

Be Prepared Always and All Ways ¹

- ✦ to give a defense of your hope (vv.15-16)
- ✦ to suffer for doing good (vv.17-18)
- ✦ to enjoy Christ's victory (vv.19-22)

“Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope....” (Zechariah 9:12 NIV84) *“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”* (Isaiah 43:25 NIV84) When Jesus was so sad that everyone kept leaving instead of listening, He asked the Twelve disciples, *“Will you also go away?”* Peter answered for them and for us, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”* (John 6:68f NIV84)

Since you have come to *“the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him...”* (2:4), you can expect that you too will be rejected by men. Friends will turn away, family may desert you, but you have God's eternal promise, *“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”* (Hebrews 13:5 NIV84) Since *“you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls”* (2:25), *“Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”* (1 Peter 3:13f NIV84) Instead, like soldiers entering a combat zone, **Be Prepared Always and All Ways**, first of all...

✦ to give a defense of your hope (vv.15-16)

Don't we have to ask why you would ever need to **give a defense of your hope**? Why did the government officials hate Daniel so much that they tricked the Persian King Darius into throwing his most faithful administrator into the lions' den? Jealousy needs no reason. They had no other way to accuse Daniel except for his faith. Fast forward to the apostolic age and Roman Empire persecutions. One official wrote to the emperor that these Christians were not guilty of any crimes. They got together to talk about a man who died and yet is alive and how they could help their neighbors. There was no way to legally accuse them except for their faith. So the Romans demanded that everyone, especially those Christians, be required to worship the emperor as God. **Be Prepared...to give a defense of your hope.**

We live in a hopeless world. A recent series entitled, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, depicts a suicidal teen blaming thirteen individuals for her hopelessness. The adults are clueless, kids that care are helpless, others are cruel and evil. To counter this we sing *“There Is a Balm in Gilead”* (CW 564), today's Hymn of the Day. Since Christ died for you, since Christ lives for you, since Christ rules all things from God's right hand for you, there is never a day when you are without hope yourself or helpless for others. Since Christ turns us outward, there is never a reason to turn in on our own lives and be clueless about the needs of those around us – young or old. **Hope** lives in Christ! But don't expect the hopeless world to like it.

Jesus advised His disciples they would be hauled into court for their faith: *“Do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”* (Luke 12:11f NIV84) Now with Jesus' authority, His Apostle Peter writes, *“But speak with gentleness and respect, while maintaining a clear conscience.”*² Everyone needs to hear law and gospel, sin and grace – whether in court, the office or at a family gathering. Find a way within the realities of your workplace. Live such a good, useful life that slanderers will be shamed for speaking any kind of evil about you. As you keep listening to Christ, you keep filling up with **hope**. Defend it, share it, then brace...

¹ Grow Groups Series: *“In a Dying World...Living (Your) Hope...”* – New Life Pastor Joel Gawrisch

² *Evangelical Heritage Version, EHV*® © 2017 The Wartburg Project. www.wartburgproject.org. Quotes unless noted.

✠ to suffer for doing good (vv.17-18)

Surely you are in good company. *“Indeed it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil....”* Stop and think about that when you’re upset and angry for the evil way people treat you. As a Christian, you’re not only frustrated for the unfairness of them, but at your own immaturity. We want to grow up and deal with these issues in a calm and peaceful way. But the heart starts pumping and the words want to flow. Disastrous if some loved one is too close at the time. Even worse if you put it in writing and send that text or post that comment. Damages can multiply in cyberspace. And the advantage of Control-Z Delete does not work on the Internet. If you have to write something, wait to address it – lest your twitchy finger hit “Send” and you regret it. Stop and pray. Eat your lunch. Sleep on it. No harm can come from patience, but a world of hurt always comes from evil. Remember what the Holy Spirit said through Peter just before our text: *“Even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.”* (1 Peter 3:14 NIV84) God aims His good your way. Why? Get this!

“Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God.” So come to God again. You don’t want to feel angry and upset, but the feelings are real. Acknowledge them to God. “Lord, I’m angry and upset right now.” Then tell Him why. Think of God with big ears, broad shoulders and a huge heart. You can’t hurt Him by being honest. Look what He was willing to do by substituting Himself under His own wrath. All the times your upset hurt someone else by word or deed, all the times your negligence cost someone their comfort or their life, all the times you should have been ready but were woefully unprepared – all those sins God nailed to the cross on His own Son. And Jesus said, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* (Luke 23:34 KJV)

Don’t let life’s drama complicate this. Christ *“was put to death in flesh but was made alive in spirit.”* Through the virgin Mary, God gave Jesus a physical body, this *flesh*, so that He could suffer in our place. In full acceptance that our guilt is gone, our sins paid for, and we are free...God then exalted Jesus with a glorified, spiritual body that cannot die again. Now **Be Prepared Always and All Ways...**

✠ to enjoy Christ’s victory (vv.19-22)

Bible translations and commentaries complicate this. If you want to dig into this sometime, let me know. The Holy Spirit’s original Greek text conveys sound truth in simple grammar. Keep it simple like the EHV: *“He was put to death in flesh but was made alive in spirit in which he also went and made an announcement to the spirits in prison.”* Easter morning bright and early God sparked Jesus’ dead body with new life resurrection. In His glorified spiritual body Jesus was able instantly to descend into hell and preach. No second chances in hell. Damned souls are feeling the curse of God’s law. So Jesus’ preaching was really *an announcement*: *True to God’s promise, Christ died and rose again. And guess what! If you had listened to my preachers and prophets through the ages, you would not be suffering here!*

Preaching 120 years to a dead audience? Life spans of nearly 1000 years? But all your preaching only brings laughter because you are building a huge ocean going ship on dry land before anyone else has ever had reason to set sail. Rain? What is rain? No record of any for the first 2000 years. And then it pours, but not until God brings all the animals two-by-two, plus seven of some – and shuts you and your wife with their married sons inside. Violent tidal waves wipe out the huge population on planet earth, so green from pole to pole. But the same waters lift and save your family, the last eight believers in God.

“And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Christ.” There’s the greatest reason your **hope** is alive and well. Your baptism connects you to Christ in His death for forgiveness and now in His life for eternal joy. This week we celebrate Christ’s Ascension. *“He went to heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.”* Keep preaching, *i.e.*, announcing. **In a Dying World... keep Living (Your) Hope in Christ – Prepared Always and All Ways** – to defend, to suffer, **to enjoy Christ’s victory**. He rules over all for you. Amen.