

Sanctify Christ as Lord in Your Hearts: A Communion Sermon

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Bible Text: Isaiah 8:11-15; 1 Peter 3:14-16

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Isaiah chapter eight verses 11 through 15.

For thus the LORD spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, "You are not to say, 'It is a conspiracy!' In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread. Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Many will stumble over them, Then they will fall and be broken; They will even be snared and caught."¹

1 Peter chapter three verse 13.

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.²

This is the Word of the Lord.

Let's pray.

My God, why would you shed your blood, so pure and undefiled, to make a sinful one like me you chosen, precious child? Father, we stand in awe of the gospel of our lord Jesus Christ. We stand in awe of a loving Savior who has laid down his life, not for good people who are trying to do better, but for bad people who are going from worse to worse. Father, thank you for the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sin. We now pray, Father, that you would speak to us through your Word. Father, we long to hear

¹ Isaiah 8:11-15

² 1 Peter 3:13-15

from you. We pray that you would give us receptive hearts that we might understand what your holy Spirit says through the inspired Scriptures which is the very voice of God.

And so now, Father, we pray for your help and we ask that in this brief meditation that you would prepare our hearts for the Lord's table in Jesus' name. Amen.

You might notice that we read both Isaiah eight this morning and 1 Peter three and now we just read them in reverse order. And it is actually 1 Peter chapter three that quotes Isaiah chapter eight and so we are going to bring both of those together.

1 Peter is really an incredibly important and unbelievably relevant book for us. And what I would like to do is I would like to give a little bit of background and then go to 1 Peter 3:15-16 where Peter actually uses the text from Isaiah that we looked at this morning.

There are two very important things in 1 Peter that not only set the context for our understanding, but which actually display or demonstrate for us the incredible relevance of this book.

The first thing that stands out in 1 Peter is the church's identity in the world. As you read through 1 Peter all the way from the very beginning, the opening of 1 Peter 1:1 all the way down to the end the Church has a specific identity in this book. In 1:1 the Church is identified as "the elect strangers of the Diaspora."

In the old 1901 ASV it says, "To the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion."³ The RSV, "To the elect exiles of the Dispersion."⁴

If you remember your Bible history, the Diaspora, or the Dispersion was the common term used for the Jews after 587 BC when the Babylonians came in and exiled or scattered God's people among the nations.

In chapter two verse 11 Peter identifies the Church as aliens and strangers. In chapter five and verse 13 he speaks figuratively those in Babylon, or "those from Babylon greet you." Peter is almost certainly writing from Rome and therefore there is this not so subtle illusion that Rome is, in fact, Babylon. Babylon, that place of human pride and opposition to God, Babylon the ones responsible for the dispersion under God.

And what you have through the book of 1 Peter is of two fold importance. On the one hand the Church is portrayed as aliens, pilgrims, strangers, people who are actually on a journey, not people who have settled down and planted their stakes, but rather people who are transient and on the move.

Peter identifies the Church in those terms. But Peter also, secondly, identifies the Church in terms of Diaspora or Dispersion. That is, those who were living in exile under foreign

³ 1 Peter 1:1 (ASV)

⁴ Ibid (RSV)

powers, those who had been plucked up from their own home, from their real home and were living in a place that was not their home.

And in a very real sense what Peter does is he takes these two images, aliens, strangers and Dispersion and uses them to describe the Church.

So, as Clowney says, “In relation to their homeland they are the Diaspora. In relation to their residence, they are aliens.”

What is interesting is that Leonard Gottheld makes the note. He says in the fourth century, at the time of Constantine, “This two fold designation, aliens and Dispersion disappeared quite necessarily.” Why? Because under Constantine Christians now—quote—“had a homeland.” They were no longer dispersed. They were no longer strangers and aliens. They had come to be quite at home in the Constantinian Roman Empire.

I will tell you that I cannot help but to think that for us 21st century American Christians the designations of aliens and strangers and Dispersion and exiles has disappeared for us. And we are very, very much at home in the empire. But the fact is that when the people of God are truly the people of God, they are very consciously aware that they are aliens and strangers living in a foreign land under foreign powers and that this world, no matter where it is, is not our home.

