



LIVING IN LIGHT OF HOPE Part II: The Action Adventure

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We're continuing our look at 1 Peter this morning. Last week we talked about the amazing hope that we have because of Jesus. Since he rose from the dead, we know for a fact that there's life after death, and we can have it for ourselves as we put our faith and trust in him. We have the hope that God forgives our sins and that there's meaning in life. We used the acronym HOPE to say that our hope is **H**istorically grounded in the resurrection, **O**utrageously good, **P**ermanently guarded and secured for us by God, and full of **E**ven-now grace. We enjoy our hope right now, not just in the future.

Peter goes on to say that having that kind of hope should change the way we live.

Imagine if you had a really bad job that didn't pay well, you were behind on your bills and your family was starving. Then one day you found out you had won the mega-millions lottery jackpot. Not just part of it – the **WHOLE** thing. But what if when you found out, you didn't turn in your winning ticket? What if you just stayed at your job, let the bills pile up and let your family go hungry? You wouldn't be taking advantage of the good news would you?

Peter says we've got this incredible treasure, and we should put it to work in our lives.

1 Peter 1:13-16

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Remember last week when I said that Peter really packed a lot into a little space? Here's another good example. In just four short verses he gives us a whole string of instructions.

The very best part of this whole section, though, is the very first word: **Therefore**. **Thank God for Therefore**. What does that little word tell us? It tells us that something came before what Peter wrote in this section. Everything Peter is about to say relates back to something he said previously. His instructions come **AFTER** it and **BECAUSE** of it. What was it that Peter said before?

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

God has shown us mercy and given us a new life in Jesus. God loves us. He has a place for us. THEREFORE, we should do what Peter says.

That's extremely important. Sometimes we try to do the right thing in an attempt to make God happy or get him to like us. But Peter says it is the other way around. God already likes us. He's already accepted us because of what Jesus did when he died for us. So the commands Peter gives flow out of what is already a reality. They are not intended to buy us a better position with God – they are motivated by gratitude for what he's already said is true.

So if the Christian life is not about earning points, what is it about? Let's break down Peter's words here to see.

Therefore, prepare your minds for action.

When you go to the movie store, there are all kinds of sections they put the different videos in. Some are drama. Some are comedy. Some are sci-fi. If Peter were putting the Christian life in a section, it would go under action adventure. He tells his readers to get ready for action. There's a lot to do as a Christian, and it's not boring stuff.

Speaking of action movies, did you ever see the scene in Spy Kids where Carmen and Juny are getting all their spy gear at their uncle's shop? They had to have the right tools before they went off to rescue their parents. They were prepared.

Peter tells us we need to prepare our minds for action. That's kind of a strange concept. Usually we think of our hands and feet getting ready for action, but here, Peter says it's really our minds that need to be ready. The way he says it in the original language gives us a picture of somebody back in Bible times wearing one of those long robes that they wore. When they would get ready to run, or work or fight, they would hike up their robe and tuck it in their belt. That gave them the freedom to move more easily. That way they wouldn't trip.

Back in Egypt, when the Israelites were still slaves and were getting ready to be freed, God told the people what he wanted them to do while they were waiting for him to strike the Egyptians. They were supposed to eat a special meal.

Exodus 12:11

This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover.

They were to be physically ready for action. “Gird up” is really the phrase Peter uses. Wrap that belt tight around your mind. You could also think of athletes binding up a wrist or an ankle before they compete to give it extra support and strength.

So Peter is saying that being prepared for action means freeing our minds from what will get in the way, AND strengthening our minds, supporting them for the action adventure.

Now Peter may have been thinking about the Passover when he wrote his letter, but it’s much more likely that he was remembering some words Jesus said – especially in the context of hope.

Luke 12:35-40

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

In other words, part of what we are supposed to be ready for, the reason we are prepared for action is the fact that Jesus is coming back. Did you know that? Someday, he’s going to return to earth.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

This starts to all make sense, because if Jesus is really coming back, and he could do so at any time, we don’t want to be caught by surprise. We want to be doing what we’re supposed to be doing. That’s why Peter says to prepare our minds for action. Our hope isn’t just that we get to go to heaven – our hope is also that Jesus is coming back to earth.

Okay. What does that mean? How do we do that for our minds? Peter gives us four ways, four places for our mind to stay.

Stay in control.

“Be self-controlled” he writes. Some versions say “Be sober.” Don’t let your mind get carried away.

I think I'm in trouble. It's the first thing on Peter's list and I already know I've failed at that one. My mind LIKES to get carried away. It can happen with good things or bad things. If I get an idea in my head, it can take over. I can obsess about something for weeks, and it will not leave much room to think about anything else.

Fear can do the same thing. You can worry about something to the point where you're no longer in control – the fear is. Anger is the same way. I've known people who are so angry with someone that they lost all perspective. Soon they blame everything that happens to them on the other person.

We need clear, logical thinking about our faith. Peter talks about self-control in several places, and it is always attached to the idea of being alert and clear-headed. If it's true that Christ can come back at any moment, we don't have time to waste. We need to stay in control of where our minds go.

Stay focused.

...set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

The Olympics are coming up. Did you happen to see any of the Olympic trials last week? There are some pretty amazing athletes going to the games. I saw a little bit of some of the races, and I noticed something about all the runners.

