

# Are You Prepared to Confess Christ?

## 1 Peter 3:15-22 (Easter 6)

*But regard the Lord, the Christ, as holy in your hearts. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is in you. But speak with gentleness and respect, while maintaining a clear conscience, so that those who attack your good way of life in Christ may be put to shame because they slandered you as evildoers. Indeed, it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil, because Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in flesh but was made alive in spirit, in which he also went and made an announcement to the spirits in prison. These spirits disobeyed long ago, when God's patience was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In this ark a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He went to heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.*

As he stood before Greek philosophers in Athens, he began to speak. "Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in every way. For as I was walking around and carefully observing your objects of worship, I even found an altar which had been inscribed, 'To an unknown god.' Now what you worship as unknown, this is what I am going to proclaim to you." (Acts 17:22-23) As the Apostle Paul continued speaking, he used the created world to teach about the only true God and to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus. Paul boldly confessed Christ in a place that was clearly very religious, but the people were lost in hopeless worship of false gods.

If you were in a similar situation, what would you say? How would you confess the Risen Christ? Would you be prepared? Maybe, but you may not find yourselves in a situation quite like Paul in Athens too often. What about if it were just one person - a close friend, a member of your family, a neighbor, a coworker, or someone like the barista at the coffee shop - do you know what you might say? Are you prepared to confess Christ and the hope you have in him?

Before we address that question, we have to address a different one first. As I was thinking this week about God's Word before us today, I had to consider this question too: What might keep people from confessing Christ? Most of what I thought about boiled down to one thing - fear. The people to whom Peter was writing were undergoing suffering, various kinds of trials, and especially persecution for their faith. You could understand how fear might cause their hesitation for confession. You and I aren't in the exact same situation. We aren't often in physical danger because of our faith, but isn't fear still a factor? Fear that you may not know what to say or how to answer a question. Fear of being laughed at or ridiculed for your faith. Fear that your relationship will be affected in a negative way. Fear that they will not just listen. In general fear leads to a lack of confident confession. It makes confessing the Risen Christ about us and not about him leaving us unprepared.

Yet do we really have anything to be afraid of? In the verses leading up to what we heard today, Peter speaks to those fears and calms them. He said, "**Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you should happen to suffer because of righteousness, you are blessed. Do not be afraid of what they fear, and do not be troubled.**" (1 Peter 3:13-14) When fear is removed what is left that keeps you from being prepared? Perhaps it's a heart issue.

Preparation to confess begins with a heart that holds Christ is the highest honor regarding him as holy in your heart. Just as every sin of thought, word, or action can be traced to the sinful desires of the heart, so

the effective rule of Christ in our lives must begin with his reign in our hearts. With hearts set apart for Jesus and faith focused on him, our desire is to always be prepared “to give an answer to everyone who asks you for the hope that is in” us, the hope that we have in the Risen Lord Jesus.

Impressions are made by one’s outlook on life and by how someone conducts their life. What made an impression on the Greek and Roman world during the time of the early church was the hope the followers of Jesus exhibited. To many people of that time there was no reason to be filled with hope. To some it seemed hopeless to believe that the glories of the past could ever be regained, and even more hopeless to look to the future beyond the grave. All they had to live for was the present and even that didn’t always look so great. The Christian faith with its certain hope of a blessed and glorious future stood in sharp contrast to this hopelessness.

Today’s world and society don’t seem much different, do they? You and I have reason for hope in Christ. Isn’t that message of hope a message to share with the world too? What hope do people really have in the middle of a pandemic when sickness, fear, and uncertainty seem to rule the world? What hope do people have when there are so many economic concerns and unemployment the likes our country hasn’t seen since the Great Depression? When all that mounts on top of other suffering and trials people endure in this world all because of sin, how much more important is it that we give an answer, confess the hope that we have in our Risen Savior so that they do not remain in hopelessness. Yet Peter gives us not a method, but an attitude. We confess with gentleness and respect.