It is a dangerous thing to lose the designation “exile.” It is a dangerous thing to lose the designation, “Dispersion, alien, stranger.” We must remember that that is our identity in this world. And the more consciously aware we are of Christ and his lordship and living for him, the more aware that we will be that this world is, indeed, not our home.

The second thing about 1 Peter that deserves mention is the concept of suffering. Some people actually approach 1 Peter as if the theme is suffering in general as if it were, perhaps, a New Testament counterpart to the book of Job. Many people have taught that 1 Peter was written to a persecuted church that was suffering heavily under persecution.

I have no doubt that the truth in 1 Peter is very relevant and applicable to those who are in persecution, but I would suggest to you that that is not the setting of 1 Peter at all. I would suggest to you with German Lutheran scholar Leonard Gottheld that 1 Peter was written not to a church facing suffering and persecution in the depths, but rather to a church that was facing social discrimination and hostility, not full blown systematic persecution.

The argument from this perspective actually looks at 1 Peter not as a counterpart to Job, but really as a New Testament counterpart to Daniel. Daniel, who was living under foreign power in a hostile society, not facing systematic persecution, but facing those who despised his faith and despised his God. Thus, the them of 1 Peter isn't suffering, per se, but it is our responsibility of living in a society that is hostile to God and to the gospel.

As you read through 1 Peter we see this over and over and what that does is it actually makes 1 Peter very, very relevant to us living in the 21st century America because the fact is that we are not a persecuted minority.

Will we be one of these days? I believe so. But in the present time, what is our current status? What is our current circumstance? We are living in a world, we are living in a nation that is hostile to our faith and is hostile to our God and discriminates against those who would hold to the faith. But we have yet to taste the kind of persecution that the first century Christians faced or the Christians in the Sudan face.

And so the book of 1 Peter is very relevant because it deals with a situation that would very, very similar to ours. Now what 1 Peter chapter three Peter actually begins to lay out, as it were, the ethics of living in a hostile environment and he says in verse nine, he says we are not to return evil for evil or insult for insult, but we are to do what? We are to give a blessing instead.⁵ “For you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”⁶

And so when evil is heaped upon us or insult is heaped upon us we don’t return in kind, but rather we return a blessing instead.

Now, again, does that take a lot of grace? And the answer is, “Yes.” Because when we get insulted we want to do what? We want to turn around. We want to win the argument at the end of the day.

Peter says, “You turn around and you give a blessing.” And then what Peter does is he uses Psalm 34 to support the call to bless those who insult us. And this is the quotation, verse 10.

For, "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and his ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."⁷

And then Peter asks in verse 13, “Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?”⁸

Now what is interesting is that in light of verse nine he says, “You don’t return evil for evil.”⁹ That means that there will be evil perpetrated against us. There will be insults perpetrated against us. And then you see in verse 12, “The eyes of the Lord are toward the

⁵ See 1 Peter 3:9

⁶ 1 Peter 3:9

⁷ 1 Peter 3:9-12

⁸ 1 Peter 3:13

⁹ See 1 Peter 3:9

righteous, his ears are toward their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”¹⁰

And then Peter turns around and he asks this question: “Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?”¹¹

And the answer is that there are plenty of people who would seek to harm us if we would do good. There is no shortage of people who would seek to harm us if we would do good. There is no shortage of those who have taken their cues from the God of this age to persecute and to make life miserable for those who would seek goodness.

But Peter doesn’t want us to focus on that because the answer is, in the ultimate sense, when he says, “Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?”¹² in the ultimate sense the answer is no one. And the reason that no one can ultimately harm us is because ultimately God triumphs over all evil. And God, in fact, will vindicate all of his people on the last day no matter what they have endured in this life.

And so Peter turns around and he says, “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.”¹³ What Peter actually is telling us is this. You take it all together and what Peter is telling us is: Remember that the cross always translates all suffering into something good that God is doing. The cross is that which transforms all suffering. The cross is that which transforms everything that comes our way that is painful. The cross refuses to leave evil and suffering in the realm of what the wicked are doing and the cross is the marvellous transformative filter through which God runs all of our suffering to turn it into our good.

