

# LIVING IN REVERENCE AND LOVE

Sermon given by Dan Phillips

At Caroline Valley Community Church

May 8, 2011

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter 2011

I Peter 1:13-23

<sup>13</sup>Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>14</sup>As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, <sup>15</sup>but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup>since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." <sup>17</sup>And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, <sup>18</sup>knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup>but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. <sup>20</sup>He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you <sup>21</sup>who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. <sup>22</sup>Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, <sup>23</sup>since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

We continue in the Easter season, with a theme of LIVING. We are alive because of the resurrection of Jesus. As we proclaim that he is alive indeed, we claim our own lives. And we are exploring what it means to live in Christ, to be alive because of our relationship with Jesus. We talked about what it means to be alive, what defines life: movement, growth, reproduction, etc. And we talked about what that means in the Christian context.

Last week we specifically talked about the idea of living in hope. This is the description of the Christian existence as one of living with the expectation and desire that things will get better. This week we are looking at living the Christian life in reverence and love. I think there is a good comparison between this kind of life and the life of a human family. As children, we live in reverence and love of our parents. We revere them because they are so much more capable and strong than we are. We love them because they care for us and provide for us. And in the mix of love and respect, we get our first hint of how the Christian relates to God.

As we begin to examine our text today, let's take a little time to look at the very first verse. It has some unique ideas in it! We are to be preparing our minds for action. How do we do that? What does it mean to prepare a mind for action? Do we psyche ourselves up? Do we limber up our mind like we limber up our bodies before running? Do we learn lots of things so our minds have many facts to work with? What exactly does this phrase mean?

And notice that Peter says that this is something that we do BEFORE we set our hopes. Our minds are prepared for action, and sober, before we focus our hopes and dreams on the grace that God will give us when Jesus is revealed. What does it mean to set our hopes on God's grace? How do you set hopes? Do you think only about that one hope? Do we dwell on the hope of divine revelation, of divine salvation? And what does Peter mean when he speaks of the revelation of Jesus? Is he talking about when Jesus comes into

our lives? Or is he speaking of the Second Coming, when Jesus returns? And how is the meaning of this passage changed with each different answer?

One thing is sure: Peter means for us to live differently from how we lived before we met Jesus. He refers to our former existence as one of ignorant passions, and calls us to be holy people. What does holy mean here? Well, it is related to the idea of sacrifice that we talked about before: taking something profane, ordinary, and making it sacred, or holy. Holy here is a synonym for sacred. It means dedicated to God, belonging to God. We are to holy ourselves: we are to live as God's possession, as someone who belongs to the nation of God.

As he continues his plea for the believers to follow the path of righteousness, Peter uses several metaphors for us as Christians. I want to look at those today, and consider them around the idea of living in reverence and love. These metaphors are all comparisons based on the family.

The first one he uses is the metaphor of children. Peter says that, like obedient children, we are asked to change our behavior. Which one of us cannot remember a time when our parents told us to behave, to act better, to stop acting out, or to straighten up? All of these phrases are about responding to the will of our parent/s, and in this context, that's God.

What behavior is God asking us to change? Peter here simply refers to them as the passions of our former ignorance. Thinking about this, we can envision children acting thoughtlessly, running through the house, breaking lamps and knocking over furniture. As adults, we can see ourselves doing whatever we want with no thought for the results. These ignorant passions, this unthinking energy, brings harmful results. Peter asks us to prepare our minds and be sober, be intentional, in our lives.

Next, Peter speaks of us as calling on God our father. Or, to use a metaphor more suited to this day of great women, God our mother. I will digress here long enough to point out that God has no gender. God is neither male nor female, and to conceive of God as one or the other is simply a limitation of our thought patterns and our language. God is so far beyond human gender that we do God a disservice to not recognize this fact. The Bible uses metaphors for God that are both male and female. And God is referred to as male because that was, and remains, the default in our language. So, in light of this day, we can say God our mother.

Peter points out that we like, as Christians, to call on God for help, for comfort, and for support. But, says Peter, as we do that, we need to remember that God knows what we have done, and will deal with us accordingly. We joke about mothers having eyes in the back of their heads. But God does know EVERYTHING that we do, and think, and want to do. So as we call on God for help, we need to think about how She is a fair and impartial judge, and we need to be respectful in our behavior.

There are two other ideas here that we need to consider. First, the word translated here as fear is translated in other places as reverent fear. We fear our parents, but not the same way we fear a murderer or a terrorist. There are clearly levels of fear, and the fear called for here is an honest recognition that God is aware of our own misdeeds. I call this kind of fear Reverence, and make a clear distinction here between the fear we often have in this culture and the respect that is due a God who has, as Peter puts it, bought us with the blood of Jesus.

The second idea here is the idea of this life as an exile. This is the concept that we are not properly citizens of this culture, this world, but belong to another kingdom: the nation of God. Because we are not a part of the world we find ourselves in, we need to remember who we are, who has our allegiance, and we need to conduct ourselves accordingly.

And the third metaphor that Peter uses here is the metaphor of brotherhood. This could also be the metaphor of sisterhood. It is the comparison of Christian relationships with other Christians as one that is like the relation of siblings, brother and sisters, to each other. Notice that the two previous metaphors had to do with our relationships to God. Now the emphasis shifts to our relationships with each other. Because, says Peter, we have purified our souls through obedience, we can love each other with a pure love. Because we have obeyed God, we can love each other in the way that we should.

We live in a society that seems fond of love. We talk about it, praise it, and find it in the strangest places. We love our country, our mothers, our children, our families, our churches, our pets, our homes, our appliances, our food, our cars, our shops, etc. We love everything and everybody, or so we often say. And yet, we are a very self-centered, self-absorbed, violent society. And this suggests that we aren't quite as loving as we think.

Peter says here that we are only able to love as we should because we have obeyed our Mother: God. We know that children that are not shown love as infants often have a hard time responding later in life. Peter is suggesting something on a spiritual level: we cannot love as we should unless, and until, we have met God and been changed by obedience to God. This purifying process gives us the ability to love one another as Christians. And Peter calls on us to love earnestly. You get a sense of effort being put into this love. It is a love that is commanded in much the same sense that we are taught to love our brothers and sisters when we are children.

As we continue our celebration of mothers and families and care-givers today, let us be particularly thankful they taught us to love, and gave us our first examples of the pure love that Peter writes about. Amen.