

Today's scripture reading is a part of our sermon series on the letter of 1st Peter. Written by Peter to the scattered believers in Asia Minor. This part of his message is primarily written to the gentile believers, and as such is one that we can learn from as well. After all, we are gentiles, that is to say non jewish.

The predominant message that comes to me in today's scripture reading is that it is by our faith in Jesus Christ and his actions that we are redeemed. Peter writes, It is not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed, but with the precious blood of Christ.

Peter is writing to a culture that very strongly believes in purchasing salvation, either through coin, animal sacrifice, or good deeds. Something that many people still feel a calling to today. Many folks will talk about doing their good deed for the day, or will talk about how they donate to a charity to balance out things in their life.

Popular stories, such as the Christmas Carol, about a wealthy gentleman who turns his life around and donates to the poor to atone for his prior misdeeds. We hear about those who have committed crimes, who not volunteer to give back to the same communities they harmed. And when we hear these stories how can we not think that the scales are being evened out.

This line of thinking does not work when it comes to salvation. No matter how tempting it might be. Peter writes in his letter, "People are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever."

Humanly deeds, and manufactured goods, will all fade in time. How can we declare to the heavens that our silver and gold, that our actions are worthy of God almighty? They aren't, and honestly that's ok. Because you never needed to give enough, or work enough, towards earning your salvation. We got rid of catholic indulgences 500 years ago during the reformation. You have never needed to earn your way to salvation.

Christ's bought our salvation for us. With his own blood. He who was chosen before the creation of the world, and was only revealed to us for our own sake. We believe through him in God, who raised in from the dead and glorified him. How could we not have faith and hope in God almighty?

In Peter's letter today then, we here that it is only by faith in Christ Jesus, and his actions, not our own, that we are redeemed. We who were born as perishable humans, have been reborn with Christ as imperishable.

So, if our actions do not merit our salvation, should we not just live for ourselves? Living life to our own fullness? There are some who would live such a life when they hear these words. Some who would claim salvation is equal to total freedom in life. But Peter's words today remind us, that we are called as Christians to holy living. "For it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'".

Peter is writing to a community who is wrestling with a changing soteriology, a changing understanding of salvation. They have come from a faith that offers animal sacrifices, gives money to the temple, and works for free as atonement for misdeeds and actions.

And for a people who subscribe to this understanding of salvation, this soteriology (doctrine of salvation). They were struggling with how to live life without these rules and enforced standards of living. And so Peter is here to tell them that their faith in Jesus is what will, and has already, reconcile them to God.

Peter goes on to say, as Christians who believe in Jesus, it is our calling to be holy like Jesus is. To live in such a way that shows others our faith. So first thing he tells them is to not conform to evil desires. To live holy lives instead.

How do we live a holy life? Live in reverent fear of God, which is just a difficult phrase to parse out. As we have attempted to do here before on a Sunday morning. The sentence is followed up though with some clarification. That we are to trust in Christ, and cast aside the empty way of life we lived before we knew him.

By obeying the truth of Jesus, and following in his pathway, we will find ourselves purified. And in that purification Peter tells us, we will be set free to have sincere love for one another, deeply and from the heart.

If we have lived our lives believing that all ill deeds must be evened out by good deeds, it can be hard to trust love and compassion from others.

They are only doing this to be nice, they are being nice in order to get a promotion. This kindness is only temporary, I will be expected to repay this in kind or in double in the near future.

When you live in a world where your relationship with God is transactional, and you need to pay off your sins, it changes the way you think about your fellow humans too.

God has given us freedom, since before the world was formed, in Christ Jesus. And it through this that God loves us completely and fully, from the depths of all creation.

This in turn, allows us, to reconsider our relationship with one another. And to as Peter says, rid ourselves of all malice, and deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. To instead crave pure spiritual milk. Meaning the Word of God.

So that might grow up in our salvation. That might grow into people who are loving and compassionate. Not because we are trying to earn something, or prove something. But because it is who we are down to our core. Because Jesus gave us the full freedom in the knowledge of his grace to be the loving people God has wanted us to be.

So continue to live your life in abundance of love. Offering freely to others, and to the church. Not so you can atone for sin. But because we are a people who are called to love, and to live holy lives.

There is much to be done for Christ's kingdom to be made a reality. But we can help start it, by ridding ourselves of deceit and malice and instead by nourishing the loving community of Christ all around us.

This is the word of our Lord
Thanks be to God.

Rev. Austin Wicks