And then Peter says this. “Do not fear their fear and do not be troubled.”¹⁴

Now the perspective on suffering here, the perspective on what God can do through the cross actually is a reminder to us that the Church is always at its finest not when it is experiencing the heights of prosperity and blessing from the world’s perspective, but the Church is at its finest when it is suffering and God is turning their suffering into pure gold. That is something that we have to remember. There is a biblical perspective that says—remember if you were here Wednesday night—the theology of glory calls that which is good evil, namely suffering, pain, misery. All of those things in God’s hand, God turns around and uses for the ultimate good of his people.

Now we are allergic to all those things. We have got pain allergies and suffering allergies and misery allergies and we want to shrink back from those things.

¹⁰ See 1 Peter 3:12

¹¹ 1 Peter 3:13

¹² Ibid.

¹³ 1 Peter 3:14

¹⁴ Ibid.

But Peter says, “No, no, no, no. When those things start to come, remember what the cross does is the cross transforms those things into the very blessing of God for you.”

And then he quotes Isaiah eight and he says, “Their fear, do not fear.” Or it may be, “Do not be afraid of them.”¹⁵ It could go either way. Peter could be quoting it in the way that we find it in Isaiah eight as we saw this morning, that is, “Do not fear what they fear,”¹⁶ or it could be, “Do not fear them.”

Either way what Peter is doing is he is saying in the midst of hostility, in the midst of pain, in the midst of all the unpleasant things that the world has the capacity to do to us, that God can actually turn around and change for our good, we need to remember that we are called not to fear.

There is this drum beat throughout Scripture where God’s people are not to be afraid. Do not be afraid of the times. Do not be afraid of what they are afraid of. Do not fear oppressors. Do not fear tormentors. Do not fear adversaries. Do not fear the future. Do not fear circumstances. Do not fear the uncertainties of life. Do not be afraid.

Throughout Peter’s book even though the focus is on hostility and a hostile climate to Christians, there is this undercurrent that things will, indeed, get worse. And Peter says, “Do not be afraid.”

And then he turns around and he says, “Do not be shaken.” Suffering comes and hard times come, but don’t be stirred. Don’t be agitated. As you see things falling apart around you, don’t be afraid and don’t be agitated. I would remind you that the circumstances in which Peter is writing, a morally decadent empire where homosexuality and abortion and infanticide were rampant and where a godless emperor was at the helm and the Church was on the cusp, within two to three years of suffering what would be known throughout history as the Neronian persecutions. And Peter says, “Don’t be afraid. Don’t be agitated. Don’t be stirred.”

“Oh, my goodness. Things are going to get terrible. Nero is now on the throne.”

“Oh, my goodness. Judgment is going to come.”

“Oh, my goodness. We are killing our babies.”

“Oh, my goodness. Homosexuality is absolutely rampant. Judgment is going to come.”

Do you understand that when you see these things proliferating it is not a sign that judgment is about to come. It is a sign that judgment has come. Everybody is worried about homosexual marriages. It is an abomination. But homosexual marriage is not going to bring about the judgment of God. That is the judgment of God.

¹⁵ See 1 Peter 3:14

¹⁶ Isaiah 8:12

We are not living in times that are on the brink of God turning us over, we are being turned over. And so what do we expect?

And so Peter says, “Don’t be afraid. Don’t get all agitated. Don’t get all worked up.”

Do we need to care deeply about the moral situation of our country? The answer is yes.

Do we need to care deeply about issues of life and the answer is a resounding yes.

We need to do everything we possibly can within our power to protect unborn babies. We need to do everything within our power to try to curb this tidal wave of homosexual marriage which is an assault on the family. We need to do everything we can as citizens of the city of man to make sure that we stand for righteousness’ sake.

But I will tell you. At the end of the day it does no good to run around like chicken little, some sort of Bible thumping chicken little saying, “The sky is falling, the sky is falling.”

Don’t be afraid. Don’t be agitated.

And Peter says, “But, sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.”¹⁷ And I will tell you. If there is anything in this passage that comes as a resounding note to us, as God’s Word for us it is this very thing. “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart.”¹⁸ Don’t be agitated. Don’t fear. The suffering is coming. Hard times are coming. The [?] of the judgment of God are rolling through our culture, but don’t be afraid. Rather sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart.

