

1 Peter

Entrusting
Ourselves
to a
Faithful
Sovereign



1 Peter 3:8-22

From Heart to Character: Recognizing Christ's Lordship

I need your help in recognizing the importance and meaning of a word. It is one you may pray on a regular basis. It also shows up once a year in connection to trick or treating. Other than in the month of October and when you say the model prayer, do you ever use the word “hallow?” It sounds like Indigo Montoya from Princess Bride when he confronts Count Rugen. We use it sometimes, but do we understand what it means? Hallow is an older verb referring to holiness; to make holy or to show as holy; possibly to set apart.

We may treat the word hallow as outdated in our everyday language, but our society considers the concept of sincere holiness as outdated. Holiness is seen as a mockery and an impossibility since at least the 60s. The moral revolution has so shaped our culture that many dogmatically assert religion as a personal preference that is to have no bearing on how or why you approach life. If you need to see a display of this cultural dismissal of faith as antiquated and even dangerous, review the treatment of the most recent Supreme Court nominee. Somehow Christian faith is assumed to make you unloving, unable to discern truth, and unable to use sound logic, that is until you interact with a Christian who displays truth, love, and wisdom with composure and grace. The world desires to exalt sin and call it love. In sin, the world may promote death and call it life. Truth becomes changeable according to one's needs.

Anyone can make a claim about how things should be and what they are. But actions, actions reveal the trustworthiness of definitions. And consistent actions reveal character. In today's passage, we are called to hallow or sanctify Jesus as Lord. We don't make him holy or make him Lord, but we are to recognize Him as Lord in our hearts. And if you recognize Christ as Lord in your heart, then this truth will determine your actions and shape your character. As we live consistently under Jesus's reign over our lives, we will give definition to grace and faith for the world. They can then see that faith is not some preference but is about responding to the sovereign over all creation with sound, life-shaping trust.

**8 Finally, all of you, have unity of
mind, sympathy, brotherly love,
a tender heart, and a humble
mind.**

9 Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

**10 For
“Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking
deceit;**

**11 let him turn away from evil and
do good;
let him seek peace and pursue
it.**

**12 For the eyes of the Lord are on
the righteous,
and his ears are open to their
prayer.**

**But the face of the Lord is
against those who do evil.”
13 Now who is there to harm
you if you are zealous for what
is good?**

**14 But even if you should suffer
for righteousness' sake, you will
be blessed. Have no fear of
them, nor be troubled,**

**15 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, 16 having a good
conscience, so that, when you
are slandered, those who revile
your good behavior in Christ
may be put to shame.**

**17 For it is better to suffer for
doing good, if that should be
God's will, than for doing evil.**

**18 For Christ also suffered 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,**

**19 in which he went and
proclaimed to the spirits in
prison, 20 because 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.

21 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,

**22 who has gone into heaven
and is at the right hand of God,
with angels, authorities, and
powers having been subjected
to him.**

We regard Christ as Lord through how we bless others.

+We are to recognize Christ as Lord through our character as a salvation-blessed community (3:8–14).

We live in light of the blessing of salvation and in anticipation of our salvation still to be applied.

We are blessed to be a blessing and are to live in anticipation of our blessing still to come.

There is a saying that I was taught several years ago and have been trying to use more often. That phrase is “Blessed to be a blessing.” The guy who taught it to me was applying this passage to his own life. We are blessed to be a blessing, and we are blessed as we are a blessing to others. I’ve found that those who are grateful for how blessed they are feel freer to help others in need. Do you realize that you have inherited the blessings of Christ? Do you know that the aspect of salvation still waiting for you in the presence of God makes the riches of this world look mundane?

So how should those who realize their blessing act?

We are to display the compassionate and loving character of Christ to our church family. Look at v. 8 again.

The language there is in direct relationship to the church, the family of God, your family. If we hope to display the love of God in relationship to the world, then we should think about the church.