Before the race and during it, none of them were waving at people in the stands. They weren't talking to each other on the track. There were a lot of distractions around – TV cameras, people cheering, even different events happening on the field. But they were so focused mentally that I don't think they would even hear if you called their name. And they didn't let up until the whole thing was over.

The Christian life requires a lot of focus. There are so many distractions, so many things to be interested in. Peter says, "Don't lose your focus. Put it completely on Jesus."

What does it look like to be focused? I have a client who is the picture of focused. In almost every conversation, he manages to work in something about his business, which is hard to do, because it's kind of a technical field. His mind is always turning over new ideas. He gets excited when he tells you about the latest article he's read. That kind of focus has paid off for him too, because he's a multi-millionaire.

Are we focused on Jesus? How do we know? We can tell by how much we talk about him. We can tell by how excited we get when we learn something new about him. We can tell by how much of what we read or think has anything to do with him. And ultimately, I think we can tell where our focus is by the results. If we're not having much success following him, maybe we're not being intentional enough. Peter says to stay focused.

He also says we should **stay in shape**. He's not talking about exercising – he's still talking about our minds.

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

He says we shouldn't conform or be shaped by our evil desires. Do you ever play with Play Dough? We have a few Play Dough molds in our house. This one is especially nice – the George Foreman grill of Play Dough that turns lumps of clay into hamburgers and hot dogs – all with a sizzle sound effect.

Let's say I have made a nice little person out of Play Dough and I put it in this mold. What's going to happen? As soon as I press down, it's going to become a hamburger patty.

Peter says that our choices in life, the things we want, our dreams -- aren't just wishes. They are forces like this mold. Choices and dreams change the shape of our character. Read Lord of the Rings sometime and you'll get a good idea of how greed and wanting something badly can change people.

But it happens on a small scale, too. Have you ever wanted anything so badly that it started to change you? Maybe your parents said "no", and you still wanted it, so you started to whine and complain? Maybe you got mad, or cried or wouldn't talk to anyone? That's an example of how a desire can affect your mind. Adults do it too. I saw a husband and wife being interviewed about their finances. They had gotten in such a bad hole buying the things they wanted that it was destroying their relationship. They were fighting all the time. Peter says don't let anything you wish for or dream about squeeze you into a new shape. Be careful what you want.

Stay away.

Peter ends by telling us in a sense to stay away. By that I mean we're to stay away from evil.

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

How would you define being holy? Perfect? Pure? Unattainable? For me, the idea of being holy seems very intimidating. I think of God as the only one who is holy. So when I hear Peter telling us to be holy, I want to throw up my hands and say that's impossible. It's hard to be motivated to try something when you know you're going to come up short.

Peter says not to give into that, though. We belong to a holy God, and that is what he calls us to. To be holy means to be separated, set aside for special use. It means to stay away from sin.

My great grandfather went to school with this man – Warren G. Harding. After he became president, my great grandfather and great grandmother invited him over for dinner one time, and he accepted. They were farmers, and they didn't have much in the way of fancy dinnerware. So they sold two traincar loads of hay to buy some special china for that dinner.

That china came to be known as the Harding china in my family. It was passed down to my mom and dad, and my mom would only bring it out for very special occasions. We learned as kids to treat it with care and not to grab those plates if we wanted a snack.

As Christians, we are like Harding china. We are only supposed to be for God's special use. We need to consider that in everything we do. Being holy requires an effort to set ourselves apart. It gets back to that idea Peter talked about in the beginning of freeing ourselves from what gets in the way. The author of Hebrews said the same thing.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

What I like about that verse is that it says to throw off everything that hinders. That includes sin, but it also includes other things. Sin is only part of what slows us down. Sometimes other things aren't necessarily evil – they just take us off task. Think of being holy as cutting loose all the things that would keep you from being set aside for God.

Four places to stay. Four ways to prepare our minds for action. As we wrap up this morning, think about each one in terms of your own life.

Staying in control – Where do your thoughts take you? Do you tell your mind who's boss and make it go where you want it to?

Staying focused – Are you focused on Jesus? If you took an inventory of the things you think about, the things you're learning about, the things that excite you and the results you're seeing in your life, how honestly can you say you're focused on Christ?

Staying in shape – What is forming your character? Have you let some ambition or desire or dream in your heart influence what kind of person you are?

Staying away – What is tangling your feet? Are you distancing yourself from the things that would make it harder for you to live for God? Is there something that is taking up your time, that's tangling your feet and make it hard for you to be holy?

At Sherwood Forest Elementary, they have slips of paper that teachers will hand out to kids in the classroom or on the playground. The slips say, "I got caught." But they're not about getting caught doing something bad – they're about getting caught doing something good. If a student helps someone, or shows a particularly great attitude,

they'll receive the piece of paper acknowledging what they did. Most of the time, the kids aren't even aware they're doing anything special, but a teacher recognizes it and rewards it.

Christ is going to return someday, and he's going to be handing out "I got caught" slips to his followers. Not the "I got caught doing something bad" slips. He's already taken care of those. We don't have to worry about being punished. But wouldn't you like to hear him say these words:

Matthew 25:23

Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!

For Peter, the bottom line was this: If Christ were to return today, what would I want to be different about what I'm doing?

Isaiah 62:11

*See, your Savior comes!
See, his reward is with him.*

Hallelujah. What a great day that's going to be. Come, Lord Jesus.