This is an absolutely powerful statement, by the way, about the deity of Christ. There are a number of inferior manuscripts that say, “Sanctify the Lord God in your heart.” That is wrong. If that’s what your Bible says it is wrong. It should say, “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.”¹⁹

And what is Peter actually saying when he quotes Isaiah eight? “But sanctify Yahweh of hosts...”²⁰ and then turns around and Peter says, “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.”²¹ Peter is calling Jesus Yahweh.

And so you sanctify God in your heart. What is it to sanctify? The idea is to set apart as holy.

What is it Christ is Lord? That is the position of supreme authority, sovereign lordship, deity.

¹⁷ See 1 Peter 3:15

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Isaiah 8:12

²¹ 1 Peter 3:15

Where do you do that? In your hearts. In your heart.

Why does he say in your hearts? Well, because as J.N.D. Kelly says, “He has ‘in your hearts’ because the heart is the seat of the deeper emotions and the place where fear would reside, but where faith and reverence should be at home.”

And so go right into that deepest place of who you are. And it is there that Christ Jesus is to be set apart in your affections as Lord.

By Peter telling us this, understand. Sanctifying Christ as Lord in your heart is the remedy to fearing them and fearing what they fear. It is the source of strength to do what is right and the devotion to do what is good. Sanctifying Christ as Lord in your hearts is the source of hope and of witness in this world.

And so here is the huge question. What does it mean to sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts?

Now, I am doing the best I can to keep some of you awake. So it is your fault. What does it mean? Number one. To sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts is to properly fear him as the holy one and no other.

Do you know Paul actually says something that sounds peculiar to us Christians in Ephesians 5:21. He says, “Submit one to another in the fear of Christ.”

“The fear of man brings a snare, but blessed is he who trusts in the LORD.”²²

When Peter says, “Sanctify him as Lord in your hearts,”²³ coming right off of that admonition, don’t fear them or be afraid of what they are afraid of. The idea is to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts means that we properly fear him as the holy one and we fear none other.

John Piper puts it like this. I love this sentence. “Fearlessness is a clear testimony that our hope is real. Fearlessness is a clear testimony that our hope is real. And since Christ is the ground and goal of our hope, fearlessness honors him. It sanctifies him, hallows him, shows his unique worth and strength in our lives.”

And so to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts means that we fear him as the holy one and we fear none other.

The Puritans said time without number, “If you fear God, you don’t need to fear anyone or anything else.”

²² See Proverbs 29:25

²³ See 1 Peter 3:15

Second, to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts is to gratefully receive from him that which he sovereignly appoints for us. In other words, to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts is to submit gladly to his loving lordship over our lives.

Throughout this whole section Peter has been reminding his readers that there are things that are coming into their life that are painful, that they want to avoid. But God transforms those things into blessings. And so to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts is to gratefully receive from him that which he has appointed for us.

Luther says, “If I give God praise for such things and consider those things good, holy and excellent, then I sanctify him in my heart.”

Third. To sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts is to praise him for all things. Luther, again, he says, “Therefore it amounts to this. ‘In your hearts,’ says Peter, ‘you are to sanctify him.’ That means if the Lord our God appoints anything for us, be it good or evil, bring it weal or woe, be it shame or honor, prosperity or adversity, I am not only to consider it good, but even it holy and say that this is nothing but a precious blessing of which I am unworthy that it should come even to me.”

Now you talk about radically counter intuitive you start to apply that day in and day out. And yet, Peter, that is exactly what he has said. If you suffer, you are blessed. Sanctifying Christ as Lord in our hearts receives from him that which he has for us and turns around and praises him for it.

Beloved, do you understand that it is God alone who can take suffering and misery and all of the things in this life that are so unpleasant, so distasteful to us. It is God alone who can take those things and transmute them into good.

Ed Clowney says, “To break the throttling grip of fear we must confess God’s lordship with more than mental assent. We must confess it with our hearts devotion.”

Setting him apart as Lord means bowing before him in the adoration of praise. A praising heart is immune to the fear of other people. Fear of another sort takes possession of our hearts and minds, a fear that does not flee in terror, but draws near in awe and worship.