You know we serve a Triune God, right? You may also know that we avoid using analogies to explain the Trinity. Analogies from creation always get you in trouble in trying to explain the nature of the Creator. But there are two great illustrations that Scripture has for us to help people appreciate the Triune nature of God. Those two illustrations are marriage, which we discussed last week, and the church. In both of these contexts of Christianity you have equal people who are willing to be in voluntary submission to one another, including willingness to submit to another equal’s leadership. Those in these relationships are considered one and yet remain distinct persons. And these contexts are supposed to be pictures of love and peace within relationships. So Peter writes with the expectation that Christians are to have unity of mind, be sympathetic with one another, have brotherly love for each other, be tender hearted with each other, and have a humble mind in these relationships. If you are struggling

to be characterized in those ways, then begin letting the Spirit and your fellow believers speak the gospel into your life in those particular areas. You need to examine what is being exalted higher than Christ in your heart.

Also, we are not to behave like those who reject and insult us. Do not engage in their polemics against you but engage in spiritual warfare. Fight back with grace, kindness, and love. When Peter writes that we are not to respond to insult with insult or evil with evil, he is not saying that insults should occur in the church. You are brothers and sisters. We should not be verbally attacking one another. If it happens, then apply this verse, but it should not be happening. Your brothers and sister should never be treated as enemies.

But when the world insults and mocks you, bless in return. Did you know that you can make anything sound insignificant by putting the word “just” right before a weak description of it. Oh, you just go to church with other Christians and have learned to say what they say. Well, of course, you do, but that’s not all. But don’t respond back by mocking their intellect. Bless them with either kindness or a question that helps them see truth better. “So, you recognize that people grow in certain behaviors when they pursue a goal together. Our goal is to know and love Christ and display his character as we share His message. Who is shaping your life and what is life about?”

God wants you to train your mind, tongue, and typing fingers to communicate grace. You should prepare yourselves for such conversations long before you have them. Look, you should accept now that the world is opposed to Christ and therefore opposed to His people, but also the world is longing for the life that is found only in Christ. If you accept those truths, then it should not be a shock or fright when you someone starts rejecting you. Instead of feeling intimidated, lean on your past experience with God in prayer and preparation.

There are a couple of places in our passage where Peter writes in hypotheticals. We need to prepare ourselves when trials are just hypothetical. 13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

It’s very possible you will interact with someone who mocks you or persecutes you for your faith, simply because you seek to do good and right. You may not have to experience it, but it’s better to be prepared ahead of time for ways to respond. If you are meeting with your community group this week, maybe you can practice some hypothetical conversations. Share some ways that you know Christians have been mocked or belittled in different environments. Then have your members respond to such a scenario according to the character traits in our passage. “This is how you are treated; this is what is said to you. How do you respond?”

You see...

We regard Christ as Lord by being always-ready gospel witnesses.

We are to recognize Christ as Lord as always-ready gospel witnesses.

What do you always have ready to use on your person? Credit or debit Card? Cell phone? A pen?

It's not just about what is in your pocket, but how able are you to use it? How many of you have gift cards in your wallet that you have forgotten are there? If you don't use it, you lose the ability to recall it easily. (example from college major classes)

Are you able to share your testimony in a way that is winsome? First, are you able to say it faithfully representing the gospel? Second, are you able to say it in a way that is tailored to your audience? The more that you are able to say it faithfully, the more that you are able to contextualize it to your audience.

Professional baseball pitchers and trainers offer a simple piece of advice to younger pitchers: Learn to locate your fastball first and then you can learn how to use breaking pitches against particular batters. A fastball is a mostly straight pitch. Your goal is to get that pitch to the plate precisely where you are aiming to throw it.

