

Sermon for April 30, 2017 – Easter 3

1 Peter 1:17-21 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

Theme: Live in Reverence towards God

- 1) *What this means.*
- 2) *Why we do it.*

¹⁷If you call on the Father who judges impartially, according to the work of each person, conduct yourselves during the time of your pilgrimage in reverence, ¹⁸because you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, not with things that pass away, such as silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰He was chosen before the foundation of the world but revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹Through him you are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Because Jesus rose from the dead, we can be absolutely sure that our sins have been paid for in full. Through faith in Christ, we can be absolutely certain that we will go to heaven when we die. Why? Because God loves us.

I know: most of you already know these truths. But do you live in them – confident that you are God’s child, fully forgiven and an heir of heaven? Can you imagine what such a life is like – living guilt free without any fear of hell – regardless of how often or horribly you have sinned? Well, you shouldn’t have to imagine it because that is exactly the kind of life God offers us through faith in the Gospel.

“Wait a second, pastor,” you might be thinking, “Do you really want people to live in full confidence that their sins are completely forgiven in Christ, and that heaven is a certainty? If that is the case, what will prevent them from skipping Church every Sunday and living in sin under the excuse that Jesus already forgave their sin so they can live however they want?”

Reverence for God and the price he paid for our salvation – that’s what will prevent such behavior! With St. Peter as our guide, let us consider this truth under the theme: **Live in reverence towards God.** 1) *What that means* and 2) *Why we do it.*

Part One: What it means to live in reverence towards God.

Our sermon text follows the wonderful encouragement we considered last Sunday; where the apostle Peter directed our attention to the hope of eternal life God has guaranteed us through Christ’s resurrection from the dead. This hope sustains us through every trial in life and will be proved genuine when Christ comes again on the last day.

Because Christ has won for us this wonderful hope of forgiveness life and salvation, Peter encourages us to respond by living as the LORD's obedient children on this earth – reminding us of God's command: *"Be holy, because I am holy."*ⁱ

He goes on to say: *¹⁷If you call on the Father who judges impartially, according to the work of each person, conduct yourselves during the time of your pilgrimage in reverence.*

In other words, God didn't forgive our sins and save us from an eternity in hell so that we could go on living as if our life on this earth is the only thing that matters. The LORD has not changed. He is still holy and hates sin.

You, on the other hand, have changed. Through Holy Baptism the Lord washed you clean from all sin, created faith in your heart, and adopted you into his family. As his dearly loved child, God wants you to live in reverence towards him – understanding that your life on this earth is a mere pilgrimage.

"But what if I choose not to do this?" someone might wonder. Well, then you show yourself to be an unbeliever, who rejects the wonderful salvation God has won for you. And why do I say this? Because God didn't save you from the consequences of your sin so that you could go on living however you want. He saved you specifically to be his holy child. In other words, if you refuse to be God's holy child, then you refuse to accept the salvation Jesus won for you. You will have to face the consequences of your sin on your own.

Think of it this way: imagine your son is in college and, through foolish spending, has racked up so much debt that he is unable to pay it. Out of love, you offer to for pay the debt so that your son can have a fresh start. But what if he says in all earnestness, "Thanks Mom and Dad: now I can go back to throwing wild parties for all my friends?" Would such a reply show respect towards you and gratitude for your gift? No, rather it shows that your child (sadly) doesn't care about you; all he cares about is himself. I don't know about you, but if one of my children did that to me, I would pull all financial support from them and say, "You're on your own. Good luck paying off your debt."

In the same way, if we use the Lord's gift of forgiveness other than how he intended it, we show that we neither care about God nor his salvation. All we care about is ourselves and the short-term pleasure we can get. But God cannot be mocked. If a person wants to live without him, then he will have to face the consequences of his sins on his own.

This is why Peter encourages us to live in reverence towards God – considering both who he is and who we are in relation to him. He is our heavenly Father to whom we owe all love, respect and obedience. Love and listen to him as such, understanding our life on this earth is merely a pilgrimage and not a destination.

What do I mean by this? So often we live as if the things we experience on this earth are the end all and be all of our existence. We are tempted to covet things like houses, cars, fashion, leisure and technology – living in full pursuit of them, all the while forgetting the greater glory awaiting

us in heaven. We try to find value in what we have and experience instead of in him who saved us.

