

## **Easter People: Practicing Our Salvation** Sunday, 5/22/22

Last week we tried to understand how the Kingdom of God has already arrived, but not quite yet. It's a glorious thing to be Easter People, living on the other side of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, breathing the Holy Spirit in and out in the joy and wonder of God's grace. But the King hasn't yet returned to complete his Kingdom, so we still have the task and privilege of acting as God's representatives, fashioning creation into the perfect image of God through our small parts in the Body of Christ.

Today we'll consider what salvation means to Easter People. Is being saved like graduating from high school, getting our diplomas, and then moving on? Is it just a credential for our spiritual resumes that will get us through the pearly gates when we die? Or is it possibly much more than that?

Twenty-five years ago, I went with a mission team to Guatemala. Half of our time there was spent at an orphanage, while the other half was spent visiting remote villages and projecting the Jesus Film onto bedsheets hung up between buildings. We drove for hours over roads that were more potholes than roads, crammed into vans that had twice as many people as seats, just to show the film, give testimonies, and then an altar call.

In retrospect, even though the idea was well-intentioned, I'm a little embarrassed about it. It's not that I'm embarrassed to share my faith openly, but the idea that a van full of white, English-speaking Americans who know little about their lives, language, or faith can drop in, show a movie, ask for a commitment to Christ, and then drive off betrays a seriously flawed understanding of evangelism and even the nature of salvation.

Salvation isn't something earned once by learning the "four spiritual laws" or praying through the "Roman Road." Salvation isn't something received or consented to once and then set aside until it's needed. Salvation comes through a quality of relationship with Jesus and the body of Jesus, the Church. It's less like graduation and more like marriage, a relationship we invest in over time. And crucially, it's something that must be practiced, daily, for the sake of deepening our love with God and God's people.

Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians that our salvation should have visible results that can be shown. I've been serving on our Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry over the past ten years, and each year we take a close look at the lives of the women and

men coming to us for ordination, looking for fruitfulness in their ministry and results of their salvation that we can see in their character, relationships, and actions. It's a very rigorous process that can take ten years or more.

Producing visible results of our salvation is an expectation not only for professional ministers, but also for all those who would call themselves Easter People, followers of the risen Christ. I wonder what it would be like for each of us if we had to endure a similar examination process by a Board of Lay Ministry? How has becoming a follower of Jesus changed your character, relationships, and actions in visible ways that can be seen by others? If you can't point to ways in which being a Christ-follower has changed you and those you live and work with, then something is missing. Easter People not only embrace changes that usher in the Kingdom of God, we're commissioned agents of that change. And that change starts with ordering our own lives to be consistent with God's picture of holiness.

If that sounds like a lot of work, it is. We're all works in progress. But Paul assures us in his letter to the Philippians that God is already at work within us giving us the power and desire to change, growing in our obedience to and deep reverence for God. Surely, the Holy Spirit is the primary and most personal means that God is using to do that today. The question is not whether God is at work in our lives, but whether we'll be still long enough and open enough to God's voice to allow ourselves to be changed. Honestly, that's the secret behind prayer that we miss when we fill our prayer with petitions and forget to listen for God's voice. God's Spirit will often speak to us in silences, in words on a page, or in the voices of other believers, but we need to be listening.

Paul lists several virtues that we might consider broadly as qualities of holiness. We are to choose to live clean, innocent lives- like bright lights in the darkness.<sup>1</sup> And how are we to do that? By holding "firmly to the Word of Life,"<sup>2</sup> Jesus, and his Holy Spirit. And just like Jesus, we are to live lives of joyful service to others, serving faithfully as "an offering to God."<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, Paul singles out complaining and arguing. One commentator

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:15. New Living Translation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 2:16. Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 2:17. Ibid

characterizes this kind of complaining as “murmuring or secret talk, or whisperings about someone...a kind of grumbling action that promotes ill will instead of harmony and good will.”<sup>4</sup> Regarding arguing, the same commentator notes “the Philippians... were engaging in speculations... that could only result in futile arguments that had the capacity to tear the community apart. These hurtful actions must go, and with them all other actions that promote disunity within the church.” Clearly grumbling and arguing as Paul intends here is different than simply expressing a difference of opinion or even advocating for a minority perspective. I suspect we all know when we’re grumbling and arguing, because the Holy Spirit has a way of pointing it out to us.

