

The Price of Holiness 1 Peter 1:13-21

I want you to imagine with me for just a second, what the last few hours of Christ's life must have been like. Being beaten and flogged to within an inch of His own life, skin being torn away from His own body, being forced to walk the road towards Golgotha, with the weight of the world's sin bearing down upon His own body. Imagine for a second standing in the crowd as Jesus walks by. Imagine listening to the people standing next to you as they shout at Christ, as they cheer for Him to be crucified. Imagine the shouts of pain as Christ is lying there on His back on the cross, nails being driven through hands and feet, the sound of steel crashing against steel, wails of grief rising up as His family stands there and watch as He's about to be crucified. Imagine being on the cross, feeling absolutely helpless at that point in time, looking down and seeing your loved ones standing at your feet, being in such immense pain, hanging, unable to breathe, being separated from the Father. Can you imagine that, can you picture that? Can you picture in your minds how horrific that moment in history must have been?

I don't know about you but I can only imagine that in the midst of all that crying out in pain and anguish, all the crying out in fear, all the hurt and the suffering that must have been going on at that point in time, I can't help but think that there must have been an overwhelming sense of helplessness. And as Christ gave up His own life we know that the foundations of the very world trembled, and darkness came upon the earth.

Now this is the sacrifice that was paid for us. This is the ransom that was paid for all of humankind. For anybody who wants to glamorize what actually happened on that day, well then we've completely missed it, we have lost the plot. This is not a sacrifice, this is not a ransom that is paid with money, this is not something that is a joyous moment at that point in time. Yes, for us as we look back now we can be overjoyed at the sacrifice that God made so that we could come into His presence but at that particular moment in time I can promise you that there was nothing joyous about it. And it's because of that same sacrifice that we have been redeemed back to God, that we have been saved through Christ's blood shed on that cross. And as **Ephesians 2:8 tells us: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is a gift of God."**

Now the implication of that term 'gift' suggests that it is not something that has to be paid for. It is not something that can be paid for. When last did you gather around for Christmas or a birthday and receive a gift for which you were told, 'that will cost you this much money'? Or when last did you gather around for Christmas or a birthday and give a gift for which you said 'here you go, happy birthday (or merry Christmas), here is the receipt for that gift, now you owe me'? The gift is free. We don't expect anything in return. And that is what God's grace is. It is a free gift, it is not a cheap gift, we've often heard about this idea that grace is given to us and we are able to do with it what we want, no! It is not a cheap grace; yes it is free, but not cheap.

Now I want to say that this is the grace of God, yes it is free but it does require something in return. And I think that this is what Peter is trying to tell us in this passage. He says, "**Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.**" And this is the start of a series of exhortations, or commands from Peter. It starts in chapter one and this theme of exhortation continues all the way through to chapter 5. Now at this particular point, Peter starts with probably one of the most heartfelt commands, divided into three aspects which encompass the entirety of human life, the entirety of what it means to be human.

First, he says, 'prepare your minds'. That is to ensure that our thinking is in line with the will of God. Set your mind on the things of God. The second he says, 'be self-controlled'. This I want to suggest refers to the physical aspect of being human, the body, be self-controlled, that is do not conform to the evil desires that are around us. Do not give in to the base urges we have, do not give in to the physical urges and desires of our hearts or of our being. And the third he says, 'set your hope fully on the grace that is to be given'. The spirit, the essence of human life, the soul if you will, has to be set on the hope given to us by God.

Now this is great, this is what Peter is telling us, this is what the scriptures continue to tell us, yes, there is grace given to us, yes there is a hope given to us, there is something that we can look forward to, but it requires some kind of response. It is not enough for us to just sit back and say, 'ok, I'm a Christian, that's great, I'm going to continue walking the same path I always have'. How many times have we come across people who have supposedly found Christ in their lives and on a daily basis say 'yes, I am a Christian, I'm good. I have received the grace of God, just keep giving it to me. Lord, let your grace flow, send it down'. Now when you ask them the question, do you actually believe in Jesus Christ they say, 'of course I believe in Christ, how can you ask me such a question?' And yet I then want to ask the following, "where is the evidence? What is it about your life that proves that you are a Christian?" If we continue to walk in the ways of the world, if we continue as what Peter is referring to here, to walk in ignorance, to conform to the evil desires, to follow along the footsteps that were handed down from our forefathers, that is the Law, that is working for something, that is hoping that we have any sense or ability to receive God's grace through the things that we do, then where is the evidence of that saving grace in our lives? Because as we have heard, we are called to be holy, we are called to walk in such a way that God is reflected through us.

William Gurnall, who is a great Puritan pastor, once said, **"We must either renounce our hope of going to heaven or resolve to walk in the only path that will lead us there."** Now that is harsh, these are really strong words. Either you renounce your hope of going to heaven, give it up entirely, don't claim to be something you are not, or make the decision to walk in such a way that your life reflects the holiness of God because that is what we have been commanded to do, "be holy because I am holy." Now what does it mean to be holy? Can anyone truly be holy? Is it possible at all? Not in our own strength it's not. There is nothing that we can do in our own power to attain holiness.

Peter goes on to tell us that you have been redeemed not with perishable things, that's things of the earth like silver or gold, but you have been redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. And Jesus outright says in the gospel of John, **"I am the way, the truth and the life"**. Jesus urges us and begs us and pleads with us to follow Him, to follow in His ways, to follow in the ways of the Lord so that at some point in time when the Lord calls us home, we will be able to enter into His presence, that we will not be condemned to hell, that we will not be cast aside. And yes it is extremely difficult because when the world is pushing at you from one side and says 'you need to follow me, conform, fit in, attain success, money and wealth', the Christian life says 'no, I need to push back because the gospel says something completely different to what the world is teaching'. When the evil desires of the human flesh push, what is the desire of the Spirit led heart saying? Be holy because I am holy. Yes, the world will judge you for it, it will call you naïve, the world will tell you that you do not fit in, but at the end of the day where would you rather fit in, with the world or the heavenly kingdom of God?

The idea of grace being cheap is something that always sticks in my mind. There is nothing cheap about the Lord Jesus Christ hanging on a cross for you. There is nothing cheap about His blood being shed so that you can be redeemed back to God. Yet, how do we respond? Think about this for even just a short while. How are we responding to God? How are we responding to the call to be holy? How do we reflect upon our own lives? How do we represent God? Can we represent God in such a way that He is glorified to the full? Can we truly walk in line with what the word of the Lord tells us? Yes, we can. Like I said, it's not easy, there is nothing easy about it but at the end of the day it will be worth it. And the Lord promises that for those who put their hope in Him, for those who put their trust in Him, for those who keep their eyes fixed upon the Lord, He will renew their strength. When the world is pushing down and you are fighting to stay afloat, put your hope in the Lord and He will renew your strength.

Christ is calling us, the Spirit is moving, He's not an idle Spirit. He doesn't come into your heart today and then put his feet up, hoping that you do well. There is something that is required of each of us and that is a faithful response. 'Here I am Lord, send me. Take my life; I surrender everything that I have to you. I pray Lord that you would use me in the expansion of your kingdom. I pray Father that you would use me to reach out to the lost, to proclaim the word of our risen Lord Jesus Christ.' The faithful response that is required of us can cost you everything, but it will gain everything as well.

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