But the LORD says that *this world in its present form is passing away.*ⁱⁱ All the things, experiences and relationships people value outside of Christ are temporary. They will all pass away. However, *the man who does the will of God lives forever.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Live, therefore, in reverence towards God by learning and keeping his commands. Understand that he is your Father who loves you dearly. Respect him as such. Use the things of this earth but do not become engrossed by them. Remember that you are merely a pilgrim in this world. Live as such. Why?

Part Two: Why we live in reverence towards God.

...¹⁸*because you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, not with things that pass away, such as silver or gold,*¹⁹*but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot.*

The word “redeem” means to “buy back”. In ancient times people who couldn’t pay off a debt were sold into slavery. If a person was redeemed, it means he was bought back from his slavery. He was free.

The LORD has redeemed you from *your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers*. In other words, the LORD paid for the debt all our sinful pursuits had earned. He bought us back - not that we can go on living a meaningless life like the rest of the world, pursuing things that will not last. No, he freed us for himself – to be his children, who would experience his Fatherly goodness for all eternity.

And what price did the LORD pay to redeem us? Something far more precious than all the gold and silver in the universe: *the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot.*

Have you ever considered why Jesus’ blood is called precious? Could it be because all human life is precious – and should never be wasted? Could it be because Jesus is unique –being the only sinless person to have ever walked this earth? Perhaps Jesus’ blood is called precious because it alone can pay for sin? Truth be told, all these reasons are true (especially the last two), but there is yet one more reason I would like to highlight as to why Jesus’ blood is called precious: he is the only begotten Son, whom God the Father loves above all else.

Now think about that for a second: would you ever consider giving up the person or thing you loved the most for someone else? If you ever did, that person must truly mean something to you. And you do mean something to God. He has placed the value of his Son upon you – that is what you are worth to him!

And consider this: Jesus' sacrifice was not some last-minute decision God the Father made in reaction to mankind's fall. No, ²⁰*He was chosen before the foundation of the world but revealed in these last times for your sake.*

Think of what this means: Even before he created one speck of matter in this universe, our triune God – knowing that we would fall into sin – planned our salvation through Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross. In his wisdom, the LORD kept the exact details of who and how the Christ would save us a secret so that his people would always be looking for him in faith. Now, however, God has revealed these details to us in the person of Jesus who, by the sacrifice of himself on the cross, has shown us the full extent to which God loves us.

Peter continues: ²¹*Through him you are believers in God*; that is to say that Jesus not only paid for our forgiveness, but made sure that we would receive the benefits of his sacrifice by creating faith in our hearts through the preaching of His Gospel. He commissioned his disciples of all time to preach and teach this Gospel, through which the Holy Spirit would create faith in everyone God has chosen from before the creation of the world. It's all and only because of Jesus that we are saved.

And how can we know for sure that Jesus actually accomplished all these things for us? Peter tells us: *God raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.*

Yes, Jesus' resurrection from the dead proves that he truly is the Messiah and that our sins have been paid for in full. Because Jesus rose from the grave, we can be confident that we too will rise from the dead – just as the Bible promises. Our sins are forgiven. We are reconciled to God.

Now, when you consider everything God has done to save you: how he planned your salvation from before the creation of the world, accomplished it through his Son's sacrifice on the cross, and made sure that you would receive the benefits of this sacrifice by creating faith in your heart by means of his Gospel . . . how can you not respond to the Lord in love? How can you not want to live your life in total reverence to God – gladly obeying what he commands for your good?

It is true – we still have a sinful nature that desires the things of this world. It wants to rebel against God and his word. Because of this, we need to be reminded of God's law and what we deserve because of our sin.

But being reminded of the Lord's law will not lead us to live our lives in reverence towards God. No, only the Gospel can do that with its bold and wonderful promises that make us certain of our salvation in Christ.

Your sins are forgiven. You are at peace with God. You will go to heaven when you die because God loves you. These statements are facts for everyone who believe in Jesus. Let these facts be the foundation of your life, ever moving you to live in reverence to God in response to the great love he has shown you. Amen

ⁱ 1 Peter 1:16 NIV84

ⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 7:31 NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 John 2:17 NIV84