



1 Peter 3:15-22 - ¹⁵ 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, ¹⁹ through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison ²⁰ who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Proclaim your hope in Christ



Peter tells us, **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.** Does it strike you as odd that Peter, of all the apostles, would give this advice? Sure, he was always eager to be the first to step up and talk, to bust out the sword and lop off an ear; Peter was the boisterous one, the firecracker of the disciples, the patron saint of telling God how he should do things, but do you remember what happened on Maundy Thursday? As a bonfire's flames warmed the courtyard of the high priest, it seems Peter's burning zeal for "all things Jesus" was turning frigid. Things were getting real. Jesus had been arrested, the other disciples had fled, and the trial for an innocent man's life was underway. Gone were the scenes of confidence and boldness from the upper room only a matter of hours ago. Now Peter was alone – a stranger in a strange place. Then the questions started. *"You're one of his disciples, aren't you? I saw you with him, didn't I? You talk funny – you must be Galilean!"* It wasn't an execution Peter was facing, it wasn't a potential burning at the stake, it was the questions of a couple young servant girls. And then the rooster crowed.

Yes, that's the same Peter who encourages us today to **always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.** Consider the source. Who's giving us this encouragement to share our hope – Peter the Denier? Denying that he even knew Jesus made Peter feel worthless, ashamed, and guilty beyond belief. But Peter didn't stay so timid. In that moment of final denial, Jesus looked right at Peter, the sinless Son of God locked eyes with his suddenly tongue tied apostle. I always thought of that look from Jesus as a look of anger or at least disappointment. *"How could you, Peter?!"* But I contend that it was more than that. Jesus looked Peter straight in the eyes and with that gaze told him, even in his moments of denial and doubt, *"You are still mine, Peter."* Peter ran. Peter wept. But Peter did not despair. Instead, he received forgiveness, assurance, and reinstatement from Jesus himself. And then what happened? A Pentecost sermon to thousands; a bold proclamation of the living Savior in front of the Sanhedrin; a missionary zeal that prompted Peter to give suffering Christians the encouragement – **always be prepared to give an answer.** It isn't the law of God that leads us to proclaim our hope in Christ, it's the love of God in Christ. That love changed Peter. That love changes us – it leads us to proclaim our hope in Christ.

You get to proclaim your hope in Christ – what does that look like? You may never get the chance to stand up in front of thousands of people like Peter did on the first Pentecost, and proclaim the only message that matters – the man you killed is the Savior of the world. But you do get to remind your spouse and your children of the power of God's forgiveness to rebuild, restore, and reinvigorate. You may never face the flames of physical persecution or martyrdom and get to make a bold confession of Jesus with your final breath. But there you are, suddenly in a conversation with someone who feels like God is so distant, so far removed, so non-existent in my life, and you get to tell them that God's not distant. In fact, he took on our humanity to be our brother, bear our sins, and bring us to himself. You may never get to cross the ocean and bring the gospel to some native tribe that time forgot. But you get to support the work of the gospel at home and around the world with your prayers and with your offerings. You may never be thrown to the lions, robbed of your property because of your faith, or have to take flight as a religious refugee. But here you are, living next door to someone who is just plain "done with church," and you get to tell them that God isn't done with you – his unbounded love, his grace sufficient, his new mercies, all for you.



Did you notice what you're sharing when you proclaim your hope in Christ? Not a new set of laws; not a uniquely Christian culture that will fix all the world's problems; not a step ladder toward moral performance enhancement. When we proclaim our hope in Christ, we're sharing Christ – who he is and what he's done. Whether it's a message to many or to few, you get to share an unconditional gospel. No strings attached. You get to proclaim the beautifully simple yet infinitely profound truth, **Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.** And because of that, there is no sin on your record; there's no accusation from the devil that can stick; there's nothing that can separate you from Jesus' loving embrace. It's so simple, but in our minds it presents itself as a monumental task. Maybe it's the general dismissal of anything Christian as being "out of touch" or "old fashioned." Perhaps it's the godless agenda of so many we see blasted on the news that keeps me from proclaiming my hope. Maybe someone else will do it; they're probably OK; it probably wouldn't work anyways.

Do you know what the fastest growing religious group is right now? I just heard these statistics again the other day and it struck me. The fastest growing religious group calls themselves the "religious nones" (not *nuns*, but *nones*, as in nothing at all). These people would best be described as people who aren't necessarily *against* any religion, but regard themselves as spiritually unaffiliated. In 1990, 8% of our population identified with this group. In 2008, 12%. In 2012, 20%. Today, 33% of people under the age of thirty identify as religious "nones." People say you can make statistics say whatever you want them to, but try to tell me that these number aren't alarming. In theory, it sounds like the fun and tolerant and inclusive thing to do – *You do your thing and I'll do mine*. But the lie of postmodern thought can hardly be described as optimistic. Instead it thrives on a claim of no absolutes, and therefore, no hope, no light, no lasting joy – only a lingering "what if" that floats through my consciousness every once in a while. I can try to ignore it or reframe it, but it's always there. So, imagine what would happen if the light of the gospel was unleashed into that darkness. Think of the earth shattering impact of proclaiming a hope that isn't just a flimsy, nice thought, but a hope that's founded on the rock solid resurrection of Jesus. That's proclaiming hope! You have peace with God through Jesus. You have hope. You're not alone.

But more times than I'd care to admit, I've fallen flat when it comes to proclaiming my hope in Christ, and you have, too. Instead of being **prepared to give an answer**, I sometimes swallow my words. Instead of proclaiming my hope in Christ to a soul who desperately needs it, I fumble and falter – throwing out some platitude about life "getting better" and never actually getting around to telling them about the One who makes us perfect in God's sight. I'd venture a guess to say that all of you can relate. Or maybe I am prepared to give an answer to someone who asks me, but I don't particularly care about doing it with **gentleness and respect**. Then, I'm not proclaiming my living hope in Christ – instead I just want to let them know that I've got it all figured out and they're wrong. When we fail to proclaim our hope in Christ or when we do it just to win an argument, where can we turn?

Turn back to the eternal, unchanging, unconditional promise of the gospel that was made to each one of you through the waters of your baptism. Did you notice how Peter encourages Christians living in a godless world to proclaim their hope in Christ? He draws our attention to another believer who proclaimed his hope – Noah. Noah lived in a world where **every inclination of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil all the time**. Sound familiar? The Lord instructed Noah to build an ark and in doing that he would speak volumes about who the true God is and what he says. The floodwaters came destroying the sinful world and, on its waters, lifting Noah and his family to safety. Peter makes the connection for us, **this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ**. Where we have failed, Jesus perfectly succeeded – never once shying away from an



opportunity to proclaim the love of God. Where our witness was concerned with self-aggrandizement and argument winning, Jesus humbly and patiently spoke God's truth, even to his enemies.

So what's the point? When we've failed to proclaim our hope in Christ to others, never forget the living hope that Jesus has promised and proclaimed to you in your baptism. There he connected you to the power of his death to pay for sin. There he linked you inseparably to the promise of his resurrection – **because I live, you too, shall live.**

Listen again to Peter's encouragement, **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.** By the Spirit's power, set apart Christ as Lord – realize what's most important for you as a child of God. After all, you can hardly give away what you don't have yourself. Hear again and again the word and promise of your Savior. Amazed by his grace, you'll hardly be able to help but to give an answer – it doesn't have to be eloquent. The Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to send to his disciples is the Spirit who lives in you through baptism. He promises to work through our humble efforts to share God's love with the world. He promises that his word will not return to him empty. God bless us as we proclaim our hope in Christ.