



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: Always Prepared

May 21, 2023

Rev. Steve Kramer

TEXT: 1 Peter 3:14-22 (ESV)

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered[a] once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which[b] he went and proclaimed[c] to the spirits in prison, because[d] they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into Heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Back in the fifth century, Saint John Chrysostom, the archbishop of Constantinople during the reign of the Empress Eudoxia, was commanded one day to appear before the Empress. She said, "I hear you preach most ardently that this man, Jesus is Lord." "I do," said Chrysostom. "This teaching cannot be tolerated," she replied, "for the only Lordship recognized in Constantinople is that of this throne. If you continue to preach these myths about Jesus, then you'll be banished from your home." "Banish me? Why the whole world is my home," said Chrysostom. My Lord has said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." "I tell you that I'm your ruler, not this crucified Jew," said the Empress. "I will order all your treasures confiscated if you persist in

calling this Jesus your Lord." "You can't take my treasures from me," he replied. "For I have hidden all my treasures in Heaven, where the Lord has promised that no one may break in and steal them." "You will cease calling this dead man your Lord," she said, rising to her feet, shaking with rage, "or I shall confine you alone and friendless in the blackest pit in my dungeon." "This is impossible," Chrysostom gently replied, "for Jesus, my risen Lord has promised 'I'll never leave you or forsake you.'" "Still you defy me!" Shrilled the Empress. "Don't you know I have the power to order your life taken from you?" "Ah, but you have no power to take my life," he softly replied. "My life is hidden with Christ in eternity. If you slay me, I will live again." John Chrysostom displayed real Christian courage that day, didn't he? And the witness of history is that the Empress was frustrated in her attempt to force him to deny the Lordship of Jesus. And ultimately, though, she did have him arrested and exiled, but she was never able to silence him or intimidate him.

So where does that kind of courage come from? I believe it was inspired by biblical instructions like we have today in the first letter of the Apostle Peter, written for Christians who were under fire for following Jesus. He writes, have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts, honor Christ. The Lord is holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that's in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect. Having a good conscience so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

We find three pieces of instruction in this passage on how Easter people are to live courageously in a Good Friday world. First, he writes "In your hearts, honor Christ, the Lord is holy." If you take that apart heart, that's the control center of the person. To honor means to esteem and revere. Christ is the title for Jesus the Messiah, anointed one of God sent to save us. Lord Means King of the Universe. God in the flesh Himself, exalted by God, the boss. Holy. That means set apart above all things. In other words, Peter's saying, put Jesus on the throne in your heart. First things first. Put him in charge of your life. See him as Lord of all and give him your devotion and allegiance. See him as your number one audience as you live out your days in this world. That's the first bit of instruction. We saw that in at work in the story of John Chrysostom, didn't we?

There's another thing we saw in that story as well. Listen to Peter's next words: "Always being prepared to make a defense [an apologetic] to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect." Being

prepared to speak up for Jesus begins with a personal commitment to Jesus. Yes, I will do that for you, Lord. When the opportunity presents itself, you can count on me. And then you are ready to take the necessary steps to prepare yourself. He says to make a defense – and that word defense is taken from the ancient Greek legal system from which we get the word apologetics, which is about presenting a case, an argument, an explanation, giving evidence in order to convince someone of the truth that you have. This requires then using one's mind, not only one's heart, but one's mind now, to prepare your case for Christ. It's getting yourself ready for questions people might ask you about your faith and hope in him. Questions about God. What do you believe about God or questions about Jesus? Who is he and why do we all need him? Which leads us to: what's wrong with this world? And what is the good news of Jesus about? And how do you know he really rose from the dead? And how do you know you can trust the Bible? And why are you hopeful about the future?

All of these are questions people might ask and Easter people committed to serving Jesus and other people who need Jesus will have their minds prepared for questions like this. They understand that a believer does not check their brains in at the door when entering God's kingdom through Christ. Easter people know that the word disciple means learner, so they commit themselves to being lifelong students of Jesus. They regularly feed their minds with God's truths in order to be helpful servants of truth, aiding others in removing doubts that hinder them from becoming disciples of Jesus. Study is a necessary discipline for Easter people. They also go to the trouble of writing a personal testimony of what Jesus has done and is doing in their life. And they memorize it even in order to be ready to give it when asked. Having one's mind ready and prepared then is no small task. But boy, is it vital. If you are a believer in Christ, commit yourself to study for the sake of effectively helping others to know the truth of the gospel. Study your Bible. Join a Bible study group that's really studying the Bible and not just trading opinions. Read books like Tim Keller's *Reason for God* or Rebecca McLaughlin's *Confronting Christianity* or Lee Strobel's *Case for Christ*. Take classes that will help you become more knowledgeable of the Bible and Christian theology.

Why? It's loving God with all your mind. And it's loving your neighbor. It's in order to serve others. If you want to be a better golfer, think about this. You study the game. You read articles, magazines and books written by experts you practice, take a few lessons from a club pro in order to improve your skills on the golf course, don't you? And isn't that true of any endeavor in life, whether it's parenting, marriage, job skills, and

hobbies, it requires some discipline on a person's part and learning in order to do it well. So, can we really do any less preparation and work in serving Jesus, who has called believers to the ultimate endeavor? To bring others to him for salvation. That's what Peter is challenging us to do here. Have your mind prepared.