The Biblical writers make frequent use of lists of virtuous behaviors that characterize a life of holiness, as well as their not-so-virtuous counterparts. Another such list is found in Peter’s second letter. I’m starting in chapter 1, verse 3 in the New Living Translation. {[Read 2Peter 1:3-11 NLT](#)}

I love the way the different New Testament teachings complement each other. Peter agrees with Paul that God has already supplied what we need to live a godly life, but Peter highlights the “great and precious promises”<sup>5</sup> of God. What are these promises?

There’s no clue in this text that Peter has a particular promise or promises in mind. The Scriptures are chock full of God’s promises, any number of which we could empower us to live in holiness. Here are just a few<sup>6</sup>: That Jesus would bear our sins on the cross; That we will receive the Holy Spirit; That we are sons and daughters of God; that Jesus will never leave us or forsake us; that Jesus will return and usher in the completed Kingdom of God; and that we will all be raised with Christ on the last day.

Just as Paul writes about the results of our salvation, Peter lists our expected response to God’s promises. Whenever you encounter a list like this, it’s important to pay particular attention to the first and the last items on the list. Peter starts with faith<sup>7</sup>. A faith in Christ is the beginning of living a life of holiness. Without a firm understanding and acceptance of

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<sup>4</sup> Gerald Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 43, p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> 2Peter 1:4. New Living Translation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.jesuswalk.com/2peter/1\\_promises.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/2peter/1_promises.htm)

<sup>7</sup> 2Peter 1:5. New Living Translation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).

who Jesus is and what Jesus has done and is doing in the world, all the rest of Peter's exhortation is quite meaningless. For example, striving for patience and self-control without the power of the Holy Spirit is an uphill battle. That's why whenever we have a baptism, confirmation, or welcome new members, we always begin with an affirmation of faith in Christ and a commitment to Christ's Church.

Peter includes many terms in his list after faith, and his list was probably not meant to be exhaustive. The first term, "moral excellence" could also be translated as simply "goodness."

As I read Peter's list, I was struck by how many of these virtues are included in Paul's list of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5. Peter includes goodness, self-control, patience, and love. I suppose "brotherly affection" could be considered the same thing as kindness. The truth is, all the items in Peter's list are every bit as much fruit of the Spirit as the ones listed by Paul. Peter is simply trying to show how faith forms the foundation of these Christian virtues, or fruit, and how they in turn lead to the ultimate goal, which is love for everyone.

Easter People carry the light of the love of Christ to others. As one commentator put it, "Christian love is the crowning virtue to which all the others must contribute...It is not just the most important virtue, but also the virtue which encompasses all the others. Love is the overriding ethical principle from which the other virtues gain their meaning and validity."<sup>8</sup>

Each of us has been "called and chosen"<sup>9</sup> to enter into salvation, something that will be realized with the return of Jesus, but which must also bear fruit in the world today. We must show the visible results of our salvation to the world if we expect to be the salt and the light Jesus calls us to be. Peter said it quite plainly when he wrote, "the more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ...[T]hose who fail to develop in this way are short sighted or blind."<sup>10</sup>

But Jesus didn't leave us alone and without resources, struggling to attain some

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<sup>8</sup> Richard J. Bauckham. *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 50, p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> 2Peter 1:10. New Living Translation (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).

<sup>10</sup> 2Peter 1:9. Ibid

impossible standard of holiness. Remember, we are Easter People. We have the power and the promise of the resurrection to draw on. We have the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit to move us forward. We have the way of prayer to yield our lives to God. And we have the loving support of one another, the Church. We're all works in progress, but we share together one baptism, one Spirit, and one risen savior, Jesus, which is all we need to work out our salvation, one day at a time.

Please take some time now to reflect on how you will “work out” or “practice” your salvation this week.



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