Here is a test as to whether or not you sanctify Christ as Lord in hearts. On Tuesday night or Wednesday morning regardless of the outcome, will you be able to kneel in worship and adoration and say, “Praise be to God the Father almighty. Blessed be his holy name. He rules. He reigns and I worship him”?

That is to sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart. If all we do if things don’t go the way that most of us want it to go and all we can do is grumble and complain and [?] and be angry about, “Oh, everything is going to hell in a hand basket,” I will tell you that if that is the attitude of our hearts we are not sanctifying Christ as Lord in our hearts.

Number four. To sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts is to trust him as our sanctuary and our safety. We see that as Isaiah unfolds that in Isaiah 8:11. But you also see it in that combination. “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart...” And what? Don’t fear. Don’t be troubled. He is a sanctuary to us.

And then, fifth, to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts is to live in bold hope that is observable to others around us.

Now that comes right from the text. Notice verse 15. “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”²⁴

In other words, it is the bold hope that we have within us that is the fruit of sanctifying Christ as Lord in our hearts. When Christ is sanctified as Lord in our hearts, we have a bold, observable hope that is not an audacious hope, but is a rock solid hope. And it is observable in a way that doesn’t come by somebody seeing your bumper sticker. It comes in a way in which you live your life. And people are going to want to know. “How come you seem so unagitated? How come you seem so full of faith? How come you seem so joyful?”

Why wouldn’t I be? I have a confident expectation that God is going to keep his Word. I have a hope. I have a hope that lies within me. Let me tell you about it. It is a hope that goes beyond political rhetoric. It is a hope that goes beyond somebody’s cheesy autobiography. It is a hope that is rooted and grounded in an empty tomb and [?] Christ.

John Piper says, “Christ is hallowed in our hearts when our hearts are hopeful in him.”

Your candidate doesn’t need to win on Tuesday for you to hope in Christ.

So if—and Peter uses a lot of ifs in his book—if this happens—indicating it hasn’t happened yet. So I say in the Petrine sense, “if” if our country continues to go down the tubes will we fear their fear? If, will we fear the future? No.

If... will we grumble and complain and be filled with bitter hearts of unbelief? No.

But rather we will sanctify Christ Jesus as Lord in our hearts with a visible hope that causes others to ask us: What’s up with you?

Now this is communion so this week I am thinking, “What does 1 Peter 3:14 and 15 have to do with communion?”

It has a lot to do with communion because to eat the bread and to drink the cup in faith is to say Christ has made purification for my sins and he is seated at the right hand of the Father and he is the ruler of the kings of the earth. And he is seated on his throne no matter who is sworn in on January 20th. That doesn’t change. And when you take the

²⁴ 1 Peter 3:15

bread and you take the cup you are saying, “Not only are my sins forgiven, but I have a king. To eat the bread and to drink the cup in faith is to believe that the gospel is more precious than politics and that the kingdom of God is more to be cherished than a nation.

Eating and drinking in faith is to publicly affirm that we believe that gospel and in believing that gospel we have been made citizens of that kingdom and that is infinitely more important than what happens on Tuesday.

You get to go to heaven no matter who is in the White House.

To eat the bread and drink the cup in faith is to declare Jesus Christ is coming back. “You eat the bread and you drink the cup until I come again in glory.”²⁵

And therefore [?] what we are ultimately saying is, “I don’t have a lasting city here. I am an alien. I am a stranger. I am in exile. And woe to me if I feel way too at home here. I have a lasting city that isn’t here. I am looking for the city to come over which Jesus is king whose builder and maker is God.”

And so is communion relevant? You had better believe it because it is a declaration of what you believe, a tangible manifestation that what you are saying is that there are things that are more important than what goes on in the political arena of the United States of America.

And so sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts by setting him apart, above all else. Fear him. Submit to him. Praise him and hope in him. And if you do, people will be looking at you as if you are a stranger, an alien and a foreigner in this world. And guess what? You are.

Let’s pray.

Father, as we prepare to take the bread and cup we ask that you would truly help us to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts. And we pray that where our hope has grown dim, you would rekindle it in a way that it becomes visible and bold to everyone around us in Jesus’ name. Amen.

²⁵ See 1 Corinthians 1:26