had Peter telling Easter People live confidently in Christ knowing that he has the last word over us. This week's answer is best summed up like this. Easter People live obediently. We live obediently if you're in Christ. There are two great C's (C as in cat) that Easter people strive to obey, empowered by the Holy Spirit, of course. First, the great commandment. That's the first C that Jesus told us about. Easter people are to be great commandment people, loving God above everything else in the world. You are to love the Lord, your God with all your heart, soul, strength in your mind. You worship him and him alone and strive to live life his way no matter what the cost. And, they love their neighbors as themselves. This is more than having a warm, fuzzy people feeling towards people. I like the way someone described it. It's: loving your neighbor is a decision to do everything I can to help my neighbor be everything God intended them to be. It's all done with an attitude of serving.

Easter People are obedient to the Great Commission. That's the second great C. Jesus commanded his followers to tell others about the great redemptive work God has done through his suffering, death, and resurrection. We are to call people to faith in Christ and help them to have a growing relationship with Jesus and obey his commands. And he promised to always be with His Easter people as they serve God's purposes in this way. "Lo, I am with you always," he said, "to the close of the Age."

I want to leave you with one last story told by a grandson. One fall afternoon, my grandfather was at home with my grandmother and heard a knock on the door. The visitor was a neighbor lady who said to my grandfather "I was out feeding the horses and I felt like God was prompting me to come and say thank you for the difference you made in my life." She sat down and began to tell stories about times when my grandfather had been merciful to her as a widow and cared for the cows and horses and done all kinds of practical things for her. She thanked him for being so real. She went through this litany of good deeds, including bringing peace in her relationships with some of her children. She finished with "I just felt like God wanted me to tell you that." My grandfather paused and looked at her and said "It was the Lord Jesus Christ who did it." There was another pause and my grandmother struck up a conversation with this lady. A few seconds later, they heard a cough and they saw my grandfather slumped over. He was with Jesus. My grandfather's last words were "It was the Lord Jesus who did it."

Easter people live obediently, and Christ lives through them. Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed. So, what now? If you believe in him, then obey Jesus. Let's pray. Help us, oh, God, to live obedient lives to the honor and glory of your holy name. Amen.