When it comes to having your testimony ready, you should be able to state how you came to hear the good news of Christ, how you then believed it, and how it is shaping your life. Practice having your words hit the target of truth about the gospel and your interaction with it. Once you do this enough, you become familiar with the message and so you can then begin contextualizing it for others. One aspect of contextualization is how much time you spend speaking. Some of you are going to have longer testimonies that include many details. You may need to work on your ability to shorten your testimony in case your audience is feeling rushed. Some of you may have your testimony rehearsed to be very brief. You may need to learn how to engage your audience in more conversation if you have time and they need more personal connection points.

You may be thinking, "If I share my faith, I open myself up to rejection."

If you suffer persecution or ridicule for your faith but endure it with Christian character and love for those maligning you, you lay the foundation for a bridge for others to come to faith in Christ, even those attacking you. Have you ever heard of Richard Wurmbrand? When the communists of the Soviet Union first came into Romania, he stood up to point out how communism and Christianity were incompatible. He continued encouraging and shepherding groups of believers who were seeking to be witnesses for Christ to the lost. He was put in jail. Eventually, his wife was put in jail as well. He was forced to do slave labor and was beaten regularly by his atheistic prison guard. One day his guard heard him praying. He came in to Wurmbrand's cell to mock and beat him for it. "You're in jail. Your wife is in jail. Your son is now an orphan. Why do you persist in praying to this imaginary god of yours? Who is left for you to pray for?"

He looks up and says sincerely, "I was praying for you."

Peter is telling us that if we must suffer as faithful witnesses when we have done no wrong and that we persist in love even for our persecutors, then God will use our suffering to be a bridge to the gospel for those around us witnessing our suffering, possibly even our persecutors. This is the pattern of how Christ won people to himself.

We cannot accomplish or apply salvation to anyone like Jesus did, but we can be used by God to be a bridge according to the pattern of Jesus.

Imitate Christ in what he did with you. You were dead according to the pattern of sin's reign. By his sacrifice, the Spirit brought you to life and into the presence of God.

Only Christ can save. You can be a bridge to that good news by how you handle people who hostile or indifferent to our faith.

We regard Christ as lord by trusting in God's vindication for His people.

We are to recognize Christ's lordship by trusting in God's vindication for His people through Christ's resurrection.

The message of the Bible is plain, clear, and simple.

John 3:16

Titus 3:5

1 John 4:10

Don't let the obscurity and difficulty of this passage lead you to set it aside. It is beautiful when you grasp what Peter is trying to communicate and emphasize. When Jesus died, those who plotted his death gloated. They felt they had finally put down a trouble maker who was interrupting their plans. But then he rose again. His resurrection vindicated him. Rom. 1:4 and who has been declared to be the powerful Son of God by the resurrection from the dead according to the Spirit of holiness. His resurrection is his vindication. His resurrection and victory are also your vindication.

1 Tim. 3:16 In flesh was he revealed to sight,

 vindicated by the Spirit's might,

 adored by angels singing.

To nations was he manifest,

 believing souls found peace and rest,

 our Lord in heaven reigning!

This passage is all about Christ's victory through his suffering and his vindication through his resurrection. This victorious vindication is also yours. God will show that his people were right through ultimate salvation for those whose faith have been in Christ. God will vindicate His people just He did with Noah. God saved Noah and his family with the ark and vindicated Noah's life and message. Noah was surely ridiculed for his ark plans and preaching messages. "God is Lord over all and is going to judge us, unless you repent and enter into his salvation!" The salvation of God in Noah's day was anticipated by the ark. God was patient yet awaited eagerly for the moment He would bring the flood to vindicate Noah.

The more experience you have on you, the more you are able to be both patient and eagerly expectant. Have you ever tried to take a kid fishing or hunting? They have no idea what it is like to be patient. They only know eager expectation. But the experienced outdoorsman knows what to expect in each part of the trip. God knew how the story with Noah would go. He was patient but also preparing for the moment He would bring the rain.

Let's look closer at this passage together so that we can appreciate this message of vindication.

Difficulty #1: Spirits in prison and preaching by the Spirit

Three parts to clarify: A) How the Spirit is the means by which the proclamation takes place: By the Holy Spirit through Noah? In the Spiritual realm? By the power of the Holy Spirit, i.e. the power of the Spirit displayed in the resurrection?