Gentleness and respect are the very opposite of arrogance, hot-headedness, or a “holier than thou” attitude. We want to speak in such a way that our conscience is clear. We don’t want our own conscience to accuse us of the same kind of malice and slander that the heathen uses against us. As a result of gentle and respectful conduct and speech, it will become evident that the attacks of those around us were unwarranted. So gently and respectfully, we love those who have no hope, by giving the hope we have in Christ. Confession begins in the heart. Just as the Holy Spirit prepares our hearts to confess, so he also prepares us by strengthening our own hope. Knowing Christ and what he has done for us makes us prepared to confess him and the hope we have through his saving work.

Peter summarizes that saving work for us. With each phrase another layer is added and our hope is deepened even more. “Christ also suffered once for sins.” One suffering, one payment for the sins of the world. That was what Jesus did for us. “The righteous for the unrighteous.” Jesus had no sin and yet he took upon himself our unrighteousness, our sin, as an exchange. “To bring you to God.” That was the purpose for all of Jesus suffering for sins: to reconcile us before God by removing our sins, to restore the separation that existed between you and him. “He was put to death in flesh.” Jesus really died on that cross for you and for me. “But was made alive in spirit.” Jesus really rose from the dead proving that sins have been forgiven because he conquered sin’s curse of death. Then alive and victorious Jesus descended into hell proclaiming his victory to those who foolishly had placed their hope of life and salvation somewhere else. Jesus’ saving work is complete. Knowing that our sins are forgiven and taken away, we are assured life in heaven because Jesus himself lives. That is the hope that we have in the Risen Jesus. That is the hope of which we confess.

Yet as we speak of the hope we have in Jesus, we cannot help but speak of the hope our baptism gives us connecting us to Jesus and that saving work. Peter said, **“These spirits disobeyed long ago, when God’s patience was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In this ark a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus**

**Christ.” (vs. 20-21)** The water of the flood brought about physical death to the whole world of unbelievers, but that water saved Noah and his family as they were kept safe in that ark floating on top of the water.

Peter uses this picture of the water that saves to remind us of the value our baptism with water has for us and the hope that it gives us connecting us to Jesus' saving work. Down below in the front of the church stands the baptismal font. Perhaps that is where you were baptized, but even if it wasn't, the font stands in front of us as a reminder of our Baptism. Baptism is more than just a rite of initiation. It is more than just a church ceremony. It isn't something we are doing for God. It is what God is doing for us through water. Baptism with water in the name of the Triune God is the baptism through which we are cleansed of our sins. It saved us on the day of our baptism and continues to save us even now. Our baptism is a guarantee of a good conscience towards God.

Baptism assures a believer of a good and clear conscience by telling him that all his sins have been washed away. There is nothing left that would give a believer a bad conscience before God. Throughout our lives, whenever our conscience would accuse us of guilt before God and make us afraid of his wrath, our baptism gives us the assurance our sins have been washed away linking us with Christ and his resurrection raising us to new life in him through water and the Word having the hope of life in heaven. The Apostle Paul wrote about that saving and new life in those waters to Titus. **“He saved us - not by righteous works that we did ourselves, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs in keeping with the hope of eternal life.” (3:5-7)**

Are you prepared to confess Christ? It doesn't have to be a long prepared message or before a crowd like Paul in Athens. Whether you think you are or not, when Christ is at the heart of your life you are always prepared. You know the hope that you have in him and you rejoice at that hope, but know that you are not alone. Confessing that hope may be your voice which is heard, but the Holy Spirit is the one who gives you the strength to speak and he is at work through you. Pray that the Spirit would give you the courage, the words to speak, and eyes to see those opportunities.

Those opportunities are always in front of us if we just look around. Look for the hurting, the uncertain, the hopeless, the struggling, the fearful, those confident in themselves, even those that don't seem to have any interest at all. Sometimes those opportunities just fall in your lap as people ask questions out of curiosity. Other times we might see an open door when we talk to people who live hopelessly, fearful, and uncertain. Share that message of hope in Christ by confessing the hope you have in him. Amen