

Theme: Be Prepared!

1. Know Your "Hope"
2. Give an Answer

Text: 1 Peter 3:15-18 (NIV)

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.

In life it is important to **Be Prepared**. Anything worthwhile, anything worth doing, anything worth anything is worth **preparing** for. Whether it's a test at school, a job interview, a trip, a particularly challenging task, or preaching a sermon—whatever it is; whether it's as mundane as making a meal for your family or as life-threatening as fighting the war on terrorism, so much in life absolutely depends on being **prepared!** The greatest and most successful men and women throughout history have realized this. Where you find successful people, you will usually find them to be **prepared** people. You can find literally *hundreds* of quotes attributed to some of the most influential and successful people in history proclaiming the importance of being **prepared**:

"Before anything else, preparation is the key to success." - Alexander Graham Bell

"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." - Benjamin Franklin

"I will prepare and some day my chance will come."

"Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe."

- Abraham Lincoln

Obviously, if being **prepared** is that important in our earthly, physical lives, doesn't it make sense that the same is true of our spiritual lives? Jesus tells us to **"Watch and pray" (Mark 13:32-33)** and to **Be Prepared** for His return on Judgment Day. We memorize and store in our hearts the many passages of Scripture that give us comfort and strength so that we can **Be Prepared** for times of trouble, trial, or temptation that may come our way during our lifetime. But how many of us are always **prepared** to "witness" to others; to tell others about who Jesus is and what He has done to save them? Peter instructs us in our text to **"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (v. 15)**. **"Always."** Not sometimes. Not only on Sunday morning, or only in a church setting, or when you have time to prepare. **"Always be prepared!"**

Think about this: If you only had a minute to share the Gospel with someone who may not know Jesus, could you do it? Could you communicate the central message of the Christian faith—your faith!—in a clear and concise fashion? Would you feel comfortable doing it, even if the opportunity was unexpected? Most of us would probably admit that we feel very **uncomfortable** doing this, and feel that we are very **unprepared**. So today, we are going to look at these words from **1 Peter** and learn HOW we can **"Be Prepared"** to **"give the reason for the hope that [we] have" (v. 15)**

How can we share our **hope**? Well, first off, we've got to **1. know our hope!** We've got to know what it is we're hoping for! Now, the **"hope"** that Peter is speaking of in our text is not some mere wish, like we use the word most often today. Like when we say, "I hope it doesn't get too hot today." Rather when this word is used in the Biblical sense **"hope"** refers to the Christian's *"joyful expectation of the fulfillment of God's promises."* Most often it refers to the promise of the sure **"hope"** of salvation in heaven.

Do you have that type of sure **"hope"** for salvation? If I were to give you a short questionnaire which box would you check:

I hope I'm going to heaven.

-or-

I know my **"hope"**—I AM going to heaven!

Do you know that your entrance into heaven on your last day is a "done deal"—no "if's," "I hope so's," or "maybe's"? Do you know that it is sure and certain because of what Jesus did for you on that cross? That is what He meant by, **"It is finished!" (John 19:30)**. If you don't **1. know your hope** you simply aren't prepared; not to witness Jesus to others, and sadly—and more seriously—you aren't prepared for Jesus' return on the Last Day!

Well then, let's look briefly and simply at what that **"hope"** is so that we can first solidify this message in our own hearts and then share it effectively and more easily with others. Ironically, sharing our "hope" most effectively usually begins by sharing some "bad news!"

† **The "Bad News" - Sin.**

That three letter word that has almost become unspeakable in our day is the "bad news." The Bible tells us that we all have it; we've all been infected by it from birth (actually, even from conception! **(see Psalm 51:5) "All have sinned"** the Bible tells us, **"and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)**. The real bad news about our sin is that the Bible also tells us, **"the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23)**—not just physical death; but eternal death, namely hell.

"Well, pastor," you might ask, "why in the world would we want to share this 'bad news' with people at all, much less *first* if we are going to talk with them about our **hope**?" Well, let me ask you: Do you think the world has a good concept of how desperate their spiritual situation is by nature? Do you think most people feel that their standing with God (if they believe He actually exists) is "good enough," and that He'll certainly let them into heaven because they haven't been "that bad," by their judgment—at least not as bad as some people they know? Do you think the people of our world and our society realize just how serious **sin** is? I don't think most people have any idea.

Who is telling them that sin—their sin—is serious? So serious, in fact, that the Son of God Himself had to die an excruciating death on a cross and suffer the torments of hell itself to pay for sins punishment and appease God's holy and just wrath against sin! Nothing less than the very blood of the Son of God would save us. Nothing else could even come close. No amount of money. No amount of human effort, or philosophy, or "wishful thinking," could make sin and its curse go away.

If people do not understand this, they will not see their need, or the relevancy of Jesus or the Gospel to their lives. If we don't understand what we've been saved from then when we tell them, "Jesus Saves!" do you know how they will respond? "Saves' me from what?" Or even worse, they will respond with, "So what?"