B) Who were the spirits in prison? Were they people entrapped by sin? The problem is that people are not referred to be trapped in a prison throughout Scripture unless it is a physical prison; it doesn't defeat that idea but pushes against it. Were they evil spirits that God decreed to be bound for a time? Scripture does speak elsewhere of God decreeing an evil spirit or demon to be bound for a time. That's possible, but let's clarify: Jesus did not descend into hell. The passage here does not include that phrase or even the word descended. When a similar statement shows up in Ephesians 4, it also does not say hell. His descent in Eph. 4 could have been descent to death but is more likely descent to the earth. So, if we are talking about bound evil spirits as the reference here, then let's be clear about what Peter is not saying. Jesus did not go to hell. It's possible that Peter was appealing to a well-known piece of Jewish literature that speaks of demons and evil spirits corrupting the world before and at the time of Noah. If so, Peter is not endorsing everything that this Jewish literature says. But he is using a popular thought of the day to point to Christ's total victory. Were the evil spirits wicked people trapped by something at the time of Noah? Were the evil spirits actually demonic spirits bound by God's power? I don't know which one is my view right now. And Peter is not concerned to give us full clarity on that aspect of his point. Why? Because his point is NOT to try to teach you about those evil spirits, whether they be human or demonic, but about the ultimate vindication of Christ's victory over any and all who would oppose God's people.

Here's the clarifying question: How does this proclamation relate to Noah and God's patient but eager anticipation of rescuing Noah?

Peter is not worried about the difficulty of his teaching. He's concerned about Christians forsaking their faith because of persecution. As Ben Merkle points out, people aren't tempted to turn away from Christian faith because of difficult passages; rather, they are tempted to turn away because of difficulties in their lives. Peter doesn't care to clarify the precise background of his wording about spirits because his focus is on how God patiently waited to vindicate Noah. Noah's example gives us an earlier framework to understand how God is going to vindicate us. God had told Noah beforehand that He would rescue Noah by means of the ark.

Difficulty #2: what about baptism?

The physical act of baptism has no salvific quality, but it is a very important picture of salvation. Peter is building off of the assumption that all the Christians there had experienced baptism and can remember it.

Here's something rather that may sound different, though. Peter and the other apostles perceived the connection between salvation and physical baptism as being expected together. The two events were practiced so closely that Peter had to clarify that physical water did not save. Still, he affirmed how baptism closely followed and pictured salvation. Baptism is a beautiful physical depiction of a greater spiritual reality that has already taken place and a future physical reality that will take place. And Peter is saying when we look back to our baptism or watch someone else be baptized, we are reminded of the ultimate vindication that we have by means of Christ's resurrection. As we identify with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection, we proclaim Jesus's victory. His victory is not just over sin and death. His victory is over all that is evil and twisted. His victory is over all people. His victory is complete and universal.

If you have professed faith in Christ but have not followed that profession with baptism, the water of baptism is expecting you. It is ready to help you proclaim to the world that you identify with Jesus. That you have been saved by real faith in Jesus, not by H₂O but by Christ's sacrifice and your sincere faith in Him. The water is ready to assist you in proclaiming Jesus's victory and lordship. That experience is not just an expression of what has already occurred. It is also a symbol of what will occur ultimately. Ultimately, Jesus will return and raise you physically to new life and show you as vindicated.

You may suffer ridicule by the world for trusting in Jesus and living for Him, but God gets the last word. Those who look to Jesus for salvation will find that the door will close one day and that they are on the inside with Christ, kept safe from ultimate judgment. You do not want to be taken away by the flood of God's judgment.

The key is "Do you recognize Christ as Lord?" If so, then move forward with confident obedience to Him. For some of you that means baptism. For all of you who have

faith in Christ, it means to live for Him in character, in witness, and in confidence of His ultimate vindication.