And he also teaches us the manner in which Christians are to courageously give the reason for the hope to question to their questioners. Their response to them is to be done with gentleness and respect. Someone once wisely noted that 90% of the friction of daily life is caused by the wrong tone of voice. Tone and manner matter. You see, sharing the reason behind one's living hope is to be understood by the Christian as an act of neighbor love toward those who question you. So communication is done with a gentle servant like attitude that is seeking to aid unbelieving people to come to recognize Jesus as Savior and Lord and come to him for eternal life. And it's done with reverence for God. God is watching. You want to please him Who has saved you. The goal of giving your reasons for the living hope that is in you is not to win arguments and beat others into intellectual submission to you. No, the goal of Easter people is to draw them to Jesus and please God. And so, we treat them as Jesus would treat them, He said of himself, I am gentle and lowly in heart. After all, we remember, they're created in God's image and loved by God, and they're died for by Jesus Christ. Christian author Dallas Willard reasons with us in his book, *The Allure of Gentleness*, "Our Apologetic, our defense has to embody the message in person. We want to communicate only with gentleness and reverence will people be able to see, verify and be persuaded to respond to what we have to say."

Finally, the third thing Peter teaches us: walk your talk, back up your words with loving Christ-like behavior, striving to be good and to do good in the name of Christ. This is the way Peter put it, having a good conscience so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. It may look ridiculous for questioning your character; striving to live blamelessly can silence the critics and allow a believer in Christ to have a chance for a fair hearing. Former Senate Chaplain Richard Halverson wrote in an article:

Sure, we believe in freedom of speech. You've got the right to say anything you like, but others don't have to listen. They're under no obligation to tune you in. When they do, they can also tune you out anytime they wish. Your right to speak is guaranteed, but you must earn the right to be listened to. It depends solely on our integrity. Integrity is a prerequisite to acceptance.

If you expect to be paid attention to back it up with your life. Let your walk correspond to your talk. This is fundamental to your witness for Christ. Many so-called Christians listen too little, talk too much, and live lives that contradict what they say. Their witness betrays Christ and alienates those to whom they speak.

It's a tall order that Peter is giving Easter people. Honor Christ in your heart, as Lord as holy, the one in charge. Always be prepared. Prepare your mind to gently, reverently speak up and speak out for Jesus and always be walking your talk. You're a walking advertisement. In other words, Easter people aren't considered themselves on call for Jesus 24/7. They're always on call, doing right and good things, shining their light before others in his name and always prepared for questions which may come their way as a result. Questions like: What gives with you? You show such patience and kindness even towards difficult people, and you appear to be confident and hopeful about things. What's the reasoning behind it? It's important that you're always prepared for these kinds of situations.

The opportunity may come up with someone who's lamenting about the broken state of the world and wondering out loud, what's the reason for all this? And what's the answer for this hopeless mess? Could you answer that? Or maybe a question will come up in a conversation, someone who was sharing that they're going through a rough patch, a situation that's looking hopeless for them, and they're looking for some helpful answers. Maybe it will come from an obnoxious questioner that is hostile towards the Christian faith for some reason and just wants to put Christians in their place. That happens. Or consider this the questions may not be asked by an unbeliever, but by a fellow Christian who is wrestling with doubts. They might say to you, "You seem confident in your faith, walk and I'm struggling with mine. I need some help. Can we get together and talk about it over a cup of coffee? I have so many questions. Maybe you can help me." In each of these instances, these questioners need you to respectfully then listen to their questions and their doubts and their fears and respond with gentleness and not judgment or condescension or scorn or anger.

Peter points out that you may wind up suffering in some way for your efforts in all this, but instead of despairing, remind yourself that you're in good company. There's a precedent. Jesus himself, the author and perfecter of our faith. Keep your mind always stayed on him. That's what Peter tells us in his final bit of instruction for today, he reminds his suffering readers for Christ also suffered for sins, the righteous one for the

unrighteous to rescue us and make us right with God. But that wasn't the last word. He was made alive in the spirit. He was resurrected from the dead. And then he descended into hell and declared victory over the spirits in prison. This was the climax scene of the drama of redemption. The seed of the woman bruising the serpent's head and manifesting himself as triumphant over all powers of darkness. And then God exalted him. And now Jesus sits at the right hand of God and everything is subject to Him. He is Lord with the final word over this world, the suffering servant king has been exalted. And then Peter says, and you are attached to him through your baptism into Christ. The regenerating power of the Holy Spirit has raised Christ from the dead, is operative in you. You're cleansed from your sin, righteous in God's sight. And as you live in that baptismal covenant, with him walking in the footsteps of the suffering servant Jesus, know this: you share in his victory and his resurrection. This is not a dead end road that you are taking with Jesus. So be of good courage. Keeping in mind that Jesus who suffered and died is now glorified. As you share in His suffering, you will also share in his glory. That's encouraging.

This is important instruction, then, that Peter has given us today. Following it can make a life changing difference in the people you encounter daily who are needing Jesus. So I leave you with one final thought from Dallas Willard on the importance of leading unbelievers to Christ through what you say and do. Listen to his words being mistaken about life. The things of God and the human soul is a serious matter. That is why the work of Christian apologetics is so important. So we speak the truth in love, and we speak with all the clarity and reasonableness that we can muster simultaneously counting on the spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, to accomplish with what we do and affect that lives far beyond our natural abilities. Did you catch that? The human soul is a serious matter, and that's why Jesus came into our world to suffer and die. Everybody needs what He offers, and He's counting on his Easter people to gently bring them the powerful truth of the Gospel so they can be led to new and eternal life with Christ. He's counting on you. Amen.