It would be like walking into your doctor's office and hearing him say, "Good news! You're cured!" But all you thought you had was a minor cough. If you didn't realize or acknowledge the fact that you actually had a terminal illness, that "good news" from the doctor wouldn't mean much to you. The same is true of Jesus' spiritual "cure" for sin. People must understand the reality and the seriousness of sin and its eternal consequences before the "Good News" will really be meaningful to them.

Speaking of that "Good News," that's what the word Gospel actually means: "Good News." It refers to what Christ has done for us.

† The "Good News" - Grace.

You can sum up the "Good News" of the Gospel with just this one word: **Grace**. Do you understand what **grace** means? **Grace** means "undeserved love," but think about what that word *means*: It means that even though we were all suffering from the "terminal illness" of sin and could do nothing to cure ourselves, God, purely out of His love for us—a love which we didn't ask for, earn, or deserve—sent His Son Jesus to be the cure for our sin. He did this by becoming one of us and taking on the "sickness" of all our sins upon Himself and taking the "terminal illness" of the cross and hell in our place that we would be cured and have eternal life in heaven.

This is the message we need to have buried in our hearts, both the "bad news" and the "good news." Sin and Grace. Our sin and God's grace. This message is what creates faith in our hearts. That faith the Bible tells us, is what makes that salvation—the "cure" for our sins, forgiveness—our own!

That faith is what Peter is referring to in the first words of our text when he says, "**But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord**" (v. 15). It is a genuine, heart-felt faith. Not "phony" in any way, or simply just "head knowledge" of what Jesus has done. It is a faith that fills your heart, giving the #1 place "**set apart**" for just for Christ. When Christ fills our heart we are going to think about Him and His Word, we are going to speak about Him, and we are going to live our lives for Him!

That brings us to the second key point of our sermon, if we **1. Know our hope** then we need to **2. Give an answer**. I might amend that second point a little and say instead that we need to **2. Give a good answer!** Listen again to what Peter says in our text about the importance of HOW we witness the "Good News" of Jesus to others. "**Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander**" (v. 15-16). Our conduct, the way we live our lives should be the first and one of the "loudest" witnesses for Christ and His love and power, and should be one of the "proofs" for the world to see that we are, in fact, one of His followers. St. Francis of Assisi is famous for saying: "*Preach the Gospel everywhere you go, and if necessary, use words.*"

Unfortunately, some of the methods of evangelism that the Christian Church has used over the years have been extremely disrespectful and very "pushy" rather than gentle and respectful, as Peter encourages in our text. How successful do you think those methods have been? A California-based Christian marketing research company once reported that non-Christians in the United States view evangelical Christians "somewhat more kindly than prostitutes, but with less affection than lawyers." That's how many people view Christians: Pushy, phony, uninterested, and uncaring—not words that Jesus would want to come to mind when "outsiders" think about the people of His Church.

I would like to point your attention once again this morning to a great example of witnessing for Jesus with "**gentleness and respect**" (v. 15) even in a very unlikely and rather difficult situation. Think back to the account of the apostle Paul in Athens which we read in our Scripture reading from the Book of Acts chapter 17.

† Paul wasn't pushy, phony, or disrespectful to the highly educated, but obviously very pagan men of Athens. And notice also he expressed his interest in who they were and found a way to turn a topic of conversation that they were obviously interested in to tell them about the true God and His Son, Jesus, who was crucified and risen again to save them. We read again from Acts 17, [Paul said], "**Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.**" (Acts 17:22-23).

- ✚ Paul didn't mock them for their pagan beliefs, He didn't walk into the midst of them and say, "You idiots! How stupid can you be to worship anything and everything and then make an idol to an 'UNKNOWN GOD,' just in case you missed one! Like that's really going to work!" No, he witnessed the truth about the true God and Jesus Christ, but he did it with **"gentleness and respect" (v. 15)**.
- ✚ While at the same time, in no way did He condone their pagan beliefs, or imply that they were somehow just as good as having faith in Christ.
- ✚ He shows an interest in their culture and their interests by quoting from one of their own poets, **"for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring' (Acts 17:28)**.
- ✚ Finally, Paul ended His "mini-sermon" with a call to repentance from sin and the worship of false gods and gave a very clear testimony of the Gospel of the risen Savior Jesus, **"...but now [God] commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:29-31)**.

Would you **"be prepared"** to give a similar witness in a similar situation? Our age and society is not much different than that of Athens in Paul's day. The true God is truly an UNKNOWN GOD to many people in our day, just like He was to the people of Athens. We have the truth about Him and His Son Jesus. We have His **"hope"**—a living **"hope"** for a dying world! Do we **1. know our hope?** Are we prepared to **2. Give an answer** for that **hope** which we have, with **"gentleness and respect"**? Look around you today. An opportunity to share that hope will be presented to you today—and everyday—by the Holy Spirit. The question is, are you **prepared?** Amen.